

SOUP OR NATURAL?

by

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I woke with a snap, like a flash of light buried deep in my brain that was so powerful I could see it with the back of my eye. It seemed as if I could hear it as well, and as my senses began to turn inside out sending feelers out into the external world I wondered if someone was outside the tent and had stepped on a dry tree branch snapping it in two. I held my breath and listened with eyes wide open staring into the blackness—nothing—only a slight breeze that comes in the depth of a predawn desert night. My senses returned from their foray into the unknown practically empty handed. I instinctively sent them out again, this time with a different mission. What was I experiencing that was not natural? If I could sense it at all, and bring the information into my consciousness, or simply into my brain to process, how could it be unnatural?

Momentarily allowing my intellect to take over and ponder my questions I turned onto my back and stared up at the gauzy netting that served as the tent's only window. The stars were overwhelming, blanketing an otherwise ink black sky with a dizzying speckling of light. Something other than that night sky was intently tapping at my awareness. There was a presence there, dark and seriously attentive—watching. I was in Chaco Canyon, an ancient Native American spiritual site in the deep wilderness of New Mexico. Cindy, my fiancée, and I had come here to investigate the many archeological sites dating back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D. (Lekson, 2006). The trip had been incredible and arduous, driving thirty or so miles on only dirt and gravel and showing up at the campsite with no food and little water. The exploration of the amazing ancient sites had made up for the temporary discomfort and soon we were sitting with

new found friends who had graciously offered hot soup and exciting conversation about the possibility of finding rattlesnakes on our path back to the tent. What had earlier felt to be a welcoming place had now, in the oppressive night, felt foreboding and resistant. I turned back on my side feeling much too small lying under the canopy of the entire universe. I felt an urge to speak but resisted. I knew it wasn't my own voice that seemed desperately to want to make itself manifest through vocal cord vibration.

“What do you want?” I thought.

“You need to leave, you don't belong here!” The answer came back powerfully and autonomously, almost sounding as if someone just beyond the thin nylon of the tent wall had uttered the words in a hoarse and harsh whisper. I could feel my body shudder, and I wondered if I would be able to get through this without becoming so frightened I would lose my mind. I closed my eyes and listened to the wind, which had picked up considerably since my snap awakening. I thought about spirit possession—often times evil entities that drop into weak and unsuspecting bodies to express themselves once again, or even for the first time, in the physical world. As a practicing psychotherapist I once had a client who had asked me during one of our many sessions what I thought of evil spirits lurking around looking for a body to invade. He didn't seem to be the type that would be worried about such things. I sat in the silence for a moment and finally threw the question back at him in typical therapist fashion, “what do *you* think of such ideas?” I was sincerely curious to know what he thought, but I was also equally resistant to telling him exactly what *I* thought, feeling that it may encourage what my profession defines as magical thinking or unscientific irrationality.

Since this patient had started therapy with me he had grown progressively more phobic of being out in public places. Driving a car had become an impossibility, as he was so certain someone would intentionally try to ram into him and cause an accident. He presented all the classical criteria for agoraphobia, or even paranoia. And he was convinced it all started one night he had decided to walk through a cemetery alone. He said he felt a presence enter his body, and he wondered if that is what had been causing his problems. Eventually he stopped talking about this experience, and had progressed in a favorable way over the ensuing years of therapy with conventional treatment. As I lay under the stars in Chaco Canyon that night I wondered how different the world would be if we accepted the supernatural for what it, at least to me, seems clearly to be, *natural*.

I decided to treat the experience I was having that night as if it *were* real and as such chose to apply a bit of my thinking power to the situation. I thought I would reason with this spirit, and ask why I did not belong. I also decided to trust what I believed to be the ultimate Truth in the Universe—love, compassion, and unity. As soon as I had reached this resolve, another entity's image came into my awareness. This time the vision was of a benevolent spirit, who assured me that if I showed a proper respect for where I was and what I was doing then all would be fine and that I then would not have to leave. It seemed that this request was akin to preaching to the choir. I had every intention of showing respect and had so during our entire trip. But maybe I was missing the point. Maybe up until now I was not really allowing myself to be fully conscious of the distinct reality of a spiritual presence in this hallowed place and what that presence represented—because these possibilities had not really been real to me, maybe I had not been putting them in my mind and heart in a manner that actually showed a sincere awareness of them.

I continued my silent conversation with both spirits. I continued to suppress the urge to actually speak the voice of the darker spirit, and I grappled with the darkness that entity brought into my experience. The night crept along and it became much more of a struggle before the light of dawn broke the spell and I drifted back to sleep. The next day as we walked through the ancient remains of a long forgotten civilization my tread was lighter and my heart softer. I saw the image of the old benevolent Indian mystic drift in and out of my consciousness as I walked on his path and felt his desert heat and breathed his desert dust. At one time, at the edge of an exceptionally magnificent Kiva, I got on my knees and prayed, feeling the sharp rocks dig into my knees and actually, for the first time during this trip, *felt* the reality of the ancient souls that physically were a part of this sun baked canyon. I thought of my possibly possessed patient, and wondered how different his therapy experience would have been if we had accepted his spirit connection as a reality, not just as a psychological event, and called upon the goodness in the Universe to assist him in his understanding and reconciliation of his possible possession by a malevolent presence. It seemed to me, at this moment as I knelt in the desert, that we were mostly turning a blind eye to much of the wonder of life, even the material world, and ultimately to love itself. In a lecture I had attended at Pacifica Graduate Institute, James Hillman, known for his work in re-visioning psychology, suggested that the entire universe of things opens up to us simply to be appreciated, to be known, and to inspire us with awe and conscious attention (2006). Manly P. Hall a theosophist practicing in Los Angeles in the mid 1900's said in *The Wisdom of the Knowing Ones* (2000):

