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EDITORIAL

Queen Elizabeth II

As we go to press the UK has come out of 10 days' official mourning at the passing of our monarch in her platinum jubilee year. Her example of faithful service through difficult times for the nation and for her own family has shone brightly around the world. Amongst the many warm tributes broadcast and published we learned that she prayed each night on her knees before going to bed, which shows the important role that her faith had in her life. We wish King Charles III well as he takes on the crown and faces a new set of challenges for the UK and the world.

Perception is complex...

In this issue we invited contributors to consider Perception and Reality as a guiding theme. Coming to terms with the gap between what our senses appear to tell us and what is actually happening is almost a rite of passage in our age. Scientific explorations into the workings of the brain further complicate matters; the brain tends to fill in gaps and attempts to make meaning out of fragments of information, which often leads to an erroneous picture of reality. Many of us are aware of how the senses can deceive and how limited our human perception is. There is a growing understanding of the brain's role in filtering out most of the information which bombards our senses, the extent of which can only be apprehended when we attain higher states of consciousness.

Amongst the intriguing contributions this time, Michael Shearer explores the difference between seeing and really looking, and artistic representation of the essence of things, with reference to Gerard Manley Hopkins, Wabi Sabi bowls, and to the paintings of Van Gogh. Of a more visceral nature is Ted Harrison's article on stigmata, a controversial phenomenon in any age, and mysterious in origin.

Mark Fox tracks a modern phenomenon in searching for examples of UFO sightings in the

Alister Hardy Archive. The archive is not usually drawn upon to search for UFO descriptions, but these cases share a characteristic of spiritual experience reports, in that those who report them have often been treated with disdain and accused of having a faulty understanding of what they were perceiving. Now commonly called Unexplained Aerial Phenomena, this topic received a recent boost of interest when the previous outright denials of any UFO activity by the authorities in the USA were undermined by a declassified Pentagon report.

On more usual territory for our pages, Marion Browne's article describes the reactions of others when sharing her spiritual experiences. This is a salutary reminder of how much work still needs to be done to build wider acceptance and understanding of spiritual experiences, not least within religious organisations.

...and Reality bites

Whilst many may be transfixed by the political storms unfolding around us (and not just in the UK), none of us can afford to ignore the catastrophic effects of climate change occurring more frequently across the globe. We are being shaken to awaken our minds and hearts to what must change in our daily lives. The stakes are high and time is running out.

The rainbow volumes

Some readers may have noticed the colours being used for our covers since I took over editorship. We are now in the yellow phase and next year will be green. I truly hope that is a good sign.



Rhonda Riachi

ARTICLES

Let your light so shine

If we could clearly foresee the consequences of our own thoughts and actions, peace and love might replace hatred and conflict. But while spiritual experiences are essential in leading us to such clarity and foresight, many conflate them with self-delusion or fraud.

Mankind has persecuted its prophets more often, perhaps, than it has taken their messages to heart. Unsurprisingly, we avoid telling of our spiritual insights, fearing mockery or rejection. I understand and share these fears, having had doubts, for instance, about including in this article my own dream and the subsequent experiences that gave it meaning. We expose our vulnerability and our dignity feels threatened. Thus visionaries prefer joining discreet organisations of like-minded individuals who reassure each other, somewhat smugly perhaps, that they alone are privy to the truth. The former Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, recognised this tendency when discussing prophets' warnings, in his book *Free to Believe*:

*Their strictures also warn against turning religion into private assemblies existing solely for the self-selected spiritual beliefs of their members.*¹

Certainly the Alister Hardy Trust's research is crucial. But its evidence ought not to remain buried in the archives, unseen by any but a handful of scholars. Every experience conveys a message to a world where notions of justice and equality are under attack. Enlightened religious leaders support the Trust with their patronage, but they should share its findings with a wider audience and argue the case as to why spiritual experiences matter. It may even surprise them to discover how many members of the public secretly agree with them.

The term 'wider audience' embraces Universities, the BBC, Parliament, the justice system and religious institutions. These bodies often debate ethics and morality but rarely address the idea that we ourselves are the principal victims of our own vices, because the

field for discussion is bound by non-spiritual views of reality.

In his book *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* Sogyal Rinpoche writes:

*In this time of violence and disintegration, spiritual vision is not an elitist luxury, but vital to our survival. [...] The entire society in which we live seems to negate every idea of sacredness or eternal meaning.*²

Ignorance of our true nature, says Buddhism, is the cause of suffering. Socrates, according to Plato, agreed. He suggested that vice was caused by ignorance. If we knew what would do us the most good we would do it. Socrates' guide was his 'daimon' or 'inner voice', warning him to eschew politics but pay the utmost attention to truth, understanding and the perfection of his soul. He considered it his moral duty to urge his fellow citizens to follow his example, and met his enforced suicide with courage and serenity.

Spiritual insight comes in many forms. Dreams, being an altered state of consciousness, are helpful but we have to recognise what they are trying to tell us.

It was a series of dreams that led me to join both the 'Alister Hardy Trust' and 'The Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies' (CFPSS) in 2012. The following dream, however, occurred two years later. In it I confided to an old friend that I had forthcoming examinations for which I was unprepared. I was felled to the ground suddenly. A voice said these tests were essential for my future work but help would come. A doctor, accompanied by other medical staff, called my name. Someone sprinkled dust over my head. Others bound my arms and legs, meanwhile impressing on me the importance of the task to be undertaken. One said that my message "made sense". Another emphasised that it was "love". Protesting it was too difficult and complaining that my legs were in an uncomfortable position, I begged to be freed. As people surrounded me I called out to a nurse in

alarm. She responded by saying, "Do you know who you really are?" A doctor tried to explain, unsuccessfully.

As I woke I wondered whether the nurse's question referred to a previous life. Some months later, I spotted a copy of Neale Donald Walsch's *Conversations with God*. I had seen one before in a charity bookshop but decided, on the basis of the title alone, that whoever wrote it was probably deluded if he thought God Himself was giving him answers. This time, on finding it again in the same shop, I bought it. To my amazement I found that the question the nurse in the dream had asked me was answered repeatedly in an astounding way. For example, in Book 2 we are told:

*You have come to this world, in this way, at this time, in this place, to Know Who You Are -- and to create Who You Wish to Be. This is the purpose of all life. Life is an ongoing, never-ending process of re-creation. You keep re-creating Your selves in the image of your next highest ideas about Yourself.*³

Meanwhile, as members of the CFPSS, my husband and I decided to join a church so as to gain a clearer understanding of the Fellowship's aims. Although confirmed in the Anglican Church many years before, we picked a free church near us, where the new minister had delivered an impressive sermon at a recent carol service. A very active lady in the church, discovering that I was a retired music teacher, encouraged me to help out, first with evening services and then morning ones too. This I was happy to do. The minister allocated a time during both services for people's personal testimonies and welcomed the occasional spiritual insights or dreams I received.

But after three years of attending this church -- during which one of the two women who had encouraged me most had died and the other had moved into sheltered housing -- undercurrents of jealousy and discontent became more marked. Furthermore, the Church's doctrine that only those who accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour could be 'saved' conflicted with my own belief that God's love is all-embracing. Wrestling

with this problem early one Sunday morning, I thought of the line from Psalm 46: "Be still and know that I am God." Gradually I realised that a different biblical reference -- Luke 4:7 -- was being impressed on my mind. I had no idea what this passage was but on looking it up I understood its relevance. Jesus' reply to Satan, who tempts him with the offer of authority over all the kingdoms of the world, is simple: "It is written, 'Worship the Lord Your God and serve him only'."

A week later, having mustered sufficient courage, I shared this experience with the congregation, emphasising that God's love is unconditional. My testimony was met with stony silence, apart from one hesitant clap, quickly stifled. However three people approached me afterwards and told me how much the message had meant to them. It was not until the end of the evening service the same day that I discovered certain members of the church's 'hierarchy' had reacted furiously. One man confronted me, saying I had no right to read from the Bible because I didn't believe in the Bible. A woman gave vent to her animosity among her close confidants, while her husband told me I had no right to be in the church.

Trying to reason with those who exerted the most influence, and who before the week was out had insisted I leave the music group, caused my husband and me considerable distress. The minister -- later forced to resign for personal reasons -- was in too weak a position himself to mediate effectively.

I interpreted this episode as the sort of trial my dream had warned me to expect if I spoke of God's universal love to those with intolerant views. But so far it had not struck me as significant that the central figures in the dream were doctors and nurses.

After a series of tests, just before Covid and lockdown struck the nations, I was told that I had an aggressive form of cancer. This meant an operation, palliative care and a doubtful prognosis. Some months later, when the oncologist rang me for the first time, I discovered I was lucky to have been offered an operation at all. One authoritarian member of the medical team discussing my case beforehand had argued

that, at over 70, I was too old. Moreover, CT and MRI scans suggested that the disease had spread to my liver and the only treatment offered should be chemotherapy. But the oncologist had insisted that every patient, regardless of age, deserved the best care possible. Another surgeon on the team kindly offered to do the operation instead -- successfully as it turned out, because the cancer had been caught just in time.

Fears remained, however. Because of the scans and the aggressiveness of the disease a liver biopsy was planned for a week after I had been discharged, to be carried out by a radiologist qualified to perform it with the aid of ultrasound. On the appointed day, as I lay on the hospital bed, apprehensively bracing myself for the procedure, the radiologist studied the ultrasound images. He made a crucial decision. The area of concern was not typical of metastatic cancer, he explained, and inserting a needle there would carry grave risks. He insisted upon a detailed PET scan instead, which in due course revealed that the suspect area was a harmless cluster of blood vessels which had probably been there from birth.

Since the ensuing radiotherapy, every scan so far has been clear and I remain fit and well. In recalling those terrifying months I am full of gratitude for the skilful, brave and dedicated doctors who argued my case and precluded a far worse outcome. Every healthy day is a blessing.

I had experienced malice, prejudice, anger and jealousy in church. I learned in hospital that care of the weak and vulnerable requires training, skill, humanity, compassion and, above all, the moral courage to challenge one's peers.

Our earthly lives, replete with potential hazards, reflect the fragility of the world we take to be 'reality'. Yet, in acknowledging our weakness and vulnerability, we gradually recognise the route to follow in order to achieve, as Walsch would put it, "our next highest ideas about ourselves".

As he relates in his book *The Christian Agnostic*, Dr Leslie Weatherhead was a 19-year-old theological student in a crowded, third-class compartment of a railway carriage at Vauxhall

Station during the First World War when "a most curious, but overwhelming sense possessed me and filled me with ecstasy [...] All men were shining and glorious beings who in the end would enter incredible joy. Beauty, music, joy, love immeasurable and a glory unspeakable, all this they would inherit."⁴ The overpowering love he felt for everyone in that compartment convinced him that his decision to become a minister was the right one.

Such rare moments shape the lives of those who experience them and those who learn of them and from them. But sharing them with a much wider audience requires courage, a necessary attribute of love. As Jesus says in Matthew 5: 15-16: "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Marion Browne

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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.
Matthew 5:16 (King James Bible)

Looking at things

Many years ago I recall suddenly noticing a particular thing, nothing special, in such a way that it seemed to stand out and become special and somehow energised and carrying a sense of meaning and presence. It slowly happened more frequently and drew more attention. I began to recognise the feelings involved and encouraged them. Emotionally, I found that it was a skill of perception which could be practised and improved. But what is going on here?

I began an enquiry and this little essay is the much shortened result. Here's the emerging route I have taken over the years.

The story begins with Aristotle and his analysis of the properties of individual things. He divided the sum total of all the features of an individual thing; this table, this chair, this cat, and so on, into two types. Some properties of, say, a cat would be because the thing has to have those properties to be the sort of thing it is. There must be properties which a cat has which it must have to be a cat. These properties Aristotle called "Essential Properties" and the total of such properties of a thing were its "Essence." A matter of enquiry to discover what they were. This enquiry eventually became science, and more and more abstract. On the other hand, this thing would also have properties which it doesn't have to have to be what it is, but it has them anyway. So the cat might be black with white patches, for example. Such properties he called "Accidents."



Onward around two thousand years, and we encounter Duns Scotus, scholastic philosopher of the thirteenth century. He talks about the "Haecceitas" of individual things, usually translated as the "thisness" or "suchness." There has been much discussion of the meaning of this term, but it appears to show an emphasis on the singular rather than the abstract in our awareness and understanding of the world. Somehow we can apprehend the unique reality of whatever we encounter. This sounds more promising.

