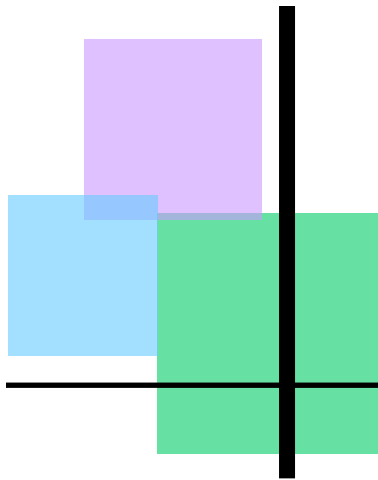
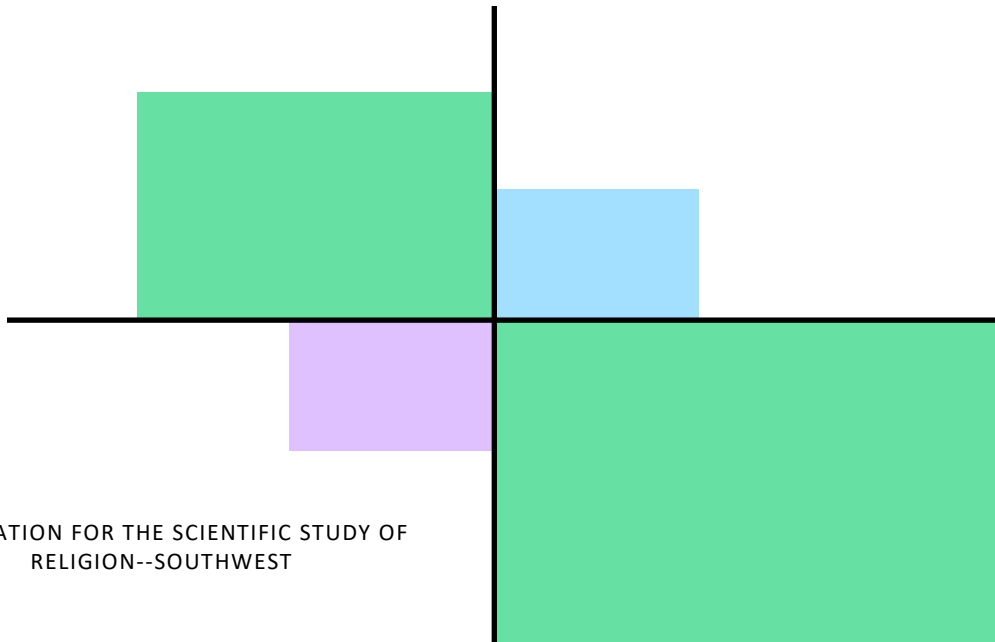


ASSOCIATION FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF
RELIGION--SOUTHWEST



The Year 2006 Proceedings of the ASSR- SW



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Editor's Note

Welcome once again to the *Proceedings* of Association for the Scientific Study of Religion-- Southwest (ASSR-SW). It is yet again both an honor and privilege to serve as the editor for *The Year 2006 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW*. Year after year, the Proceedings are another fine collection of papers and presentations from both our perennial authors and presenters as well as a host of new academic talent who bring with them new styles and topics. Regardless of who contributes to this collection, the subject matter never tires or bores the reader. As usual, this year's papers are again exceptional and thought-provoking!

It is important for our future that every member of the ASSR-SW not only encourages new membership at every opportunity but solicits scholars throughout the colleges, universities, and organizations at which you reside to become involved in our group through chairing sessions, writing and submitting papers, or holding office. Please let your leadership here at the ASSR-SW know of all who would like to become involved. We have grown significantly over the past few years and would like to see our organization become as inclusive as possible. Please encourage your friends, colleagues, and associates to join and become active next year!

The quality of these *Proceedings* attests not only to the fine work that has been accomplished by the efforts of many who participate and promote our meetings through research, writing, attending our sessions, and sponsorship through both donations and the purchase of this collection. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helps to make the ASSR what it has been, what it is, and what it hopes to become. Joining the ASSR is still FREE of charge and all we ask in return is your support and participation in our yearly sessions and helping to make them successful by writing and presenting papers, chairing sessions, and attending the presentations of others. Once again, I want to thank all of you for your support.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the officers of the ASSR for this past year. These are the people who, along with our presenters, truly made the Year 2006 meetings possible:

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I hope all of you have a good year and I will be looking forward to your participation in the ASSR in 2006-2007! Please visit our Web Site at www.assr-sw.org .

Sincerely,

Jon K. Loessin, Editor

The Wind (Spirit) Blows Where It Chooses: Reflection on the Origin of Religion

Joe E. Barnhart
University of North Texas

“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes or where it goes” (John 3:8).

Various theories have emerged to account for the dawn of religion just as various definitions of “religion” have appeared. Rather than offer a sweeping theory or definition, I explore a central element of the early stages of religion. I take a cue from the Greek noun *pneuma*, translated as *wind, air, breath, spirit, ghost, or spirit life*. Similarly, the Hebrew noun *ruach* means *spirit, breath, air, breeze, or wind*. (1) First, wind is invisible, yet effectual and sometimes powerful. It can howl like a visible animal, make the tall grass sway, fell a tree, or stir up clouds of dust. A major ingredient of storms, wind often accompanies rain or delivers it. In short, though invisible, wind can impact the sensory realm.

In the first chapter of Job, a messenger comes to Job to inform him that the Sabaeans have swooped down to carry off his animals and slaughter his herdsmen. Another messenger arrives to tell him of the troubles inflicted by three bands of Caldeans. A third messenger appears to report that a *whirlwind* has swept across the desert to demolish his eldest son’s house and killed all of Job’s offspring. Ironically, near the end of the Book of Job, the god Yahweh answers Job from a *whirlwind* to inform him basically that he has little understanding of how things come into being and to imply that such an ignorant creature should not complain about his losses (38:1). Yahweh’s argument comes close to saying Supreme might make right.

Just before Yahweh’s speech, Job’s visitor Elihu informs him that the breath of the god El formed ice and spoke to the rainstorms, saying “Be violent,” whereupon at his voice the rains poured down unchecked. In some cases, El and the elements in Job are not clearly separated. “Just listen to the thunder of his voice, the rumbling of his utterance” (37:2). He roars and thunders “with majestic voice” (37:4).

When the Hebrew’s god controls the wind, it often seems to be his self-control. At other times, his powerful breath is words turning into sky-fire, rain, and storm in a kind of self-projection. This may be compared to Thales’ theory of primordial water assuming various forms. For Anaximander, the primordial source was Apeiron, the boundless. Anaximenes of the sixth century BCE taught that air was the basic universal substance. The Hebrews had various words to indicate different functions of air. The *ruach* of Elohim in Genesis 1:2 hovers or sweeps over the surface of the waters. Elohim breathes into the nostrils of the images he has formed from dust to give them the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). The Hebrew tradition retains the anthropomorphic air or wind. El, Elohim, or Yahweh consciously controls his manifestations and projections, often by speaking.

(2) Second, controlling the wind is not conspicuously easy, although wind can sometimes be put to use. Anyone thought to have influence on the wind, therefore, tends to enjoy influence within the community. Shamans, including such mutants as prophets and priests, have sometimes professed the ability to control at least indirectly the wind and its accompanying elements (e.g., Elijah 1 Ki. 17:1, 13-24; 18:36-41).

The crafty shaman Samuel apparently encouraged the Israelites to connect his prayers and sacrifices with the wind and weather. When the Philistines approached to attack, the Israelites begged Samuel, “Do not stop crying out to Yahweh our Elohim so that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines” (1 Sam. 7:8). Samuel in his priestly

function solicited and elicited Yahweh's thunder against the Philistines, which was so loud as to throw them into a panic that led to their slaughter (7:10). "Throughout Samuel's lifetime Yahweh's hand was against the Philistines" (7:13).

The text of 1 Samuel makes it clear that Samuel wanted no king for the tribes of Israel. Why should he? He was virtually king himself as well as seer and the controlling priest. Since Samuel has become the accepted spokesman for Yahweh, it comes as no surprise when he reports that Yahweh does not want a king. The author or redactor of the Samuel story loses no opportunity to stress Samuel's enormous power as priest in controlling the weather. Samuel says to the people, "Now then, take your stand and observe the great thing Yahweh is about to do before your eyes! Is it not the wheat harvest today? I'm going to call on Yahweh to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what a wicked thing you did in Yahweh's eyes when you asked for a king" (1 Sam. 12:16-17). According to the story, the people saw and heard Yahweh's response to Samuel's intercession. "Then Samuel called upon Yahweh, and on that same day Yahweh sent thunder and rain. So, all the people stood in awe of Yahweh *and Samuel*" (12:18 italics added). Fearing they might die at Yahweh's hand, the people implore Samuel to pray to Yahweh on their behalf (12:19).

(3) Third, for ancient and preliterate peoples, deceased ancestors, ghosts, and other beings were like wind—mostly invisible but powerful in varying ways. The idea of spirit as a manifestation or source of life came perhaps from the observed fact that with human beings and animals, breath is essential to life. Ancient Hebrews seemed not to have a consistent notion of disembodied spirit. Does not breathing presuppose a body?

(4) Fourth, in early Hebrew thought, wind is a kind of personality in the sense of liveliness and unpredictability. After making apparently mud figurines, Yahweh breathed the breath of life into their nostrils to make them living or lively beings (Gen. 2:7). This is close to the notion of human freedom and will. As late as the Gospel of John, the author has Jesus saying to Nicodemus, "The wind [or spirit—the same word *pneuma*] blows where it wills [or wishes, chooses], and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit [*pneumatos*]."

(5) Fifth, when wind-spirit takes on personality, a tendency develops to give it characteristics of publicly observed, embodied beings. In some of the Hebrew tradition, Yahweh/Elohim seems to be embodied. In Genesis 3:8-10, Adam and Eve hear the *sound* of Yahweh Elohim as he walks among the trees of the garden "at the time of the evening breeze" (NRSV). In 2 Samuel 5:24, Yahweh says to David, who is prepared to attack the enemy, "As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move quickly because that will mean Yahweh has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army." Here, the god, or his army, is invisible but can be heard in the treetops, which might otherwise be taken as mere wind passing through the trees. In Judges 6:34, however, the Spirit (*ruach*) of Yahweh clothed itself (herself) with Gideon, suggesting perhaps that Yahweh was the indwelling life in the people of Israel. In Genesis 2 when Yahweh Elohim breathes his own life into his created images, he gives them spirit in the sense of self-motivating, effective personality.

If spirit/wind is to interact with human individuals, then some *publicly identifiable embodiment* seems required. Raw wind is difficult to *re-cognize* and identify as the same person(ality) over stretches of time. The dilemma of the J Writer's Yahweh lies in his being both a body and his being like the wind. He is a "man of war" and he is a spirit. Early Hebrew metaphysics faced, not the Cartesian mind-body problem, but the problem of the spatial limits of the body, on the one hand, and the need for wind/spirit to have specific location, on the other hand. The tension between the invisible divine wind/spirit and the embodied wind/spirit is found throughout the early Hebrew religion. In Exodus, for example, despite the statement that "Yahweh spoke face to face with Moses, as a man speaks with a friend" (33:11), Yahweh says to him, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see my face

and live” (33:20). Moses succeeds in gaining permission to see only Yahweh’s back. Yahweh then uses *his hand* to cover Moses, thus preventing him from seeing him until he passes, leaving only his back visible to Moses (33:22-23).

In Homer, the gods make appearances as actors arriving on stage to deliver their lines and perform their deeds, sometimes incognito. In Judges 13:2-24, an individual appears incognito to Manoah and his wife, but the story reads like a skit with heavy humor, as the human couple and the reader try to determine whether the visitor is a man, an angel, or something else. He says he will not be able to eat food offered him. Manoah wants to know his name, but he says his name cannot be known and then advises Manoah to give Yahweh an offering, presumably food. Manoah takes the advice and makes a sacrifice on a rock, whereupon Yahweh does a wondrous thing. As the flames are rising up from the altar to the sky, Yahweh’s angel rises up in the flames. Manoah exclaims, “We will surely die, because we have seen Elohim.” But his more pragmatic wife disagrees. “If Yahweh wanted to kill us, he certainly wouldn’t have accepted the burnt offering and grain offering.” The humorous confusion in this scene comes from the disturbing ambivalence generated by the humanlike being who apparently is a messenger. Although appearing human, he not entirely so, which is why Manoah’s wife thinks this “man (*ish*) of Elohim” is “very frightening, like an angel of Elohim” who would not give his name.

In *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible*, James L. Kugel argues that the early Hebrews thought that because of his appearances, the deity was somewhat human, and yet not human. The deity pops in unexpectedly and often leaves unexpectedly—now you see him, now you don’t. He comes and goes like the wind. Sometimes he is like smoke—not an illusion yet not something that can be clutched and held. Like sound and smoke, deity rises to heaven. Or like a cloud in heaven, it can descend to become the *shekinah* of God. Though not found in the Bible, it is found in rabbinic literature to mean God’s dwelling or resting—in some instances a synonym for God. Some writers imagined it to be a light, a visible glory hovering above the Temple. The pillars of cloud and fire hovering above the Israelites at the Exodus appeared as *shekinah*. In some of the New Testament, Jesus appears as *shekinah*. In Luke 24, Jesus appears after the crucifixion to apostles en route to Emmaus but is not recognized by them despite their having seen and heard him only a few days earlier. Then after breaking bread with them and giving a brief lesson for their benefit, this same Jesus vanishes—gone like the wind or smoke. In the next scene, which is in Jerusalem, Jesus appears to the eleven and their companions. They think they are seeing a ghost or spirit [*pneuma*] (Lk. 24:37). Since Luke wants to emphasize that the resurrected Jesus is not spirit/ghost/wind, Jesus invites them to observe that he is flesh (*sarks*) and bone (*osteas*), which a spirit lacks.

Sometimes, the *now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t* becomes *now-I-see-it, but-you-don’t*. In Acts 7, Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, looks up to heaven and sees God’s glory and Jesus standing at God’s right hand. Stephen exclaims that he sees heaven open and the Son of Man standing at God’s right hand. Though a young man named Saul (later called Paul) was present, he did not see what Stephen saw, or at least never refers to it in any of his known letters, although later he hears a voice identified as that of Jesus.

The point I wish to make now is that in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, deity often comes and goes like the wind, sometimes materializing or at least seeming to. Whether or not the Jesus whom the disciples touched had kidneys or a stomach remained perhaps unanswered in the minds of the New Testament authors. The Jesus of Luke 24 eats fish, which would perhaps end up in the glorified stomach. Jesus of Luke 7 in heaven might not have needed a stomach. These are questions Luke does not raise, although interestingly in Acts 10 he has food descending on a sheet presumably coming from heaven. He does not represent this as a publicly observable scene.

In much of the Hebrew Bible, the deity lives mostly in heaven. Prayers and cries along with the smoke of offerings rise up to him. But apparently he cannot view everything happening on earth, which is why he sometimes descends to find out for himself what is happening. Yahweh had heard about the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, but he needed a first-hand report. And Yahweh said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so utterly grievous, I will go down and see if they have indeed gone astray as their cry [indicates], and if not, I will then know." (Gen. 18:20-21)

The Hebrew Bible preserves an ancient view of Yahweh as a man who walks in the garden, eats with human beings, and is a fierce man of war. As literary critic Harold Bloom points out, a booklet attributed to the Palestinian rabbi Joseph ben Akiba, who died about 132 CE, speaks of "the measure of the body," which shockingly is Yahweh's own. Yahweh is a cosmic giant in height, length of limbs, facial features, and stride (198).

While this view of God is a long way from God as spirit/wind, some characteristics of the wind remain in the sense of changeableness, unpredictability, and being both comforting like a cool breeze and terrifying like a raging storm. Nevertheless, Yahweh in especially the J Writer has little in common with the God of Aristotle, Thomas, Tillich, and the systematic theologians. Indeed, the Hebrew Bible stands against every attempt to draw out of it a coherent biblical theology.

The New Testament cannot provide a coherent, self-consistent view of the historical Jesus. He becomes as illusive as the wind. The mighty theological works by the church fathers are admirable works of art, but their attempts to present the three illusive persons of the Trinity as distinct personalities are unsuccessful. To keep some semblance with monotheism, Christianity has had to sacrifice the Father's personality to the point that he has little kinship with the roaring, dynamic, wind-like character called Yahweh. At the same time, as Stephen Prothero shows, Jesus today has multiple personalities, especially in America, where he becomes something of a Rorschach test that tells us more about ourselves than about a certain Galilean. The quest for the historical Jesus proves to be crosswinds of doctrine and, in some cases, a seemingly endless chase after a will o' the wisp.