Every blade of grass, every tree, is the visible extremity of a vast invisible process. The choirs of hierarchies are as inconceivable as the symbolism of Dante and Milton might suggest. These wonders are not to be named except by an adventure of the spirit beholding the substance of truth. For the rest there can only

be acceptances put into words or shapes that suggest, but faintly, the sublimity of their originals. (p. 74)

Carl Jung, the imminent Swiss psychologist and the founder of archetypal psychology, presented a similar idea, but from an opposing perspective, in his essay “On the Nature of the Psyche” (1960):

The moment one forms an idea of a thing and successfully catches one of its aspects, one invariably succumbs to the illusion of having caught the whole. One never considers that a total apprehension is right out of the question. Not even an idea posited as total is total, for it is still an entity on its own with unpredictable qualities. This self-deception certainly promotes peace of mind: the unknown is named, the far has been brought near, so that one can lay one’s finger on it. One has taken possession of it, and it has become an inalienable piece of property, like a slain creature of the wild that can no longer run away. (p. 168)

Jung seems to have suggested that it is a materialist’s goal to reduce everything that we perceive in this world to a namable and identifiable element. I would go further to posit that the primary tenet of our current scientific worldview is to call only those experiences that we can define in this limited manner *real*. The experiences that remain un-named, unmeasured, and unpredictable fall into a category that contemporary philosophers have called *promissory materialism* (Tart, 2009)—phenomena that will eventually be reduced down to their identifiable, and thus definable, parts within the current scientific definition of reality. This leaves a world and universe entirely defined by the Newtonian classical physics of cause and effect. B. Alan Wallace stated in his seminal work *The Taboo of Subjectivity* (2000):

Twentieth-century scientific materialism abandoned belief in any form of theism by adopting the principle of physicalism, which states that in reality only physical objects and processes exist. In other words, only configurations of space and of mass/energy and its functions, properties, and emergent epiphenomena are real. A closely related principle maintains that everything that exists is quantifiable,

including the individual elements of physical reality, as well as the laws that govern their interactions. (p. 26)

Where does this limited view of reality leave the discoveries of quantum physics and noetic science? All experience then that falls outside of the materialist view of the universe becomes a fantasy at best, and at worst, it is ignored.

What is ironic about this definition of reality is that many of these so-called supernatural events have withstood the scrutiny of classical scientific methodology. The extensive scientific experimentation in psi research at various universities around the world have proven, according to currently acceptable scientific method, that certain phenomena such as ESP, and psychokinesis, do in fact exist within a materialists framework (Radon, 1997). Once this causal element within our definition of reality becomes loosened, it should open the door to more research or at least a less prejudiced way of thinking. It should, but it does not seem to have had much of an effect.

In Michael Glickman's book *Crop Circles: The Bones of God* (2009) he presented a "Twin Phenomenon"—the first being that crop circles simply cannot exist as our science, as we know it now, cannot accommodate their existence. The second phenomenon he explains:

...is simply humanity's ability to look the other way. The pathetic and clearly specious Doug-and-Dave hoax confection was swallowed with relief and gratitude but without consideration by millions. Yet if we believe, if we *truly* believe, that the crop circles are a man-made enterprise in their entirety, why do they remain unnoticed? Why is the art world unmoved? This must surely be the most astonishing body of earth art in history. Why has academia not taken note of the numerological and geometrical skills demonstrated here? Why has the media not remarked on the perseverance and proficiency of this team of gifted operatives? And why does nobody point out the breathtaking conspiracy of secrecy underlying this human enterprise? Above all, how could anyone with a grain of discernment associate these noble and enigmatic emblems with the claims of a squalid crew of frauds and deceivers? (p. xvii)

The crop circles are probably one of the most materially manifest examples of an unexplainable creative mechanism present on earth today. They have reached a proportion of complexity that defies any attempt at describing them as a hoax, yet the world truly does “look the other way” (Glickman, 2009).

My experience in the desert showed me how a sincere awareness of an autonomous (yet ultimately not autonomous at all) presence expanded my sphere of consciousness. If I had held this spiritual encounter as strictly an epiphenomenon of my own isolated psychology I would not have thoroughly integrated the experience in a sincere and heartfelt manner. My intellect would have insisted on keeping the experience internalized and within the limited scope of Newtonian causal science. I believe I would have missed the whole point.