Flitting again a few hundred years we reach the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, who had a strong theological and philosophical bent and regarded himself as a disciple of Duns Scotus. Hopkins has his own term for this individuality of things, derived from Duns Scotus. He calls it "Inscapae." Again a vague term, hard to define, but it is clear that apprehending inscapae was, for Hopkins, a matter of perception, not so much an act of conceiving, like essence. So we can see inscapae.

So another difficult word to come to terms with, but it is clearly related to Hopkins' active conviction that he could see God in all things. The inscapae of something was the specific embodiment of a shape and organisation of the divine energy which makes it exactly that thing at that time, fitting the complex further patterns of energy in which it is embedded. He tried to make his poems have this quality of right form while often talking about the exquisite momentary being of a hovering kestrel, a speeding kingfisher or a superb, single, nodding snowdrop. Inscapae is spiritual.

Onward to painting. Painters often select individual things to paint. But why? Why those things? Of course, there are numerous paintings of individual things or collections of objects to the extent that it constitutes a genre of visual art. The name used for this category seems resonant with what I am trying to locate. It is called "Still Life." Exactly. Somehow there is life in things which seem to be just inert objects. However, many paintings as classified are just showing the painter's skill in depicting different sorts of object. See, I can do fruit and bottles and



whatever. And some are reminding an upper class person of the paraphernalia connected with his favourite pastime of hunting or fishing or dining. But many Still Life paintings have a distinct sense of the aura of significance which I'm trying to consider.

Many artists could be examined with profit at this point, but let's limit it just to one, Vincent Van Gogh. He seems to have seen this presence of energy in everything and found it somewhat overwhelming. There are paintings of landscape with coruscating swirls of energy out of which trees and crops somehow emerge. This is the background that I am seeking. Pure energy out of which things come. Seeing things as emerging in this way gives anything a special presence.

Frequently in Van Gogh's paintings there are relatively simple images of a few things, or just one thing. One such famous example is his depiction of a single chair (above).

There is no question of this being offered as something beautiful, or iconic, or in any way symbolically significant. It is its very ordinariness which matters. Yet it breathes its own suchness, its sheer individual presence in exactly that place and time. It has the aura that I'm talking about.

Progress. We have the perception of something emerging from a source of universal energy. And we have the sheer this-ness of something so produced. Something which is precisely that individual thing.

Then I encountered one further practice concerned with developing a particular way of seeing: the Japanese notion of Wabi Sabi. This seems to have emerged through the fashion of the collecting of begging bowls of mendicant monks (see example below). What mattered here was the humble character of such bowls, they are ordinary, old, worn. But their very simplicity and the signs of their use through time gave them the quality of individual presence which the collector sought.

Slowly, this capacity to see and appreciate the depth in anything which had been in the world and showed its encounters through whatever wear, and even damage that had happened, became a way of perceiving linked with a particular feel of things. Here was something, this object, with a presence, but which carried its history, in the details of what could be seen. This bowl, this vase showed its past, its life, its being, in the accidents it had; and onward, this tree, this cat had the particular marks and evidence of its individual passage through time. So the experience spread to other types of objects, particular streets, time of the day, seasons. It became both a genre of art and a way of living: seeing the passage of time in things which made it that thing and no other.



I found myself applying this skill to people more consciously; not just inanimate objects, looking at them more carefully, seeing the lines and creases

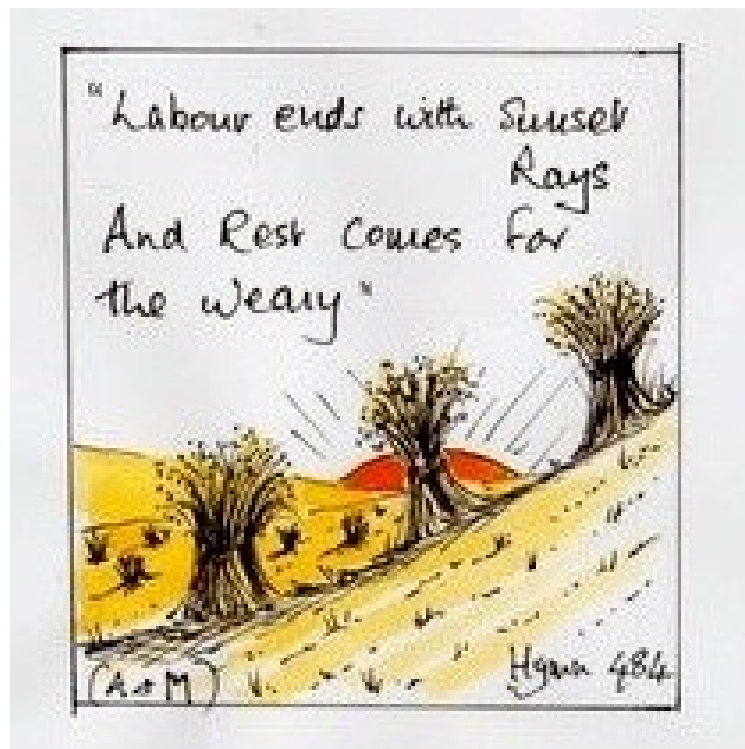
in the face, noticing the slight limp, the thousands of subtle details of their appearance which recorded their passage through time, their life, their very individuality formed into their physical presence. Like a novelist, or a painter of portraits. And this, I found, took me more out of myself and more capable of practising a form of compassion less egoistic than before. More spiritual.

Oh, I thought, is this why I got interested in all this in the first place?



Michael Shearer

Images from Wikipedia and Google Arts and Culture: Van Gogh, Wheatfield with Cypresses (1889); Van Gogh's Chair with pipe (1888); Tea bowl, Tokyo National Museum, Japan; Van Gogh, The Starry Night (1899).



Drawing by Juliet Greenwood

The changing perception of stigmata

There was one question I was frequently asked when people heard that my PhD research was into the phenomena known as stigmata:

‘Are they genuine?’

Sceptics hoped for the answer ‘no, it’s fraud’; believers hoped for the answer ‘yes, we are witnessing a gift from God’.

Stigmata, in this context, is the appearance on the human body of the marks of Christ’s Passion and crucifixion. They might take the form of wounds in the hands, the side, scourge stripes on the back or marks like pin pricks around the head, associated with the crown of thorns.

In the Roman Catholic tradition the marks are variously deemed to be a sign of God’s favour, evidence of diabolical counterfeit or human deceit. Claims of stigmata are normally cautiously and slowly examined by the church authorities. To receive the marks is no guarantee that the recipient will eventually be deemed a saint. Maybe, after lengthy enquiries, canonisation will follow, but usually not until many years later. The appearance of the marks themselves is not, of itself, considered evidence of sanctity, the candidate needs to satisfy much wider, and very strict, criteria for canonisation.

Sceptics, on the other hand, have no time for the spirituality of the phenomena and all the religious talk. They have prejudged that the marks cannot possibly be supernatural and therefore must be self-induced. Many sceptics claim that the marks are produced deliberately to con the gullible, although when explored as a possible medical condition several doctors have suggested that the marks of stigmata might be psychosomatic.

What all sides to the debate have largely agreed however is that the question to ask is ‘are they genuine?’ But that, as I was to conclude, was the wrong, or at least an unhelpful, question to ask. For what does ‘genuine’ mean in this context?

There is no doubt the marks are observable, unlike many claimed mystical phenomena. In the course of my researches I witnessed several cases. I saw, filmed and photographed visible

bloody wounds and healing scars. I took witness statements and recorded the personal testimony of many contemporary recipients - the stigmatics.

I also examined the historical records. Leaving aside an ambiguous reference by St Paul, stigmata first emerged in 13th century Europe with St Francis of Assisi’s stigmata being considered the earliest well-known example. Cases of stigmata paralleled the growth in Catholic devotion to the Eucharist and the body of Christ as witnessed by the adoption of the Feast of Corpus Christi.

Over subsequent centuries there have been at least 350 cases recorded, probably more. Most have been Roman Catholics, and the majority of stigmatics have been women. What I noticed from the history was that cases tended to cluster geographically, and that since the 19th century the gender balance had shifted. From a 7:1 ratio of women to men, it has changed to a 5:3 ratio. And from around a century ago reports of priests receiving the marks were heard for the first time. This suggested that in understanding stigmata it is important to consider social factors at work.

Stigmata might be seen as a sign of protest. In Medieval times, pious women, being unable to become priests and thus denied access to the Body of Christ except through the mediation and with the permission of a man, found that displaying the marks of Christ’s suffering on their own bodies was a way to by-pass this restriction. Over the last century a number of priests, who have appeared to be at odds, or in dispute, with their superiors within the church have displayed the wounds.

From my examination of contemporary cases I was unable to confirm any single physical cause. Some marks appeared to be the product of a sharp object, others more like a burn, some appeared more like natural skin blemishes. In no circumstance could I find evidence that even hinted at a supernatural event. In both the historical and contemporary records I could find no reliable eye-witness to the moment when marks first appeared. Of replicas of the marks on

Christ's side I noticed the ratio of left-side marks to right was equivalent to the ratio of right-handedness to left-handedness in the population.

What cases had in common was not their origin, but that they had been recognised as stigmata by a third party. In some cases a confessor, in others by a congregation or medical professional.

The case of Ethel Chapman from Liverpool was an interesting example. She was seriously ill in hospital and believed she was dying. A friend visited and gave her an illustrated Bible and they prayed together. That night Ethel had a vivid dream, or hallucination, and felt herself being crucified. When she woke in the morning a nurse noticed Ethel's hands were bleeding. Ethel's first thought was that she has clenched her fist so tightly in her dream that her fingernail had drawn blood. A Roman Catholic doctor saw the marks and suggested stigmata. The effect of the experience was so profound that it gave Ethel new purpose in life to live a religious life centred on prayer for others.

The marks were in all probability caused in the manner Ethel first suggested. Their symbolism was what became important, plus the recognition of this symbolic significance by the doctor and later her parish priest

Ethel's 'stigmatisation' was a profound religious event, with genuine consequences, involving no suggestion of deception and yet was not supernatural in that nothing that happened defied the laws of nature.

In the course of my research, I formed the opinion that for God to perform a holy party-trick by zapping chosen individual with stigmata seemed to me theologically implausible and in a world where his intercession would have been far more valuable in so many other ways, inconsistent with a Christian understanding of the nature of God.

And yet I saw that claims of stigmata frequently sparked religious revival within a congregation or community. I witnessed genuine religious enthusiasm, which would have been pointless to fake. There have been times in history when individual stigmatics have acquired a near cult

status, Padre Pio being a 20th century example. Their public appearances, often with the stigmatic being seen in an ecstatic state or bleeding profusely, have been akin to performance artists such as Marina Abramović who pushes her mind and body to their limits - in one performance painfully stabbing herself with knives and drawing blood.

So the reality of stigmata is complex. It involves marks that are visible and recordable with no all-embracing explanation as to their origins, except that they are consistent with the laws of the natural world. The recognition of the marks as being of religious significance, by a third party, elevates them to the realm of stigmata. The recipient may become a living exhibition and the marks, the story told of them and a whole devotional act can turn them into a form of performance art. The effect of this on the witnesses and wider community can be profoundly religious and create waves of genuine religious activity - as well as trigger exaggerated reports and elaborated stories when the facts are stretched to incredible limits and then shared and believed as indisputable accounts of miraculous events.

All this depends on how the marks are perceived. A sceptic with a predisposition not to believe in anything beyond the material world will willingly conclude that marks, if they are not supernatural must be fraudulent. There will be no recognition of the genuine religious devotion inspired by the stigmata.

In the same way that a great work of sacred music or the awe-inspiring architecture of a cathedral, undoubted works of human hands, can lift the eyes heavenwards, so can stigmata.

**Ted Harrison
Artist and writer**

The Egyptian mysteries of Osiris and Isis: ancient attempts at inducing spiritually transformative experiences

Mystery religions were common in the ancient world. The mysteries of Demeter and Persephone, Orpheus, and Mithra are a few, but it is generally conceded by scholars – ancient and modern – that the Egyptian mysteries were the first, and that subsequent mysteries were modelled on them.