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The Stonewashed Church: The Impact of Consumer Culture on Modern U.S. Evangelical Churches

Walt Scalen
*Angelina College & Stephen F. Austin
State University*

J.B. Watson, Jr.
Stephen F. Austin State University

Introduction

The role of consumption in shaping human societies is a long-standing concern of sociologists. The impact of consumer culture on religion has also received increasing attention in the scholarly literature. The unique context of U.S. evangelical churches will be analyzed as a sociological case study, to assess the impact of consumption on the modern evangelical religious enterprise. One would expect that evangelical churches, as a form of moral association, would oppose the incorporation of consumer culture, but in fact, many churches and denominations have embraced this paradigm as a model for organizational success. The growing emphasis, especially in the so-called megachurches, on efficiency, predictability, calculability, substitution of “nonhuman” technology, and attempts to control uncertainty - the basic tenets of McDonaldization - represent a unique juxtaposition of commercial and spiritual values (Ritzer, 2004, 2006; Drane, 2002).

Andy Crouch, a writer for *Christianity Today*, recently applied the metaphor of “stonewashed” to contemporary practices in evangelical churches, drawing a parallel with the brilliant marketing of denim jeans in recent years. When sales of denim jeans slowed, enterprising marketers increased sales by shifting to stonewashed denim - jeans conditioned at the factory to be well-worn. Stonewashed jeans were a big hit with consumers (Crouch, 2005). The term “stonewashed church” has been coined by the co-authors of this paper to refer to the consumeristic church model increasingly dominant in conservative evangelical churches. We will examine the relevant work of social scientists and conservative evangelical leaders on the “stonewashed church.”

Peter Berger (2005), a noted sociologist of religion, has also highlighted the primacy of a consumer-based model of contemporary religious practices. In a recent article, “Religion and the West,” Berger described this development:

In America, the term "religious preference" - tellingly derived from the language of consumer economics - has become part of the common discourse...furthermore, both in Europe and in America, there are large numbers of people who pick and choose from the religious traditions available on the market. Sociologists on both continents have noted and studied this phenomenon... Robert Wuthnow, who has analyzed a mass of American data, calls the same phenomenon "patchwork religion" (Berger, 2005:112).

In her book, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*, sociologist Juliet Schor describes American Society's obsession with consumption. She claims, “the architects of this culture, the companies that make, market, and advertise consumer products, have set their sights on children.” (Schor, 2004:13). She argued that these companies' marketing efforts are reaping huge dividends in terms of corporate profits, but they are also creating a culture of consumption in which “contemporary American tweens and teens have emerged as the most brand-oriented, consumer-involved, and materialistic generations in history” (Schor, 2004:25).

In a poignant and thoughtful essay entitled *Consumerism and the New Capitalism*, author Rip Cronk claims “the traditional cultural values of Western society are degenerating under the influences of corporate politics, the commercialization of culture and the impact of mass media” (Cronk, 1996:1). He believes that consumerism is systematically stripping away major traditions and cultural heritage. He writes that the public is conditioned to “fetishistically substitute consumer ideals for lost acculturating experiences of art, religion, and family” (Cronk, 1996:1). According to Cronk, emerging consumeristic culture has normalized manipulation and duplicity and greatly diminished human freedom. He writes, “as we become acclimated to life around the television set, collectively striving for a media-produced image, our choices are made for us.... choice is reduced to brand name... consumerism, like communism and fascism, is a secular religion restricting freedom of choice” (Cronk, 1996:3).

Conservative Evangelicals, Church Growth, and Consumer Culture

Few scholars disagree that production and consumption are fundamental to human society. The sense that consumerism, however, is a distortion of traditional economics is increasingly given currency by cultural analysts. The dominance of a cultural mindset that unwittingly redefines the value of people in terms of material success, status, and possessions is often seen as problematic. Richard John Neuhaus defines consumerism as “living in a manner that is measured by having rather than being”(Neuhaus, 1992:52-53). This perspective mirrors the view of Pope John Paul II, expressed in the Second Vatican Council, that consumerism is a “threat to the freedom of the human person to live according to the higher demands of love rather than to the lower pull of material desires” (De Souza, 1999:1).

In an interview promoting the upcoming “Christianity in a Consumer Culture” Conference, to be held in Minneapolis, April 28-29, 2006, Rodney Clapp called consumerism and Christianity “competing faiths” (Clapp, 2006). He stated “Christianity, as a faith and a way of life, affirms that humans are created ultimately for participation in the life of God.” In contrast, “consumerism says we are born, live and die to consume material goods, experiences, an unending array of novel pleasures.” A similar view is set forth by T.A. McMahan in his recent e-book, *Consumer Christianity Part I*. He writes that consumerism and Christianity are “antagonistic to one another.” Therefore, he finds the consumeristic orientation of the Church Growth Movement (CGM) to be shockingly ironic. He coined the term “Consumer Christianity” and defines it as “an endeavor to help Christian churches grow in size and become more effective through the application of business principles, marketing strategies, and management concepts” (McMahan, 2005:1).

It is this ironic, even oxymoronic mixing of Christianity and consumerism so prevalent in many modern evangelical churches that the co-authors of this paper find so intriguing. How did this happen, and why are those involved so apparently oblivious to what appears to many to be an obvious inconsistency? For those studying this phenomenon, it becomes readily apparent that consumerism in many evangelical churches is not just the result of cultural osmosis (the slow influence of the larger culture on the subcultures of churches), but has been a planned, programmed, intentional effort to reform and modernize traditional evangelical churches. This phenomenon is described as the Church Growth Movement (CGM). Historical descriptions of this movement point to the writings & lectures of theologian & former missionary Donald McGavran as the inspiration for the CGM (McIntosh and Engle, 2004).

In 1955, McGavran published a book entitled *The Bridges of God*. He introduced his concept of cultural “contextualism” - essentially the notion that some measure of local cultural accommodation is necessary in order to evangelize target populations (McGavran,

1955). For example, he noted that church structures built by missionaries should look like the architecture of the native peoples. Undoubtedly, some measure of cultural accommodation to religious practices is inevitable; however, every religion, including Christianity, can be seen as a culture within itself. Therefore, excessive accommodation could be viewed as a threat to a religion's own cultural identity. For example, every religion has distinctive ideas, beliefs, values, standards, and practices. Often the religion is associated with a particular language, distinctive art forms, dress styles, and so on. These characteristics serve as boundaries distinguishing those who practice a particular religion from those who do not.

Some observers suggest that McGavaran's ideas have been put into practice in a manner that somewhat departed from his original intent. The idea of a "bridge" suggests a point of communication, and attempt to find common ground. Surely McGavaran did not intend a "superhighway" of cultural exchange, or even less, the replacement of one culture with another. It is the opinion of the co-authors that the modern proponents of the CGM have either intentionally or unwittingly adopted a corporate business model as their *modus operandi* for reforming evangelical churches, and that they have produced outcomes antithetical to and inconsistent with their own religious doctrines & practices.

The two names most associated with the CGM are Bill Hybels, Pastor of Willowcreek Community Church located in suburban Chicago, and Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Community Church in suburban Los Angeles. Both have written and spoken extensively about their ideas. Warren is the author of one of the bestselling books of all time, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Warren, 2002). Both claim that thousands of churches around the world have adopted and implemented their ideas. Hybels is known for the phrase, "seeker-sensitive" and Warren has actually made the phrase, "purpose driven" a registered trademark. Hybels is the son of a corporate executive and Warren has said in the public media that Peter Drucker, business management guru, has had a profound influence on his life and work. Both Hybels and Warren are persuasive, innovative, and industrious. They have built two of the largest congregations in the U.S. Both churches claim very orthodox or conservative "Statements of Faith." Over the last 15-20 years, the CGM has profoundly influenced the way Americans "do church." The impact of the movement engineered by Hybels and Warren is nothing short of revolutionary.

After reading hundreds of articles, numerous books, reviewing endless CGM websites, viewing hours of taped broadcasts of seeker sensitive/purpose driven churches, and personally and directly observing several churches in Eastern Texas undergo the "paradigm shift" advocated by the Saddleback and Willowcreek Associations, the co-authors are persuaded that the central idea of the movement is simply this: the church should be viewed as a business. Everything follows from that basic notion. Churches are seen as "marketing" a product, and they are encouraged to do everything conceivable to make that effort successful. Pastors and their churches are promised two things. If you follow the methods, techniques, and formulas that have been proven successful, your attendance and your offerings will increase. Undoubtedly, the goals of the movement do not include the promotion of the shallowest brand of consumerism imaginable, but in many cases that is exactly what has happened in actual practice at the level of the individual church.

Most conservative evangelicals do not view a business model as inherently evil. References to sacred texts are often used to buttress this line of thought. According to Biblical New Testament documents, Jesus grew up in a family business. The Apostle Peter was a fisherman, and in the course of his earthly ministry Jesus blessed Peter's business with abundant catches. The Apostle Paul was a tent maker, who apparently continued his work during his missionary efforts. Critics of this perspective often cite other Biblical accounts. There are two stories in the life of Jesus, which illustrate this point. In Luke 18:18-30, a rich young ruler comes to Jesus and asks him what he must do to be saved. Jesus

tells him to sell everything he has and give it to the poor. The young man decides otherwise, and goes away disappointed. The moral of the story is that the young man's possessions were actually in possession of him. In John 2:15-16, Jesus confronts the corruption and commercialization of the temple by angrily driving out the "moneychangers." In so doing he declares that they had made his house, "a house of merchandise." The Matthew account styles his remarks this way, "it is written, my house shall be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a robbers den" (Matthew 21:12).

In addition, some modern business ideas, beliefs, values, and practices seem in direct contradiction to Christian teachings. "The bottom line rules" and "the ends justify the means" hardly represent the epitome of Biblical ethics. Manipulation, duplicity, trickery, hype, and misleading rhetoric are far too common in some business and marketing circles. This is not to imply that all corporations are on an "Enron-like" road of ever-increasing corruption, but there are limited applications to church organization. Critics of CGM & similar ideas frequently suggest that a careful reading of the teachings of Jesus, the writing of the Apostles, or the works of the early Church Fathers hardly encourage the development and promotion of a profit-driven, customer-sensitive corporate business machine that is efficiently producing ever-increasing material assets in a church context.

Scholarly and Journalistic Assessments of the "Stonewashed Church"

It is worth noting that two of America's foremost religious scholars have made similar observations. Martin Marty has for thirty-five years been a Professor of Religious History at University of Chicago. He has written over fifty books. He is a well-known speaker, columnist, pastor, and teacher. The University of Chicago has built and dedicated a religion center in his honor. Alan Wolfe is Director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College. He is the author of several books including the recently released *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith*. He has also contributing editor of *The New Republic* and *The Wilson Quarterly*. In an article entitled, "Will Success Spoil Evangelicalism," Marty reminds his readers that in 1927, Richard Niebuhr described American Protestant Christianity as the "religion of the disinherited" (Marty, 2000). As lavish megachurches spring up in the U.S. at the current rate of approximately one every two days, Niebuhr's quote is no longer descriptive (Symonds, Grow, and Cady, 2005). Marty claims that modern evangelicalism is "nonascetic," that the movement has shifted from "otherworldliness to this worldliness." He calls modern evangelicals, "some of the worldliest citizens around." According to Marty, this is only one of the "many 180 degree turns, flip-flops and about-faces in the evangelical cohort during the time of its prosperity" (Marty, 2000:758).

For example, in the middle of the 20th century, culturally beleaguered evangelicals often made the claim that it was clear they represented the truth because they were "little and despised." Now, according to Marty, evangelicals claim "numbers and prosperity as the test of truth" (Marty, 2000:759). He also observed that evangelical churches have become less inclined to advocate a high standard of conduct and are more inclined to do whatever is necessary to attract prospective customers. He writes that "prospering megachurches" do not lead their people "out of the world," but offer an endless array of entertainments and services. He claims, "those who offer, not those who demand, prosper in market-era religion" (Marty, 2000:760).

According to Marty, evangelicals once disapproved of the popular culture; now they embrace it and imitate it. No group was more massively opposed to the sensual and sexual provocative nature of early rock music than evangelicals. This view held firm for several decades in the 20th century, but in another reversal of position, evangelicals now imitate every conceivable form of rock music, and the contemporary Christian music industry is a

one billion dollar per year business. According to Marty, “the postures, gestures, costumes and settings that had been regarded as devilish” have now been “sanctified” into a profitable enterprise (Marty, 2000:761). Marty noted that evangelicals, by and large, have normalized several previously prohibited behaviors. For example, drinking, gambling, and divorce have faded from most sermons. He reflects that “when the president of your denomination, the members of your family, and your favorite evangelical celebrates divorce at the same rate as their liberal and secular counterparts, you are far more likely to treat the subject as a tragedy than as a sin” (Marty, 2000:761). Marty observed that for now “most evangelicals draw the line at abortion, euthanasia, and homosexual expression,” but he wonders if “preaching on these subjects will change as cultural accommodation” continues (Marty, 2000:761).

Marty believes that the “market” has become the new “god” of evangelicalism. As evangelicals aggressively market every conceivable kind of product and gloat over their ever-increasing bottom line, they are actually losing their distinctiveness, their identity, perhaps, their Faith. He sees consumerism as a threat to the culture, and he sees modern evangelicalism as part of the problem, rather than a voice for reform.

Sociologist and religion scholar Alan Wolfe (2003), in his book, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith*, sets forth a similar view of the “paradigm shift” occurring in evangelical churches and other forms of American religion. Wolfe, an ethnic Jew, who describes himself as “not very religious,” is nonetheless alarmed at the degree to which modern evangelicalism is embracing corporate business culture, pop psychology, and pop culture in general. As popular American culture has become a race to the bottom, ever increasingly vulgar and vacuous, evangelical Christians are along for the ride, often driving the bus. Essentially, Wolfe claims that evangelical churches are turning away from historical religious ideals and moving toward a kind of pragmatic materialism. His studies reveal that American culture is defining American Evangelicalism and not the other way around; evangelicals are de-emphasizing historic Christian teachings, traditions, and moral values. In other words, there is little that distinguishes evangelicals from their cultural counterparts.

In a *Business Week* article entitled, “Earthly Empires; How Evangelical Churches are Borrowing from the Business Playbook,” the authors assert that the runaway success of this “new generation of evangelical entrepreneurs...is modeled unabashedly on business” (Symonds et al., 2005:2). According to the authors, “savvy leaders...tailor a panoply of services to meet all kinds of consumer needs.” Gone are traditional symbols and traditional Christian music. To appeal to youths the new music ranges from “alternative rock to punk and even screamo.” Evangelicals’ “eager embrace of corporate-style growth strategies” is giving them a significant advantage in the race for “religious market share” (Symonds et al., 2005:1-2). The article also includes a stunning quote from Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church and a leading figure of the CGM. He insists, “our goal is not to turn the church into a business” (Symonds et al., 2005: 3). This is a remarkable comment coming from someone so active in promoting ideas that are clearly borrowed from a corporate/managerial model.

In a similar vein, CGM leader Bill Hybels, pastor of Willowcreek Community Church in Chicago, has said that what was done to build Willowcreek, “doesn’t necessarily have to apply to every church.” Yet he formed the Willow Creek Association, a consulting firm that “earned \$17 million last year, partly by selling marketing and management advise to 10,500 member churches from 90 denominations. The association is run by a Harvard MBA who readily admits to an “entrepreneurial impulse” (Symonds et al., 2005:3). According to the *Business Week* article, “Hybel’s consumer-driven approach is evident at Willow Creek where he shunned stained glass, Bibles, or even a cross for the 7200-seat, \$72 million sanctuary he recently built” (Symonds et al., 2005:3).

In a *Forbes* article entitled, “Christian Capitalism: Megachurches, Megabusinesses,” writer Luisa Kroll (2003) asks, “maybe churches aren’t so different from corporations.” She goes on to describe “the megabusiness of megachurches, where pastors often act as chief executive and use business tactics to grow their congregations,” and adds that “this entrepreneurial approach has contributed to explosive growth...in our society growth equals success,” and megachurches are all about both cultural goals (Kroll, 2003:1-2).

