

REACHING OUT



The Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies

SPRING 2013

The Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies (QFAS) is a Listed Informal Group of the Religious Society of Friends. QFAS aims to explore evidence for survival of death, to provide a forum for discussion on this and related subjects and to learn from and support those with psychic gifts and experiences. It aims to do this within the Quaker movement and in society in general by liaising with other groups with like aims.

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Welcome to the latest edition of *Reaching Out*. Thank you to all those who have sent me contributions. I look forward to receiving more for future editions. All contributions (including photographs etc for cover) should be sent to me, preferably by email but, if that is not possible, by post. My contact details are on the inside of the front cover. Please include your name and, if sending by post, your postal address or telephone number. Please also say whether you are happy to have your name included with the item in the magazine or would prefer your contribution to be published anonymously.

As requested in the last edition, we would like to include items on experiences involving animals and also guides and guardian angels. So if you have such a experience to tell please let us know.

Also, please let us have details of any mediums you would recommend so that we can add their names to our list.

Cover Photograph

I am grateful to Judith Taylor for the lovely cover photograph of a sunset. To me this is symbolic of the fact that while the sun may set on one horizon, it will rise again on another. So our personal 'sun' may 'set' on this earthly life at physical death but will rise again in another existence

Cherry Simpkin

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for the year were due on 1st January. Subscription renewal slips are included with the magazine. (The subscription was raised to £10.00 waged, £7.00 unwaged or retired, at the AGM. If you have already paid for 2013 at the old rate please don't feel you need to send more! If you pay by Standing Order please could you contact your bank and inform them of the increase.)

It helps to keep down administrative costs if members pay by standing order so please consider arranging to pay your subscription this way if you do not already do so. Your membership of QFAS is greatly valued. The more people who support QFAS the more we can do for our members and the more QFAS can widen its scope and influence within the Society of Friends and in the wider world.

Standing Order forms may be obtained from the Membership Secretary, Sylvia Izzard (see contact details inside front cover) or can be downloaded from the QFAS website at www.quakerfellowshipforafterlifestudies.co.uk/contacts (scroll down to the bottom of the page).

CDS OF SPEAKERS ARE NOW AVAILABLE

CDs of talks given at QFAS conferences are now available. An order form with details is enclosed with this magazine.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

QFAS Spring Conference 2013

The QFAS Spring Conference will be held on Saturday, 4 May, 2013 at Friends' House from 10.30-16.00. Speakers are: David Taylor and Cal Cooper.

David Taylor:

Bridging the Worlds: A social history of communication with the Otherworld

From shamans to EVP. David will look at the social historical developments in attempts to communicate with cultural concepts of the 'otherworld' and how these various attempts have been influenced by the current Zeitgeist.

Cal Cooper: **Phone Calls from Beyond?**

(author of "Telephone Calls from the Dead" by Callum E. Cooper, pub. 2012)

"Many people, when asked, will say that at some point in their lives they have experienced what they believe to be a ghost, or have had a psychic experience.

However, will many people openly admit that they have experienced what they believe to be a 'phone call from the dead'? This question has been asked before, and was investigated back in 1979, in a book entitled *Phone Calls from the Dead*, written by D. Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayless. For many years, this subject has remained dormant, until now, thirty years on, in this new book, the research has been revived and continued. New cases of anomalous telephone communication have been researched, new history has been considered, new findings are presented and alternative theories for how such events take place are discussed...."

Cost: £15.00 waged, £10.00 unwaged

Further details and booking forms from Angela Howard, Webb's Cottage, Saling, Braintree, Essex, CM7 5DZ. Phone 01371-850423. Email angela1@webbscottage.co.uk.

QFAS Autumn Conference 2013

Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham, 20-22 September. Held jointly with Friends' Fellowship of Healing it will cover all aspects of healing.

Conference programme not yet finalised but if you would like to receive a booking form when they are ready please give your name to: Angela Howard, Webb's Cottage, Saling, Braintree, Essex, CM7 5DZ. Phone 01371-850423. Email angela1@webbscottage.co.uk



CONFERENCE REPORT

QFAS Autumn Conference 2012

The residential autumn conference was held at Glenthorne Quaker Guest House in Grasmere from 7th to 9th September, 2012. The theme for the weekend was "Communication between the worlds: a look at the positive and negative aspects". The speakers were Ros Smith, Cherry Simpkin, David Britton and Angela Howard.

The talks are summarised overleaf.

**"AFFINITY: THE UNIVERSAL LAW OF LIKE ATTRACTS LIKE"
A Talk by Ros Smith summarised by Cherry Simpkin**

There is a great universal law – the Law of Attraction - that 'like attracts like'. Every area of our lives is influenced by this Law.

We attract into our life those things, circumstances and conditions that correspond with the nature of our dominant, habitual thoughts and beliefs, both conscious and subconscious.

We attract people into our life, people with whom we have an affinity, and with whom we seem to unite at an intuitive level, or a level of spiritual consciousness.

Everything, including all aspects of ourselves, is pure energy vibrating at different frequencies. The basic premise of the Law of Attraction is that like energy attracts like energy. We attract to ourselves that with which we are in vibrational harmony.

It is said that when we die we will meet up with family and friends. For some this is fine but for others this causes great anxiety. There are people who they really don't want to meet, such as those who have harmed them or humiliated them in any way.

However, the evidence, from various sources, suggests that we will only meet up again with those with whom we have had a good relationship during earthly life, and whom we want to see.

From a communicating spirit – *'This business of finding people (is not fully understood). People become widely scattered as they find their true affinities here. I can't always find Mother now because she is content to stay in the early stages, partly because she feels at home there for the time being, and partly because she is waiting for Father. I can find her thought...and we often talk together...You must remember that distance depends for us on affinity...that we are separated into planes of being and unless we happen to be close to one another here the only way of finding a person is by tracking his thought...'*

In reports of NDEs there are meetings with robed figures in white, who radiate love and wisdom. These often relate to a particular spiritual practice e.g. a devout Christian will see a vision of Jesus, a Buddhist will see Buddha and so on. So, when we pass over into so-called death, do we see or experience what we expect?

There is a story about a little boy who lay dying, with his family around him. Suddenly he sat up in bed, his face lit up, and he held out his arms saying 'Mummy, Mummy I can see you. I'm coming!' But his mother was one of the family around his bed. Was he seeing what he wanted to see? (Or, was there a part of his mother's spirit that still resided in the after-life, as a sort of residue, or anchor, of when she was in the state between lives? Christopher Bache mentions this in his books *Lifecycles* when considering of the concept of the Oversoul).

We will only 'meet up' with those with whom we are in a like vibratory state. Again, those with whom we have an affinity.