For over 3,000 years Osiris was the resurrection and the life for the ancient Egyptians. At the time of the Middle Kingdom (2055-1650 BCE) and in subsequent years, the mysteries were celebrated at the ancient burial ground at Abydos. The mysteries that were open to all consisted of a “Passion Play” that enacted the death of Osiris and his resurrection three days later. It was his wonderful wife Isis who brought his body back to life and had sex with him, thereby conceiving their child Horus. After this, Osiris was taken into the afterlife where he became ruler and judge of the dead. Osiris dies and is resurrected on the spring equinox, and his son Horus is born at the winter solstice.

The secret mysteries were an initiation that was open to only a few. In ancient Egypt this was a sought-after high honour. In Roman times Osiris’ wife Isis was more popular than her husband and was worshipped throughout the Roman Empire. From what we know, the initiation was similar for initiates of both Isis and Osiris mysteries. In temples throughout Egypt and in the Roman Empire that included a mystery chapel dedicated to Osiris or Isis, there was always a crypt where the secret mystery ceremonies were held. Initiation into the mysteries of Isis or Osiris required money and time. While the pagan cult was banned by the Christian Emperor Theodosius in 391CE, the worship of Isis continued until the 6th Century in southern Egypt and even later in the Sudan.

All of the mysteries were secret, and only tidbits of information about them remain. Our best source of information comes from a Roman writer and spiritual seeker named Apuleius who wrote *Metamorphoses* (also known as the *Golden Ass*.) Although the work is a fictional account, we know that Apuleius was an initiate



into the mysteries of Isis, and virtually all scholars agree that the account is most likely autobiographical. Apuleius describes the initiation as consisting of:

1. abstaining from meat and alcohol for ten days,
2. Instruction by the high priest from the holy book as to the “secret words,”
3. a ritual bath,
4. meditating in the temple for ten days,
5. being clothed in a linen robe,
6. being placed in a tomb in the dark of night (which was most likely accompanied by a rattle or rhythmic drumming) and also being placed in a mild hypnotic trance and/or meditating. Almost all scholars agree that drugs were NOT used.

This is what Apuleius says about his experience:

“Hear, then, and believe, for what I tell you is true. I drew nigh to the confines of death, I trod the threshold of Proserpine (Persephone), I was borne through all the elements and returned to earth again. I saw the sun gleaming with bright splendour at the dead of night. I approached the gods above, and the gods below, and worshiped them face-to-face. Behold, I have told you these things which, though thou hast heard them, thou must yet know naught.”

When we look at the description of his experience, it is clear that what Apuleius experienced was a near-death-like spiritual experience. Now let us look at this from the standpoint of 150 years of academic research into religious/spiritual experience. Although there is no evidence that the mysteries of Osiris and Isis were held in the great pyramid, the comparative religion scholar and spiritual seeker Paul Brunton did a quasi-replication of the mysteries (in the 1930's) by spending a night in the king's chamber of the great pyramid.

In preparation for a night in the pyramid, Brunton fasted for three days and meditated. During his night in the king's chamber, he had an NDE-like mystical experience. It began with a negative quality of spirits questioning why he was there, but then turned positive when two ancient priests showed up in spirit form. The elder priest stayed with him and helped him have an out-of-body experience to show him that his soul could exist apart from his body. He was told that he was an “immortal child of God” and that humans must look inward.

Dr Raymond Moody researched an ancient Greek oracle of the dead at Ephyra. Based on what he found, he constructed a psychomanteum in an attempt to replicate the ancient experience. Fifty-percent (50%) of subjects were able to conjure up their dead relatives using this technique. It should be noted that sometimes the hoped-for loved one was not the one who showed up! This technique has been replicated by subsequent researchers. The highest success rate reported to date is 63% (Hastings, 2012). While Dr Moody makes no claim about the metaphysical status of these experiences, some individuals report learning information from the apparition that was previously unknown to them.

According to Dr Marianne Rankin, research into spiritual experiences done by students and faculty at the Alister Hardy Religious Research Centre range from 33% to 65% in the U.K. (Hay, 1978; Pupynin & Brodbeck, 1998), 56.7% in China (Yao & Badham 2004), 45.9% in Turkey (Yaran, 2006), and 68.4% in India (Robinson & Ravikumar 2006).

Because the initiates into the ancient mysteries were spiritual seekers (and not members of the general population), the percentage of initiates having a spiritually transformative experience may have been higher, but it is unlikely that all of them had a genuine spiritual experience. So what about those who did not achieve a genuine mystical experience? They at least got a simulation when they were taken out of the dark crypt and greeted by individuals with bright torch lights, honoured, and adorned with new robes. They were now, “in the club,” and they had learned the secret words that would insure a good afterlife. Many Roman tombs of the period had the motto of the faith of Isis inscribed: “Be of good courage.”

Now let us look at the “secret words.” Most scholars feel that the “secret words” of the initiation into the mysteries of Osiris or Isis were an abbreviation of the text known as the Egyptian Book of the Dead. It is important to realize that the Book of the Dead was not standardized, and its length varied considerably from elaborate scrolls to a few spells written on a sarcophagus. We do have the secret words for the mysteries of Orpheus that were discovered inscribed on thin gold foil and found in southern Italy in a tomb that was dated to around 400BCE. The initiate was taught that – when they approached afterlife – they would be thirsty. They were told NOT to drink of the spring by the white cypress (which is the water of forgetfulness and will cause them to forget their life and be reincarnated.) Rather, they are instructed to tell the guardians of the afterlife that, “I am a child of earth and starry heaven, but heaven is my home. I wish to drink from the lake of memory.” This will enable them to ascend to the realm of gods and heroes.

Knowing the “secret words” is common to most religions. Some years ago, I watched the

televised portion of the execution of Saddam Hussein. His last words consisted of repeating the Moslem Confession of Faith over and over: “I confess that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.”

For Fundamentalist Christians, the “secret words” are John 3:16 and John 14:6. Many Liberal Christians delight in the secret words of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas (which was discovered in the mid-20th Century).

For Hindu followers of Vishnu, the “secret words” are to die with his name on your lips or one of his incarnations, such as “Rama” or “Krishna.” This will take all your sins away!

For the followers of Pure Land Buddhism, by invoking the name of Amitabha (the Buddha of Infinite Light) at death, you will be transported to the Pure Land of Bliss in the West.

For Tibetan Buddhists, the “secret words” in the Tibetan Book of the Dead must be recited by a relative or monk by your corpse which will enable you in the afterlife to choose those things which will give you a good re-birth.

Next, let us explore the “fruits” of initiation into the mysteries of Isis and Osiris. According to Plutarch (46-119CE) and Apuleius (124-170CE), the “fruits” were a temperate life, fair dealing, and a thirst for truth. Diodorus (90 – 30BCE) wrote that those who have participated in the mysteries have become more spiritual, more just, and better in every way.

In conclusion, we see that the initiates into the mysteries of Isis and Osiris gained:

1. a genuine mystical experience or, at the very least, a simulation,
2. admission “into the club,” and
3. knowledge of the “secret words” that would insure admission to a good afterlife.

Dr Ken R Vincent

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UFOs in the RERC archive: an analysis of twenty-one cases

Introduction

Within the last two years major studies of UFOs have been announced, conducted and concluded by NASA, US congress, and the US military. Most of the newspapers in the UK and elsewhere have carried stories on these developments, suggesting that whatever they may or may not be, UFOs – sometimes termed ‘UAP’ as an acronym for ‘Unexplained Aerial Phenomena’ – remain big news.¹

Side by side with these developments, some other recent (and somewhat lesser known) advances within the field have also taken place. In 2019, for example, Oxford University Press published *American Cosmic*, a study of UFOs by Diana Pasulka, professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, and chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion there. It is somewhat unusual for an academic publisher to carry a title about such things; just as it is also somewhat unusual that Pasulka should turn her academic gaze to them. Indeed, as she herself avers early on in *American Cosmic*: academics don't tend to write about UFOs, and if they do have an interest in such things it's usually under the cloak of anonymity.²

I have an interest in UFOs that goes back almost fifty years and, spurred on by the increasing degree of attention being paid to them, from scientists, government agencies, the media and academia alike, together with my longstanding interest in archival research, I decided that now would be a good time to attempt to see if the archive might contain any accounts of UFOs. My initial expectation was that it might contain a handful at least, for, as is well-known, Sir Alister Hardy had a particular kind of experience in mind when he formulated what has become known as the 'Alister Hardy question' but received many accounts of experiences that deviated widely from what he was looking for.

To give focus to my study, I set out to answer two specific questions. Firstly, might accounts of UFO 'encounters' be amongst the thousands of experiences detailed in the RERC accounts? And secondly: if such should exist, how might they

confirm and/or disconfirm descriptions of and conclusions reached regarding UFOs within existing UFO literature?

In the event, my archival search yielded 21 experiences of UFO 'encounters'/events contained within seventeen separate archival accounts: a significantly greater number than I had anticipated. What follows is an analysis of those 21 cases.

Analysis

Shape and Colour

As is well-known, the term 'Flying Saucer', which came to denote the 'archetypal' shape of such objects, was, in fact, a journalistic interpretation of a comment made by salesman Kenneth Arnold when describing the motion of the objects he saw on 24 June 1947. The journalist, Bill Bequette, heard Arnold describe each one as moving like 'a saucer skipping over water', coined the term 'Flying Saucer', and the label stuck. Sure enough, descriptions of UFO sightings in subsequent years have been replete with descriptions of saucer-shaped, round, or disk-like objects, even though drawings made by Arnold reveal that what he actually saw were much closer to boomerangs in outline than to saucers.³ What is still comparatively little-known, however, is the fact that a bewildering array of shapes has been reported within UFO literature in the years since Arnold's sighting, with whole studies being devoted to cases in which a single shape - often far removed from that of a saucer - has been described and examined.⁴ Diversity, rather than unity, seems to be the order of the day: at least as far as the shape of the UFOs is concerned.

This fact was reflected in the twenty-one cases examined within the RERC archive. Where a shape was reported, the descriptor 'saucer' occurred twice, 'circle' three times, 'ball' twice, 'trapezoid' twice, and 'city', 'surfboard', and 'bowler hat' once each. In one other case, it was not possible to determine if 'saucer' was being used to describe the actual shape or as an available term to describe an anomalous event including a bizarre aerial phenomenon.

Subjects' descriptions included the following:

'I couldn't believe what I was seeing. This large saucer shaped apparition was now quite large and so brilliant that it lit up the entire sky.' (4393)

'Though the rest of the sky was a dark navy colour dotted with stars, directly above our car &, I judged - not too far up - there was a complete circle of blackness.' (4242)

'It had just got dark and we were just sitting down to enjoy a drink, when suddenly a bright ball of light emerged from the top of the hill and moved quite quickly in an arc across the sky.' (4469)

'I noticed a pulsating light down the road [at] a distance that was in the shape of a surfboard and appeared to be hovering a foot above the ground.' (4812)

'I was looking towards the heavens and before me appeared a great piece of light travelling diagonally across the sky. It seemed to be not much higher than a telephone pole. It was trapezoid in shape – being four foot square and twelve or fourteen feet long.' (227)

As far as I am aware, no study of UFOs exists which has devoted exclusive attention to their *colour*. When considering colour within the wider context of other UFO studies, however, it is apparent that, as with shape, diversity predominates. Indeed, within the UFO literature virtually every colour is encountered within witnesses' testimonies, a situation complicated by the fact that objects are often reported to have more than one colour or even to change colour whilst being observed.

Colour was reported in six of the twenty-one archival UFO accounts found, and if 'black' is included the figure rises to eight, although in each of these two cases there are complexities which are discussed below. Three objects were reported as being or in some sense emitting 'red': once exclusively, once in association with 'orange' and once in association with a variety of colours. 'Blue' was reported twice: once in association with 'green.' 'Bright' was used by subjects four times, although in each case it was not possible to determine what colour underlay or gave rise to the brightness.