Conclusions and Implications

While most of the evangelical leaders of this very consumeristic, business-oriented model for doing church remain unapologetic, oblivious to any possible inconsistency, one of their very own has had a change of heart. One of the key names in the CGM who once said that he hoped for a 100,000 “Willowcreeks” across America, and is credited with one of the best-known church growth mantras, “the audience, not the message, is sovereign,” is now telling his readers to escape from market-driven churches (Barna, 1988, 2005). George Barna, in his recent book, *Revolution*, writes, “millions of devout followers of Jesus Christ are repudiating tepid systems and practices of Christian Faith” (Barna, 2005: 11). He goes on to state that the new revolutionaries have no use for “churches that play religious games” and promote programs that “bear no spiritual fruit.” He claims that those leaving will not tolerate the “compromise or soft sell” of “our sinful nature to expand organizational turf.” He states that the revolutionaries will not follow ministry leaders who “cast a personal vision,” or “seek popularity rather than the proclamation of truth.” “They refuse,” he continues, “to donate one more dollar to man-made monuments” (Barna, 2005:13-14). Perhaps Barna will join the chorus of longsuffering voices who have for decades warned their fellow evangelicals that they were on the wrong road. John MacArthur, Os Guinness, Jim Cymbala, Greg Laurie, David Wells, Chuck Swindoll, Henry Blackaby, R.C. Sproul, and John Piper are just a few of those who have cautioned against a consumeristic model for church growth. Counter-movements may emerge in response to the dominance of CGM. In fact, many observers suggest that there is already an “emerging church” with conservative evangelical roots, with a minimalist and decentralized organizational structure. Important figures in this counter-movement include Spencer Burke, Kyle Cheatham, Mark Driscoll, and Richard Foster. Churches include Terranova (Georgetown, Texas), Mars Hill (Seattle, Washington), and Vintage Faith (Santa Cruz, California). If Barna is correct, the megachurch movement, also known by the CGM acronym, will eventually run its course, and evangelicalism in America and elsewhere may return to its more traditional roots.

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Talking to the Dead: An Analysis of the *Mental* and *Physical* Phases of Modern Mediumship in the American-Made Religion of Spiritualism

Todd Jay Leonard
Hirosaki Gakuin University (Japan)

If mediumship, or the ability to communicate with those who have passed from this earth life, is the primary purpose of the American religion of Spiritualism, then the ultimate goal of Spiritualists is to make contact with those in the spirit world. Although mediums and mediumship have existed since ancient times, it has only been since the mid-1800s that this ability was organized into a religion. The main difference between Spiritualism and every other organized religion, and the most noticeable distinguishing factor that sets Spiritualism apart from all other religious traditions, is the emphasis it places upon the continuity of life in the spirit world and the ability of the medium to communicate with spirits.

Nearly all religions have a belief in a Supreme Being(s), and nearly all religions promote the belief in a hereafter. Only Spiritualism, however, actively practices and advances the belief in spirit communication with loved ones and those in spirit through a sensitive called a “medium.”¹ Also, another key concept in Spiritualism is the idea that the personality of the person during life on earth follows that person into spirit, as well as any issues or lessons that the person experienced in life; a fun-loving, jovial person in life retains these qualities in spirit (if a person had emotional and spiritual lessons to be learned in life but was unable to finish these before his/her transition, so must he/she continue to work upon these on the other side).

To those who believe, mediumship offers them a doorway or window onto the other side, offering hope and comfort in knowing that there is something beyond this earthly existence—a spiritual life where people go when the transition of death occurs, allowing the spirits of these people to continue along their souls’ journeys. Believers find spirit communication to be just another phase of the natural progression of life, providing a limitless source of truth to those willing to accept it; hope for those willing to ask for it; and profuse possibilities to elevate and perfect their souls’ desires toward the eventual goal of enlightenment.

To nonbelievers, categorical rejection of the possibility of spirit communication is at the center of their argument and disbelief in mediumship. Oftentimes, the mere idea of “speaking to the dead” is regarded as nothing more than a form of either witchcraft² or the fanciful delusions of a charlatan based on trickery and hocus-pocus fakery. To these disbelievers, the earth life humans experience in the here and now is all that is; once the physical body ceases to sustain life, there is no more. Non-adherents to spirit communication, but those who do follow a religious tradition such as prescribed by Christianity or Judaism, often use scripture from the *Holy Bible* to bolster and corroborate their claims.

¹ “Some religions believe in spirits, but only in a saintly fashion. Fundamentalist Christians believe that to attempt communication with spirits is to solicit contact with the devil. Spiritualists, on the other hand, center their religion around communication with the spirit world.” (Owens, xiv)

² To the uninformed, this may seem to be the case. In fact, however, Spiritualism and mediumship is in no way related to “black magic” or the “conjuring of evil forces or dark spirits.” Spiritualists believe strongly in God and only work with entities that are benevolent in nature, from the light of the Creator, that wish to offer love and healing to those on the earth plane.

For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any *thing* that is done under the sun. ...Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; there *is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10, *Holy Bible*, King James Version)

Just as nonbelievers can quote scripture against spirit communication, so can Spiritualists cite biblical verses to corroborate their beliefs:

Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. ...Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same in Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. (I Corinthians 12: 1, 4-11, *Holy Bible*, King James Version)

Also, in I Corinthians 15:44-49, the *Holy Bible* clearly distinguishes between an earthly body and a spiritual body:

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was *made* a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man *is* of the earth, earthy: the second man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *is* the earthy, such *are* they also that are earthy; and as *is* the heavenly, such *are* they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. (*Holy Bible*, King James Version)

Christians who believe that once the body is dead, waiting until the Second Coming of Jesus to be resurrected, Spiritualists query: What becomes of the soul—the spirit—during this period of time? The above delineated scriptures from I Corinthians suggest clearly that the spirit is alive and active. As I Corinthians 15:55 states: “O Death where is *thy* sting? O grave where *is* thy victory?” This suggests that the end is not when the body dies, but that there is continued life, which Spiritualists maintain is in the form of spirit entities that can have intelligible communication with those left behind on the earth plane. The essence of the person—its soul, its life-force energy, its spirit—departs the body and is thus released. It is energy, which is constant, and must be somewhere. It cannot be in a stagnant state, according to Spiritualists, dormant and waiting to be resurrected. Instead, it is active, alive, and anxious to make contact with those left behind.

It is, in many respects, a moot point to use the *Holy Bible* to either persuade or dissuade anyone in believing or not believing in mediumship and spirit communication. The *Holy Bible* is a literary masterpiece, both ageless and dated at the same time, perhaps inspired

by God, but made by humans after being passed down orally (in some cases) for hundreds of years before being put down onto paper. Its ambiguity is what makes it unique and distinctive. For Spiritualists, the interpretation is as clear and unambiguous as it is to fundamentalist Christians and Jews who interpret the same passages quite differently. The scriptures have always been, and will always be, a source of great debate between followers of different traditions.

The National Spiritualist Association of Churches define a “medium” as “one whose organism is sensitive to vibrations from the spirit world and through whose instrumentality, intelligences in that world are able to convey messages and produce the phenomena of Spiritualism.” (NSAC, 35) It continues on to define the “phenomena of Spiritualism” as that which “consists of Prophecy, Clairvoyance, Clairaudience, Gift of Tongues, Laying on of Hands, Healing, Visions, Trance, Apports, Levitation, Raps, Automatic and Independent Writings and Paintings, Voice, Materialization, Photography, Psychometry and any other manifestation proving the continuity of life as demonstrated through the physical and spiritual senses and faculties of man.” (NSAC, 35)

In this paper, a sampling of the above examples of spirit-communication and phenomena will be focused upon and divided into two parts: The *Mental* and *Physical* Phases of Mediumship. Every Spiritualist medium has his/her own personal ritual and individual manner of connection to the spirit world when preparing to give a message or reading to another person. The rituals involved may vary, but the intended results are always the same—to make contact with spirits on the other side and to communicate evidential messages to those on this side of the veil. It does not matter if the medium uses a “mental” or “physical” phase of mediumship to give a message, the continuity of life that is thus demonstrated is the intended result, and is the primary purpose of mediumship within the American-made religion of Spiritualism.

Mental Phases of Mediumship³

Mediumship—as a process—is when the medium receives messages and acts as a channel for spirit beings wishing to communicate to those on the earth plane; this ability to communicate with spirits is not reserved for a select few with special psychic gifts and talents, but to some degree is possessed by all humans in varying intensities. Mediumship can be developed through concentrated instruction, self-discipline and a practicum that allows ample opportunity to hone the skills involved in receiving and

Table 1: *Mental and Physical Mediumship*

Mental	Physical
Clairvoyance: Vivid mental pictures.	Ectoplasm: Diffuses from orifices of the medium’s body—mucous membranes; intense trance.
Clairaudience: Hearing messages.	Telekinesis: Objects move through mind power.
Prophecy: Information received from spirits usually concerning future events; can be personal or great events.	Psychokinesis: Objects move and float because of mind <i>control</i> .
Scrying: Clairvoyant receives visions from gazing in [a] crystal ball or water.	Spirit Raps: Spirits bump, bang, and rap furniture, walls.

³ For a list of the different types of mental and physical mediumship, see Table 1.

Healing: When positive spirit energy is sent through the medium to heal and cure.	Apports: Spirits bring objects from their plane—flowers, living animals and objects relevant to séance.
Psychometry: Information obtained from handling objects, mainly through clairvoyance and telepathy.	Levitation: Persons, furniture, and objects float or rise.
Trance: Deep hypnotic condition in which the medium is controlled by a spirit guide—but not possession.	Materialization: Spirit produced; appears to be solid by sight and touch; can be spirits or objects.
Automatic Writing and Drawing: When a spirit operator manipulates the muscle reflexes of the medium.	Voices: Direct or indirect voices, comes from the medium, apparition, or “thin air.”
	Spirit Lights: Singular or hundreds of twinkling lights—all shapes and colors.
	Breezes and Drafts: Cold, warm or scented, from spirits.
	Musical Instruments, Singing: From spirits.
	Table Tipping: Spirit(s) move or rock table back and forth.
	Ouija Board: Messages come from Spirit(s).
	Odors: Flowers, medicines, perfumes, or stench.
	Spirit Photography: Spirit images appear on film.
	Telephone, Radio, Television, or Tape Recorder Voices: Spirit voices.

(From Dreller, L. (1997) *Beginner’s Guide to Mediumship*. York Beach, Maine: Sam Weiser, Inc.)

deciphering messages from the other side. Not everyone has the needed perseverance and practical know-how to become proficient in spirit communication; it takes a long time to develop with hard work and much dedication.

Spiritualist mediums are required to undergo an extensive developmental process and apprenticeship before being certified by a Spiritualist organization. A mediumship “test” is often performed under prescribed conditions to make sure that the aspiring medium is indeed connected to spirit and can offer messages to others that are correct and informative to the receiver, often including specifics such as names and events.

Prophecy

The gift of prophecy has been practiced since prehistoric and ancient times. It is central to many of the world’s great religions. In the course of human history, there have not only been true prophets, but also false prophets. Spiritualists concur that whenever there is authenticity in any endeavor, so shall there be dishonesty and deceptiveness in an attempt to mimic that which is true. In order to have fakery, there must be a model of the genuine in which to base the insincere. (Brown, 2004) Such is the case with Spiritualism—there are those who try to pass themselves off as genuine mediums for self-gain and profit.

Prophecy has been practiced for many centuries in connection with many religions. There have, of course, been false prophets as well as true prophets. But there are also good and bad men, honest and dishonest, false and fair, in every human calling. The existence of the false is no good or logical reason for attempting to hinder, stifle or destroy the true and honest. Because there are imposters and pseudo-mediums is no good reason for passing laws to silence the voice of honest mediums. The false and dishonest persons engaged in any legitimate work or businesses are only a small percentage of the whole number; and, therefore, it must appear an unwise policy, nay more, an unjust and oppressive procedure, to legislate the whole body out to their calling or employment because of the wrongs of a few. There are always weeds or tares among the wheat. (NSAC, 55)

From interviews and research done for this study, it is clear that Spiritualists are very concerned about their image and do work hard toward “weeding out the tares among the wheat” within their particular organizations. Accusations of fraud are taken very seriously and are promptly investigated; if the medium is found to be using false tactics or trickery that is passed off as genuine spirit communication or phenomena, then the medium that is in noncompliance is asked to leave the association, organization, or church and to desist in practicing their mediumship under the banner of the Spiritualist organization.⁴

With these caveats in mind, two questions present themselves: Why is prophecy such an integral part of this modern-day religion? And why do people seek out the assistance of prophets and mediums? The National Spiritualist Association of Churches lists four specific reasons which serve to answer these questions:

First, to learn from them moral lessons. And these are sometimes impressed as forcibly by those who still inhabit the lower spheres as by those who have advanced to higher ones; even as we are, in this life, sometimes more quickly moved to moral effort by the conditions and sufferings of the sinful than we are by the precept and example of those who live pure and upright lives.

Second, to receive instructions from spirits in regard to the laws, structure, and character of the spirit world; just as we would try to learn of these things in regard to any country on this earth to which we expected to travel.

Third, to hold communion with our beloved ones over there for the mere pleasure that such communion imparts, in exchanging assurance of continued love, just to do in this world, by visiting and writing to the objects of our love and affection.

⁴ In the course of the research for this study, this researcher was privy to a situation which occurred where a medium was found to be falsifying phenomena; promptly, the medium was investigated and the medium's credentials were rescinded by the parent organization. Critics of Spiritualism oftentimes assume that such instances are rare where a medium is, in effect, excommunicated. Over the course of three years of onsite research and personal observations, I found that the Spiritualist organizations used in my study were very concerned with any hint of impropriety and immediately investigated it to conclusion. As it was explained to me, it is necessary for the movement as a whole to keep the mediumship standards beyond reproach, and the quality of the mediums engaged in this work high; not doing so would be detrimental to the organization, and ultimately, to the religion.

Fourth, to seek the advice of spirits in matters affecting our mundane welfare. But in so doing, we do not accept their advice as always infallibly correct, since we realize that the judgments, points-of-view, and ability to foresee differ among the wise and experienced denizens of the spirit world as they do among those of this earth; however we feel assured, from our own experiences in holding converse with spirits, that they are often better qualified to prophesy for us and have a keener insight into the future than our earthly friends, and thus are often in a better position to give us suggestions for our consideration in connection with our plans and conduct for the future. (NSAC, 54-55)

On the fourth point, critics may contend that if a message indeed comes from the spirit world, should it not be infallible? Spiritualism advises that if one is not able personally to receive messages directly, and hence seeks out a medium to assist in this task, then it is up to the seeker to discern wisely in choosing a person who has the best qualifications to accomplish this task. Anytime a person purports to be able to speak to those in the spirit world, it must be remembered that the medium is human, and as a human, can make mistakes. No medium is endowed with perfect judgment in matters of his/her physical life or mediumship. An example offered by the National Spiritualist Association of Churches likens it to people erring in selecting their medical doctors, legal advisors, politicians, business associates or even friends—seeking spiritual advice is no different, there are honest as well as dishonest mediums; good as well as bad mediums; accurate as well as inaccurate mediums.

...the Spiritualist claims the right to act for himself without let or hindrance from those who differ from him in religious views. If he makes a mistake which causes him loss or suffering, it must be remembered that even Jesus, with his extraordinary psychic powers, made a mistake when he selected Judas Iscariot as one of the Twelve. If it be said that this seeming mistake was part of a divine plan, then it may be also said that the Spiritualist's seeming mistakes may also be a part of a divine plan. (NSAC, 55)

This type of reasoning—that messages clearly wrong or irrelevant may be a part of divine order— may seem a bit too convenient to skeptics who demand accuracy in order to prove one's mediumship skills; they maintain that this is an easy way out for mediums to explain away their erroneous or faulty predictions. Upon deeper inspection, though, is it reasonable to expect the medium to have 100% accuracy in matters of prophecy? In defense of matters of spirit, it, after all, is not an exact science and even scientists rarely are able to have 100% results in their work; readings largely depend upon a variety of extraneous factors, most notably the physical and mental condition of the medium as the "reader," and the person receiving the reading's openness to receive and ability to interpret the message given. As stated before, mediums are human, a fact stressed by Spiritualists, and making mistakes are inevitable; in addition, spirit-messages sometimes are symbolic and it is up to the medium to give the message received, interpreting the best way he/she can; it is up to the receiver to further interpret the message, taking from it what he/she needs, and leaving the rest in the reading room.

Primarily, a medium's role in prophecy is basically to offer comfort to the bereaved in order to lessen the pain or even guilt; to assist in prayerful devotion in helping the departed soul in its transition; to gain knowledge of that which is not easily understood; to negate the fear of death in order to establish peace of mind for those on the earth plane; to have open dialogue with the spirit world; to reveal to those left behind that there is a cause and effect

relationship related to one's actions which can result in more spiritual work when in spirit or rewards for good deeds done while on earth as a mortal; to heal; and finally to develop the gift of prophecy. (Dreller, 2)

Clairvoyance and Clairaudience

Under the umbrella of "prophecy" is clairvoyance and clairaudience. These two abilities are perhaps the most common types of mediumship. Clairvoyance (literally *clear seeing*) manifests visually as an impression or perception received in the "mind's eye" or "third-eye" chakra located between the eyes, in the middle of the forehead.