Those with whom we want no contact will not be able to reach us – or we them - though we may be aware that on another level they exist – perhaps on the level most suited to them at that time.

Because of the life-review which we are told happens for us all after death, they are now able to see what their behaviour has been and then they may want to make amends in some way, because in the spiritual world the only way is 'up' so to speak! Even if it takes a long time, they should still make spiritual progress, eventually.

If we are able to forgive those who 'wronged' us – perhaps to see beyond the crime and into the real being of the person - then we might see them in a completely different way and understand why they were like they were.

It's probably not easy, at our current earthly level, to think that we might get to a stage of being able to forgive so easily but, taken from a higher vantage point – an all-seeing all-knowing one, which might be more evident from where we shall then be – then we might well find that the barriers between us – and therefore between meeting again – might just dissipate, crumble away, leaving us with a desire to welcome them.

We are said to consist of interpenetrating forms, or levels of energy, which become more apparent after we have shed the physical body. According to one channelled explanation the whole human is composed of four interpenetrating forms.

The physical body is the most visible to other human beings on earth but, Ros believes from her studies, that it cannot be seen by those on higher planes.

The second body of energy is the etheric or life-body, the blue-print of our physical body, and gives the power of sensory experience. It never leaves the physical body even in sleep, but parts from it at death as do the third and fourth levels of being – the astral body, where emotions and feelings are expressed, and the spiritual body or ego-principle as it is sometimes termed.

Because the etheric energy body is so closely related to the physical it has to be shed before the astral and spiritual bodies can pass clearly into their proper sphere. This appears to take three days. The astral and emotional and spiritual bodies can now link with higher planes.

Maybe Jesus' resurrection and ascension was more like this process than an actual physical body resurrection.

The etheric, the astral and the spirit-body are often seen by those on the other side in terms of light. We can also see these levels of energy while still in our physical form, particularly when we are sufficiently evolved or are in altered states of consciousness.

Dr Robert Crookall in his book *The Next World – and the Next* explains that those in the spirit world see our etheric bodies or our auras rather than our physical bodies. They also sense our thoughts and emotions, and the higher level of ourselves, the spirit or the real beingness of us.

The Oversoul – that which is always us and which is constantly re-incarnating. - appears to oversee each earthly personality while it works through karma (residues or soul scars left by previous life experiences, good or bad). Violent death, either inflicted upon the person or carried out by them on another, may not be worked through but may show up as an aspect of personality. And then this can be worked through, or healed.

Jane Sherwood, a Quaker medium [see the article below] says in her book *The Fourfold Vision* – *'The ego-principle (or spirit body) has unguessed potentialities, wisdom distilled from many lives of varied range and power. How could it possibly be a simple product of one paltry lifetime of restricted experience? It is an age-old psychic residue carrying on into the present life the essential meaning of many lives, (the only element of which remains in this immortality of meaning,) upgathered from all previous experience.'*

We are 'felt' by those on the other side rather than being seen. They 'pick up'

the meaning of our thoughts rather than the words, and so language is not a problem. Also, the feeling of our emotions can be experienced intensely by a spirit and so on. (It is said, that intense and overly prolonged mourning can affect a spirit – some say it holds them back from their progress.) Of course, in the same way, feelings of love and compassion can be experienced. The vibratory frequencies of emotion are experienced intensely by those on the other side. This applies whether a spirit is experiencing these waves from either another spirit, or from a person still in the physical body.

'Society (over here) is organised on a basis of emotional health: the angry, the sadistic, the brutal and the jealous have of necessity to foregather in their own place, because the atmosphere they engender cannot be borne by others, nor can they themselves bear the more rarefied conditions of the higher sphere. Cure of these disorders comes gradually, and as they are cured they are able to graduate into better conditions and are admitted to higher planes of being. It is a caste system if you like, but one based on fundamental affinities and never a cast-iron system from which there is no escape. The path upward is always open and there are willing hands to help and encourage any who aspire to tread it.'

'My emotions still shake me dangerously and I have to learn also to take the emotional impact of other beings with equanimity. I have become wary of impatience and anger; their manifestations are too repulsive. The slightest shift in feeling makes a corresponding change in appearance as well as in one's own feeling of well-being. Relations with people, when nothing can be hidden, become a high art requiring control and a larger sympathy than is ever needed on earth where its absence can usually be covered by the conventional word or action. It really amounts to this, that one is not safe in this plane until all the

twisted, negative emotions are cleared out of one. Then it will be possible to live fearlessly and freely...'

This links up with the 'field' theory that everything is interconnected as one vast energy field – and that matter of any kind is taken to be a 'thickening' in this universal electro-magnetic field.

'The second death' takes place when the spirit is ready to shed the astral or emotional body, and another transition takes place onto a higher plane. Then there is only the spirit left - the awareness of being.

Even for those on the astral emotional plane communication is not easy with those further advanced onto the plane of pure spirit.

'Coming and going between ourselves (in the astral realm) and a higher world is possible to a limited degree...but this interchange tends to be a one-way traffic, because although the higher can come back to the lower at the cost of some deprivation of light and speed of being, the lower cannot easily bear the higher conditions.'

When those on the other side communicate with us on earth, it is their essence, which is totally individual, that is sensed by the recipient. However, they may need to imagine and project the thought of how they looked when in the physical body for us to recognise them. This can be an effort for them if the memory of how they looked has faded and so it is important for us here to let go of trying to experience people in their earthly form and learn to rather get a feeling of their personality.

In order for successful communication to take place, the medium and the communicating spirit need to be in a state of affinity or 'like mind' with each other.

Those who have learnt to extend their self-awareness to include awareness of self in others, share in the real beingness of the other. With this intensified consciousness they cannot cause pain and suffering because they too share in it.

What a wonderful world it would be if everyone felt like this. Warfare and suffering could be eliminated! Everyone would be a Quaker.

Sources include:

Books by Jane Sherwood –

The Fourfold Vision ...

The Country Beyond ISBN 0-85207-254-6...

Post-Mortem Journal: Communications from Lawrence of Arabia through the mediumship of Jane Sherwood. ISBN 0-85207-253-8 (all available from Abebooks.co.uk and other second-hand online booksellers).

Christopher Bache – *Life-Cycles* ISBN 1-55778-645

THE NATURE OF MEDIUMSHIP – DOORWAY OR DELUSION

A Talk by Cherry Simpkin who has also written this summary

"I shall not commit the fashionable stupidity of regarding everything I cannot explain as a fraud." - C.G.Jung

Many sceptics assume that all mediums must be frauds because they themselves cannot accept that communication with the next world is possible or even that there is a next world at all.