Subjects' descriptions of the colours of the objects they saw included the following:

'Once, not being able to sleep at about midnight, I became conscious of a curious noise coming closer & closer as of an engine or engines purring, the noise persisted and became static, eventually I looked out of the window to discover the source, over the rooftops of the houses opposite was a red sphere glowing and this quite obviously the source of the "engines" I had heard.' (2751)

'The object seemed to be cigar shaped and reddish-orange in color and just seemed to hover as we were awed by it.' (3815)

'I saw this thing which I can only liken to an immense bowler hat with a very thick rim. It appeared to be floating about six feet clear of the undergrowth, and a sort of blue light was coming from beneath it.' (3371)

'OH MY GOSH they were bigger than a car and surrounded by a halo of green light or greenish blue.' (3978)

'I saw just above the other apple tree on my left a circle of light, blue in the centre, round the blue a circle of amber, round the amber a circle of pink. Round the whole was a circle of clouds. The clouds seemed to be unfolding round the outer pink light which gave the whole the strange appearance of beckoning and pulling.' (1948)

The two accounts in which the descriptor 'black' was used merit separate attention. One of the respondents described '[A] great, black and perfect circle which blocked out the moon and the stars. I could see stars all around the horizon.' (1797). The other described '[A] complete circle of blackness. Completely round. Completely black with no stars.' (4242). The similarities here are intriguing. In each case we are presented with the possibility of (a) something positioned between the witness and the sky to the extent that the night sky behind it was completely blocked or (b) something, as it were, 'cut out' from the night sky: not so much a presence as an *absence*. The identical, circular, shape is also of note. Indeed, it is very tempting here to conclude that each witness, widely separated from the other in terms of context, time and space, was describing essentially the *same thing*.

Movement and Medium

In a bid to describe the behaviour of many of the frequently-reported objects described by witnesses, UFO researcher Luis Elizondo has recently set out what he dubs the 'Five Observables': characteristics most commonly reported in association with UFO sightings. He describes these as follows:

- 'Positive Lift or Anti-Gravity' (UFOs can move without any means of propulsion or lift),
- 'Instantaneous Acceleration' (UFOs can reach extraordinary rates of speed in little or no time),
- 'Hypersonic Velocity' (UFOs often travel at speeds vastly greater than those of conventional aircraft),
- 'Low Observability' (UFOs often seem invisible to conventional tracking means such as radar), and
- 'Trans-Medium Travel' (UFOs often move apparently seamlessly through space, air and water, frequently exchanging one for the other with no interruption of their movement.⁵

What is particularly striking about this list is the fact that four of the five 'Observables' relate directly or indirectly to *movement*: means of propulsion, rate of acceleration, speed, and transition from one 'environment' to another. In view of this and of the widespread discussion that Elizondo's list of UFO 'features' has received, I was particularly interested to see whether or not any or all of his 'Five Observables' would be present within the RERC archival UFO reports.

In the event, description of movement was found in no fewer than fifteen of the twenty-one experiences examined. In every one of these cases no apparent means of propulsion could be discerned at all: the closest being the description of some sort of engine noise in account 2751. Hence, Elizondo's assertion that UFOs frequently exhibit no discernible means of propulsion was overwhelmingly confirmed.

Given the actual descriptors used, assessing the presence or otherwise of instantaneous acceleration proved more problematic, as did

assessment of whether or not objects moved at speeds surpassing or greatly surpassing those of conventional aircraft. As regards *acceleration*, two accounts suggested at least a degree of rapidity. In account 1656, a 'very big', sparking 'star' which had appeared outside the subject's kitchen window was described as having 'moved off quite quickly' but whether such a departure could be described as 'instantaneous' is difficult if not impossible to determine. Account 4393 offered a little more, with the subject describing how at the end of her sighting a saucer-shaped object 'circled away' at 'furious speed.' As regards speed generally, rather more could be determined, with several respondents drawing specific attention to how quickly the UFOs in their sightings moved within their overall trajectories:

'It circled around at a furious speed, then came in and hovered around...for some minutes, as if searching for something. Suddenly it rose again to some height, then circled away at the same furious speed as before, leaving the sky vacant except for the stars.' (4393)

'It had just got dark and we were sitting down to enjoy a drink, when suddenly a bright ball of light emerged from the top of the hill and moved quite quickly in an arc across the sky.' (4469)

'I saw what looked to be a flying saucer – before I could get out of bed – from the size of an egg it moved at great speed to the window.'

Taken together with the descriptions of acceleration, therefore, four accounts described objects as moving 'quite quickly' (twice), 'at furious speed', and at 'great speed.' In the remaining accounts where movement was reported it proved impossible to determine from descriptions given either the rates of acceleration or speed of movement in general.

No subject attempted any subsequent check to determine whether or not the objects they saw were tracked by radar or some other means: hence Elizondo's fourth 'observable' was impossible to confirm or disconfirm. However, his fifth, 'Trans-Medium Travel', was apparently confirmed in one intriguing case:

'I was conducting investigations at a place called Keta near the Togoland border and had to stay at

a Rest House near the sea. Going early to bed I was awakened by the cries of birds, the barking of dogs, etc, and was amazed to see a large bright light ascend from the sea and sway in the sky within my vision, and after some time it moved straight over the Rest House, and by getting out of bed and looking upwards from the window I could see it immediately overhead.' (800)

Two other cases are also of note, here. In account 4469 the UFO was seen by witnesses to emerge from within a hill 'in the Matthews range, in the foothills of Kenya', suggesting an apparent ability to move through and out of the ground and into the air, whilst in account 3978, what appears to have been the same 'green light' was seen by the witness on two separate occasions: the first time 'moving rapidly under the water of our harbour, during the daytime' and the second time in the early morning coming round a bend at the top of a hill when he was rushing, late, to work.

Despite the relatively small number of UFO accounts located within the archive and the relative ambiguity of some of the descriptors used it was possible to confirm - at least to an extent - four of the five 'typical' UFO features as presented by Luiz Elizondo. This was one of the most intriguing of this project's findings.

Fear and watching

Given the vast amount of UFO literature - a "slowly evolving quagmire" according to UFOlogist Micah Hanks⁶ - it may seem odd that comparatively little attention has been paid to the effects of UFO 'encounters' on witnesses, but this has been the case with one or two notable exceptions. For example: researcher Ryan Sprague has recently examined cases in which their UFO encounters impacted witnesses and affected them in various ways, including the triggering of searches for 'deep meaning'; searches comparable in some senses to those reported by the subjects of religious and spiritual experience.⁷ In only one case within the RERC archive was anything found that was comparable to this, with the subject of account 3815 reporting 'a strong urge to start reading the Bible which I had never felt compelled to do before' as

a result of her encounter with a hovering, cigar-shaped, reddish-orange UFO which filled her with a sense of awe and led to 'dreams with U.F.O.s and religion in them.' Indeed, RERC accounts of UFO experiences, far from being positive and uplifting during and subsequent to the events described, turned out to contain descriptors strongly suggestive of fear and associated emotions:

'At that stage of life I was not afraid of God, Devil, man or animal but never since then have I had such a scare.' (1797)

'I was petrified...I had the *feeling of being engulfed...*' (B1)⁸ (Emphasis in the original)

'I had become very frightened.' (3371)

'I was petrified...I don't know how long I stood there but vaguely remember...my friend pulling my arm and leading me back to the car....It was at this point that the experience was just too much for me and I broke down and started crying due to the terror I had felt.' (4812)

In an archival study published in 1999, Merete Demant Jakobsen found 170 accounts of what she dubbed 'negative spiritual experiences' from an analysis of the first 4000 accounts. These included experiences of evil within a variety of contexts and amounted to 4.25% of the total number examined: a very small percentage.⁹ By contrast, six of the twenty-one UFO experiences I uncovered within the archive for this study contained descriptors associated with fear: some 28.6% of the total. The contrast is striking and merits further comment later.

One further intriguing thing in connection with the feelings reported by subjects (or, in one case, those accompanying them) is a sense of being watched or observed. Descriptions of this curious *motif* included the following:

'I knew I was being watched and believe now they knew I knew, whoever they are.' (3978)

'They did not appear to do anything but observe.' (4832)

'Upon our return to the car both girls themselves were in a state of terror and stated that they felt as if they were being watched...' (4812)

'[F]rom the size of an egg it moved at great speed

to the window - an object the size of a large crab - with fearsome underpart which *watched me* - at the only point to do so through the six inch curtain gap...I knew *it could tell what I was thinking...*' (B1) (Emphases in the original)

Taken all together, these findings suggest that the UFO experiences stand in direct contrast to the majority of reported experiences within the RERC archive. Within an admittedly small sample, reports of unpleasant sensations involving fear and a sense of being watched appear to recur a disproportionately large number of times. Indeed, when reports of the effects on animals are factored into the analysis, the trend becomes clearer still. In account 800, for example, a bright light reported as emerging from the sea and into the air was signalled by 'the cries of birds [and] the barking of dogs...' whilst the great, black and perfect circle' reported by the subject of account 1797 appears to have terrified his dog:

'[H]e made the most peculiar {sic} noises. Sort of a combined whine, growl and yelps all at the same time...and when I opened the door to let him out he refused to go...He huddled up against my legs, as he had done several times in the house, so hard that he almost knocked me down.' (1797)

Attention has frequently been drawn within UFO literature to the effect of these objects on animals. In his seminal 1977 study of sightings contained in US Air Force Files as part of their initial studies into UFOs, for example, astronomer and early UFO expert J. Allen Hynek differentiated between experiences he dubbed 'Close Encounters' of the First, Second, and Third Kinds, with effects on animals being considered within the first two of these categories. As part of his study into these, Hynek reported that the nearby presence of UFOs made dogs bark, whimper, shake, and hide, whilst effects on cattle were also reported, including one case in which a bull was so terrified that it 'bent the iron bar in the ground to which it was tethered.'¹⁰ Before moving on from this stage of the analysis, therefore, it is worth considering two further cases in which the reported events apparently affected animals.

We noted the sense of terror reported by the writer of account 4812: both on the part of

himself and those who were with him. Notable too was the effect of the unfolding events on the surrounding wildlife, reflected in his comment toward the beginning of his account, that: 'There were absolutely no noises of any kind from insects or other wildlife whatsoever which was most unusual as it was a rather warm summer evening.' This strange silence was mirrored in account 1948, in which rabbits and pigeons were first agitated by unusual events including a slowly-moving multi-coloured aerial object ('At that moment the rabbits and pigeons went frantic. The rabbits scampered about in their hut like mad things and the pigeons all flapped their wings as if they were taking flight together') before being rendered strangely silent: ('[A]fter their mad rush and flutter they all settled down without a sound as though they were all dead.')

Stranger and Stranger

As noted, above, US astronomer J Allen Hynek was the first to use the term 'Close Encounter(s)' to differentiate between various kinds of 'close up' UFO sightings. He used the term 'Close Encounter of the Third Kind' to designate a UFO event in which occupants were reported 'in association with the UFO sighting.' Hynek acknowledged that these types of experiences were 'characterized by a high degree of strangeness and by the complete bewilderment of the witnesses'¹¹ and I was particularly interested to ascertain whether any such accounts could be located in the archive.

In the event, three such accounts were found. Two made reference to beings of the 'bedroom invader' type as popularised by UFOlogists such as Budd Hopkins, David Jacobs and John Mack in the 1990s: beings which apparently appear in subjects' bedrooms, often waking them up.¹² Four months after seeing a UFO, the writer of account 3815 wrote how one night 'I came wide awake out of my sleep and asked myself who was awakening me. When I turned over there appeared this being next to my bed who was blacker than the room itself. It looked like he had a wetsuit on and the most perfect shape I had ever seen. When I first looked at it our eyes met (but it had no eyes) and it was like a standoff. When I started to travel downward with my eyes, all of a sudden out of its chest, [it] shot evil at

me. I actually saw evil hang in mid-air. It just shot out like an electric current at me and my whole insides just cried out in fear...'

Comparable to account 3815 was account 4832 in which the presence of three humanoids was reported, again of the 'bedroom invader' type, who on various occasions 'appeared on my side toward the bottom of the bed. They did not appear to do anything but observe.'

Even odder still was the experience recounted in account 3371 which began when, whilst in bed, the subject was ordered by an invisible voice to 'Get up!' His account continues:

I got up, dressed, went down and out to the garden shed where I keep my bicycle. I mounted up and headed straight for the heath land behind _____ common. Don't ask me why because I cannot remember being told to go there. Anyway, I eventually arrived and looking up, I saw this thing which I can only liken to an immense bowler hat with a very thick rim. It appeared to be floating about six feet clear of the undergrowth, and a sort of blue light was coming from beneath it. At the same time, I could hear a sound coming from it, and this I cannot describe because, to be brief, I've never heard anything like it in my life. Then suddenly there was this shape before me. I did not see it come from the other thing, all I know is that the top part of it did appear to resemble a human being...All I can remember was this thing which was perhaps twelve feet tall, although in my terror, I quite failed to see if it was indeed standing on the ground...I think the most frightening part was the pointed horns with the circle of what appeared to be fire which kept spinning round the horns at great speed. This [was] coupled with the triangular openings where one normally expects to see eyes but, in this case all I could see was this mass of green fire glaring from the openings....I had the feeling that here before me was a far superior intelligence to mine.'