There are several types of clairvoyance, varying according to the mental and physical make-up of the medium. These are: (1) x-ray clairvoyance enabling the medium to see through opaque objects; (2) subjective, impressionable or mediumistic clairvoyance, by means of which the communicating spirit registers the thought upon the mind of the medium through vision, symbol, or impression, or the taking on of conditions; and (3) objective clairvoyance, wherein the medium is able to see, objectively, spirit entities and their surroundings as they actually exist in the spirit world. This form of mediumship may also be referred to as soul sight. (King, 15)

Clairaudience, similarly, "is a mental form of mediumship closely allied to clairvoyance. Clairaudience is known as *clear hearing*. The impressions appear to be heard rather than seen. The two phases may often manifest in the same medium at the same time." (King, 15)

In a book entitled *Clairvoyance* (written by C.W. Leadbeater and first published in 1899) divides clairvoyance into a variety of categories: simple clairvoyance—full and partial; clairvoyance in space—intentional and semi-intentional, as well as unintentional; and clairvoyance in time—the past and future.

"Simple clairvoyance—full" involves the ability of the medium to see whatever may be present around him/her on different, but corresponding, levels (but nothing at great distances).

We find among sensitive people all degrees of this kind of clairvoyance, from that of the man who gets a vague impression which hardly deserves the name of sight at all, up to the full possession of etheric and astral vision respectively (p. 32).

"Simple clairvoyance—partial" pertains to the medium's ability to see only partially in degree, variety, or in permanence a vision:

Some times, for example, a man's clairvoyance will be permanent, but very partial, extending only perhaps to one or two classes of the phenomena observable; he will find himself endowed with some isolated fragment of higher powers of sight which ought normally to accompany that fragment, or even to precede it (p. 57).

Leadbeater describes "clairvoyance in space—intentional" as a "capacity to see events or scenes removed from the seer in space and too far distant for ordinary observation" (p. 67). In contrast, he defines "semi-intentional" clairvoyance as when the medium tries to will him/herself to see something, but then has no control over the sight after the visions start;

being receptive to receiving, but simply waiting for a message in the form of a vision to appear (p. 99).

An “unintentional” clairvoyance episode in space is when the medium picks up a vision of some event taking place in a distance, but is seen quite unexpectedly and without any conscious preparation to receive them.

There are people who are subject to such visions, while there are many others to whom such a thing will happen only once in a lifetime. The visions are of all kinds and of all degrees of completeness, and apparently may be produced by various causes. Sometimes the reason of the vision is obvious, and the subject-matter of the gravest importance, at other times no reason at all is discoverable, and the events shown seem of the most trivial nature. (p. 104)

Finally, Leadbeater categorizes clairvoyance into “past” occurrence and “future” events. These clairvoyant visions offer a glimpse into these spaces of constant time to see events that have happened in the past and will happen in the future.⁵

Clairaudience “is the psychic state in which conscious interchange of thought between medium and spirit entities results from the ability of certain sensitives to *tune in* mentally with disembodied entities. (King, 16) This form of mental mediumship allows the medium to hear “through the etheric body system impressed on their inner listening ear—or objectively—as an externally heard physical vocalization.” (DeSwarte, 27)⁶

Clairsentience, also known as the “sixth sense,” literally means *clear sensing*. It basically entails the ability to perceive spirit communication by sensing intuitively what the message is (from the spirit entity). Although similar to clairvoyance and clairaudience in that the medium must do a fair amount of interpretation of the information received, in clairsentience it is especially necessary that the interpretation of the information is done correctly.

Clairsentience also has some of the qualities of psychometry (reading of objects), intuition, telepathy, and in fact, of all supernatural mental vibrations that impinge upon the realm of spiritual discernment. There are countless variations of the vibrations entering the consciousness of the receiver. (King, 17)

This form of mental mediumship is related to being able to discern the spirit-world using one’s intuition in conjunction with the five physical senses (hearing, seeing, smelling, touching and tasting). It is the “hunch” a person gets but cannot explain why this intuitive knowing occurred. It is an intuitive “knowing.” (Greer, 2)

In my research, I observed that mediums often used a combination and variety of techniques in their mediumship-work that involved not only clairvoyance and clairaudience, but also clairsentience. Particularly, mediums have to learn to decipher and interpret messages. Some messages come in the form of symbols. For instance, a “rose” that is seen psychically by the medium could relate to a favorite flower of the person in spirit, or of the person receiving the message, or as a name of someone living or dead. A good medium will throw out whatever symbols come through from spirit to allow the person receiving the reading to assist in their interpretation. The symbols may mean nothing to the

⁵ See Appendix A for a list of definitions for clairvoyance.

⁶ In the primary data gathered for this study, the majority of respondents who are licensed mediums through Spiritualist associations and organizations claimed to be clairvoyant; second was clairaudient.

medium, but the sitter may know exactly what they refer to in relation to his/her life and experience with the person coming through. This can be a secret code, of sorts, between the sitter and the entity attempting to make contact.

Other times, the medium is able to work out a set of symbolic definitions with his/her spirit-guide which signal to him/her a particular message involving a family member or event for the sitter. For example, a medium that perceives a "soldier" as a message could refer to the person in spirit and how he/she passed, or is a source of pride for the person in spirit as a form of "proof" to the sitter, or could relate to a current person in the military. The medium works out how the symbols relate to him/her and the sitter, through trial and error and years of experiential readings, to connect those symbols to actual messages that can be understood easily by the sitter.

Aural messages can also occur either independently, or in conjunction with a visual message. Some mediums report hearing an actual, independent voice that appears to be coming from far away; others report experiencing a voice from within their mind that sometimes resembles their own voice. In either case, the voices often offer information that give proof to the sitter of the identity of the spirit who is attempting contact. The most convincing, perhaps, is when actual names are offered that are somewhat unique (*i.e.* not Mary, John, or Bill—common names that almost every family has at least one member with the same name somewhere in their family tree).⁷

Clairsentience is similar to clairvoyance and clairaudience in that the medium often will (through practice and experience) be able to interpret feelings he/she receives during a message. Often mediums will work out a system with his/her spirit guide in order to know who and what type of spirit is attempting to make contact. For example, a medium can work out a system where if he/she feels tingling on the left side of the body, this could be in reference to a male figure, the right side, a female, or vice versa. The same is used in trying to figure out if the entity is a relative or loved one, friend, neighbor or teacher, *etc*; or if it is someone completely unrelated just trying to get through (even though there is no familial or friendly connection between the sitter and the spirit). Often, as explained to me by practicing mediums, spirits clamor to get through in any way they can and when an open channel is noticed, an attempt may be made. When this occurs, the medium asks the spirit entity to step back and another attempt is made to make contact with someone familiar to the person receiving the reading.

Added to this is when spirits attempt contact but the sitter is unaware, has forgotten, or is in such an emotional or mental state that he/she cannot clearly discern who or what the entity is.⁸ It is important in these instances for the sitter to take what he/she needs and to leave the rest; the reason (or spirit) behind the message may present itself later and clarity may ensue around the message once contemplation is made upon the information given or after consulting with other family members about confusing symbols or names contained within the message.

*Psychometry*⁹

⁷ For a testimonial of a séance experience by this author, see Appendix B.

⁸ For an example of this, see Appendix B.

⁹ Psychometry was discovered by Joseph Rodes Buchanan (1814-1899). "He believed that humans leave psychic energy on objects they touch as a kind of residue, and that the sensitive psychic could read the collected energies on an object as an imagined narrative history of its use. This was used by psychics to produce descriptions of ancient civilizations through touching recovered artifacts. It was also used by psychic 'healers' to diagnose the illnesses of people who had sent them a lock of their hair and a dollar in an envelope." (*The Organ of Spirituality*, 2002)

The phase of psychometry is when a medium is able to hold an object and subsequently receives a message merely by touching it. It is thought that the object itself has energy and this causes the object to give off the vibration of previous owners of the object or of people who have come into contact with it.

Upon contact with a physical object a medium may be able, on feeling the vibrations emanating from it, to learn its origin, its natural surroundings, and receive a glimpse into the characteristics of those who have touched it. Some people accept psychometry as only psychic, not necessarily spiritual. Others classify the term as a blending of mental and physical faculties. Leading contemporary scientists consider it to be a purely mental type of mediumship. (King, 25)

This technique is based on the idea of a “universal consciousness” which records all events of the past, present and future. A person gifted with psychometry can tap into this consciousness and history of an object, therefore giving information about the people who were in contact with it. It is believed that the vibrations of the object impress themselves on the medium’s brain, thus allowing the sensitive to give a reading based on these impressions. This notion is somewhat related to karma in that many New Age followers believe that like people, objects (*i.e.* jewelry, houses, pieces of clothing) have their own karma which details the histories of all of those who have owned them in the past.

...Because the impressions coming from the object observed and the thoughts from the medium’s own mind are closely blended, great care must be taken on the part of the medium to learn to recognize the distinction between the two ways of receiving information. With practice and care, the medium may learn to separate what is coming from spirit sources from what is coming from himself. (King, 25-26)

Psychometry, then, is perhaps the hardest to decipher for the medium because he/she must be able to know intuitively which information is a form of the subconscious, and which is authentic spirit communication. “Perfect good faith, however, is not incompatible with this source of error, the psychic may faithfully describe the vision which arises before him, and yet it may be nothing but a dream-structure evolved by his subconscious, and clearly revealing, to those who know how to look for them, his own repressed wishes and anxieties.”¹⁰ (Fortune, 188-189)

Trance

Although “trance” mediumship is often placed in the subject area of the mental phase of mediumship, it does sometimes take on the appearance of being a form of the physical phase of mediumship in that the medium often does change in appearance somewhat and the medium’s natural voice is replaced with that of the spirit entity. Initially, though, the medium must release completely from his/her physical surroundings—a withdrawal of consciousness from the objective world (this is so the ego can be released from any limitations that is placed upon it in the physical world, allowing it to enter into another higher plane of consciousness). (Fortune, 70)

¹⁰ In all of the primary research done for this study (including interviews and surveys of dozens of mediums) I did not come across any medium who actively does psychometry on a regular, consistent basis in his/her mediumship work.

Although there are considerable differences in degree, trance is spoken of as *going under control*. It resembles a *sleep state* in that there are various stages of unconsciousness. ...As in sleep, trance has its preparatory stages of lulling to sleep, deep trance assuming the condition induced by an anesthetic, and the return to consciousness similar to emerging from a sleep state. The mental organization of the medium is manipulated by the spirit control in order that the desired thought may reach the mind of the medium, but never does the guide actually enter the physical body of the medium.

...The receptivity and sensitivity of the medium, as well as the extent to which he or she may be used as an instrument of communication, expands under trance. The instrument is more capable of transmitting a message or thought going far beyond the ordinary perceptive powers. Indeed, trance does not harm one's individuality. Rather, the opposite is true. Through trance, the medium gains a greater awareness and a deeper knowledge and understanding of the mighty universe than could have been possible otherwise. (King, 21-22)

There are those that have a natural gift for trance and those who must train themselves to do it at will. For people who have a natural gift, it is believed by people who subscribe to the concept of "reincarnation" that the person trained in the occult or spiritual matters extensively in a previous life, hence this past-life memory accompanies them into this life making them more susceptible to trance mediumship. People who must train themselves to go into trance have to work diligently over a long period of time in order to become proficient at it.

Basically, there are three primary types of trance which mediums go under: *Trance of Projection*, *Trance of Vision*, and *Mediumistic Trance*. Each of these requires the medium to experience a disassociation of the self, separating the different levels of consciousness.

Trance of Projection [is called such] because the Self is withdrawn from the physical body and functions independently.... The second type of trance...—*Trance of Vision*—[is called such] because in this case the soul does not withdraw from the body, but, inhibiting the physical senses, appears to open up the senses of super consciousness which can perceive the subtler planes of existence. ...In the third type of trance, which is called the *Mediumistic Trance*, disassociation takes place between Personality and the Individuality; that is to say, the whole of the Self which has been built up by the experiences of the current incarnation is left to ensoul [sic] the body, while the Higher Self, as a whole, withdraws. (Fortune, 66-67)

The control that the spirit guide exercises over the medium is done mentally and not physically. Unlike that which is portrayed in movies and on television, the actual organism of the medium is never taken over by an outside force (*i.e.* possessed); instead the spirit enters the medium's energy field (aura) that surrounds everyone's physical body and merely blends with it, taking control of the thought processes of the medium. (King, 21)

Inspirational Speaking and Writing

This form of mental mediumship is somewhat related to trance, but in this phase of mediumship the medium is never completely unconscious or unaware, and is able to control his/her body at will. The medium is very much aware of everything that is being said and all that is taking place around him/her. Simply, by controlling the medium's flow of thoughts,

the spirit can “inspire” the medium through speech or written prose without any effort on the medium’s part. In order to do this, all the sensitive has to do is to ask earnestly and sincerely to be an instrument of the spirit guide, and the inspiration begins to gush forth.

This is perhaps one of the most common forms of spirit communication between a novice medium and spirit entity initially; the aspiring medium is inspired through writing regarding spiritual truths and wisdom that is not a part of the person’s learned knowledge base. Also, it is believed to encourage the flow of energy without the interference of the medium’s personal thoughts about life and work, helping the medium to become more adept at spirit communication. This is best accomplished when in a quiet or meditative state.

The instrument may be used by more than one spirit being on a single occasion. The thought intention of the personality in spirit is projected into the subconscious mind of the medium who then frames it into words by voice or writing. There is a blending of the mentalities of the sender and receiver. (King, 23)

Related to inspirational speaking and writing is “automatic drawing.” This is done by mediums (even with no artistic ability at all) who can draw portraits of spirit guides and people they have not yet met. It has been described as being as if someone else was doing the drawing, but with the person’s body.¹¹

Spiritual Healing

Spiritual healing is an important aspect of Spiritualism. This practice, though, was not developed by Spiritualists but instead has been a part of collective human history for millennia. Notable healers throughout history include Buddha (who believed that illness was actually rooted in people’s minds); Zoroaster (who taught his followers that prayer had powerful curative effects); Elijah and Elisha (Hebrew prophets who were renowned healers during their time); Jesus, perhaps the greatest healer who ever lived, healed many during his lifetime; and Mohammed who had a healing touch and healed many who suffered from a variety of health problems (Harris, 137).

This is also known as the “laying of hands” where the hands of the medium are placed upon the physical body; curative energy from the spirit world passes through the medium’s body and out of the hands to heal the illness or disease affecting the person’s body. The medium acts as a vehicle for the healing and the spirit world does the actual healing. The energy that passes through the medium is a vibratory force. “This force enters the etheric body of the patient and stimulates the vitality, soothes, and builds up the tissues of the sufferer, thus placing the body in a state of harmony. These spiritual forces operate through a spiritual healer.” (King, 19)

The purpose of a healing is not to produce a “miracle” because Spiritualism does not subscribe to the belief in miracles—everything is based on Natural Law, which is God’s Law.

¹¹ During a message service at a Spiritualist camp I attended while researching this topic, I witnessed this form of mental/physical mediumship. The medium sat at the front of the church with a drawing pad of blank paper and a variety of colored pencils; during the service she feverishly drew portraits while occasionally gazing out toward the audience, but not really focusing on any one person. At the end of the service she gave a message from the spirit world, along with a drawing of the person’s spirit guide, to a number of people in attendance. Of course, it is impossible to know if the portraits are accurate, but interestingly each one had smaller sized images around the peripheral edges of the paper. After the service, a number of people commented that those smaller portraits indeed resembled family members who were in the spirit world.

Instead, a spiritual healing endeavors to bring about a harmonious balance between an overabundance of vital energy and an insufficient amount (King, 19).

Healing is brought about by working through the medium to vitalize the diseased portion of the patient's body with curative fluids and energy; through illumination by spirit of the brain of the healer so that he may know the nature of the disease and its cure; and by absent treatments whereby the patient may be healed without being in the presence of the healer. ...The healing force emanates from higher spiritual planes and contacts the etheric body of the individual being treated. The etheric body, in turn, dwells within the physical body. The physical and mental bodies are both acted upon. This is accomplished through the laws of attraction and vibration. (King, 19)

A necessary part of the healing depends upon the person being healed. A sincere desire on the part of the person being healed to have a spiritual healing is a component in the overall healing process. If the person passively receives the healing without a sincere desire to become healed, then the affect of the healing is lessened. In order to attract the vibrations needed to affect a healing, the receiver, as well as the giver, needs to cooperate in the process in order to achieve a successful outcome.

Physical Phases of Mediumship¹²

Physical mediumship that produces physical phenomena (like materializations, transfigurations, apports, rapping, *etc.*) is much rarer than mental mediumship that produces clairvoyant, clairaudient, and clairsentience phenomena. This is, in part, due to the fact that physical mediumship requires much more precise conditions for phenomena to occur. As mentioned earlier, in mental mediumship the medium's ability to receive and act as a vehicle for spirit communication is dependent upon the medium's overall physical, emotional and mental condition; this is true for physical mediumship. However, "physical mediumship is dependent on three things: focuses trance via the base of the brain; the solar plexus area where the core (gut-level) of intensity cycles with the brain; and third, from the vibrational energy received from the sitters and observers." (Dreller, 41) This type of mediumship requires much more effort and ability by the medium as compared to mental mediumship. This is not to suggest that one form of mediumship is superior or better to the other; quite the contrary. Each method has its merits and some mediums are more adept at performing one type over the other. Also, much depends upon the spirit world and which mode of mediumship they choose to make contact during a séance or reading.