People have been acting as mediums for thousands of years. One of the oldest and most famous examples is the Witch of Endor mentioned in the Bible (1 Samuel ch. 28.). We are told that King Saul went to the woman with a "familiar spirit" (presumably her spirit guide) and asked her to "call up" Samuel, which she did. This case is often quoted by those who are opposed to "dabbling" with mediums because Samuel complains at having been summoned. They claim it is wrong to "summon up spirits" against their will. However, it is clear from the passage that Samuel objected because Saul already knew the answer to his questions himself. People in spirit cannot be "summoned up". They come if they wish to do so. The idea that mediums are disturbing the "dead" from their rest is also a misnomer as, rather than resting, they seem to be extremely busy and this includes helping those still on Earth.

Another example of mediumship in the ancient world is the Oracle of Delphi in Greece. People came from all over Europe to Mount Parnassus to consult the Pythia, a medium of Apollo. She was the telephone psychic of ancient times. Her answers could determine when farmers planted their fields or when an empire declared war. A succession of different women acted as Pythia from about 1400 B.C. to A.D. 381.

It has been suggested that the mediums' predictions were hallucinations caused by volcanic gasses, but who knows?

Modern Spiritualism began in the 1840s with the experiences of Margaret and Kate Fox, two teenage sisters, in Hydesville, New York State. They claimed that a discarnate spirit was communicating with them in their home through a series of knocks representing the alphabet. A committee of investigation established that the communicator was Charles B Rosma, who had been murdered and buried beneath the cellar of the house. Human remains were discovered in the cellar.

Following this, Spiritualism became very popular throughout the 19th and early 20th Centuries and then gained even more momentum after World War 1 as people tried to contact loved ones who had been killed in the conflict.

Spiritualism had many eminent supporters, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the scientist Sir Oliver Lodge. The first Spiritualist church in Britain opened in 1853 in Keighley in Yorkshire. The Society for Psychical Research was founded 1882 to investigate psychic phenomena.

These days mediums are often called "psychics". However, while all mediums are psychic, not all psychics are mediums. A medium always acts as an intermediary between people in the next world and those on earth. A "psychic" may pick up information about the sitter e.g. through his/her aura rather than being in communication with a discarnate person.

Many Spiritualists would say that the purpose of mediumship is to prove survival rather than give advice or predict the future. However, many mediums do all of these.

Anyone seeking to consult a medium should be wary of those who charge high fees or give categorical assurances that they will make contact with a deceased person. Communication cannot be guaranteed. One should also be suspicious if the medium will not allow the session to be recorded.

There are two types of mediumship – physical and mental.

Physical Mediumship was very popular in the early days of Spiritualism. Phenomena produced range from the movement of objects and table-rapping to the full materialisation of a discarnate person. The medium will usually be in a deep trance and totally unaware of what is going on. The proceedings commonly took place in total darkness, or with just the use of a dim red light for illumination, with the medium sitting in a 'cabinet' to concentrate the power.

One of the most famous physical mediums in the 19th Century was Daniel Dunglass Home. During his sessions, he would often levitate, including going out of one window several floors up and coming back through another. Other phenomena included table rappings and spirit materialisations. Home's debunkers came up with various theories about him such as that he chloroformed his sitters, used hypnosis and that he had a pet monkey who was trained to produce various phenomena such as levitations and the movement of furniture. However, in 1871, Sir William Crookes, a physicist and chemist, conducted tightly controlled experiments with Home and concluded that he was a genuine medium.

A common phenomenon in physical mediumship is the production of ectoplasm.

The word was first coined by Professor Charles Richet a former president of the Society for Psychical Research from the Greek words 'ektos' (outside) and 'plasm' (substance). He called it "a substance that comes from the body of a medium during a séance".

Ectoplasm flows out from the medium's body and is then moulded by the spirit guides and helpers to form a solid 'materialisation' of a spirit person, which can often be positively identified by friends and relatives of the spirit person. Fraudulent mediums were often exposed for using cheesecloth to represent so-called 'ectoplasm'. They would hide it on their person and then produce it during the session. However, it is hard to see how cheesecloth could be moulded into the recognisable form of someone's deceased loved one.

Spirit Photography is a phenomenon which has occurred from the early days onwards. In Victorian times the images of dead relations would appear on photographic plates alongside the living sitters. They looked faked, and probably often were, but on some occasions, under test conditions, they were still present. Photographic phenomena of various kinds continue into the digital age often causing hot debate.

Another famous physical medium, in the 20th Century was Helen Duncan. She got into trouble with the state authorities in 1941 after the spirit of a sailor materialised in one of her sessions and claimed that he had just gone down on a vessel called HMS 'Barham'. This loss was then unknown even to the War Office and was not officially declared until several months later, its sinking having been kept secret to mislead the enemy and protect morale. It was thought that she had somehow accessed state secrets. Helen Duncan continued to be harassed by the police throughout her career and eventually died in 1956, after the police raided a private séance she was holding. It has been suggested that her death was a direct result of the police interrupting her while in deep trance and causing serious shock to her system when the ectoplasm shot rapidly back into the body. Inexplicable burns were found on her stomach.

The Helen Duncan case was influential in the repeal of the Witchcraft Act and its replacement by the Fraudulent Mediums Act in 1951. Following this, Spiritualism was declared a recognized religion by Act of Parliament in 1954.

The other type of mediumship is mental mediumship. This is like a kind of telepathy with the spirits.

This takes place within the medium's mind in various forms e.g. "hearing" (clairaudience), "seeing" (clairvoyance), or "feeling" the presence of someone (clairsentience). The medium may receive messages from those in the next world and pass them on to those on earth.

The medium may also act as a channel through trance mediumship whereby the discarnate person will speak through him/her conveying thoughts through the medium's mind and voice. This may be deep trance, in which the medium is unconscious, or "overshadowing" in which the medium is fully aware of what is happening and can stop it if he/she wishes.

Sceptics claim that mental mediumship is either completely faked by the medium or comes from the medium's own subconscious mind.

They claim that it is possible to give convincing but fake messages through "cold reading" in which the medium tells the message recipient something that they have tricked the person into unknowingly telling them already, or by making educated guesses. For example, a medium may tell an elderly person that his/her grandfather has a message for them. A medium may also use "Barnum statements" (after the American

showman), i.e. general, usually flattering, statements that are unlikely to be contradicted. An example might be 'he's telling me that you're a very caring person.'

However, these explanations fail to hold water when the information given is something the medium could not possibly know or which the recipient does not know and subsequently discovers to be true or where the message comes from someone that the recipient does not expect.