Conclusions

Confirmations and refutations

How far, then, have the findings of this RERC archival study confirmed or refuted conclusions found within existing Ufological literature?

Overwhelmingly it has become clear that they have provided a high level of confirmation: particularly as regards diversity of shape and colour of objects and objects' reported modes of motion. Granted, we have seen little that hints at any form of positive spiritual transformation resulting from a UFO encounter, with negative feelings having been seen to dominate many subjects' reports, even extending to animal disturbance. Yet even here we may detect a degree of confirmation, with no lesser an authority than J Allen Hynek alluding to the fact that a UFO 'Close Encounter' is 'often a frightening experience, and always an awesome one.'¹³ It is also worth noting here the absence of sound within all but two of the reported experiences: something else which, whilst not invariant, has been typically reported in Ufological literature.

Perceptions and realities

Finally, is it possible as a result of this study to determine what these respondents actually saw? To say anything about the realities underlying their strange experiences? At the very least, C G Jung's oft-cited comment about Flying Saucers, 'something is seen but one doesn't know what', seems amply supported.¹⁴ Further, on occasions when they did attempt to identify their 'unidentifieds', it is clear that not all respondents were able to accept the identifications given to them. For example: the writer of account 1656 includes the interesting fact that she wrote to TV celebrity astronomer Patrick Moore after the event in an attempt to gain an explanation for her sighting. His reply, "No mystery. It is the planet Venus" appears not to have satisfied the writer, for her account ends on a rather sceptical note: 'I don't believe it. No ordinary star moved that fast.' And, indeed, her description of the quickly-moving object as having 'sparks coming out of the sides and something out of the bottom and the top' sounds very *unlike* Venus. Elsewhere, witnesses appeared to be content with a lack of identification, as reflected in the writer of account 4469's comment that '[W]e just called it [a] U.F.O – that is, unidentified by us.'

What also seems clear is that the small number of UFO testimonies within the archive forms a group distinct from those of orbs and lightforms.

The UFOs' locations, modes of movement, and effects on witnesses - both human and animal - make this clear, as do the strange, very un-orblike shapes that they frequently adopt. Further, unlike lightforms, where a 'common core' of sorts can be determined within the hundreds of testimonies that the RERC archive contains, it appears that there is no 'core' to the UFO reports: although the similarities between certain of the descriptions *do* indeed suggest that the 'same' phenomenon might be being reported.

For now, then, the mystery remains. At the very least, however, the presence of such a small but extremely interesting group of testimonies bears ample witness to the richness and diversity of the RERC archive: and of the wonders that await any intrepid explorer determined to uncover and examine its many and hidden treasures.

Mark Fox

Mark Fox is an independent writer, speaker and researcher. For more, go to www.markfox.co.uk

Notes:

1. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/what-the-pentagon-report-says-about-ufos>

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3. Keith Thompson, *Angels and Aliens: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination* (1991) Reading, Addison-Wesley, pp. 13-14

4. On this, see, for example, David Marler, *Triangular UFOs: An Estimate Of The Situation* (2013) Amazon

5. Ross Coulthard, *In Plain Sight* (2021) Sydney, HarperCollins,

6. Robbie Graham (ed), *UFOs: Reframing The Debate* (2017) Hove, White Crow, p. 63

7. Ryan Sprague, *Somewhere In The Skies: A Human Approach To The UFO Phenomenon* (2020) San Diego, Beyond The Fray Publishing

8. This account, which could not be retrieved from the archive, is reproduced in Timothy Beardsworth's analysis of the first 1000 archival accounts, *A Sense of Presence* (2009) Lampeter, RERC, p. 1 and is henceforth designated as 'B1'.

9. Merete Demant Jakobsen, *Negative Spiritual Experiences: Encounters With Evil* (1999) Oxford, RERC, pp. iii-iv

10. J. Allen Hynek, *The Hynek UFO Report* (2020) MA, MUFON, p. 165

11. *ibid*, p. 193

12. On this, see, for example, Budd Hopkins, *Missing Time* (2020) London, August Night Press

13. Hynek, *op cit.* p. 139

14. C.G Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth Of Things Seen In The Sky* (1987) London, Ark, p. xiii

EXPERIENCES

Arthur and the tiger

I have just been rereading the article entitled “Buster the cat” in De Numine number 71, page 17. Talking of Buster, Billie asks: “If I had reached out to touch him? What would have happened then? What?” I suddenly felt I knew the answer: her hand would have passed right through the apparition and when she touched the table the apparition would have vanished! My reason for saying this is my experience with a tiger and the death of my cousin Arthur.

In the days when I had to work for a living I had to spend a day in the Physics department of the University of Manchester. I began by calling in at the department office to see if I had any mail. There I momentarily thought that I could see the reflection of a tiger in the shiny front of a filing cabinet. When I looked round I could see nothing to produce such a reflection so I forgot about it.

When I went to lunch I had to walk along a long corridor which had two fire doors spaced out along it. These were largely made of wired glass so I could see to the end of the corridor. In the distance I suddenly saw a tiger racing towards me! Intellectually I knew that it was an hallucination, because it came through the fire doors without opening them or breaking the glass. However, I was just petrified, rooted to the spot! The tiger was full sized, full colour and looked completely solid. It ran right up to me and

through me as though I were the wraith and it the solid animal! Yet there was no sense of touch, no sound, no sense of smell, no wind. Once I could no longer see the animal I was no longer petrified, so I turned round to see where it had gone. There was no sign of it, it had simply vanished.

Later that day when I got home I was told that my cousin Arthur had just died unexpectedly from a heart attack. Unfortunately I do not know the precise time that he died because he was living alone. However, his sister was going in regularly to get his meals for him. He was still alive and seeming to be well at lunch time but was found to have died by tea time. I get the feeling that he must have died shortly after my experience with the tiger. It is as though his unconscious mind was trying to tell him in the morning that he was seriously ill but could not get through to his conscious mind. It tried again more urgently at about lunch time but still failed. These messages then came through to me instead as a visualisation of a tiger, presumably as a form of telepathy. The mediaeval explanation would have been that the angel of death came to Arthur first, but when he brushed her aside she came to me instead until eventually Arthur could no longer avoid her.

Barrie Rowson



Bengal tiger,
National Zoological
Gardens, Sri Lanka.

POETRY

I perceive, therefore I am

Perceived through eyes, sight
Distorted by cataracts, by bloaters
... and the mind
Interpreting, intellectualising,
conceptualising
Each one distancing
Perceived reality
From actual reality

Perceived through ears, hearing
Distorted by background noise, by wax
... and conditioning
Expectations, assumptions, cultural bias
Each one separating
Our perception of each moment
From the reality of each moment

Inner perception: sensed, felt
By our soul, our spirit
Experienced: here, now
Perception without interpretation
Reality



Rydal Water by Rhonda Riachi

Dr Keith Beasley
www.keithbeasley.co.uk

REPORTS

South East Wales Group Report

May 18th

Five from our group visited Pentwyn Farm run by Gwent Wildlife Trust in the very picturesque Wye Valley. It boasted many wild flower meadows. I saw my first blue orchid! We were blessed with a delightfully warm day. (The cottage is available to holiday-makers.)

On the way home we passed Kate Humble's farm. So now I know where it is!



June 15th

Ken Davies presented a light-hearted account of his childhood encounters with his local churches and chapels in north-east Wales, and how he searched for meanings and explanations.

Following this, we heard from Ken Price about a study day at Lampeter, run by the Temenos Academy. The morning told of 'The transgressions of Taliesin, the mystery of the ancient child'; and also, 'Journey to the Eastern Paradise: meetings with dragons, spirits and other mystical creatures of Ancient China'; and in the afternoon, a dramatized tale of Rhiannon from the Mabinogion. Ken had felt a special spiritual rapport with some of the attendees. He decided on staying another day, and getting to know something further about this religiously significant part of Wales.

I was taken back to the first meetings at Llantarnam Abbey, when, as the All Welsh group,

we were encouraged to involve ourselves in the historical Mabinogi. Now, sadly, the nuns are moving away, so we assume we will not be able to meet there in the future.

September 14th

The group considered three questions about our reading to date:

- *Through your reading, have you felt that the spiritual lay at the crux of the book?*
- *Do you feel some authors use their works (fiction or not) as a safe way to share their experience of the spiritual?*
- *Why do we always find that the crux of the book lies in the last chapter? And is this because we need to endure the earlier chapters to really get the whole point?*

We briefly discussed Michael Smith's book about Ernest Shackleton, leader of the 1914-1917 Trans-Antarctic Expedition, entitled *Shackleton: By Endurance We Conquer*. Shackleton was the first of the three explorers who survived the hazardous trek across South Georgia to proclaim: "I do not doubt that Providence guided us". Many years later his companions Worsley and Crean admitted to the same belief.

I felt the element of the unspoken taboo on disclosing any spiritual experience to be integral to the meeting. We found various ways to interpret our wide subject, and agreed that we would continue our discussion into the December meeting.

A member of the group who couldn't attend our meeting introduced a book with which he felt greatly in tune: "The Alchemist" by the Brazilian, Paulo Coelho. We look forward to visiting it together next time.

Mary Cook

Oxford and Cotswold Group Report

Discussing Guardian Angels and Spirit Guides

Thirteen members of the local group met in Frank Cook Court in Kidlington on Saturday 1 October on a lovely sunny autumn day. Rhonda Riachi read extracts from Ruth White's book, *Working with Guides and Angels*. It was very clear that these two 'beings' are extremely different, although they may be watching over the same person on earth. Apparently Guardian Angels never incarnate but they have definite roles, such as Messengers, Healers, Comforters, Wise councillors, Bringers of compassion, etc.

Spirit Guides can and do incarnate. It may have been a very long time ago or more recently.

My mother in law Doris Mason was an excellent and a very modest medium, who conveyed messages from spirit guides to many people over her long life. I recalled that my husband Don's spirit guide came through via his mother for the first time when he was a teenager. The guide was Chinese, named Si Si, and did not speak English so my father in law asked him to learn our language and come back when it was possible. It was about six months before Si Si returned and was able to convey helpful messages and advice to the family for many years.

We all have spirit guides to help us through life to help us as we progress. I have recently wondered about my own spirit guides. Apparently we can have more than one and the most helpful will come forward at the most appropriate time.

I have often been aware of the 'presence' that Sir Alister often speaks about when out in the countryside but would have liked a more vivid picture of my personal helpers. It came in a glimmer, a quick flash and my father was there

making his presence felt. So our spirit guides may be family members or may not but will be the best ones to help.

Ian said he had often felt the positive presence of guides but on one occasion he had felt a presence from the darker side. Through prayer and strong will power he had cast out this negative influence and sent 'it' on its way.

Paul told us about the Buddhist beliefs regarding Guardian Angels, and Patricia recounted a good 'entity' wearing army uniform whose presence had been felt by several members and visitors in one of the guest rooms at Frank Cook Court.

We realised and sensed that although there were just thirteen friends visible in the sitting room, each was surrounded by our own 'cloud of angels'; in fact the room was packed with many loving spirits and most wonderful of all, **WE COULD FEEL IT.**

Mahalla Mason

Neil Hancox adds:

On a more practical level we had a microphone which enabled each speaker to be heard (some of us, well I am, are getting a bit deaf!) and Clare kept up our spirits with delicious cake and biscuits to accompany the coffee.

The Oxford and Cotswold Group meets every month on the first Saturday of the month at Frank Cook Court, Kidlington (and occasionally on Zoom).

To join future meetings please email alister.hardy.oxford@gmail.com

Report on the conference ‘Mystical Experiences: Past and Present’

Organised by the Religious Experience Research Centre at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David with support from the Alister Hardy Trust

The annual conference of the Religious Experience Research Centre, Lampeter, took place this year in hybrid form. Of the 179 people who registered for the event, 89 attended online in the morning and 54 in the afternoon, and approx. 50-60 people on site. The onsite participants were mainly from the local area but some had travelled from as far as Oxford. Most of the online delegates were based in the UK, with several in the USA and Brazil. Participants included postgraduate students, lay members of the Alister Hardy Trust, scholars working in the field, and other people interested in the speakers or the topic. While the keynote speaker attracted most attention, the other papers were also very well received and discussed.