Materializations

Materializations occur when spirits appear to those present, as actual physical beings to the sight and touch. This can include objects as well as entities, and should not be confused with other types of apparitions such as ghosts or phantasms. Spirits that form in materializations during a séance or healing circle do so by using the energy of the medium and those in attendance to appear as physical phenomena. Materializations will sometimes occur when a group of people gather as one accord for séance work over a long period of time, building up energy each time which makes the conditions more suitable for this type of physical phenomena to occur.

¹² For a list of the different types of mental and physical mediumship, see Table 1.

Full-form materialization is rare. Nevertheless, it is a most impressive form of mediumship, especially convincing to the senses and emotions of the sitters. To produce these phenomena, the vibrations of the spirit entity wishing to manifest are slowed down by the use of ectoplasm¹³ drawn from the medium and sitters until the form becomes visible to our physical eyes. The ectoplasm is molded by the spirit entity through the power of thought until it is solid enough to resemble the former physical body. To accomplish this, the manifesting spirit has to recall how the physical body looked. Memory may not always be perfect in every respect.

To demonstrate the phenomenon of materialization the séance room must have just enough light for the forms to become visible. A cabinet is set up, usually with black curtains, in which the medium sits entranced while the spirit form is taking shape. The spirit personality then emerges from the cabinet into full view of the sitters. Singing by the entire group helps to establish good vibrations for building up the forms.

In order to materialize, spirits must lower the vibrations of the spirit bodies to conform to the rate of vibration of the sitters. Using the spirit body of the medium as a framework upon which to build (while the physical body remains in the cabinet) the spirit entity molds a replica of himself [*sic*] which is seen by the sitters. The spirit body is connected to the medium's physical body by the pericord.¹⁴ Spirit helpers assist in all aspects of this phenomenon. Materialized forms should not be touched without permission of the spirit controls, since it can do great harm to the medium if the ectoplasm should spring back too suddenly into the physical body of the medium.¹⁵ (King, 37-38)

Transfiguration

Somewhat related to materialization is the phenomena of transfiguration. This type of phenomena occurs when the face of the medium transforms and transfigures into the face of a spirit entity. The actual face seems to change appearance, transfiguring into that of spirit entities, sometimes in quick succession. This type of manifestation occurs when ectoplasm covers the body of the medium, transfiguring it to resemble the form of a manifesting spirit entity.

¹³ Ectoplasm "is a Greek word meaning 'exteriorized substance.' This cloudy substance streams out of mediums when they are demonstrating phenomena, usually from the mouth or nose, and frequently from the solar plexus, but can emanate from any orifice. Generally, it forms around the spirit to give the entity a visible shape when a spirit is manifesting during a séance to afford the participants the opportunity to see a spirit." (Owens, 182)

¹⁴ The word "pericord" comes from the root *peri* which means "about, beyond or around." The cord refers to the "ethereal string attached to the astral body in an astral projection, stretching as far as the projector desires to go; ethereal energy, breath, and 'spirit' runs back and forth through this thread while bodies are detached; can be perceived clairvoyantly..." (Bletzer, 135, 462)

¹⁵ This is a common belief among Spiritualists, but there has never been any documented case where a medium was killed (or even severely injured) from someone touching him/her when a materialization was in the process of occurring. In the latter part of the 1800's onward, sitters would often pounce upon the spirit entity when it was thought to be fraudulent. Often was the case that instead of a materialized entity, it was in fact a human masquerading as a spirit. Genuine materializations tend to look ethereal, according to mediums, and sitters today can certainly tell the difference.

Another form of transfiguration is called “etherealization.” “This phase is not often witnessed. The spirit forms which appear in the séance room lack the density that is apparent in full materialization. They are more etheric in nature. However, because of the lack of density, the forms usually disappear very quickly. The appearance is ephemeral; it makes a fleeting impression.” (King, 35-36)

These types of materializations—transfiguration and etherealization—offer a demonstration to those present during such manifestations of the innate connection between the spirit and earth planes. Although hard to comprehend to those who have not yet experienced such phenomena, they are quite extraordinary to those who have, offering them visual proof of spirit communication between those in the here and now with those who have passed over to the other side.

Direct Voice

During a séance or healing circle, a spirit can speak through “direct voice” (sometimes called “independent voice”) which is seemingly separate from that of the medium’s voice (meaning the actual voice of the medium); this is unlike what occurs in “trance mediumship” where the medium’s voice is used, but changes in tone and style. What does occur, however, is the medium’s voice box is used to draw from it the necessary ectoplasm to form the voice heard by those in attendance. Spiritualists maintain that this is why the voice sometimes resembles that of the control medium. Usually, though, the voice is said to be quite distinct of that of the medium; depending upon the entity coming through, the voice can be masculine, feminine, childlike, and even with a foreign accent.

During such phenomena a “trumpet” is sometimes used. This is a long, narrow conical object made out of tin that is used as a tool by the spirit entity to communicate the message. It is open at both ends, constructed in sections with tiny seams that allow the trumpet to be reduced in size for easy storage. It is used as a sort of megaphone by the spirit-world to make the voice coming through stronger, louder and clearer. The sound is created from a makeshift voice box that is formed at the end of the trumpet with ectoplasm. As with direct voice, ectoplasm is a necessary part of this type of manifestation which aids in lifting the trumpet up off the table so the spirit entity can use it to send the message to those present.¹⁶

The spirits usually indicate their presence in the room by moving the trumpet about and touching the sitters with it, its movements being seen in the dark by coating it with luminous paint. Sometimes luminous faces are faintly seen in the dark and floating spirit lights.¹⁷ If the conditions are good and there are several sitters, all sorts of conversations with spirit friends may be heard. Different spirits not only speak with different voices and accents, and in every language, but remarkable good singing and whistling are often heard.

Apparently the *modus operandi* of the spirits when communicating with the direct voice is to materialize sufficiently to be able to speak. They evidently create a larynx or its equivalent, from ectoplasm withdrawn from the medium or sitters, just as they do at materialization séances when they show themselves fully formed and talk to the sitters. (Holms, 45-46)

¹⁶ This researcher attended a number of séances and healing circles where trumpets were displayed for the use of the spirit entities, but on no occasion did a direct or independent voice come through these objects.

¹⁷ “Spirit lights” are “dancing globules or sparks of light filling the air in a séance room or psychic development circle, [indicating] that etheric world entities are in the room, ready to bring help to psychic manifestations.” (Bletzer, 582)

Curiously, many dubiously inspired tests were performed in the early decades of the Spiritualist movement to ascertain the validity of the medium performing such manifestations. One such test involved a sitter who would sit next to the medium and place his/her hand tightly over the medium's mouth; another test procedure included sealing the medium's mouth shut with plaster so that if the lips moved in any way, or if the mouth was opened even slightly, the plaster would quickly breakaway. Sometimes the medium would be required to take a big gulp of water from a glass and asked to hold the water in his/her mouth throughout the trumpet and direct voice manifestation (the glass was physically removed from the séance room or placed out of reach of the medium); afterward, he/she would spit the mouthful of water into an empty glass to prove that it was not him/her speaking, but in fact authentic direct voice (Holms, 46).

Apports

Apports are basically objects that are presented as gifts to sitters in a circle from one location to another, and even from the spirit realm. These can consist of almost anything: jewelry, flowers, coins (money), flowers, relics, precious and non-precious stones, *etc.*

The following testimonial regarding apports is taken from an interview with The Reverend John Lilec:

TJL: Have you had any experience with apports?

RJL: Yes, when I walked up the stairs from the séance room, where I was sitting as a student, coming up the stairs and all the lights were on at Rev. Tingley's¹⁸ house, and right behind me and in front of me, I could hear these popping noises and they were apports following right into the light. And they were just...pop, pop, pop...and everyone was just following and picking these things up.

TJL: What type of objects were they?

RJL: They looked liked diamonds, rubies, garnets, precious and semi-precious.

TJL: Now, did these things stay in the physical, and people could take those as souvenirs with them?

RJL: Yes, they can use them as souvenirs and also they would tell them that they are meant for the energies drawn and as healing stones for themselves; if anything, a souvenir of that event. I have heard many stories now of different apport mediums and a lot of charlatanism, but I have seen the apport delivered two different ways now; right in through, passing through the medium's solar plexus, before it must reach that individual or location. And so it's difficult to try to explain to people how this works, but we understand the science—that's the beauty of it.

But I have seen another instance when I was in séance with Rev. Tingley, and we got a red light right over him and he was in trance, at an angle where I could see him but the sitters couldn't. We had about 17 or 20 people in

¹⁸ Rev. Tingley, who is now in spirit, was the mentor and teacher of Rev. Lilec when he was a student studying mediumship in development and unfoldment classes.

there. All of a sudden, I saw a man's hand throw these objects out into the audience, out into the sitting room. But Rev. Tingley, both of his hands, and being a scientist and trained to study every little detail, I realized his arms were right on the table. So I went to a private séance and asked the spirit doctor,¹⁹ Dr. Taylor, without being doubtful or pessimistic, and trying to be respectful at the same time—Dr. Taylor knew that I was edging to the words and he just said, "Well, that was Dee Dee Ho." And it was, a little man that projected right out of Rev. Tingley, actually throwing these objects. I had never seen this before. I always thought they were delivered through a trumpet.

Many Spiritualists relate similar experiences regarding apports and the appearance of objects seemingly out of thin air into the laps of sitters or onto the table of the healing circle or séance. Skeptics and debunkers of Spiritualism and physical phenomenon maintain that instead of the spirit world, these objects come from a very earthbound source—the medium himself/herself—through elaborate hoaxes and fakery.

Throughout the history of Spiritualism, there have been countless instances of fakery and trickery associated with mediumship and physical phenomena—some rather sophisticated, others rather unrefined.

Conclusion

If the heart of Spiritualism is the medium, then the soul is the "séance" where both mental and physical mediumship are demonstrated for the sitters. Pure mental mediumship using clairvoyance, clairaudience and clairsentience is by far the most common and practiced types of mediumship amongst Spiritualist mediums. However, a goodly number of these same mediums do employ physical mediumship into their spiritual work (sometimes through concerted effort and other times quite unexpectedly).

In this paper, a survey of Spiritualism and mediumship was rendered, focusing on the various types of spirit communication and the various methods used to do it. Specifically, mental and physical mediumship were introduced, offering a variety of illustrations and detailed explanations of the various types of phenomena.

Many aspects of mediumship are misunderstood. Mediums are at once reviled and rejoiced, depending upon the mood of society. The work of mediums is a very hazy area that naturally opens itself up to ridicule. Those who have experienced phenomena (whether it is mental or physical) have no qualms about accepting the idea that spirits exist and certain people are adept at communicating with them. Those who have not experienced any supernatural occurrences find it hard to believe in the possibility of spirit communication. These two camps of thought probably will never come to any mutual conclusions, except, perhaps, to agree to disagree.

Although mediumship has been around for eons, Spiritualism is rather new when considering the entire scope of human history. The idea of a religion that is based upon "talking to the dead" makes outsiders suspicious of the motives and purpose of the adherents. Even if one does not accept the idea of spirit communication, one must accept the fact that there are honest and sincere mediums that wholeheartedly believe in spirit communication and feel what they are doing is in service to God and humanity.

¹⁹ Spiritualists believe that each person has five main spirit guides: Doctor-Teacher, Master, Chemist, Indian Guide, and Joy guide. Each guide has a distinct role in the medium's work and assists him/her with messages, readings, and spiritual matters. See Appendix P for a detailed explanation of "spirit guides."

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Appendix A:

Definitions of Clairvoyance

NOTE: Clairvoyance literally means Clear Seeing, but in Spiritualism it has a technical meaning and refers to psychic sight. Clairvoyance may be either Subjective or Objective. It is often difficult, if not altogether impossible, for even the clairvoyant to distinguish between the two.

Six definitions of clairvoyance are here given, to-wit Subjective, Objective, X-Ray, Cataleptic, Trance-Control and Telepathic Clairvoyance. The first two definitions pertain to the two distinct forms of clairvoyance; the other four deal with phases of these two forms.

1. **Subjective clairvoyance** is that psychic condition of a human being, who thereby becomes a medium which enables spirit intelligences, through the manipulation of the nerve centers of sight, to impress or photograph upon the brain of the medium, pictures and images which are seen as visions by the medium without the aid of the physical eye. These pictures and images may be of the things spiritual or material, past or present, remote or near, hidden or uncovered, or they may have their existence simply in the conception or imagination of the spirit communicating them.

2. **Objective clairvoyance** is that psychic power or function of seeing, objectively, spiritual beings, objects and things by and through the spiritual sensorium which pervades the physical mechanism of vision, without which objective clairvoyance would be impossible. A few persons are born with this power; in some it is developed, and in others it has but a casual quickening. Its extent is governed by the rate of vibration under which it operates; thus, one clairvoyant may see objectively spiritual things which to another may be invisible, because of the degree of difference in the intensity of power.

3. **X-Ray clairvoyance** is a form of clairvoyance which partakes of the characteristics of the X-Ray, and seems to be objective. The clairvoyant who possesses this power is able to see physical objects through intervening physical matter, can perceive the internal parts of the human body, diagnose disease and observe the operations of healing and decay.

4. **Cataleptic clairvoyance** occurs when the body is in a trance state, resembling sleep, induced by hypnotic power exercised by an incarnate or discarnate spirit, or it may be self-induced. When in this state, the spirit leaves the body, and is able at its own will or the suggestion of the hypnotists to travel to remote places and to see clearly what is transpiring in the places it visits and to observe spiritual as well as material things in its environment. While in this state it sometimes happens that the thoughts of the spirit in its travels are expressed by the lips of the physical body, and that thought waves are conveyed to it through the physical body. This may be due to the fact that there is a spirit cord which connects the body and the spirit and transmits vibrations is not severed, the spirit may return to the body, but should it be severed, then what we call death would at once ensue. Under this form of clairvoyance there is an interblending of subjective and objective spiritual sight.

5. **Trance control clairvoyance** is that psychic state under which the control of the physical body of the medium is assumed by a spirit of intelligence and the consciousness of the medium is, for the time-being, dethroned. In this case the controlling spirit is really the clairvoyant and simply uses the medium's body as a means of communicating what the spirit sees and, therefore, the question of subjective or objective spiritual sight, in so far as the medium is concerned, cannot be raised. To some persons who go to mediums for consultations and who may become witnesses in trials at law, it may not be known that under the trance control of the medium is, to all intents and purposes, absent; therefore, in dealing with definitions of clairvoyance to be used for enlightenment of judges and jurors, it

seemed necessary for the protection of mediums to explain what is here termed trance-control clairvoyance.

6. **Telepathic clairvoyance** is the subjective perception in picture form of thought transmitted from a distance.

[Taken from: *NSAC Spiritualist Manual*. (1998) Lily Dale, NY: National Spiritualist Association of Churches, pp. 44-45.]

Appendix B:

Testimonial by the Author Regarding his Experiences at Séances and Healing Circles

During the three years I actively gathered research data for this study, I attended a number of séances, healing circles, clairvoyant circles and message services at Spiritualist churches both as an observer and as a participant. On more than several occasions, I did witness various examples of mental and physical phenomena.

On one occasion in particular (early on in my research), while participating in a healing circle, the medium told me clairvoyantly that she had my “mother’s mother” (maternal grandmother) and a young girl named “Evelyn” who were coming through for me. She asked if I could accept them and although I knew of my maternal grandmother, she had passed decades before I was born; also, I had never heard of an “Evelyn” in my family who had passed over to the other side. The medium reiterated to me that the spirit entity was coming through for me, and asked again if I could accept them. Being a novice sitter, I said that they must be mistaken as I had no idea who the “Evelyn” could be. The medium thanked them and sent them back to the spirit-realm and brought another spirit through for someone else. I have since learned, through trial and error, that it is best to accept whatever comes through from the spirit-world; later, after thinking about the message, one can interpret, digest and even reject the message if it does not pertain readily to one’s life, family or experience.

Later that evening, I asked my mother if the name “Evelyn” meant anything to her. She immediately proceeded to tell me a story about her half-sister who died as a young girl before she (my mother) was born. According to my mother (who had heard the story from her mother as a young woman), her half-sister had been jumping rope continuously one day and later complained of having a side-ache. My grandmother passed it off as being overexertion from playing jump rope all day. It worsened as the night went on and soon became apparent that it was more serious than a normal pulled muscle. The country doctor was summoned and an emergency appendectomy was performed on the kitchen table; the appendix had burst, however, and Evelyn later died from the toxicity of the burst appendix. Although not exactly sure, to the best recollection of my mother, this probably occurred circa 1910. My mother recalls her mother speaking fondly of Evelyn periodically while she was growing up, but had not thought of her half-sister (that she never knew personally) in many years.