A very convincing example of mental mediumship was reported in the journal of the Society for Psychical Research in April 2006. This involved a chess game played in the 1980s between chess grandmaster, Viktor Korchnoi, and a former grandmaster, Géza Maróczy, who died in 1951. This was set up by Dr. Wolfgang Eisenbeiss, a Swiss stockbroker and a doctor of economics with a long-standing interest in psychical research. Maróczy's moves were "channelled" by automatic writing through a German medium called Robert Rollans. Eisenbeiss chose him because he believed he had integrity. Rollans received no payment and, apart from being taught the moves, he knew nothing about playing chess. The game lasted 7 years until Maróczy resigned. Rollans died 3 weeks later.

Experts verified that Maróczy's playing was at grandmaster level but old-fashioned (like the players of his earthly time) and as if he were a bit rusty. During the match, Eisenbeiss put 92 questions to Maróczy in order to confirm his identity. Many of the answers needed substantial research in Hungarian chess records. 85 of the answers proved to be correct and the remainder could not be verified but were not shown to be untrue.

Eisenbeiss, having found a record of the match in 1930, asked Maróczy about the player he had defeated, an Italian named Romi. Maróczy replied that he never knew anyone by that name, but that he did defeat a man named 'Romih.' Even though the historical records showed the name as 'Romi,' Eisenbeiss found a programme of the 1930 match in which the name was spelled 'Romih.'

Another example, involved the medium, Eileen Garrett. At a sitting on October 7, 1930, two days after the explosion of the R101, Flight Lieutenant H. C. Irwin, Captain of the airship, came through Mrs. Garrett and gave a highly technical account of how the airship crashed. Later, experts confirmed that much of the information given in the message tallied in every detail with what was afterwards found in the course of the official inquiry.

Genuine mediums do great service. They can help the bereaved to come to terms with a loss and move on. They can help us to face the prospect of our own deaths. They can show us to that we are part of a greater whole and give us a purpose for living this Earthly life to the full.

MRS PIPER AND MRS WILLETT – TWO FAMOUS MEDIUMS **A Talk by David Britton who has also written this summary**

Mrs Piper, born in 1857, was the wife of a shopworker in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1884 she went into trance while consulting a healing medium, and soon after, developed as a deep trance medium and set up her own circle. Her first control was a Dr Phinuit, an alleged Frenchman, who spoke very little French. However, her telepathic knowledge of the people at her sessions and their relations, was astonishing. William James said in 1886 he was thoroughly convinced of her gift and her complete honesty.

In 1887 Dr Richard Hodgson, an expert in unmasking fraud, came from Britain to investigate Mrs Piper, including employing a private detective to check her social contacts. He was so impressed with her mediumship that he took her to England where she was thoroughly investigated by the British Society for Psychical Research, and continued to produce genuine telepathic data.

In 1892 'Dr Phinuit' was replaced as control by George Pellew, or 'GP'. He communicated details through Mrs Piper of his own life on earth which were confirmed by a friend and at subsequent sittings conversed with 29 of his old friends who recognized him as the personality they had known. This important evidence for survival convinced Hodgson that GP was a surviving spirit.

After his death in 1905, Hodgson himself became Mrs Piper's control. In 1909 William James wrote a 120-page summary of 'The Hodgson Control' for the British SPR. Although he believed in survival and accepted that Mrs Piper was totally genuine, James was unsure whether the messages came from a surviving spirit or from some general cosmic reservoir of knowledge.

Mrs Piper's trance mediumship ended in 1911, but she practised automatic writing as one of the mediums employed in the vitally important 'Cross-Correspondences' experiment. This was organised by Frederick Myers, Edmund Gurney and others from the other side and lasted over thirty years. The mediums did not know or communicate with one another and the messages transmitted through them only made sense when they were put together.

Mrs Willett was born in 1874 into an upper middle class family. She became active in Liberal politics and was a suffragette and Welsh nationalist. She was naturally psychic from childhood but her family discouraged this. She kept her work as a medium secret from her family and separate from her political life. It was only after she died in 1956 that the Society of Psychical Research discovered that her real name was Winifred Coombe Tennant.

Although she had previously rejected the idea of an afterlife, she revived her mediumistic gifts following the death of her daughter Daphne (born 1907) at 18

months old. She began with automatic writing and later became a medium. As she was scared of becoming unconscious, she did not go into deep trance but heard the voices of her communicators in her mind and transmitted their messages herself to those on earth.

It was believed she was encouraged and trained by Myers and Gurney from the other side and, like Mrs Piper, was one of the mediums in the Cross Correspondences experiment.

After Mrs Willett died in 1956 she communicated through the medium Geraldine Cummins through automatic writing. These transmissions were recorded in the book "Swan on a Black Sea" published in 1960. Professor C D Broad, a very detached psychic investigator, wrote the introduction and was very enthusiastic about the validity of these scripts.



"PERSONAL COMMUNICATION: TRUSTING, TESTING AND SHARING STORIES" **A Talk by Angela Howard who has also written this summary**

I wanted to approach this subject in a rather meditative, reflective way to encourage Friends to remember and share personal stories of direct communication.

I mentioned the different ways in which communications may come, and that the contact might be very fleeting, so that one is left wondering, "Did that really happen?", but at another level of the mind, absolutely certain that it did.

It could be a glimpse of an outline of a figure, or a few familiar words that come into our minds. Or maybe a feeling of warmth, and being surrounded by love. There are many thousands of recorded examples of these kinds of communications. They are really not at all uncommon but they tend not to be talked about- except in groups like ours.

I gave many examples in my talk. I began by reading a dream as described by a QFAS member, Jane Clist, which appeared in the June 2012 edition of "Reaching Out". It came two months after her husband, Gerry's, death and seemed similar to a visit I had from Martin when I was in a semi-conscious state early one morning. Both experiences were almost like formal visits to announce that our loved ones were now in new bodies and in a new life, and came to reassure us of their continued existence and love. I added that I get very little in the way of personal communication but I do get a feeling of guidance.

The amount of contact varies for everyone and may be something to do with how psychically receptive we are. Lack of personal contact certainly does not mean that there is a lack of love, and contact can always be sought through a medium.

I then briefly mentioned the negative aspects of personal communication. Too strong a wish for contact on the part of a bereaved person can be counter-productive because it causes stress, and contacts often come when we're relaxed and least expecting them. (Though sometimes a contact can come in a situation of extreme need, as assistance in a crisis, or as a warning.)

We can apparently create difficulty for those who may be trying to contact us if we're too intense, or feeling too strong an emotion. We're told that an atmosphere of very intense grief is rather like a thick fog around us and difficult for a spirit being to penetrate. Sitting in an attitude of quiet attentiveness is probably best.

The contact should always be sought in a serious way through feelings of love and need. If it is undertaken lightly or flippantly mischievous or troubled spirits may come through and can literally cause havoc in people's lives.

Our culture tends to make us sceptical. A bit of scepticism is not a bad thing. There are people who are always on the look out for messages or contacts of some kind from the spirit world and they can be on a bit of an ego-trip.