One speaker had to withdraw the day before due to COVID and the programme was slightly adjusted. We started with a welcome from Prof Medwin Hughes, Vice Chancellor of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and Prof John Harper, Vice Chair of the Alister Hardy Trust. The Rt Rev and Rt Hon Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Wales and Canterbury and Patron of the Alister Hardy Trust, gave the Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture on *The Soul and the Trinity in Julian of Norwich*. As expected, the lecture led to a rich discussion.

The second paper was given by Prof Lisa Isherwood, Professor of Practice at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, on Margery Kempe: God's wild housewife! Her paper complemented the keynote lecture perfectly and provided a feminist reading of medieval mystics.

After the lunch break, Prof Marta Helena de Freitas, Catholic University of Brasilia – UCB, spoke on Brazilian psychotherapists' narratives about mystical experiences in clinical contexts. She referred several times to Prof Isherwood's paper and highlighted the links between past mystics and today's experiences. The discussion led then harmoniously to the next paper by Prof Bettina Schmidt, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, entitled Rudolf Otto and a reflection on mystical experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. After a question and answer session about this paper, all speakers were invited to join a final panel discussion with questions and comments from both online and onsite participants.

I want to thank the Alister Hardy Trust for the support of the conference, financially but also in person, online as well as on campus.

**Prof Bettina Schmidt, Director,
Religious Experience Research Centre,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David**



Left to right: Prof Lisa Isherwood, Prof John Harper, Prof Medwin Hughes, The Lord Williams of Oystermouth, Prof Bettina Schmidt and Prof Marta Helena de Freitas

Report from Director of Communications & Membership Administrator

Membership

People continue to join the AHT – mainly to gain access to the Archive. At the moment we have 249 members. A new member Young-hae Chi from the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (formerly the Oriental Institute) at Oxford University attended the RERC conference in Lampeter in July where he met many of us. He subsequently invited me to a colloquium, ‘Oxford Dialogue’ where I responded to his presentation on *Existential anxiety and environmental crises: Death as a foundational origin of environmental crises and as a foundational solution*. This focused on NDEs as changing attitudes to life and death, and my response, widening that to RSEs more generally, brought the research of the RERC, to the notice of scholars worldwide.

I have updated our publicity leaflets and if anyone would like a few copies, please get in touch. I’m happy to mail them.

Members’ Day

In 2022 we were finally able to meet in person again at our usual venue, the Quaker Meeting House in St Giles, Oxford on 15th October. This was the first face-to-face gathering since the Golden Anniversary celebrations of 2019. This year I was invited to give the annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture. I followed on from my presentation last year and spoke on my PhD research under the title *Is Altruism a Principal Fruit of Spiritual Experience? An Exploration of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre Archive*.

In the afternoon we welcomed back Dr Wendy Dossett, former Director of the RERC, now Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the

University of Chester, to speak on *Addiction: A spiritual malady? Some Reflections on Twelve Step and Buddhist Approaches*. This was followed by Rhonda Riachi telling us about *The Spirit and the Word: Editing De Numine*. It was a rich and enjoyable day and our first hybrid meeting – we included an online option on Zoom for those unable to attend.

Events

Thirty people signed up for our online meeting on April 30th with guest speaker David Lorimer, who gave a fascinating talk on *Dr Albert Schweitzer – Peace and the Ethic of Reverence for Life*. It was a wide-ranging presentation covering many aspects of Schweitzer’s life and thinking. If you missed it, David’s book *A Quest for Love and Wisdom* contains much of the material of the talk as well as other valuable studies of people who have influenced him on his own spiritual journey.

In activities only partly related to the AHT, I led Quiet Days for several groups looking back at the Covid Lockdowns – enabling us to *Share, Reflect and Learn* from them. Initially just after the first lockdown, people seemed to have learned so much and to have embraced a more spiritual outlook. There were experiences of neighbourly kindness and a new sense of community. But in general, after several further lockdowns, people now seem to be bent on getting back to normal life. Have the good intentions survived? It’s hard to say.

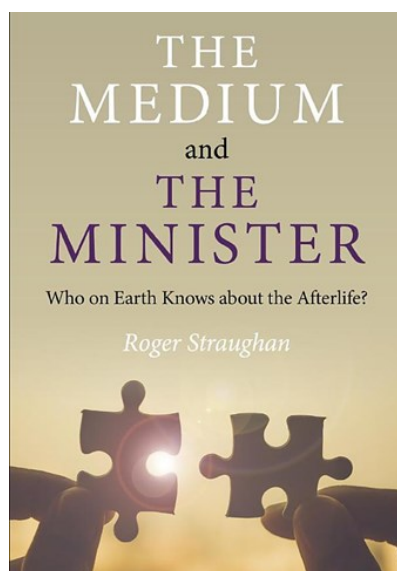
Marianne Rankin

marianne.rankin@studyspiritualexperiences.org

BOOK REVIEWS

Roger Straughan, *The Medium and the Minister: who knows about the afterlife?* Alresford, John Hunt Publishing, 2022, pp. 176, ISBN 978-1-789048-80-3, £10.99

This is a useful and succinct introduction to the controversies in Christian churches concerning belief in and evidence for life after death in the 19th and 20th centuries. It charts the development of spiritualism and psychic research in the USA and Britain and outlines the opposition they encountered from Anglican and other church authorities and the scientific establishment alike. Case studies of personal experiences and examples of psychical investigations which present strong evidence of life after death are discussed.



Readers of *De Numine* may be familiar with Straughan's earlier work, *A Study in Survival: Conan Doyle Solves the Final Problem* (2009), which we explored in detail at a meeting of the Oxford & Cotswold Group in 2011. Conan Doyle makes a key appearance in this book, along

with the eminent scientist Sir Oliver Lodge. As early members of the Society for Psychical Research (Lodge was its President at the time of his knighthood) they were leading lights in the growth of psychic research and spiritualism, spurred on by their own experiences of after-death communication. Lodge's son, Raymond, was killed in the first World War in 1915 and a year later his father published a book about the many apparent communications the family had received from him after his death, entitled *Raymond or Life and Death*. In that year Conan Doyle became a supporter of the Spiritualist movement following a message given to him via a medium apparently from his brother-in-law, who had been killed in 1914.

One chapter is devoted to the infamous 1939 report on spiritualism commissioned by the Anglican Archbishop Cosmo Lang. The commission members were divided on the conclusions to the report, with a minority offering their own conclusions. As it was considered to be potentially highly damaging to the church it was not published until 1979.

Although there is no index, the book includes all key references and suggestions for further reading. The author does not seek to convince others of what the afterlife might be like, but prefers to let readers make up their own minds.

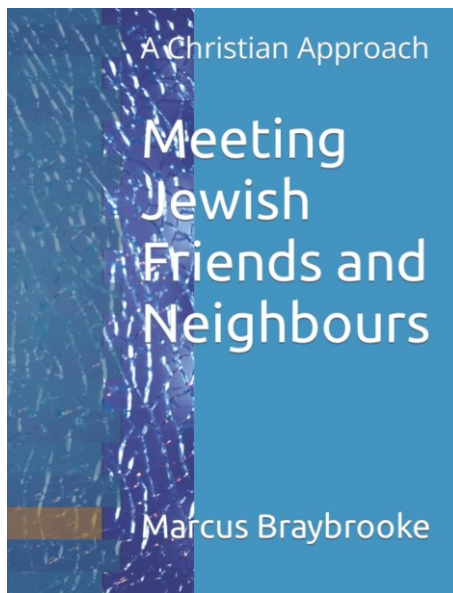
Rhonda Riachi

Marcus Braybrooke, *Meeting Jewish Friends and Neighbours*, Abingdon, Braybrooke Press, 2022, pp. 207, ISBN 979-8-806184-22-2, £12.99

It is tempting for Christians to assume that we know about the Jews. They have always been with us and we share some of their scriptures, what Christians call the Old Testament. Abraham, Moses, David – and of course Mary, Joseph and Jesus and others depicted in the New Testament

were all Jews. We may be aware of traditional Jews with their ringlets and know about the horrors of the Holocaust, but this book offers a fascinating, in-depth portrait of the Jewish people, which can move us from what we think we know to a detailed understanding.

Above the title on the cover of the book, is stated *A Christian Approach* as Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke is writing as a Christian; he is a retired vicar. However, his credentials for writing the book are his detailed knowledge of the Jewish tradition and close involvement with the Jewish community. He is a former President of the World Congress of Faiths, Director the Council of Christians and Jews and co-founder of the Faith and Belief Forum. He has been an AHT member for many years and gave the Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture in 2018.



In a foreword, Michael V. Sternberg praises the book for teaching him, a Jew, 'so many new things' about his own tradition. Braybrooke begins with history, making it clear that Judaism today is post-Rabbinic, built up after the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 70CE. Thus what we read in what Braybrooke refers to as the Hebrew Bible, rather than the Old Testament, which may sound disrespectful, is interpreted by Jews in the light of centuries of Rabbinical study. We learn of the Diaspora and about the differences between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews. The complexities of the various Jewish communities such as the Strictly or Ultra-Orthodox and the non-Orthodox, including Reform, Progressive and Liberal Judaism are explained.

At the outset, a fundamental question is posed, 'Who is a Jew?' Strictly, anyone with a Jewish mother is a Jew, but when Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, attempted to get a

definition from Jewish figures worldwide, the answers varied so much, that he abandoned the attempt. The Jews are a people united by a common history, family ties and culture, rather than through common beliefs. These can vary enormously and there is a traditional joke, that if two Jews are in discussion there will be three opinions.

Differences in Jewish attitudes to their scriptures are explained and Braybrooke suggests that a prevailing paradigm may be found between them, often taken to be Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Belief. Family life and traditions are described as practised in the home and kosher dietary laws explained. Communal life is centred on the synagogue and Jewish holy days, such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, their history and associated rituals are explained. Précis are given of famous Jewish thinkers of the past, including Marx, Freud, Einstein and Buber and more recent feminist writing and the ordination of women rabbis is recorded.

The passages describing the horror of the Holocaust or *Shoah*, as it is often known by Jews, are especially moving. Braybrooke describes his own visits to Auschwitz and other Holocaust museums, memorials to the six million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis. The awful events are recorded in detail, and in his text Braybrooke blends detailed facts with moving memoirs and poems. The aftermath is considered – the Nuremberg trials, raising questions of forgiveness and reconciliation and the chapter ends with 'A Prayer for Christians and Jews to say together'.

The significance of Israel and Jerusalem to the Jewish people is considered, introduced by a clear overview of its history and struggle for the nation's survival. Rivalry for a land sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims has not made its existence easy. Threats to peace are unceasing, but so are efforts to establish harmony through interfaith organisations and individual efforts at reconciliation. Leaders of the three faiths came together in 2002 to sign the Alexandria Declaration which deplored the killing of innocents in the name of God. In 1965 the Second Vatican Council decree *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Age) emphasised the need for dialogue between Christians and Jews.

Thorny issues raised in Jewish-Christian Relations are covered and their motivations addressed, including charges of deicide by Christians and resentment of missionary activity by Jews. In fact both religions – Rabbinic Judaism and the Early Church are sometimes seen as springing from the same root. Braybrooke ends by emphasizing a ‘shared vocation “to struggle to bring God down to earth” ... to oppose racism, anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination.’ This is an aim for which all religions and spiritual people can strive and gaining a greater understanding of each other is a vital first step. This book fulfils that criterion for Jews as seen by Christians.

The book is large, A4 size, clearly set out and illustrated, although unfortunately not in colour. Some smaller maps are unclear and typos have crept in from time to time but this does not spoil the work. Although scholarly (with almost 500 footnotes), it is an easy and fascinating read, highly recommended as a comprehensive portrait of a remarkable people, who have had such a profound effect on our civilization.

Marianne Rankin

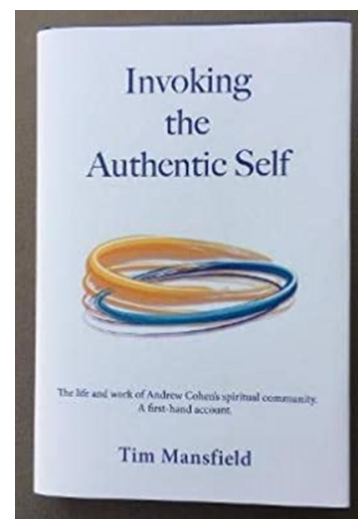
Will the real self please stand up?