This was more than mere coincidence I concluded. First, the name “Evelyn” is not that common of a name and for the medium to call her by the actual name was nothing short of amazing to me; second, the fact that “Evelyn” would have been my aunt, the medium nonetheless specifically said that my maternal grandmother had a “young girl” with her; third, since I had no conscious (or subconscious) knowledge of the existence of Aunt Evelyn precludes the possibility of my offering by accident hints or information that would have guided or encouraged the medium to say what she did during this reading.

In a subsequent séance, with another Spiritualist medium completely unrelated and unknown to the original one who brought my grandmother and Evelyn through the first time, my grandmother and Evelyn came through again for me. Of course, I apologized profusely for sending them back the time before.

An instance of physical phenomena I experienced while sitting in a séance occurred in a one-room schoolhouse that had been converted into a family dwelling. The owners had felt the presence of apparitions ever since they moved in and wanted to have a séance to see if any contact could be made. They were not afraid, nor did they want to drive the spirits away, they were just curious as to who they were.

The room chosen for the séance was sealed by covering the doors and windows with heavy blankets. The room was cleansed and prepared for the séance by the medium. Those in attendance cited the Lord's Prayer in unison to raise the vibration of the room. Once the séance started, it was not long until spirit messages were coming through. The first message was from a cousin of one of the sitters; the medium noticed a lot of red and asked the person why there would be so much red. The person said that the cousin had been brutally murdered and there had been a lot of blood. Immediately, the medium asked if he could send the entity back as there was too much trauma involved to deal with that particular spirit at that time; the medium did not feel comfortable allowing this energy into the circle.

Soon thereafter, I and another sitter (who was facing the same direction) saw clearly a form (not a materialization but an etherealization) of a spirit dart across the room. At that moment, many of us felt a distinct coolness around us that caused the hair on our necks to rise up. Above the head of one of the participants, there was an orb of light floating effortlessly about two-feet over her head. She was sitting with her eyes shut, almost meditating, when this occurred. This was what Spiritualists refer to as a "spirit light." It remained there for the duration of the séance. During this séance, the medium intuited the name "Luke," which he perceived to be a little boy who was present.

A total of three séances were done in this same venue and at a subsequent séance in this same house, the medium and the sitters physically felt the presence of a spirit. When a question was asked, one woman (not the medium) experienced clairsentience-like sensations where the right side of her body would feel a burst of cool air. A code was established where a "yes" answer would receive this sensation. The owner wanted to know a name, so each letter of the alphabet was recited by the medium; when a letter corresponding to the name was said, the sitter would feel the cool air sensation. Slowly the letters J-A-C-O... were realized. At this point, everyone assumed the name must be "Jacob."

The next week, the owner of the house did some research to find out if there had ever been a "Jacob" that lived in the house and was attached to it or had gone to school there a century before and met an untimely death there, etc. Immediately prior to the current owners living there, it was used as a dormitory for farmhands working on the adjacent farm. The last known occupant was an old man by the name of Clyde Jaco. He had lived there until he was moved into a nursing home, where he stayed until he died, more than twenty years before.

At a séance that included only three people, in the reading room (a room especially reserved for the medium to give readings to clients) a rather odd thing occurred. During the séance, which was lit by a variety of candles, it appeared that the face of the medium completely disappeared. At first, I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me, so I looked away, and then looked back, it really did look as if the medium's face had vanished. Later when I told the medium what I saw, she explained that it was possibly a form of transfiguration when a spirit was perhaps trying to come through. Although I cannot say I saw the face of another spirit, I can say that I saw her face appear to have vanished.

When I first began doing the primary research for this study, I was admittedly a skeptic. As a researcher, though, I tried diligently to remain objective, setting aside my own personal beliefs and opinions when trying to ascertain the possibility or existence of spirit-communication. But having experienced a variety of spirit-related phenomenon during the course of my research, I cannot simply dismiss these occurrences out of hand. I suppose the old saying "seeing is believing" has substance in this instance.

[This testimonial was put down on paper by Todd Jay Leonard, February 29, 2004 which includes the period from 2000-2003.]

Adelante, Good Spirit: Spiritism and Ancestor Veneration among Santería Practitioners

Mary Ann Clark
Rice University

Introduction

At one end of the room stands a small two-tiered table. The upper tier holds two vases of flowers, mostly daisies and carnations with a couple of roses. On the lower tier six clear glass tumblers stand in two rows of three, each tumbler is filled to the brim with fresh clear water. Between the two rows of glasses stands a seventh glass. It too is filled with water but in addition a crucifix stands half-submerged in the water. Behind the water glasses a white "seven-day" candle burns. On the floor in front of this altar to the spirits, a gourd bowl rests on a white cloth. The bowl holds a handful of flower petals floating in a milky white liquid. Chairs stand in a semi-circle around the altar; underneath some of the chairs are more tumblers of clear water.

At one end of the circle cigars, a prayer book, a bottle of rum, a bottle labeled Holy Water and containers of the white chalk called cascaria surround one of the chairs. Other paraphernalia surrounds the other chairs: a tin can filled with thick dark coffee, a leather wine bag, a tambourine.

The group assembles. Most are dressed in white; each carries a small drum, shaker or other percussion instrument. The woman leading the ritual introduces it by proclaiming the purpose of this spiritual mass and reading from a prayer book. Then each member of the group moves forward to the altar, splashes some of the milky liquid from the gourd bowl onto him- or herself throwing the excess toward the altar and rapping on the bottom tier of the table. Thus begins a spiritual mass as celebrated in a local Santería household.

Practitioners in the African-based religions known as Santería or Orisha religion often say that the dead give birth to the deities. Among other things, this saying suggests that religious practice begins with the veneration of one's religious and blood ancestors. Santería practice commonly encompasses several different traditions including the Egungun traditions of West African and the Spiritist traditions of the Caribbean. In this paper I will describe these precedent traditions and explore some of the ways contemporary practitioners have used them to develop their own techniques for speaking with the dead.

Ancestor Veneration

Ancestors are extremely important to the peoples of Western Africa. Among many West African peoples including the Yoruba, the ancestors are thought to continue to be concerned about the lives of their descendents after their deaths. Ancestors watch over their children and their children's children rejoicing when things are going welling and unhappy when they are not. Because they continue to live as invisible beings, Yoruba ancestors can provide guidance to their family members through dreams and divination and through the institution known as Egungun. The Egungun are masquerade dancers who visit the towns and villages during special ceremonies and festivals. Dancing through the streets they bless and chastise their descendants. The Egungun mask is full-body costume that conceals the identity of the dancer from observers. When an Egungun speaks, it is believed to be the voice of their dead ancestor that listeners hear. The Egungun not only bless and counsel the people they also serve as an important part of Yoruba society. They are the moral voice of the town that works to ensure that everyone from the youngest child to the king acts

according to the moral and ethical code of the community. The Egungun masqueraders and their helpers belong to a secret society that constructs and maintains the costumes and supports the dancers during their appearances. Being a member of the Egungun Society is a great privilege reserved for the most highly respected members of the community.

We know from the historical record that there was a revival of the Egungun Society in Cuba during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, several factors seem to have worked against the continuation of the Egungun on the island. Constructing, maintaining and presenting the Egungun masks is expensive, requiring support from the most highly placed members of the society. In addition, since the ancestors and their human representatives were not part of the colonial government that ruled the island, their words no longer had the authority they had had in their homeland. Consequently, the Egungun Society died out in Cuba.

Among the Yoruba in pre-colonial times (and often still today), the dead were buried within the compounds of their families. Often a room or portion of a room above the burial site was set aside as a shrine where one could honor the ancestors. Just as many Americans today visit the cemeteries where their loved ones are buried and leave flowers and other tokens of respect, the Yoruba visit the family shrine. There they tell their ancestors about the doings of the family and leave small offerings, perhaps a plate of food, some palm wine or pieces of kolonut.

When the Yoruba were taken to the Americas they didn't forget to continue to honor their ancestors. Although they no longer buried their dead beneath their homes, they often constructed small shrines in the house where they could continue to communicate with their loved ones. There they could leave plates of food, glasses of water or rum or other offerings. Because the dead were buried in the earth, if not directly below the shrine, the offerings would be set on the floor just as they had been back home. Even though the Egungun Society no longer performed their community festivals and danced in the streets, people continued to build personal shrines for the family dead, the egun, in their homes.

In the meantime, another way of communicating with the dead was coming to the Caribbean. Espiritismo (Spiritism), the practices of speaking with the dead based on the work of Allan Kardec, was brought to Cuba in the 1950s. Kardec, who was born in France as H. Leon Denizard Rivail in 1804 was trained as a scientist and mathematician. In 1850 he began to investigate the phenomenon of "table turning" that was sweeping through Europe with the intention of discrediting it. Table turning involved a group of people who gathered around a table in an effort to communicate with disembodied spirits. When the spirits were present the table would move, sometimes raising into the air or spinning rapidly. Although he was a natural skeptic, Rivail soon became convinced of the reality of this phenomenon and began a systemic investigation. As he would later say,

It is a most curious thing! My conversations with the invisible intelligences have completely revolutionized my ideas and convictions. The instructions thus transmitted constitute an entirely new theory of human life, duty, and destiny, that appears to me to be perfectly rational and coherent, admirably lucid and consoling, and intensely interesting.¹

After two years of investigation he decided, with the approval of the spirits, to write a book describing the information he had gathered from these conversations under the pen name Allan Kardec. Soon he was the center of an organization of mediums from around the world that were continuing and extending this research.

Although originally embraced by the Cuban middle class who wanted scientific proofs that the living could communicate with the dead, Kardec's techniques soon evolved into four different systems of practice. Professor Armand Andres Bermudez calls these

Scientific Spiritualism (Espiritismo de Mesa), Spiritualism of Charity (Espiritismo de Caridad), Spiritualism of the Chain (Espiritismo de Cordon), and Mixed or Crossed Spiritualism (Espiritismo Cruzado)ⁱⁱ. In developing a form of Spiritism that mixed Kardec's techniques with elements from Yoruba and Bantu religious practices, Afro-Cubans created their own methods for speaking with the dead. Through these rituals they were able to communicate with elevated spirits who they believe had the power to aid them on their spiritual journey.

Although not all contemporary practitioners of Orisha religions participate in Spiritism, many find that these ceremonies form a natural complement to Orisha rituals. In many communities, participating in Spiritism misas or spiritual masses and developing their aptitudes as spirit mediums forms a natural introduction and training for the rituals of Santería particularly the rituals of possession trance.

American Orisha devotees maintain several traditions for communicating with their ancestors and other spirits that can be traced back to traditions developed in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Cuba. In addition, some communities have reestablished the Egungun ceremonies that didn't survive in Cuba. From the Yoruba tradition of maintaining ancestor shrines in their homes, contemporary Americans setup and maintain egun shrines where they can honor their ancestors. Although it is a separate tradition, many santeros are also practitioners of the Kongo-based tradition of Palo Monte, which provides another way for them to communicate and work with the spirits of the dead. From Kardecian Spiritism they have adapted the white table ritual to a home shrine known as a boveda where they can connect with their spirit guides and helpers. In addition, many participate in the Misa Espiritual where they can both develop their mediumistic skills and work with experienced mediums to communicate with these spirits directly. The rest of this paper will be a discussion specifically of the Spiritist traditions of the home shrine, the boveda and the Misa Espiritual.

The Boveda

Although most of the Spiritist literature only speaks of the group rituals, many Spiritist practitioners, called espiritistas, set up a Spiritist shrine, known as a boveda in their homes. The shrine modeled after the altar table used in the misa blanca, or white mass of the Espiritismo de Mesa, consists of glasses of water, a white candle, and a rosary or cross which are placed together on a table or bureau covered with a white cloth. Generally there is an odd number of water glasses, five, seven or nine (all of which are significant numbers for santero-espiritistas). However, many espiritistas place a glass of water for each of their spirit guides and guardians. Some people will also include glasses of water for their ancestral dead although Kardec himself discouraged his followers from attempting to contact their recently dead family members and many people feel that the egun shrine is a more appropriate venue for such communication. In general, natural materials, for example wood and glass rather than plastic, is preferred for these items because they are seen as closer to the natural world. Although fresh flowers may be included on a boveda for special occasions, many people include a bouquet of artificial flowers on their altars. Other tokens representative of or requested by the spirits may also be included on the display including statuettes, dolls, perfumes, cups, bowls and the like. Although a strict Kardecian view of the spirit world suggests that material offerings are not appropriate since spirits exist on a non-material plane, many santeros leave coffee, rum, cigars, and food offerings on their bovedas.

When it is first set up and periodically when it needs to be refreshed, the boveda is sprinkled with Holy Water from a Catholic Church and Florida Water a kind of cologne commonly available in botanicas and markets serving the Hispanic community. As sites of

communications between the physical and spiritual worlds, the boveda is used by espiritistas to pray and meditate in an effort to maintain connections with their spirit guides. One of the rituals commonly performed at the boveda is a series of prayers for the recently dead. In line with Catholic theology it is believed that the prayers of the living can smooth the path of the dead as they make their way to God to receive His final judgment. Every evening for nine days the espiritista places a glass of cool fresh water and burns a white, unscented candle in front of the boveda while praying that the spirit may receive light, spiritual elevation and clarity. The first evening the water and candle are placed on the floor in front of the boveda. On each subsequent evening the water and candle are raised slightly higher by placing them on short stools, piles of books or the like. On the final day, the water and candle should be on bookcase or cabinet above the head of the espiritista. Nine is a significant number in both Yoruba and Catholic practice. Among the Yoruba nine is the number associated with the Orisha Oya who, among other attributes, is the owner of the cemetery who rules the spirits of the dead. Among Catholics a novena is a special nine-day prayer cycle based on Greek and Roman mortuary customs. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, novenas may be conducted for any number of reasons, including prayers for the dead.ⁱⁱⁱ

This is only one of many private rituals that may be conducted by the espiritista in front of this shrine. Because it is a home altar, the rituals and prayers performed by the owner of the shrine are only limited by the desires of the espiritista and his or her spirit guides.

The Misa Espiritual

Although many followers of Kardec's Spiritist system construct bovedas in their homes in order to have a site for interaction with their spirit guides and helpers, many also participate in the ritual known as Misa Espiritual or the Spiritist Mass. The misa is a form of Espiritismo Cruzado that incorporates Yoruba and Bantu (often called Kongo) elements into the Kardecian ceremony. The purpose of the ceremony is to raise both spirits and human beings to a higher spiritual level through communication and interaction. During the ceremony spirits may speak to the assembled congregation through the bodies of experienced mediums in a type of altered consciousness called possession trance. Mediums may also hear, see or feel the presence of spirits.

Before the ceremony begins an altar table is prepared with glasses of water, flowers, and candles arranged on a white cloth. Rum, cigars, coffee, Florida Water and other things that the spirit guides of the congregation enjoy are prepared and placed on the table. The participants sit in a semicircle in front of the table. After a special cleansing ceremony they begin the ritual by reading prayers from Kardec's Book of Prayers, which is available in both English and Spanish versions. They may also add other songs and prayers, many of which have been passed down through Spiritist circles since the early-1900s. After praying and singing for some time, they will call upon the spirits to join them in the ritual.

Although some of the members of any group participating in a misa are more experienced or skillful in spirit communication than others, at the misa everyone is considered equal. Anyone who hears, sees, feels or becomes possessed by a spirit is encouraged to declare it. Although some groups may follow a set format, often the misa is open-ended, guided by the desires and leadership of the spirits. The more experienced mediums will attempt to discern the true nature of the spirits participating in the misa, testing them to make sure the spirit is beneficial to the members and is not trying to trick them or disrupt the misa. Disruptive or unruly spirits are dismissed while benevolent spirits are encouraged to share in the proceedings. Often spirits mount or possess one of the members

so that it may speak and act more directly. These spirits may cleanse the human participants or give advice to individuals or to the congregation as a whole.

The spirit guide or guardian of one of the participants might speak directly to its human counterpart, giving advice or asking for offerings or tokens to be placed on individual's home *boveda*. Many spirits enjoy being embodied, albeit temporarily, smoking the cigars and drinking the rum or coffee or other drinks provided.

According to Espiritismo philosophy, guardian spirits are spiritually elevated by this participation in the mundane world and by the guidance they provide to the human participants. However, some spirits may attend the *misa* in an effort to be cleansed and released from lingering impurities. These impurities are thought to tie spirits to the physical world and prevent their full release into the world of the dead. The healing activities performed by the elevated spirits on the living participants in the rituals as well as the healing provided by the living for these less elevated spirits are one way that the ideals of Espiritismo de Caridad are incorporated into this tradition.