I suggested we think about the process of communication, and about recognizing when something that happens in our lives may actually BE a communication: recognising and becoming more sensitive.

We looked at the different ways we may receive communications through extensions of the five senses. Sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste. Usually they connect us with the physical world, but we can also think of their use in an extended form as connecting us with the paranormal or spiritual world.

Sight and hearing are the most usual. Sight. Seeing – apparitions, impressions – anything from a mental picture in the mind to seeing the person as if in the flesh. Hearing – an actual recognizable voice, an impression of words, impression of a thought. Also sometimes, though less common, Smell – a perfume or tobacco smoke or other scent associated with a person. Taste – I don't think that applies. It might do. And it might be linked to smell as they are very close. Very important -Touch - a sensation of being touched: held, kissed. Warmth or cold.

I gave an example of touch from my own experience. After my father died I had the sensation of warmth on the back of my head as if a hand had been placed there. I can remember feeling it when I was doing the washing up.

We can receive a strong emotional feeling. A feeling of love surrounding us which may be linked with the sensation of warmth.

Where may a communication come? Wherever we are. Probably in the home if that is where we spend most of our lives, and where we spent most of our time with the person who has passed on.

We are told that dawn is a time when the two worlds touch and communication may be easier. We are also waking up at this time and our minds are in a sensitive and semi-conscious state which may be more open and receptive.

Meeting for Worship would seem to be another good time and place for Friends.

Maybe in places which had significance for both people – on favourite walks perhaps. They may come when we are thinking about a loved one or they may come 'out of the blue'. Perhaps they come as a sudden flash of warning in a time of danger or stress.

I then quoted extensively from a booklet, "*Listening In – A Record of a Singular Experience*", written by Olive Pixley in 1928. Olive was quite reluctant to put her experience of contact with her brother, Jack, down on paper, but had been encouraged by others to do so. Jack was killed in 1917 in WW1. Some days after his death she began to have quite long and detailed conversations with him. This was an exceptional case for someone without experience and mediumistic training, in which she found herself speaking his words aloud or saying them silently (as if, she says, learning poetry). This booklet may be difficult to obtain but there are many such examples of personal communication recorded in books on this subject.

It takes two to communicate. Obviously. Perhaps we can learn something from trying to understand how communication might be experienced from the other side?

I used "*Destiny of Souls*" the second book written by Michael Newton an American counsellor/psychologist and hypnotherapist. Michael's first book is "*A Soul's Journey*". He has developed a technique for regressing certain people to focus on the between life state and quotes from what he has been told during these sessions. The different studies seem to confirm one another in that they give the same kind of details. I gave three examples from case studies, of spirits trying to contact close relatives and showing the difficulties which they had. It's interesting as an exercise to think what it must be like for a spirit being to try to contact a person in a physical body and how they attempt it. The examples show that it isn't at all an easy thing to do and that some are much better at it than others.

I then mentioned some types of events which can come following a bereavement. Synchronicities – meaningful coincidences which lead us into a certain path. Physical events often concerning disturbances with electrical functioning. I describe some of these events in my book "*Only a Thought Away*" as they happened to QFAS members, Sylvia Izzard and Eileen Farrah-Jones. They include lights turning on and off by themselves and a car's electrical system malfunctioning. These are extremely common but unless talked about often go unrecognized and unrecorded.

I have a friend, Jill Woods, who is very interested in the paranormal as was her husband Bryan, who died in September 2010. After Bryan's death Jill noted down anything unusual that happened. There were coincidences or synchronicities, sometimes involving the computer. There were also things that happened to her friends. I was talking to her one day with the TV on but the sound down. Suddenly the TV switched itself off. There were some happenings which involved physical movement of objects in the house. All these types of events are very well documented in the literature. If you've done much reading or talked to people on the subject I'm sure you will have heard about something similar.

Once when I was speaking on the phone to Eileen Farrah Jones I could hear an electrical doll she had which laughed when moved, laughing in the background of its own accord. Eileen enjoyed such events and they were a common occurrence for her. She was convinced they were caused by her husband Ernie who had a great sense of humour.

The talk finished with a very moving account read for us by Jill Inskip. It concerned her personal recollection of her Grandfather who saw his wife coming to meet him as he died, and called her by name. She wrote the story for "*The Unfamiliar Country: An Anthology of Quaker Experience*" (obtainable from QFAS). Of course, many, many similar accounts have been recorded and they are very comforting.

The discussion which followed did indeed contain some remarkable examples of personal communication from audience members. In an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding most people have some sort of story to tell whether the experience happened to them personally, or to someone else. QFAS and other like-minded groups can provide that much needed opportunity.



QFAS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING held at Glenthorne, Saturday, 8th September, 2012.

The AGM was held on the Saturday afternoon of the Glenthorne Conference and a committee meeting was held on the Sunday morning. Here are the main items of interest which resulted.

Finances.

Commenting on the funds, the treasurer, David Britton, said that there was a balance of £1,312 in the funds. At the AGM in 2011 the figure was £1,493. He suggested a rise in the membership subscription to £10.00 p.a. with £7.00 for concessions. David said that he believed the number of paid up members was 111 and not 147. 30 are paying by standing order – the number has increased this year and we encourage Friends to pay this way. We have 11 new members. We are grateful to those who pay more than the required amount.

A room at Friends' House is expensive to hire for our Spring conference and we always make a small loss even with 40 present. This year the loss was £43. The meeting agreed that next year the conference fee should be £15.00 with £10.00 for concessions.

The Newsletter

Friends were pleased with the new magazine, "*Reaching Out*" which went out in December 2011 and June 2012. The editor, Cherry Simpkin, asked for more ideas regarding content. A section giving the events planned by other like-minded groups and a book review section were suggested. Cherry asked for more of member's experiences to be sent in as some felt the magazine was too 'intellectual'. An edition featuring animal stories had been planned but no articles had yet been submitted. Photographs for the cover were also requested. (A group photo was taken during the weekend which may appear in a future edition.)

Future Plans

An idea for an online discussion forum for members was introduced by Rhonda Riachi. IT is Rhonda's field of expertise and she would be willing to help set this up. The idea was welcomed by those who use computers and the meeting agreed we should go ahead with it.

It was suggested that a group of Friends might act as 'telephone F/friends for enquirers and new members who wish to share experiences and generally talk about QFAS ideas. Jill Inskip kindly offered to help the Clerk and Membership Secretary, Sylvia Izzard, in this way. (Please phone Angela Howard, 01371 850423.)

Production of CDs.

David Arundel our CD Secretary had produced a report. To date, £117.00 had been made from sales of CDs given at QFAS conferences. It was decided to continue to produce them. Our thanks to David and Clement Jewitt for their work on this.