Tim Mansfield, *Invoking the Authentic Self*, Biddles Books, 2021, 264pp, ISBN 978-1-913663-87-2, £29.00 (hardback)

I approached this book with trepidation, not least because I had failed to interest several other potential reviewers to read it. It is possible that they also felt slightly queasy when thinking about modern spiritual groups dominated by one teacher. My own take on these groups (commonly called *religious cults*) has been influenced by years of media reporting on how young people can get ensnared by the glamour of a breakaway community that promises them enlightenment, sometimes with tragic results including lasting psychological trauma. I was willing to be disabused of my prejudice against groups of this kind, but having read this book I now feel the same destructive tendencies were at work in Andrew Cohen’s EnlightenNext community throughout the 27 years of its existence. However, the author does not feel that he was subject to any abuse and says that Cohen’s teachings liberated him from fear, so the situation was clearly complex. As such this book should probably be on the reading list of anyone studying modern religious cults and their after-effects.

Tim Mansfield describes Andrew Cohen (born in 1955 in New York), his community of multinational students, and the author’s own take on various incidents that happened over

the years. Cohen and his students sought to invoke what they saw as an enhanced form of enlightenment, which they named *the Authentic Self*. Mansfield covers the years 1986-2013, from the inception of the community to its dissolution. Locations include Foxhollow (a country estate in Massachusetts), India, the south of France and London. Cohen developed and maintained a hierarchical structure, with a worldwide inner circle of 150 to 300 “close students” and 10 EnlightenNext centres at its peak. The global audience (including retreat attendances and book and magazine readerships) is said to have reached about one million people.



The enlightenment sought by the community is clearly difficult to define (most spiritual concepts are...) but I did feel somewhat underwhelmed by the description given in chapter 2 as correlating with the “dissolving of self-importance”, and the desire to attain it being “akin to a love of mathematics” in its complexity and limited appeal in society at large. Tellingly, the author says that pursuing enlightenment can be emotionally “crushing”, an adjective he uses again later in relation to the responsibilities that are given by Cohen to select members of the community. The definition of the Authentic Self the students encountered, given in chapter 21, likens it to the Christian Holy Spirit. I have no means to judge that statement, but the long term effects on the group seem to differ markedly from what was seen in the case of Christ’s disciples in the Bible.

Chapter 3 deals with the concept of ego as viewed by Cohen and the community, described as a “big subject in the life and work” of the community. The definition of ego given is along the lines of a force working to oppose enlightenment, which “destroys curiosity while inflating self-importance”. I don’t doubt that ego is a problem in our time and in secular

society, but what is striking here is that the students were instructed by Cohen to observe and attempt to “cage” their ego, whilst Cohen’s own ego is never questioned by the author, and appeared to be able to do what it pleased.

Later chapters detail the history of the community, the separation into male and female groups, the (perhaps inevitable) conflicts which arose, and the final break up and dissolution. As with all large groups which end explosively, there have been many accusations aired by former members. Some hair-raising stories can be read on the Amazon pages and on Facebook, among other sources.

One interesting and perhaps more positive outcome of the dissolution of EnlightenNext is that none of the dissolved community’s money went to its founder, but was all disbursed to community causes and to Harvard’s Divinity School.

In all I found this is a fascinating read, but perhaps not for the reasons the author intended. My wariness of self-appointed gurus has not abated.

Rhonda Riachi

Edwin and Laurel Lloyd-Jones, *The Elm Grove Story*, pp468, ISBN 978-1-922722-55-3

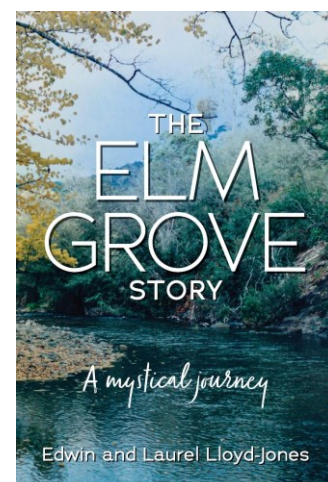
Here is a powerful story of a couple’s life journey completely guided by fate. Even excluding my personal bias (they had some spiritual journeys and I, like surely many others, foolishly presumed such things only ever happened to me!) this is a story of uncanny events, unexpected synchronicities, incredible guidance and heavy tests.

As they embark on the journey of a lifetime, taking their whole family with them, a married couple seek to create a safe haven for many others. From selling their house to picking the town to start this creation in, they only ever do it with the guidance of God.

Never have I read such a gripping, fast-paced spiritual journey. While trying hard not to let the cat out of the bag, I would say read this one

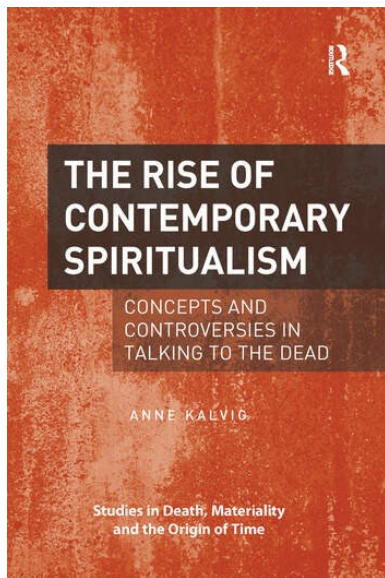
when you are not planning to have time to put it down!

Billie Krstovic



Anne Kalvig, *The Rise of Contemporary Spiritualism*, Routledge 2020, pp124, ISBN 978-0-367595-98-2

This is one of the most helpful books I have found on alternative spirituality and new religious movements. It combines scholarship and academic rigour with accessibility for the general reader. There is plenty of material to ponder in what appears to be a short volume.



The Rise of Contemporary Spiritualism provides a very useful exploration of the relationship between the study of religion(s), religious experience and the paranormal. Its author is Professor of Religious Studies in the Department of Cultural Studies and Languages at the University of Stavanger in Norway.¹ With a background in religious history, Anne Kalvig adopts a pluralist approach to the study of contemporary Spiritualism, with a particular focus on her own country, which is grounded in the historical development of this religious movement, including its relationship with Spiritism. Kalvig is described as a “women’s activist” and her other research interests include Norse culture and religion, Shamanism and alternative therapies.^{2,3} These subjects are also considered in *The Rise of Contemporary Spiritualism*, and her discussion of what might be described as intersectionalities between various forms of alternative spirituality is most instructive.

In addition to the discussion below, there are two informative reviews of *The Rise of*

Contemporary Spiritualism on the Good Reads and Reading Religion websites.^{4,5}

The motivation to review this book initially arose from conversations with Rory Evans of Mid Wales Paranormal between 2020-21, as reported in a previous article for De Numine.⁶ I wanted to have a better understanding of Spiritualism and “talking to the dead.” I also have a longer-term interest in Shamanism and the connections made by Anne Kalvig between this and “the rise of contemporary Spiritualism” appealed to me. Originally published in 2016, the Routledge edition I used was from June 2020. Since its conception, the broader context for contemporary religious and paranormal experience has changed dramatically, with new interest in the supernatural arising first due to Covid 19 restrictions and most recently from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The latter has triggered new discourses around the nature of evil with reputable sources claiming Russia’s secular and spiritual leadership is possessed by dark forces, and Vladimir Putin likened to the Anti-Christ.^{7,8} More generally, Coronavirus seems to have triggered an openness to the so-called “uncanny”, with a BBC Radio series of that name and increasing reports in middle-brow media formerly cautious about tackling the paranormal.^{9,10}

One of my underlying questions in reading *The Rise of Contemporary Spiritualism* concerns how those who engage with the non-material or spirit world might distinguish between good and bad entities. This subject came to the fore during a presentation by Dr Terence Palmer (a former PhD student of Professor Bettina Schmidt) at the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Conference in 2019.¹¹ There is a central dialectic in the relationship between Spiritualism, which does not tend to concede the existence of evil after physical death, and Spiritism which recognises a variety of disembodied forms whose moral essence and intent the medium needs to discern very carefully. For this reason, Kalvig scrupulously outlines the emergence of the two movements in the 19th century, with Spiritualism evolving

first mainly in Britain and North America, and Spiritism from the work of Allan Kardec in France.¹² Spiritism tends to have spread beyond the Anglophone world, for instance in Brazil. Anne Kalvig also suggests that “....spiritism, not spiritualism, is the common denominator for the mediumistic field in Norway.” However, as the title of her book implies, “spiritualism” remains the popular nomenclature for engagement with the spirit world here and in other countries where English is widely used.

The tendency for conceptual fusions and, therefore, potential for confusions is a widespread feature of new religious movements and alternative spirituality as these are generally populist in their appeal. A particularly helpful feature of Kalvig’s book is her discussion of the contemporary milieu for religious and paranormal experience associated with practitioners of Spiritualism, Spiritism as well as fusions of these with Christianity, Shamanism and various forms of Neo-Paganism. The North American communications theorist Marshall McLuhan coined the expression “the medium is the message” to promote better understanding of how different forms of media technology operate across culture and society.¹³ His aphorism might also be applied to the operation of mediums, clairvoyants and other human (plus non-human) channels of the spirit world as well as the diverse loci in and through which paranormal communication takes place. As Kalvig notes, such communication increasingly occurs in technologically mediated settings, whether more traditional like broadcast television or on new (and now not so new) digital platforms.

New technologies and social media have become an integral part of modern paranormal and religious experience, including the rise of contemporary spiritualism. I recently came across the term “haunted tech” and the relationship between technology and hauntings seems to have become a subject of considerable interest in itself.^{7,14} Digital technology has certainly enabled memorialisation of the dead, both individually and collectively, as never before and has contributed to what might be described as a

new cult of death in many secular Western countries, further amplified by Coronavirus. Although Kalvig’s book predates the pandemic, its subtitle of “concepts and controversies in talking to the dead” very much fits with wider contemporary societal and academic interest in death and the afterlife. This also reflects forms of ancestor worship which are generally regarded by scholars of religion, such as Robin Dunbar, as core phenomena in organised religious experience from its earliest manifestations.¹⁵ Dunbar writes from a rather different intellectual perspective, but like Anne Kalvig he identifies the key role of “religious specialists, like shamans” who can guide others through “parallel cosmologies.”

To conclude, on the central role assigned to women in *The Rise of Contemporary Spiritualism*, Kalvig suggests that, among other factors, a relative lack of institutionalisation partly explains this. Women, it should be noted, are also the major consumers of alternative spirituality with small retailers at one time serving this market, which has since moved increasingly online. From such a business, which also hosted a range of mediumship and other events, some years ago I came across the work of prolific American “New Age” writer Doreen Virtue.^{17,18} Virtue, who has a professional background in mental health services, subsequently repudiated her earlier “channelled” spiritual enterprise in favour of born-again Christianity.¹⁹ Just as Virtue’s earlier work attracted many followers (she currently has 1.3 million on Facebook), so did her road to Damascus conversion.²⁰ Such tumultuous journeys are not uncommon in religious movements (alternative and conventional) and themselves have wide appeal. However, for those who prefer to combine spiritual contemplation and engagement with critical thinking, I strongly recommend Ann Kalvig’s book.

Note on book formats: My digital version of *The Rise of Contemporary Spiritualism* was provided by publisher Routledge for review through <https://www.vitalsource.com/>

Janet Mackinnon

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https://www.studyspiritualexperiences.org/uploads/3/6/6/5/3665804/de_numine_71.pdf
7. <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/15065/catholic-priest-in-ukraine-starts-putin-exorcism-ritual>
8. <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/ukraines-religious-community-perseveres-through-horrors-war>
9. BBC Radio 4 - Uncanny
10. Spooky Britain: how ghosts became a national obsession | Health & wellbeing | The Guardian
11. A revised epistemology for an understanding of spirit release therapy developed in accordance with the conceptual framework of F. W. H. Myers - Bangor University
12. <https://imhu.org/spiritism/spiritism-and-spiritualism>
13. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_medium_is_the_message
14. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20161027-how-smart-homes-have-become-the-haunted-houses-of-today>
15. <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/22-april/features/features/in-conversation-with-author-robin-dunbar-from-cave-to-chancel>
16. How Religion Evolved (penguin.co.uk)
17. <https://www.waterstones.com/author/doreen-virtue/30476>
18. <https://www.lifejourneys.net/celebrities/doreen-virtue-phd>
19. <https://doreenvirtue.com/> <https://en-gb.facebook.com/DoreenVirtueForJesus>
20. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conversion_of_Paul_the_Apostle

Richard Botelho, *The Full Extent: An enquiry into Reality and Destiny*, pp270, ISBN 978-0-964392-63-2

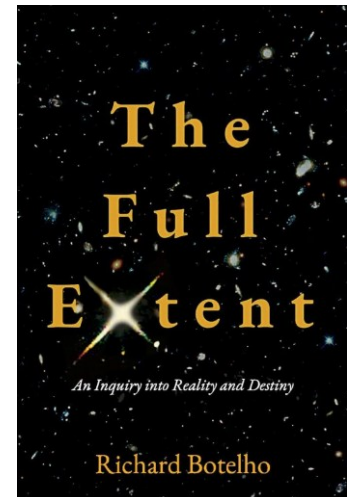
This is an interesting philosophical enquiry into the nature of reality and the spiritual development of humanity. Botelho sets some firm hypotheses about humanity's level of development and proposes a solution for further growth. He examines the role of consciousness and unity within the collective human experience.