I do not propose that we make greater efforts to prove the scientific viability of psi and paranormal phenomenon. Although there have been great strides made in the specific scientific experiments revolving around certain types of psi such as ESP, psychokinesis and other similar phenomenon (Radin, 1997), I do not personally believe the answer lies in simply defining these events in the same manner that we define most everything else in material existence. Taking true advantage of what these things can teach us or how they can help us see the world, the universe, life and even material manifestation, in a more expanded and more truthful manner will not come about through an objective, realist, methodology. So then it becomes a matter of heart, and not entirely intellect, and matters of the heart have not typically been viewed by science as empirically evidential.

It seems then that the issue becomes an act of balancing. What has priority in our lives, what leads and what follows? What is taken seriously, and what is relegated to mere fantasy, dreams, and if not a positive experience, nightmares and pathology. As children we are encouraged to fantasize, to bring elves and fairies to life, to have imaginary friends and make-believe worlds. But when a certain age is reached, and these non-physical fascinations are continued, the young adult is considered mentally ill and needs treatment to bring them into the real world of quantifiable materialism. It is a shaky proposition to suggest that we all take fairies, ghosts, and other supernatural experiences as seriously as we do cancer cells in our bodies, gold in the bank, and food on the table, but I believe that some effort must be made to find a place for these realities *as* realities and not merely epiphenomena of the chemistry in our brains.

It is important not to lump all non-physical experiences together and place them on equal par with all physical experiences. They are different, and within each world of reality between purely subjective thought and hard-core physical manifestation there are subtle distinctions. A dream of fairies is different than a sighting of fairies in a waking state (which only one person can see) which is different than the actual discovery of physical fairies in some obscure wooded valley in an unexplored region of South America (no, no such discovery has been made as yet!). Just as the thought of traveling to the moon is different than the event depicted in movies and literature—which is different than the actual moon landing. There is a demand, in our current Western paradigm, that individual experience is suspect until it becomes a group observation. Wallace (2000) commented on this as well:

The principle of objectivism demands that science deals with empirical facts testable by empirical methods and verifiable by third-person means. This

principle has proven to be very useful in revealing a wide range of facts that are equally accessible to all competent observers. Such facts must be public rather than private; that is to say, they must be accessible to more than one observer. However there are many other empirical facts—most obviously, our own subjective mental events—that are accessible only by first-person means and of which the only competent observer is oneself. (p. 22)

There is indeed a thin veil between the subjective imagination and what is considered objectively real. I believe that our current culture and scientific paradigm demands that there be a distinction between these two realms of experience. Newtonian science, for the past four hundred years, has provided a convenient measuring stick for this determination. Now it seems that our comfortable and delineated way of looking at the universe is falling apart. We are becoming more aware and conscious of the events that occur within our sphere of experience that fall outside the boundaries of causal science. We seem to no longer have a simple way to determine what should be taken seriously and what we should relegate to the realm of fantasy and the supernatural. Granted, it may be quite a while before we reach the level of consciousness that allows our imagination and inner dream world the same exalted status as the material world. But it seems that we are on the brink of expanding our serious awareness to include such things as soul survival after death, communication with disincarnate spirits, crop circles and other physical anomalies, some forms of UFO phenomena, ESP and other similar types of psi experiences. These are the bridges that will connect our totally subjective world of inner images and thoughts to the objective material world we navigate through as physical beings.

There are possibly many people who would have completely ignored the type of paranormal event I experienced that night in Chaco Canyon. They would have rolled over

in their sleeping bag and passed it all off as a typical nightmare not giving any of the messages received any more credence than what they would give any other dream or imaginative thought. There are also possibly many people, and more so now than maybe several decades ago, that would have given the experience the utmost attention and would have allowed it to integrate with their physical material engagement as if it too were of the same caliber of experience. I chose to do just that as I struggled to reconcile an experience that simply did not fit in the materialist's worldview. I believe I am a better person for it, and as a result of my insistence in assessing my experience as reality I have expanded my awareness of life, love, human expression and our role as beings on this planet. I do not believe I would have come to this insight in any other way.

In *Journey to Ixtlan* (1972) Carlos Castaneda and his mentor, Don Juan, are in the desert at night searching for a spirit. They come across what Castaneda observed to be a calf-like creature with the ears of a wolf and the beak of a bird. It is curled up in their path and screaming as if about to die. Castaneda, at his first encounter with his creature, is terrified; but soon, after his reasoning powers kick in and assures him that the existence of such a creature is impossible, he sees that it is actually a fallen tree branch wafting about in the wind. He points this out to the Yaqui shaman and expresses his pride in seeing the *true* reality. Don Juan rebukes him and tells him that in fact the tree branch *was* a dying spirit while it was "alive with power" (p. 104). It was not transformed into a tree branch until Castaneda doubted its existence.

Similar experiences happen in less obvious or dramatic ways to many people, if not all people, through synchronicities, encounters with the paranormal, and intuitive events. When we doubt the existence or reality of these experiences we could actually be

changing the experience itself. Certainly the experience loses its impact and thus its power to effectuate meaningful change in our lives and perspectives. Reality then becomes a moving target subject to our own personal beliefs. We truly would be masters of our universe as the observers of material manifestation creating the world in the manner in which we wish it to be rather than allowing the material world to create us.

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