Future Events

BYM 2013 in Bath. Rhonda Riachi offered to give some sort of a presentation on behalf of QFAS and this was very gratefully accepted by the meeting.

An advert for QFAS has been appearing once a month in "*The Friend*" since early this year and has produced a few enquiries. It was decided to continue for another 10 issues with no change in the wording. After this, to consider a change.

The venue for the autumn conference in 2014 was discussed because we need to book it now. It was decided it should be in the West Country. Ammerdown and Abbey House, Glastonbury, were suggested and we will look at the details and prices of both.

The Committee

All committee members are willing to continue to serve for another year in their present posts with the exception of David Britton who is retiring as Treasurer after twelve years, but remains on the committee. Committee members are now Sylvia Izzard (membership secretary), Ros Smith, Cherry Simpkin (newsletter editor and treasurer), David Britton, Geoffrey Martin, Angela Howard (clerk). The nominations group is Ros Smith, Elizabeth Angas and Geoffrey Martin. All are willing to continue to serve for another year.



FAMILIAR TERRITORY

By Jill Inskip

During 2012 I have, as part of my daily devotions, turned to a little book I've long had which is an anthology completed by the novelist, Elizabeth Goudge, entitled "*A Diary of Prayer*". It is largely Christian and Anglican but there are very few of its varied and often beautiful examples of prayer – both ancient and modern - to which I have not been able to respond with real joy and gratitude.

In it there are prayers for each day of the year and, in November, during the season in which All Souls were being commemorated and several of the entries concentrated on matters of death and the after-life, I came across one prayer which I felt so closely echoed the insights we have considered during our discussions within QFAS that it occurred to me that others might like to know it, too. Its author is that prolific writer, Anon, but it is I who have highlighted the word 'him' (on the first occasion on which it's used) because that pronoun is so clearly interchangeable with both 'her' and 'them' throughout the passage.

It reads:

"O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh in whose care all souls live, in whatsoever world or condition they may be; I beseech thee for him whose name, and dwelling place, and every need thou knowest. Grant to him light and rest, peace and refreshment, joy and consolation in the nearness of the Saviour, in the companionship of saints, in the ample folds of Thy great love. Grant also that he may go from strength to strength until at last he can enjoy the unveiled vision of Thy glory.

"If it may be, tell him, gracious Lord, how much I love and miss him and long to see him again, and if there be ways in which he may come, grant him to me and guide and guard, and give me a sense of his nearness in such degree as Thy laws permit.

"If in aught I can minister to his peace, be pleased of Thy love to let this be; and mercifully keep me from every act which may mar the fullness of our joy when the end of days hath come.

"Pardon, O gracious Lord and Father, whatever is amiss in this my prayer, for my will is blind and erring, but Thou can do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The prayer begins with a premise which I imagine that all of us confidently share - that there are other worlds and conditions which the 'spirits of all flesh' inhabit following death, where – because God knows all our individual needs – we are able to live in 'light and rest, peace and refreshment, joy and consolation' and in the

'companionship' of those who have preceded us. It then speaks of us going 'from strength to strength' until at last we 'can enjoy the unveiled vision of Thy glory' with the sort of progression suggested by Helen Greaves in *Testimony of Light*, among others, which was further outlined by Rikky Rooksby in his recent lecture to us about the maps of the after-life envisioned by the Theosophical Society. The prayer then goes on to speak – so comfortingly and delightfully in my view - of 'ways' in which our departed loved ones may come to us and give us a 'sense of (their) nearness' and even of the possibility of our being able to 'minister' to their peace after the physical separation caused by death has taken place. How often have we at QFAS learnt of the details of these 'ways' – demonstrated through near-death experiences, the assistance of mediums, the support of spirit guides and guardian angels and instances of unusual and unexpected happenings experienced by individuals whose stories we have been able to share?

Finally, it even seems as if it has been suggested to the writer that there might be something amiss in his prayer on this particular subject – just as it has been to us by Quaker friends and others! How glad I am that, even so, the author persisted in writing and also that Elizabeth Goudge saw fit to include it in her personal selection which was published over four decades ago. How glad I am, too, that QFAS exists and provides us with such a welcome forum for our own continuing explorations.



THE WORK OF JANE SHERWOOD: A QUAKER MEDIUM

By Rosalind Smith

We live in a time when there are many people who claim to have received channelled wisdom, very often through automatic writing. It may be that the whole process, now recognised as a credible phenomenon, has become easier over the last century, both in its implementation and its acceptability. There is, however, still a great deal which one might regard, not necessarily as fraudulent, but as a result of the interference of the medium's own mind.

Always with this reservation firmly in mind, I have been greatly interested in the channelled communications that came to Jane Sherwood soon after she started, in great loneliness and desperation, to try to make contact with her husband, Andrew, who had died in the 1914-18 war.

She was warned by "those who had experience that there were certain dangers which might have to be faced if one opened one's mind to influences from the spirit world." Nevertheless, nothing daunted, she felt herself stretching out into "the great universe of real being searching for Andrew and...convinced that he was there." She felt that there is a "beyond-body", something that is incorporated in each of us and therefore more than the system of chemical energies, and that "to make contact with this beyond body of another, one must learn to use the corresponding body in oneself."

Like many before her, and since, she pondered on the keen intellects and trained minds that had made the transition into the unknown. Was all their genius and wisdom lost? Surely not. She began to recognise an inner compulsion to try and align herself to the level of perception that she knew might be a bridge between her material and scientifically oriented world and that "other world".

Although she makes no actual mention of belonging to any specific religious denomination, here and there are definite Quaker phrases e.g. 'that of God' and from this I must assume that her own spiritual leanings lay in this direction. (Later information has come that she was indeed a Quaker.) Apart from a very few references to the words of Jesus, there is hardly a mention of Christian or any other of the world's faiths' teachings, and, interestingly, the initial indication that Andrew was trying to make contact came through to her via a friend's message from a Spiritualist medium.

At first this led her to search for help amongst Spiritualist literature, initially finding it rather a "hotch-potch of mystery and imagination" and it was only when she came upon the ideas of Rudolf Steiner that she began to be able to suspend her faint hostility and suspicion. In several communications from a medium she had been "urged to attempt to take automatic writing" and eventually she began to experiment.

For the whole of the first two years nothing happened. Despite some despondency on her part about this, she persevered, and one day the initials G.F.S appeared on the paper and, as Jane relaxed her hand, "they made a name, a signature – G.F. Scott."

Even as she experienced the shock of success she felt too "the impact of an emotion, a surprise and joy that matched my own."