These traditions provide a way for contemporary practitioners to stay in communication with both their personal dead and with elevated spirits who are interested in guiding their spiritual development. Although some practitioners of these traditions make a strong effort to maintain a separation between African and European practices, Espiritismo Cruzado provides a vehicle whereby both European and African methods and cosmological ideas can be integrated, along with elements from other cultures, into a single system of practice that allows the living to speak to and interact with the dead.

ⁱ Allan Kardec, *The Spirit's Book* (São Paulo, Brasil: Lake-Livraria Allan Kardec Editira Ltda., 1972) p 12

ⁱⁱ Armando Andres Bermundez, "Notas Para La Historia Del Espiritismo En Cuba," *Etnologia y folklore* 4 (1967).

ⁱⁱⁱ Joseph Hilgers, *Novena in Catholic Encyclopedia* (Online Edition) [Webpage] (Robert Appleton Company, 10/06/05 2003 [cited 1/2 2006]); available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11141b.htm>.

Itako Ritual: How the Blind Shaman Women of Aomori Japan Dialogue between the Spirit of the Dead and the Client

Takefusa Sasamori
Hirosaki Gakuin University (Japan)

Abstract

In this paper, the significance of the ritual by the Japanese blind shaman, itako, will be explained and their ritualistic process of Kuchiyose (spirit talk) will be evaluated. An itako invokes the spirit of the dead and the shaman incarnates into the dead person speaking out as the actual spirit. The client will then respond to the words of the spirit and the dialogue begins. This paper deals with (I) the process of the ritual of Kuchiyose (spirit talk), (II) substances of actual Kuchiyose, (III) other types of itako ritual, (IV) other types of Japanese shaman, (V) problem solving methods, and (VI) reliability of the itako seance. An appendix is included containing an observation of actual kuchiyose.

I. The Ritualistic Process of Kuchiyose (Spirit Talk)

Kudoki (declaration by the spirit) is one part of the Kuchiyose (spirit talk) ritual. When an itako is asked to call upon the spirit of the dead, the itako chants a long sutra accompanied with the rubbing sound of prayer beads or the beating of a drum. This sutra varies between itako. The first sutra she sings is the chant kamiyose (summoning of the gods). By singing this sutra, she asks many gods to enter into the room, and with their divine protection, she travels to the *sanzu no kawa* (the River Styx, which flows between this world and the other world), and visits hell to search for the spirit of the dead.

Chanting the chant *hotokeyobi* (the searching and calling of the spirit), the dreadful and ghastly sights of the 136 spots of hell are described, and also the views of paradise are briefly described. This chant is constructed of simple rhythmic patterns and short melodic phrases, and is repeated persistently for a long period. This produces a mysterious atmosphere in the room. The spirit of the dead then comes down from the other world. The itako then incarnates into the spirit. At first, the spirit thanks the client for the calling to this world. Then the spirit often speaks reminiscently about the incident she or she had before departing from this world. Then a dialogue between the spirit and client begins.

The topics the client wants to speak about may concern divination, fortune, how to cure a disease, advice about family troubles, advice on travel, etc. The spirit will then give the client appropriate advice on each topic. The conversation between them is quite realistic. In the case of the spirit, the client's own child who may have died young, often moves the person to tears. When the client does not have a particular question, the spirit offers advice on general topics like how to live decently. After this, the spirit goes back to the other world.

By the time the spirit goes back, the itako chants a special fixed form of chant called *Hotoke okuri* (sending off of the spirit). By reciting another chant, *Kami okuri* (sending off of gods), the gods then return to their shrines. After this has finished, the itako recovers from the trance. As a purifying ritual, the shaman rubs the prayer beads that allow her to clean her body which was made impure by the dead spirit. The above Kuchiyose procedure can be summarized as follows: (1) Preliminary portion of the ritual and preparation of the altar--the shaman places a cup of sake or water, lights a candle (those are optional). The itako sits in front of the altar, asking the client to sit by her or behind her. She then asks whose spirit should be called, and is given a brief description of the dead person. This information

can be asked during the time the first chant is sung. (2) Summoning the gods (kami yose); (3) Searching for the spirit ... in hell (jigoku)...in heaven (gokuraku); (4) The descending of the spirit; (5) The declaration by the spirit (kudoki); (6) The sending off of the spirit (hotoke okuri); (7) The sending off of the gods (kami okuri) and (8) The purification of the itako's body.

II. Substances of Kuchiyose Ritual (kinds and nature of spirits)

There are four types of kuchiyose which differ by nature within spirit types. ...The usual spirit of the dead, called in Japanese 'hotoke', usually that denotes Buddha, but the local people imply it to mean the spirit of the dead. This suggests the idea that all dead persons become divine like the Buddha. Hotoke can be invited to this world after 49 days from the day the person passed away, and before the 50th anniversary of the person's death. The spirit will reach to other world after 49 days, and before then, is wondering here and there in this world. The spirit will gradually lose his individuality and become a general spirit, according to tradition. When a foreigner's spirit is called, he or she speaks in Japanese. The itako explain that spirits gain special ability to speak in any language, according to the language the shaman uses. The spirit of a dead infant, Hanako yobi is a special sutra for calling this type of spirit. The word hanako literally means flower. The spirit of a living person; in this case the spirit of a lost person, a soldier missing in action, or a fisherman who is lost at sea, can be called in. The spirits of gods, can be classified as a type of kuchiyose, nevertheless the itako considers it as a different practice.

III. Other Types of Sutra by Itako

There are nearly twenty different sutra chants. Some of these are used exclusively for healing, while others are used against illnesses as well as for exorcism and other purposes. These are listed below: 1. Spirit talk (kuchiyose); 2. Tutelary gods or guardian gods of the local community (ubusuna); 3. Invocation of the gods (kami-sandan); 4. Sutra of man (ningen kyo); 5. Heaven (Takamaga hara); 6. Thirty-three Kannon (sanjyu san Kannon); 7. Rice-sprinkling sutra (sango date); 8. Counting of the shrines (kuni gake); 9. Curing illness (netsu samashi no kyoumon); 10. Celebration of the New Year (aratama); 11. Epic of the god Oshira (Oshira saimon); 12. Sutra of Oshira (Oshira kyo); 13. The god Konpira (Konpira ichidaiki); 14. The god Inari (Inari-sama); and 15. Epic of the god Iwaki (Iwakisan ichidaiki).

IV. Other types of Japanese Shaman

1. Gomiso: Not limited to females, nor to blind person. Has no traditional sutras nor formal ritual procedures. The shaman does not participate hotoke yobi seance. 2. Yori: A shaman is lead into trance by a yoritsuke priest. The yori is then possessed by spirits of any kind, including animals, evil or hotoke. The yoritsuke priest will interpret the words of the spirit and explain them to the client. They engage in a dialogue. The priest will do an exorcism before bringing the yori's consciousness back. 3 Yuta: Okinawan shaman. These shaman have the same kind of function, but only itako has the privilege to deal with ancestral spirits.

V. Problem Solving Methods

In order to cure illnesses, itako use a combination of three possible strategies: Physical contact, the recitation of magical words and chanting of sutras. Physical contact consists of massaging the patient's body with the prayer beads or patting the afflicted area with an

Oshira figure or another instrument. Itako have magical words; such as words for taking objects out of the throat, words to take out poison when bitten by a snake, or words to help assure an easy childbirth (Sasamori, 1997).

VI. Reliability of the Itako Practices

As far as reliability is concerned, the following points are presumed:

1) The setting of the ritual's situation: The arrangement of the ritual's place is very crucial and is fundamental for any religion. The splendid architecture of a cathedral, temple or shrine, or the solemn interior decorations, attracts people to participate and believe in a higher being. Long recitations of monotonous melodies, the dark voices of itako, create a mystic atmosphere. The itako herself goes into a trance, or at least gets into a mental state of self-hypnotism. Most Itako say that they are not doing the actual speaking, but the spirit makes them speak. Often they do not remember what is said during the message (Sasamori, 1989).

2) Tradition: Itako tradition has a long history, and the community believes and observes its customs as being authoritative. These seances are a kind of culturally orientated code.

3) Client's ardent wishes: In the young lady's case [mentioned in the Appendix], she needed so badly to listen to her dead fiancée. A client's desire to meet a lost mother; a mother who loses a child wishes to communicate with the child again, even if it might be a phantasm or fabrication. All infants who visit this world again and meet their mother, without exception, say: "Mommy I miss you. I'm sorry that I had to leave you so soon. I cannot do any good for you by staying at the bank of the Sanzu no kawa. I can only pile the pebbles to make a tower, praying for your happiness." No mother can bare the heartbreaking sadness of these words)

4) Blind people's sensibility. If the spoken subjects are vague, broad, and something in common, inevitably something fits to being true. According to the way clients breathe, or respond, the itako can guess if she is right or wrong. Blind persons can see matters that man with eyesight can not see, as the proverb says.

5) Psychological support. It is hard to judge if itako really goes into a trance and is possessed. A local psychiatrist Takeichi Tsugawa once tested the brain waves of several itakos, and the result was not favorable. Only one itako's wave showed a change, but the others did not indicate any abnormality or change. Tsugawa points out the fact that to diagnose epilepsy, he asks patients to blow the pages of a book to turn; getting out of breath causes a lack of oxygen to the brain which can lead to illusions or even fainting. Recitation and singing for a long time may produce same results. Not like other types of shamans in different cultures, itako do not use drugs, alcoholic drinks, or other substances to induce a state of trance, but merely recite, chant, and sing. Tsugawa concludes that itako is not a mental illness but are women who have special abilities to get into this special mental state. This ability is acquired by participating in the severe asceticism (Tsugawa 1989:123-125). On the occasion of Mt. Osore's Festival, a huge number of people come to Aomori from all over Japan. In order to meet their demand, the limited number of itako do not have time to recite those long sutras and get into trances for each individual spirit. They assure that the spirits are already gathered at the place of the seance at holy Mt. Osore during the festival days. So they do not necessarily to get into a full trance in order to invite the spirits. These facts lead to the arbitrary view that work of the itako as not being not real but are pseudo shaman. Nevertheless, we should know that on other occasions, itako are more sincere and go into a full trance. At least at the time of their initiation rite they experience full trance and spirit possession.

Who has the right to say to clients that itako are good actresses and only deceive? Who suffers from bitter distress and who are saved by itako even though it cannot be proven

through scientific logic? The voice is the true answer, coming from heaven. The itako tradition is now fading, for there are no successors. The reasons for this is that no parents wants their blind child to become an itako. The sight-challenging child in Japan has enough misfortune, and why add more misery to her by insisting that she become an itako? The social status of itako has been low and placed among those of the out-cast class. The prejudice and discrimination against such professions still continue in local communities. It can not be helped, but the tradition will be soon become extinct. Yet the need of itako will not become extinct as long as there are people who want to communicate with family members who have died. Their roles will switch to other shamans such as gomiso. People's wishes for dialogue between spirits of the dead will never die.

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Appendix

1) Observation of Actual Kuchiyose Itako: Asa Hirata, and a client in Fall 1998 at Ms. Hirata's home. The client asked the itako to call in the spirit of her mother.... Sutra of Calling of the spirit (hotoke yobi) is sung accompanied by drum beating. ...Stopping the song, the itako said, your mother must have died without staying long in bed and then asked the client how many sisters she had and whether her father is still alive or not. Then, the itako told her that; Now your mother will appear here, you may engage in a conversation... The dialogue begins M(mother): I'm your mother , I did not think that I would go to the other world so soon, and I expected to recover from my illness. It must have been my destiny. C(client): Yes, it was too soon. I apologize for not being devoted enough to you. But we always talk about you. M: I'm glad to see you again. I watch you folks from the other world and protect all of you. Always, I am with you. C: Please keep your guardianship of us also in the future. M: One of your sisters must be seriously ill. C: Our elder sister is. That is why I had to meet you to consult. M: She might be cured by next February. Even so, she may lose the ability to speak. She worked too hard and has strained her nerves. If she were like you, she would not become ill. C: Yes, you are so right....

In this way the spirit of the mother speaks, and she repeats the same phrase at the end of each sentence, gwakarimasuka? (Do you agree with me?). The client is persuaded by the mother and conversed as though she were actually facing her mother. The client is emotionally moved to tears. The mother asks her to take care of the sister, promising that she will also protect her, and she then returned to the other world. The sutra of sending off the spirit is sung to the beating drum.

2) At the Mt. Osore Festival (the biggest gathering of itako in Japan), a young lady called the spirit of her fiancée who died in a car accident. I was astonished by the shrill voice of the young lady who was crying. After she returned from her session with the itako, she cried for a long time, not aware of other people's presence. On the way back from the festival, I happened to meet her on the same train. I asked her what was the matter? She explained that she had come all the way to Mt. Osore to listen to her fiancée's voice who died in a car

accident. Without his permission, she feels she cannot live anew life. According to her, he was so kind and told her that she may live as she likes. At the time she told me this, her facial expression looked brighter.

3) An elderly lady asked the gods to solve her husband's troubles. At Itako Ms. Kasai's home. The god told her that his mental problem is caused by a lapse of faith. It required that she go to a Shinto shrine for a week.

Cioran and the Paradox of Faith

Jon K. Loessin
Wharton County Junior College

For faith is this paradox, that the particular is higher than the universal. Yet in such a way, be it observed, that the movement repeats itself, and that consequently the individual, after having been in the universal, now as the particular isolates himself as higher than the universal. If this be not faith, then Abraham is lost, then faith has never existed in the world because it has always existed. – Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling¹

Emile Cioran (1911-1995) once wrote in admiration of the Russian-Jewish philosopher of despair Lev Shestov (1866-1938) that, "He was the philosopher of my generation, which didn't succeed in realizing itself spiritually, but remained nostalgic about such a reality... He played an important role in my life. [...] He thought rightly that the true problems escape the philosophers. What do they do but obscure the real torments of life?"² It was in fact Shestov himself who studied Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, developed friendships and associations with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, became a student and disciple of Kierkegaard, and was himself admired by D. H. Lawrence and Albert Camus. Shestov's relative obscurity today is surprising, for seldom does one of his scholarship, admiration, and influence come to rest on the scrap heap of philosophical history. He was, after all, one of the last philosophers to analyze Kierkegaard thoroughly and present a convincing argument that reason, idealism (a hopeful and optimistic vision), and progress was to be rejected in lieu of a doctrine of despair and faith—that as terrible as things may be, when despair has reached its greatest heights, when no hope whatsoever remains, all things are still possible.³ He writes:

Kierkegaard says that "the opposite of sin is not virtue but freedom" and also "the opposite of sin is faith." Faith and faith alone liberates man from sin; faith and faith alone can tear man away from the power of the necessary truths that have controlled his consciousness since the time when he tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree. And faith alone gives man the courage and the strength to look death and madness in the eye and not bow helplessly before them. "Picture a man," writes Kierkegaard, "who by straining his frightened imagination has thought up some unprecedented horror, something completely unbearable. And then suddenly he finds this horror before him; it becomes a reality for him. To the human mind it seems that his destruction is certain. But for God all things are possible. This constitutes *the struggle of faith: a mad struggle for possibility*. For only possibility reveals the way to salvation. In the last analysis one thing remains: *for God all things are possible*. And only then is the way to faith made open. Man believes only when he cannot find any

¹ Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling*. Trans. Alastair Hannay. New York: Penguin Books.

² Cioran, Emile. *Oeuvres*. Paris: Gallimard, 1995. p. 1740.

³ "Lev Shestov." *Wikipedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Shestov>.

other possibility. God signifies that everything is possible, and that everything is possible signifies God. And only that man whose being has been so shaken that he becomes spirit and grasps that everything is possible, only he has drawn near to God.

The opposite of sin," he writes "is *not virtue, but faith*. That is why it is said in Romans 14:23: all that is not of faith is sin. And this belongs to the most explicit of Christianity's definitions: that the opposite of sin is not virtue, but faith." He repeats this many times throughout all his works, just as he repeats countless times that, in order to attain faith, one must renounce reason. In his last writings he even formulated in this way: "Faith is against reason—faith dwells beyond death." But what sort of faith is spoken of in Holy Scripture? Kierkegaard's answer is: "Faith means precisely this: to lose reason in order to find God." Kierkegaard had written earlier, with regard to Abraham and his sacrifice: "What an incredible paradox is faith! The paradox can transform murder into something that is holy and pleasing to God. The paradox returns Abraham's Isaac to him. Thinking cannot master the paradox, for faith begins at the exact point where thinking ends.