Interestingly, he hypothesises about alien races and their likely spiritual development which he compares to ours, human versus alien states of consciousness. Here he presumes that we humans are not at the required degree of spirituality to be contacted by hypothetical alien races and points out that that this should be another reason to work on our development. He suggests several solutions and discusses a path humanity could take.

Botelho has clearly given a lot of thought to what alien races' spirituality might be like and in parts it seems much as our own or perhaps

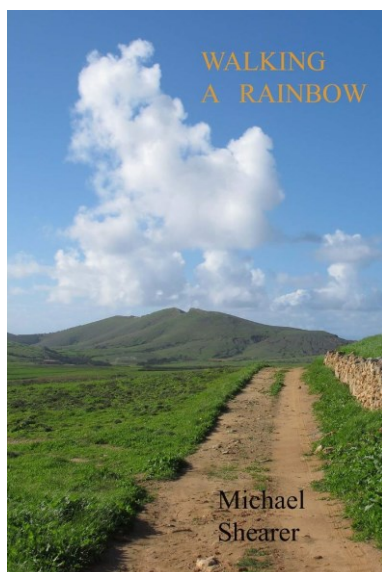
what we might aspire to. I am unsure how much of this I agree with, but anyone interested in extra-terrestrial ideas might want to look into his work. There is plenty to consider and digest here.

Billie Krstovic



Michael Shearer, *Walking a Rainbow*, pp339, ISBN 978 1 722279 48 6

This is an unusual story of a walk through Spain by a philosophy teacher and his nine-year-old son Kes. It is a story of spiritual awakening and a call to change our world - all our worlds.



During one hot summer, the two decide to walk from Essex to Camino de Santiago in Spain. The trip is eventful, with many strange and weird people, many 'pilgrims' such as themselves. As with any true, real life experience this one has laugh-out-loud moments as well as difficult, painful and life changing events.

This is a story of purification, friendships, fatherhood and profound change. It is a wake-up call to see the nature of our reality as human beings in the 21st century. Who are we? Why are we? What are we and what really matters?

Some might find answers or perhaps awakening in this lovely book.

Billie Krstovic

OBITUARY

Frances Mary Bird

Born in Montreal, Canada, Frances had a comfortable and pleasant childhood with her siblings and many cousins. From an early age she had two burning ambitions: to qualify as a nurse and then to go to Africa. Both ambitions were fully realised, graduating from Montreal General Hospital as a nurse in 1968 and leaving shortly afterwards for Zambia in Central Africa for two years with CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseas), a voluntary organisation helping in developing countries.

In Zambia Frances worked in an isolated mission hospital, cared for the patients there and rode her motor bike to outlying villages to tend the sick, deliver babies, pull teeth and generally promote good health and hygiene. She loved it and said it felt like “arriving home” when she reached Zambia. On completion of her two years in Zambia Frances returned to Canada and worked as a nurse in Toronto City Jail, both respected and protected by the prisoners.

Frances returned to Africa to nurse once again in 1971, this time in a small mission hospital in a tiny village called Zonkwa in the centre of Nigeria. On her way to her first shift she met a young man on his motor bike leaving the hospital having been discharged after a severe bout of malaria. As the weeks and months passed Frances and Derek (Bird) developed a lovely relationship which would last for 50 years.

Frances worked tirelessly at the hospital helping the poor and sick of Zonkwa. At the end of their contracts Frances went back to Canada, Derek returned to the UK, and from a distance planned their future together.

When Derek received immigration approval from Canada in 1973 he flew to Montreal to marry Frances, in Lachine, a suburb of Montreal where Frances grew up. Frances’s brother Mike read *Desiderata* by Max Ehrmann at the service and all guests signed a poster print of the poem as a memento. Frances and Derek lived and worked in

Montreal for about 4 years with a stint in Papua New Guinea sandwiched in the middle. When it came time to settle, they agreed on the UK and bought their first house in Tadley, Hampshire, and then along came daughters Maria and Naomi.

There followed a relatively “stable” period, with Frances nursing again, fitting her duties at Basingstoke District Hospital around responsibilities for the children. They had dogs for most of their married life, mainly from rescue centres in line with Frances’s wishes, and opened their home to children from underprivileged areas in the UK so they could have a holiday away from home. They also tried fostering – again initiated by Frances. During her lifetime Frances did so much for so many people and never sought praise for what she had done.

An opportunity to return to Africa came via a former work colleague of Derek’s, who with her husband had set up a school in the Tigray region of Ethiopia for the education of local children. They met with Max and Kathryn Robinson and agreed on a 3-month stay at the school in Mekele, northern Ethiopia in 2011, just after both had retired. Frances taught biology and, in her own tactful way, provided some input to the school First Aid programme.



Frances Bird shaking hands with General Gowon, President of Nigeria, visiting the hospital in the early 1970s

There were some students who Frances felt needed additional nutrition and after scouring the internet she came across PLUMPY'NUT, a supplement supplied in sachets and containing peanut paste, vegetable oil, powdered milk, sugar, vitamins & minerals. She and Derek flew to Addis Ababa to inspect the factory where it is made to ensure Plumpy'nut was a viable option for selected children at the school, and ordered a large trial carton of sachets for delivery by bus to the school. The children loved it and Plumpy'nut clearly helped their nutrition. Frances initiated basic health checks on all the schoolchildren, approximately 1,000 at that time, carried out during lunch breaks over the three months they were in Ethiopia.

Frances loved her family, relatives, friends and humanity in general. She adored her two daughters and her two grandsons, Leo and Jax. She loved all animals, especially dogs, her garden and gardening, reading, creative writing, poetry,



travel, swimming, walking, and painting. She also got a kick out of playing Pickleball, winning a gold medal in the ladies' doubles at a tournament in Amsterdam.

She especially liked the music of Leonard Cohen, a fellow citizen of Montreal, and country and western music. She loved the friends she made through her work, through the Alistair Hardy Trust, Quakers and Pickleball. The list is endless.

Frances is sadly missed by the Oxford and Cotswold AHT group. Her time as our meeting chair in 2021 was all too short. We remember with fondness her presentation on Henry, the dog who came to stay a while with Frances and Derek, and his special spiritual connection with her.

Rhonda Riachi

Frances Mary Bird, née Savage, 17 November 1947 - 21 April 2022.

Many thanks to Derek Bird for supplying the text of his eulogy to Frances, on which this obituary is based. Derek will be presenting on the projects that he and Frances undertook in Africa at a meeting of the Oxford & Cotswold Group on Saturday 3 December in Kidlington. Contact alister.hardy.oxford@gmail.com for details.

NOTICES

Alister Hardy Trust Books for Sale

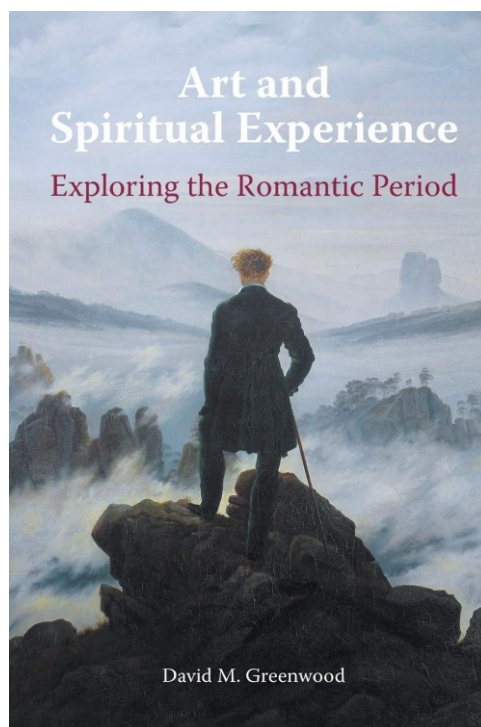
As members will know, following the death of Tom Pitchford the RERC office in Lampeter is no longer staffed on a regular basis. To enable members to continue to buy our most popular books, we have transferred them to the address below.

Here are the titles:

- *The Divine Flame*, Sir Alister Hardy (an essay towards a natural history of religion). RERU 1966. £2.00
- *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, Sir Alister Hardy (a study of contemporary religious experience). RERC 1979/2006. £5.00
- *Living the Questions*, Edward Robinson (ed). (Studies in the childhood of religious experience). 1978. £5.00
- *Exploration into Spirit* (A power greater than...). John Franklin. Alister Hardy Trust 2020 (3rd ed). £13.00
- *A Sense of Presence*, Timothy Beardsworth (Study of Contemporary Religious Experience). RERC 1977/2009. £5.00
- *God's Biologist*, David Hay (A biography of Sir Alister Hardy). Darton Longman and Todd 2011. (Hardback) £19.50 (Reduced).

I have managed to secure a good deal for my own book *Art and Spiritual Experience* (2018) which I am donating to the Trust and is available to members at £6.50 (less than half price).

Of the latter Bishop John Saxbee writes: "A thorough and thoughtful inquiry into how art in general, and landscape painting in



particular, can trigger awareness of transcendence and often powerful spiritual experiences."

Post and packing is £1.50 and the books are available from me at:

**Field Cottage,
Lower Welson,
EARDISLEY,
Herefordshire, HR3 6NB.**

**Payment by cheque, or by transfer to our account with a copy of the on-line receipt forwarded to me at
d.greenwood@uwtsd.ac.uk**

David Greenwood, Hon. Treasurer

EVENTS

Oxford Humans Death Forum

End-of-Life Experiences: What do they teach us about death and life after death?



Dr Peter Fenwick (above) neuroscientist and former Senior Lecturer at the University of London, will tell us about the results of his life-long research on the End-of-Life Experiences and their implications for what happens to us after we die.

5.00-6.30 pm GMT, Friday 11 November 2022 on Zoom

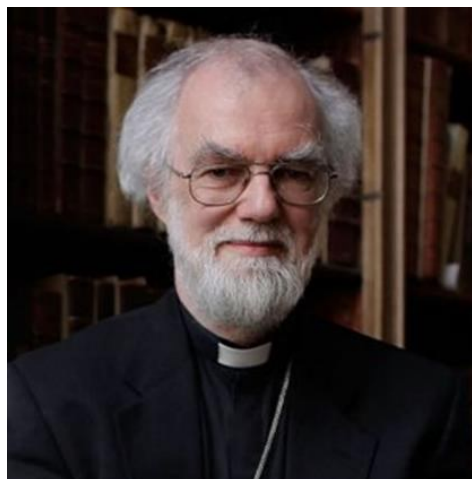
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2140714062?pwd=SG11aWpjaGtjNGRUeWNwTmdWaGhDdz09>

Meeting ID: 214 071 4062

Passcode: 1008

YouTube livestreaming URL:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7BqnQc0_KagngDSwDJvEng/live

What is Death, and How to Die Well



Dr Peter Fenwick and The Lord Williams of Oystermouth (above) will explore this crucial question and give us their answers through a dialogue between neuroscience and theology.

5.00-6.30 pm GMT, Monday 12 December 2022 on Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2140714062?pwd=SG11aWpjaGtjNGRUeWNwTmdWaGhDdz09>

Meeting ID: 214 071 4062

Passcode: 1008

YouTube livestreaming URL:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7BqnQc0_KagngDSwDJvEng/live

Moderator for both events: Dr Young-hae Chi (Lecturer, University of Oxford)

For details go to www.oxfordhumans.com