This tentative, exploratory communication developed her sensitivity, and she soon became aware of the presence not only of Scott but, to her joy, her husband, Andrew. There was also a third communicator who was only ever referred to as E.K, and who seemed, of the three, to be the most spiritually advanced.

Scott, who actually communicated enough evidence for Jane to later write *Post Mortem- Journal*, never wanted his true earthly identity to be published, but in the Introduction to this book she makes it clear that from the first communication with her, in 1938, he used his own real name, Colonel T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia). As is well-

known, Lawrence took the name of Scott for the last years of his life in order to gain anonymity and distance himself from the notorious events in which he had been involved. It is also well-known that he died in a motor-bike accident – and a graphic account of this is given at the commencement of the book, followed by the circumstances in which he then found himself. He continued to recount his experiences for about twenty years.

Andrew's communications were more personal to her, understandably, and he was able to describe not only his present existence and conditions, but also the circumstances in which he found himself when he first "woke-up".

It is now over 40 years since the first publication of *Testimony of Light*, the beautiful account by Helen Greaves of her communication with her friend, Frances Banks. This is a very well-known 'best seller', a classic of its kind, and a wonderful book for anyone who has been bereaved or is facing their own death. However, the various planes and conditions that are described in that "other world" had been written about many years earlier, and published originally in 1944 by Jane Sherwood. Much of the wisdom communicated by Frances Banks verified that already received by Jane from E.K., from Scott, and from Andrew.

These communicators were sometimes present as a group, and it seems to have been a combination of the communications from all three, though with the main 'received wisdom' emanating from E.K., that led to the content of both *The Four-fold Vision* and *The Country Beyond* (this second book also containing material from an earlier book, *The Psychic Bridge*).

The title of *The Four-fold Vision* refers to the four principles of being: that we are more complex than just body and soul – "a more accurate analysis would prove that we have a purely physical body actuated by a body of sensation, working in co-operation with an emotional form, and these all interpenetrated by a spiritual mode of being."

These divisions can be more clearly understood as the physical body, easily visible as solid matter; the etheric body, which contains the blue-print (or the facsimile) of the physical; the astral body in which all emotion and feeling is present, the essence of the personality that has built up during the earth life; and, that which contains everything else, the spiritual body.

When a person dies, leaving behind permanently their physical body, there is an interlude in which they find themselves in their etheric body. And, for a while this experiences various states of consciousness, including sleep, until it too is shed leaving the astral body to wake fully on the astral plane. Interestingly the communicator says that it normally takes three days for the etheric body to disengage from the physical, bringing to mind the biblical mention of "on the third day he rose again." Once on the astral plane "one's thoughts begin to be much concerned with the life of earth which

has been left behind." The scenes and events now come back vividly in terms of their feeling content, and impressions of people, events and acts are now more real and comprehensive than when they were actually experienced. The difference now is that the feelings and reactions of other people are now included – "the effects of deeds on the lives of others must be experienced as intimately as though to do and to suffer the deed were one...where sorrow and wrong have been inflicted they must be felt." Not only is it justice, it is "redemptive suffering...a purely natural process, set going by the astral body itself which thus works to rid itself of impurity and disease." This brings to mind the biblical phrase "As through a glass, darkly, but now face to face."

The astral body is that with which we experience feelings and emotions – often a very unruly part of ourselves when still on the earth plane, and which requires a great deal of work and development. When we are no longer in the etheric body the astral body is the only visible part of us – and that only to others on that plane. Here we exist in a world of thought – we can 'think' ourselves from one place to another. We can think of another being with whom we would like to make contact, and, providing that they are on the same plane as ourselves, we can find them. However, if there is not an affinity between us then we cannot make this contact, or at least, not until one or the other of us 'catches up'. The great spiritual law of 'Like attracts Like' pertains here, and, as we develop and grow spiritually we will find ourselves progressing onto higher planes, with more highly evolved beings. And, although time is not measured in the same way as here on earth, it will still seem like ages for this process to be worked through .

The fourth aspect of our being is that of pure spirit, referred to throughout the communications as the ego-body (not to be confused with the Freudian concept of ego), and which, though totally invisible, can stand off from the other bodies and observe their doings objectively. It is the part which differentiates human beings from animals and which can say "I feel happy" or "I feel tired" – in other words it can be aware of itself. It is this ability which causes its feeling of separation from the environment and from other beings, its isolation.

"The other work of the ego-principle is to infuse the whole of experience with the special value we call meaning...No clear thought or perception could emerge unless the ego was present to translate all this into terms of meaning." The meaning, or essence of a thing, is generated by the ego – otherwise it is just a meaningless object. Communication on the astral planes is by thought, not in actual words, but as meaning. Thus there is no language barrier, as meaning is the same to all; its other name is intuition.

Jane found she always knew who of the three communicators was working with her at any one time, as her writing changed completely. She recognised immediately the handwriting of her husband, being able to compare it with the letters she had kept –

and the writing changed noticeably when Scott came through, and again with E.K., who had a very sloping style. There are examples in *The Country Beyond* of these greatly varying scripts.

In the last few years of her life, Jane wrote a short though wonderful book, *Peter's Gate: a Book for the Elderly*, in which she calls upon her own wisdom and understanding to offer guidance to those who, being elderly, are either dreading the thought of their own death and possible annihilation, or looking forward towards the final adventure. Instead of closing down one's senses and interest in life she advocates embracing whatever new experience is on offer, even though bodily aches and pains may make life difficult. She even gives a very good healing exercise designed to help a person cope, and rise above, physical and mental pain.

The freedom of being alone, not lonely, at the end of one's life is a gift, although it might take some time to be realised as such. This freedom can begin to take the form of a rediscovering of the self, a recognition of the person one really is – not the person who has "been taking (our) ideas at second-hand"...and "unconsciously adopted someone else's attitudes to politics, religion, books and music." How often have we noticed that bereaved people, once over the first trauma of their grief, begin to gain a strength and individuality that they did not have before, perhaps because, unwittingly, they allowed their personality to be dominated by another?

Jane Sherwood refers again and again to the concept of the four-fold states of being, and in her advice for the elderly exhorts them to look forward to the expanding of their spirit when they eventually leave the physical body behind. This greatly reflects the writing of Rudolf Steiner who felt that the soul expands vastly once out of the physical body, and then contracts again as it re-incarnates.