...Philosophy begins in despair. Even the questions he sets before us are dictated to him by despair... He wrestles with despair in his heart over the right to despair and (if I may use the expression) find thus peace in despair. And so, by human standards, salvation is a complete impossibility for him. But for God all things are possible. Faith consists of this: a mad struggle for possibility. For only possibility opens the way to salvation....When a person falls into despair... only possibility will save him. Possibility appears, and the one who was in despair revives... Without possibility, just as without air, man suffocates. At times it seems that his inventive imagination is itself the creator of possibility. But in the last analysis one thing remains: for God all things are possible.⁴

Cioran was deeply influenced by these passages in constructing his own system of thought. No philosopher was ever more tormented about life and existence or more supportive of tyrants and disillusionment.⁵ To the lay philosopher, Cioran's perspectives may seem as if they dwell on the brink of madness. To Cioran, life has to be meaningless for it to be meaningful. Oppression has to occur for freedom to thrive. All that seems evil, wrong, or unjust, is precisely what renders faith, and without faith, life has no meaning. One version of Cioran's paradox of faith might be simply stated as follows: Because we die, life means nothing... Because we die, life means everything.⁶

The depth of Cioran's paradoxical stance on faith is worth contemplating. Given his seeming lack of faith and distrust of humanity and because of his prolific yearnings for

⁴ Shestov, Lev. *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*. Trans. Elinor Hewitt, Ohio University Press, 1969.

⁵ Cioran, Emile. *History and Utopia*. Trans. Richard Howard. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.

⁶ "The Outsider Lives and Dies." *The Ponderer's Guild*. May 6, 2005.
<<http://p088.ezboard.com/fponderersguildfrm6.showMessage?topicID=1673.topic>>.

extinction and his hatred of life, his actual life-state and actions affirm life courageously and in fact, happily. He takes pleasure in misery and despair. *Schädenfreude* occurs to Cioran only on a deeply personal level, and like those who take pleasure in the misery of others, Cioran takes great pleasure and finds contentment in the misery of himself. Even his propensity toward the belief in nothingness coupled with his hatred of life becomes a potent stimulant to life, belief, and faith. An observer of Cioran's writings once wrote that no one should read or interpret his philosophy literally, or else "you will blow your brains out."⁷ Still, another keen observer noted that while Ernest Hemmingway, who lived life to its fullest at every waking moment, did "blow his brains out," Cioran never did.⁸ As Cioran concludes, faith through despair yields a zest for life. "The deepest and most organic death is death in solitude...in such moments you will be severed from life, from love, smiles, friends, and even from death."⁹

Is there anything on earth which cannot be doubted except death, the only certainty in this world? To doubt and yet to live—this is a paradox... Despair...is only possible with great effort... [while]...doubt is anxiety about problems and things, and has its origins in the unsolvable nature of all big questions. Despair is the state in which anxiety and restlessness are immanent to existence. Nobody in despair suffers from "problems," but from his own inner torment and fire. It's a pity that nothing can be solved in this world. Yet there never was and there never will be anyone who would commit suicide for this reason... That is why I prefer the dramatic life, consumed by inner fires and tortured by destiny, to the intellectual, caught up in abstractions... I despise the absence of risks, madness, and passion in abstract thinking. How fertile live, passionate thinking is!...One must descend all the circles of an inner hell to turn one's destiny into a subjective but universal problem...to finally come to achieve a superior form of personal existence. And this will be so not because you have any special value or excellence, but because nothing interests you beyond your own personal agony.¹⁰

And what is the meaning of life? Nothing—and everything—all at once. As Cioran states,

"Everything is possible, and yet nothing is. All is permitted, and yet again, nothing. No matter which way we go, it is no better than any other. It is all the same whether you achieve something or not, have faith or not, just as it is all the same whether you cry or remain silent. There is an explanation for everything, and yet there is none. Everything is both real and unreal, normal and abnormal,

⁷ Carvalho, Olavo de. "Olavo de Carvalho on Cioran." Planet Cioran.
< <http://www.geocities.com/PlanetCioran/>>.

⁸ "The Outsider Lives and Dies", *op cit*.

⁹ Cioran, Emile. *On the Heights of Despair*. Trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992. p. 6-7.

¹⁰ Cioran, Emile. *On the Heights of Despair*. p. 37-8.

splendid and insipid. There is nothing worth more than anything else, nor any idea better than any other."¹¹

It is the retreat into one's own existence, relishing in inner torment, locking out the irreconcilable problems of humanity that is the path to hope, faith, and life. Cioran criticizes as dangerous, becoming, in his terms, "overcivilized." With modernity, there is a tendency for individuals to "relapse" into the need to be stimulated by outside forces that displace solitude and thus, the only genuine mode of human freedom—liberation from action.¹² Modernity, to Cioran is like a drug—a rendition of Marx's "opiate"—that keeps humanity in chains, not realizing such bondage also causes the loss of faith and the true meaning of life. While despair may seem an existence most never aspire to achieve, who is to say that one mode of existence is any more superior to another since all have their positive and negative sides? For Cioran, inner torment may seem undesirable, but it results in life. Materialism and modernity may be seemingly grand, but can result in the death of spirit (and thus faith). In an interview, Cioran was once confronted with the statement, "You have been against everything since 1920," to which he replied, "No, since Adam."¹³ "We were happy only in the ages when, greedy for obliteration, we enthusiastically accepted our nothingness."¹⁴ "In the Middle Ages, a man made a regimen of salvation, he believed *energetically*: the corpse was in fashion. Faith was vigorous then, invincible... it knew the profits to be derived from corruption and gruesomeness. Today...religion adheres only to 'nice' hallucinations, to Evolution, and Progress."¹⁵ Anyone seeking true freedom must be willing to take one final step—"to be free of liberty itself...[o]nly then will we begin to learn how to act without desire."¹⁶ This step is the key to faith.

It is important that Cioran's quest for relishing despair and inner torment not be confused with self-pity. Self-pity is a material concept of the modern world as it allows its victim to compare one's life with the lives of others. In actuality, Cioran would have everyone engage in self-denial of self-pity (and self-denial of everything else as well).

Cioran tells us not to worry about those who are excessively self-pitying because an excess of self-pity preserves reason. "This is not a paradox ... for such brooding over our miseries proceeds from an alarm in our vitality, from our reaction of energy, at the same time that it expresses an elegiac disguise of our instinct of self-preservation. ... Sickness can increase self-pity, thereby reason, thereby self-preservation. To cross the abyss that is life, if that is our purpose, we must use both sickness and health, self-pity and detachment, the desert and the oasis. To deny either is either fatal or contemptible." Cioran shows by example, how various the tension between opposites is manifested. His examples have one thing in common it seems: the admittance of

¹¹ Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*. p. 116.

¹² Sontag, Susan. "Introduction." In Emile Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968. p. 18-9.

¹³ Leon, Alberto Pinzon. "Cioran a la Postmodernidad."
<<http://www.antroposmoderno.com/textos/Cioran.shtml>>.

¹⁴ Cioran, Emile. *The New Gods*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Quadrangle, 1969. p. 14.

¹⁵ Cioran, *The New Gods*. *op cit*. p. 37.

¹⁶ Cioran, *The New Gods*. *op cit*. p. 46.

lucidity, that which lies behind all stories, all systems, all action, all help.¹⁷

Perhaps the final word on Cioran should come from an essay by Dylan Trigg who best summed up Cioran as follows:

Consumed with the formless, he nevertheless took it upon himself to craft a landscape littered with familiarities composed from an apocalyptic canvas. The lure towards eschatology as a comfort, a means of orientation, serves well in Cioran. Indeed, not only is the affirmation of the void a means of rebellion against the void (cf. Nietzsche's *amor fati*) but it also acts as the Archimedean point upon which Cioran is able to attest his bile... To Cioran's credit, the vile unattainability of a plausible reconciliation and the vacuous consolation of the demiurge of logic and abstraction, only confirmed his opulent misery: "I turned away from philosophy when it became impossible to discover in Kant any human weakness, any authentic accent of melancholy."

... Let us assume he is in the right. Let us assume that the rise of progress is synonymous with the rise of reason and that without the former then there can only be decline and epistemological ruin... Let us assume then, that to rid ourselves of reason is to rid ourselves of progress: "We begin to live authentically only where philosophy ends, at its wreck, when we have understood its terrible nullity, when we have understood that it was futile to resort to it, that it is no help..."¹⁸

But still, to Cioran, by finding true faith, all things are possible. Just as Jesus directs his followers to give up their worldly possessions, as a monk takes a vow of silence, as an anchoress seals herself in a room for decades in isolation with only a Bible, as the mystics have practiced their holy forms of flagellation, as Nietzsche proclaims that what does not kill him makes him stronger, or as Christ accepts his sacrificial crucifixion willfully, Cioran turns inward to revel in the doom of existence—to turn it into a type of religious art—to leave behind the minor miseries and false pleasures of the external world, and in their place discover genuine faith and purpose, and in so doing, achieves something most will never do—meeting his Creator face to face to see the joys of paradise, all accomplished while lying alone in his earthly bed, bemoaning his despair.

¹⁷ Mitchelmore, Stephen. "To Infinity and Beyond." *Spike Magazine*.
<<http://www.spikemagazine.com/1197cior.php>>.

¹⁸ Trigg, Dylan. "In Ruins: Cioran amongst the Debris." *Naked Punch*.
<<http://www.nakedpunch.com/issues/02/dylan1.html>>.

The Eight Degrees of Tzedakah in Maimonides: Some Current Implications

Thomas D. Watts
The University of Texas at Arlington

Abstract

The eight degrees of *tzedakah* (charity) in Maimonides are discussed with some current implications drawn for poverty policies. The conclusion here is that asset-based policies that stress personal ownership would be favored over traditional “welfare,” redistributive policies. Maimonides would favor teaching a person how to fish, rather than giving a person a fish to eat that has already been caught and paid for by someone else (usually, the government). A major supporting principle here is that in the *Mishneh Torah* by Maimonides (10:7-15), the best and highest degree of *tzedakah* is to enable a person to obtain employment, so that the person will not be dependent on or requesting charity, or to extend a suitable loan, preferably before they become impoverished, so as to prevent them from being in a state of poverty. Principles of the “ownership society” are discussed in respect to *tzedakah*. Ultimately, *tzedakah* is more about justice than about “charity,” and in that respect is concerned with prevention and empowerment of the individual, rather than creating a dependent situation between the individual and the state.

Introduction

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204 CE) is considered one of the most important Jewish thinkers in history. “Rambam” was an appellation that is commonly used for this Spanish Jewish scholar, philosopher, physician and jurist. His native city of Córdoba was invaded in 1148 CE by a Muslim group, the Almohads, and he eventually moved away from Spain, eventually ending up in Fustat, in Egypt. He uniquely incorporated Greek philosophy into Judaism (Noegel & Wheeler, 2002: 277). There are some parallels here with St. Thomas Aquinas, who of course did much the same thing for Christianity. Dobbs-Weinstein (1995) has contrasted the thought of Maimonides and Aquinas.

Maimonides wrote many works. One of his most famous is The Guide of the Perplexed. While not regarding himself as a philosopher, nevertheless this book by Maimonides is widely regarded as a major philosophical work (Manekin, 2005). His first major work was the Commentary on the Mishneh. He later wrote his classic work the Mishneh Torah [The Torah Reviewed], in addition to his other works. The literature on Maimonides and his work is sizeable indeed. A search of the World Cat List of Records (one of the most comprehensive information sources available) reveals a total of 3,177 publications on Maimonides.

Eight Levels of Giving Charity (Tzedakah) According to Maimonides.

Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10:7-14, contains a list by the Rambam of eight principles of charity. Each principle will be discussed here, moving from the lowest level of charity (eighth) to the highest level (first):

8. When donations are given grudgingly. Here giving is done with an uncheerful face, reluctantly, haltingly. This could happen when one is confronted by a beggar. However, one “clearly may not pass by but must rather notice these people in recognition of their

basic humanity” (Dorff, 2002: 156). If donations are given haltingly, grudgingly, then the basic humanity of the recipient has not been recognized (which of course is a key component here).

7. When one gives less than they should, but does so cheerfully. Amsel (1994:300) notes that “it is preferable, according to Maimonides, to give less than what the person asks or needs but with a happy disposition than to give the full amount asked for but with an uncheerful disposition.”
6. When a person gives assistance directly to the poor, but only after being asked to do so. True, giving assistance after being asked to do so is better than not giving assistance at all. However, it is better yet to give assistance when there is obvious need without being asked.
5. When one gives assistance directly to the poor, but without being asked to do so. Here again, the basic humanity of the person is enhanced when assistance is offered without being asked.
4. Donations to the recipient who is aware of the donor’s identity, but the donor still does not know the specific identity of the recipient (Jewish Virtual Library, 2005).
3. Here the donor is aware of who is receiving the charitable assistance, but the person receiving the assistance is unaware of the source of the assistance.
2. Providing assistance so that both the giver as well as the recipient are unknown to each other. At first glance, anonymity would seem to connote a degree of impersonalism. But here anonymity serves the purpose of enhancing the dignity of the recipient, while at the same time purifying the donor of any ego or status in the giving process. Sometimes givers want public recognition for their giving [plaques, honors, public acknowledgement, etc.]. St. Paul (himself raised in Judaism) espoused a doctrine of Christian charity that “totally avoids any reference to self-interest” (Douglas, 1983: 80). Certainly Maimonides would like to cleanse or purify charity as much as possible of self-interest and personal recognition.
1. Finally, the highest form of charity is to sustain an individual before they become impoverished or destitute, by offering a substantial gift, in a dignified and honorable manner, or by making a suitable loan to a person, or by helping them find employment or establish them in business so as to prevent their becoming dependent on others. Prevention and self sufficiency or two key concepts here. During medieval times, Widroff (1987) points out, concern in Judaism for the status, the dignity and the overall future prospects of the recipient of assistance was a genuine concern. Dorff (2002:156) states:

If assistance is necessary, for both practical and moral reasons it is better to proffer employment, a loan, or investment capital to poor people than to give money as a dole. A loan or investment has the potential for making the poor person self-supporting, thus eliminating the drain on the community’s resources. It also preserves the dignity of the poor person now and, if the venture succeeds, for the long term.

Conclusion

Dalin (1997) avers that from ancient Israel to pre-New Deal America, Judaism emphasized individual self-help and self-sufficiency, not welfare state intervention and control. Friedman (2002:17) notes that the “role of tzedakah creates an environment where individuals can begin to empower themselves.” In the Jewish tradition, tzedakah becomes an entitlement (Goldstein, 1988), rather than charity as we have traditionally understood the term in the Christian tradition. Tzedakah in the Jewish tradition means justice or righteousness (Friedman, 2002). Tzedakah was balanced by “chesed,” which means loving

kindness. Here charity and social welfare must ideally include both justice on the one hand, and charity on the other hand (Watts, 2006). As the familiar saying goes, no justice, no peace. There must be justice first, before anything else. Indeed, the great Jewish social justice tradition, reflected in its concern for poverty and inequality (Watts, 2006), has been a shining beacon over the course of human history.

The conclusion drawn here is that Maimonides would favor asset-based policies that stress personal ownership over traditional “welfare,” redistributive approaches. This can be looked at as part of a larger conception of the “ownership society.” A definition of “own” is “to have or possess” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1994: 595). The “aim of the ownership society is to increase for citizens the amount of ownership, and choice. In so doing, people have more of an investment in society” (Watts, 2005: 169). The idea of the ownership society has received support from the Bush Administration. President George W. Bush has stated that “...if you own something, you have a vital stake in the future of our country...” (The White House, 2004). Aristotle noted (1998: 28-29) that “what is held in common by the largest number of people receives the least care. For people give the most attention to their own property, less to what is communal...” Thomas Aquinas (1988: 72) agreed, stating that “everyone is more concerned to take care of something that belongs only to him...”

Asset based approaches stress the importance of increasing the total assets of the poor. Individual Development Accounts are special accounts where the savings of the poor are “matched” by another party (usually, the government). This concept was introduced by Michael Sherraden (1991). The Child Trust Fund program in the United Kingdom seems to hold much promise. Maimonides would no doubt approve of IDAs, for the dignity of the poor is respected and indeed enhanced. Here, policies would assist the poor in the knowledge and skills of how to fish, rather than giving the poor a fish that is caught by someone else. Independence is enhanced, rather than dependence.

Are asset based programs and the ownership society enough? The Rambam would probably answer that they are not enough. Traditional “welfare” programs may be needed for awhile, until a transition can take place to programs that are asset based. Also, asset based programs (and social welfare in general) must be adequately organized so that people do not “fall through the cracks.” Needed is a larger change of heart, an awareness of God’s greatness, justice and mercy. In the view of Maimonides, “it is not God who abandoned us, but we who have turned our backs on him.” (Seeskin, 1991:126).

Tzedakah, for Maimonides, must be undertaken with a keen awareness (with a strong component of reason, like Aquinas) of the dignity of the human person. The human person has been created by God and is here for a time, only later to return to God. Tzedakah is owed to all of God’s creatures.

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N.B. Not all references listed here are actually cited in the text.

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