It is very likely that all of these books are out of print now, but they can be borrowed from the CFPSS Library. It is also possible that they can be obtained from one of the internet booksellers who specialise in finding out-of-print books e.g. www.abebooks.co.uk

1. *Peter's Gate: a Book for the Elderly*. CFPSS 1973
2. *The Four-Fold Vision*. Neville Spearman Ltd. 1965
3. *The Country Beyond*. Neville Spearman Ltd. First published 1944.
(New edition combining *The Psychic Bridge* and *The Country Beyond* 1969)
4. *Post-Mortem Journal*. Neville Spearman Ltd. 1964

*Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, The Rural Workshop,
South Rd, North Somercotes, Lincs, NL11 7PT
Phone: 01507-358845. www.churchesfellowship.org.uk*

BOOK REVIEWS

"SERIAL CONSCIOUSNESS"

(subtitled "THE TRUTH ABOUT REINCARNATION") by Greg Branson

Published by the Eye of Gaza Press (2011) ISBN 978-1-873545-06-5. Price £11.50.

Reviewed by Elizabeth M Angas

This is a remarkable book, furthering and confirming my understanding about the afterlife, reincarnation, past lives and before life existence, soul, spirit and karma.

Where did this knowledge come from? A biographical introduction states that the author is a "quiet visionary who probes deeply into the higher planes of consciousness and those subtle realms within the Earth. He has investigated the plans of the Godhead ...". Does this mean I can trust all the apparent facts, beliefs and values he has convincingly produced?

My intuition tells me 'yes' because it seems to come from spiritual experiences and from his work as a past-life therapist and healer. It is also written with great clarity and seeming 'authority', as though he were discerning 'the Truth' or ancient universal wisdom.

However, of course, it is not scientific research, although very exciting and innovative. Nor is it based on creedal statements or dogma. Although each religion's beliefs are explored. I felt upheld in my own Quaker experiential faith and in the beliefs I have been 'given' so far. When I came back from my Near Death Experience (NDE), I knew things I did not know before. I had had my big questions answered. This book gave me the same convincements, in spite of my scientific education and healthy scepticism. It filled in many gaps and cleared up some remaining puzzlements in what seems to be esoteric knowledge.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the "Serial Consciousness" of the title. To understand this, one needs to realise one has a 'source self' as well as a 'me' self and a spiritual family as well as an earthly family. You may already know about the causal, mental, astral and physical planes, or understand that we are entering the age of Aquarius, or already comprehend about chakras, existences on other planets etc. All this is clearly explained with examples and diagrams. Many other related topics are included in the 14 Chapters.

So, of what value is this book? A readership might include those interested in psychic, spiritual and afterlife studies (e.g. QFAS and CFPSS). Will it help us to have a more peaceful world? Or become more compassionate? What is Greg Branson's mission in writing this book? We each have a unique meaning and purpose which we have to 'remember' during our incarnation on Earth. We each uncover our own, many layered 'truth' only when we are ready. This book may help us to do that.

PROOF OF HEAVEN: A NEUROSURGEON'S JOURNEY INTO THE AFTERLIFE

by Dr. Eben Alexander.

Piatkus. 2012. 194 pp. ISBN: 9-780749-958794. £12.99.

Reviewed by Ros Smith

This is not just another book about near death experiences. It is a book which puts the relationship between our everyday earthly lives and that of the afterlife into an exciting perspective.

Try and imagine that you have just come out from a theatre or cinema, into the bright light of day. While you were inside, the play or film absorbed and delighted you, (or otherwise) and occupied all your attention. But now that you are outside and back to the reality of your own world, the performance, which seemed so real at the time, is even now already becoming a memory, and rather a faded memory at that. This explanation by Dr Eben Alexander, the practising neurosurgeon and experimenter of the amazing journey into life after death described in this book, has remained with me far more vividly than any other NDE that I have ever read about. It helped me to understand why it is that those on the 'other side' not only find it difficult to return, but, because the life there is so much more vivid and real, there is no desire to return to the dullness in which we exist here.

Struck down suddenly and inexplicably with spontaneous E.coli bacterial meningitis the author went into a deep coma. During that time his 'entire neocortex – the outer surface of the brain, the part that makes us human – was shut down. Inoperative. In essence absent.' His brain had closed down completely. He was kept going with various machines including a ventilator, and pumped with powerful anti-biotics.

He went through similar experiences which have been recorded about NDEs for centuries – the journey 'through a dark tunnel, or valley, into a bright and vivid landscape...the sense of being able to see in all directions simultaneously...the sensation of being above linear time – of being above everything...the direct and instantaneous reception of concepts that normally would have taken a very long time and a great deal of study to comprehend, without any struggle whatsoever...feeling the intensity of unconditional love.' He felt as though he was 'being born. Not reborn, or born again. Just...born.' He uses words such as brilliant, vibrant, ecstatic, stunning to describe what this world looks and feels like. And all the time he had felt 'alive, and aware, truly aware, in a universe characterised above all by love, consciousness and reality'. He realised that 'the death of the body and the brain are not the end of consciousness, that human experience continues beyond the grave. More important, it continues under the gaze of a God who loves and cares about each one of us and about where the universe itself and all the beings within it are ultimately going.'

During his time there he became aware of another being – a beautiful girl who

communicated with him telepathically and showed him many wonderful things. He did not recognise her, but later, when he was recovering, he was shown a photograph of a half-sister who had died at a young age, and before he had had a chance to meet her. As he looked at the image of her he became aware that this was the being he had met in the afterlife.

Interspersed with his own experiences are chapters which tell of the heart-rending situation in which his family found themselves. They took it in turns to be by his bedside, and watched helplessly as his condition deteriorated dramatically. Eventually, when the doctors told them there was no hope they prepared themselves for the worst. Except for his young son, Bond. The boy had reached a stage where he felt he could not go into the hospital any more and see his father in the terrible state he was in. But, on hearing that the doctors had given up, Bond rushed into the room and pulled up Eben's eyelids, and said repeatedly and directly into the empty unfocused eyes, 'You're going to be okay, Daddy. You're going to be okay'.

As he gradually returned it seemed that his mind – his real self – was 'squeezing its way back into the all too tight and limiting suit of physical existence, with its spatio-temporal bounds, its linear thought, and its limitation to verbal communication.' And he became aware of six faces, unrecognisable at first, and yet he felt he should know one of them in particular. It was someone who needed him, who would never recover if he left. It was the face of a young boy. It was his son, Bond.

It took about two months for him to recover completely, which even so is a miracle. For those who contract E.coli bacterial meningitis and survive it, almost all will spend the rest of their lives in a vegetative state. Dr Alexander not only recovered well but was able to return to his scientific study and work on the human brain, with the new knowledge that can link science with consciousness – or should I say Consciousness.



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* * *

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ONLY A THOUGHT AWAY

A personal story of bereavement and communication beyond death.
by Angela Howard

Published by Quacks Books, 2010. ISBN 978-1-904446-28-6.
£5.00 + £1.50 p&p

Please order from Angela Howard,
Webb's Cottage, Woolpits Road, Gt. Saling, Braintree, Essex, CM7 5DZ.

SCIENCE, MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

by Don Mason

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