



Science and Psychic Power

By John Peterson
FROM LOS ALTOS, CALIF.

THIS is not the tame stuff of science fiction. It is, instead, the realm of the psychic, the mystical world of the supernatural and the paranormal that, its adherents say, may change your life markedly in the next 5, possibly 10 years.

Some highly reputable scientists and philosophers, undaunted by the scorn and skepticism that such thoughts evoke, see ordinary folks doing some amazing things as a profound psychic revelation imbues them with extraordinary powers:

- It is the middle of the afternoon. Rather than telephone your wife, you ease back in your chair, compose your thoughts, and beam a telepathetic message to her. That evening your favorite dinner is waiting.

- When some disease or ailment strikes, you head for the nearest spiritualist, acupuncture practitioner, or faith healer. We will all realize, of course, that our minds control our bodies and that illness is merely the result of a disturbed psyche. This peace of mind will also mean the near-eradication of mental illness.

- Those who really work at it will be able to read books still on the shelf in the next room, partake of astrotravel (where the soul leaves the body and flits through the universe), or communicate with deceased loved ones and our spiritual guides. We may even learn of our previous re-incarnations.

One Hazard: Insanity

Inevitably there will be broader, more significant implications to society because of these expanded powers of our minds, but their definition must wait until the nature of these now-inexplicable occurrences becomes clear. Former astronaut Edgar Mitchell contends we are now on the verge of man's most important scientific breakthrough, which will show these phenomena to be "natural events that can be as easily explained as sunlight bending around the moon." He adds, "Anyone who is still doubtful of psychic phenomena is simply ignorant."

Mitchell is hardly a voice in the wilderness, for interest in psychic research is booming. Physicists at major universities and research centers are attempting to measure the mind's waves or energy levels that produce these phenomena. Philosophers are trying to develop theories that embrace and explain the inexplicable. No one yet has a true glimmering of the answer—if indeed there is an answer.

But even while learned men try to unravel the mystery, thousands of persons are flocking to institutes, classes, and week-end sessions that hold forth promise of psychic knowledge and insight. Some are finding it. And what's more, drug-abuse experts are learning that the expanded consciousness that comes with spiritualistic or psychic experiences is the best alternative to wean the young away from drugs. It is, perhaps, the greatest movement among young people since the psychedelic revolution began 10 years ago.

Alan Vaughan, coeditor of the San Francisco-published *Psychic* magazine, says the news in psychic phenomena today is that science may have the tools to finally analyze these powers of the mind. Indeed, literally scores of organizations are involved in researching and teaching the psychic. This work is not without its dangers. Mitchell, founder of the Institute for Noetics in Menlo Park, Calif., an organization he hopes will be the catalyst and focal point for the study into the science of the consciousness, says ruefully, "Insanity is the occupational hazard of this business."

Scientists Try to Detect, Measure the Existence Of Psychic Phenomena

The Quest for Insight

Explains Allen Cohen, a clinical psychologist in Berkeley who is also director of a drug-abuse institute at the John F. Kennedy University in Martinez: "We're going to see some profoundly disturbing events. I've seen more than 100 psychic eruptions in people who have gotten in over their heads. By the late 1970s we'll have the same need for discrimination in these exotic alternatives to drugs as we now have with drugs themselves."

The problem, he says, comes as people work at altering their consciousness and opening their minds to new forces. "Through improper meditation, serious illness, or attempts to astrotravel, these people see mystical visions that they can't integrate properly into their view of life. There is a great and building problem today with the huge numbers who are becoming obsessed and

possessed. When you treat their mental disturbance in a normal way they simply aren't helped."

Eleanor Criswell, an educator-psychologist in Sausalito, agrees with Cohen that psychic disturbances may account for as much as 80 per cent of all mental illness. "I want people to know that they are normal when they hear voices, when they experience visions," she says. "We need a psychic liberation, an understanding and acceptance that psychic experience is not unnatural and is not an illness."

Most people who are excited about the psychic get involved through such methods and practices as transcendental meditation, hypnosis, yoga, drugs, Scientology, and several different mind-control programs. By altering their consciousness they hope to open their minds to deeper insight into the meaning of life.

Types of Phenomena

Most experts agree that most programs or movements that end up with a cultish devotion to the leader, trapping devotees to a dependence upon the group, are harmful. "Ideally a person should sample the techniques used to open the mind by each of these organizations, and then move on to another," says Mitchell. Adds Cohen: "Some groups have learned how to open a person's mind up, but then they simply don't have the spiritual direction or depth to give the person direction. Some end up hurting a lot of people."

Elmer and Alyce Green, noted biofeedback researchers at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kan., see the mind-rubbing courses as most dangerous. In a report written for the

Academy of Therapy-Psychology and Medicine, they contend some courses induce in some persons "a form of mild neurosis or psychosis, often related to obsession or possession." They caution that unless these practitioners regulate themselves, the Government "may summarily ban many research and training programs that otherwise, if carefully developed, might become valuable adjuncts to our education and health systems."

Cohen says there are three traditional types of psychic phenomena: mind-to-mind, mind-to-matter, and matter-to-mind. "There really are seven distinct phenomena," he says. "A person usually only has one of them, though some rare psychics have combinations of them."

His classifications: mind reading, or the ability to receive telepathic messages; clairvoyance of the past, future, and present; vibrational empathy, the most complex, includes the ability to heal, read another person's aura, and perceive others' spiritual guides; psychometry, the ability to know the past of a person or object through touching; and mind-force control, the most dangerous ability, which includes both the projecting of thoughts into another person's mind—as in voodoo—and the rare psychokinetic power to bend or alter metals and to make objects dematerialize and rematerialize.

These psychic powers have been chronicled in literature for decades. But the same problem exists today as always: The charlatan is still difficult to disprove. As a result, most truly gifted psychics and some not-so-gifted seers spend much time proving their powers in scientifically controlled tests, which also allow scientists to seek the origin and nature of their power.

Audiences Gasp in Amazement

Such tests at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in Palo Alto have created unusual interest because of the stature of the scientists involved. But SRI, after spending weeks with two renowned psychics, Uri Geller and Ingo Swann, carefully guards its words. "We do not claim that either of these men has psychic powers," says Harold E. Puthoff and Russel Targ. "We have observed certain phenomena with the subjects for which we have no scientific explanation. All we can say at this point is that further investigation is clearly warranted."

Geller, a 26-year-old Israeli now living in Ossining, N.Y., apparently possesses unusual powers, though his detractors, including *Time* magazine, contend he does nothing a magician cannot duplicate. During a performance before 1,500 persons at Stanford University he performed feats of telepathy and psychokinetic power. "This is not a scientific laboratory," he told the audience, "but I have done the same kind of things at SRI."

He appeared twice at Stanford, each time apparently exhibiting that he can receive others' thoughts and that he can bend keys and start up watches that had been stopped for years merely by passing his hand over them. People would gasp in amazement as a ring or key that they clutched tightly in their hand began bending and kept on bending for minutes after Geller had passed his hand over it.

"I first discovered that I had this power when I was 7 years old," Geller says. "I could move the hands on my watch. But no one and no device can measure my energies. I violate physical laws that scientists say cannot be violated. Many thousands of scientists still don't believe, so the major thing I'm doing now at SRI and other universities in the United States is proving to them that my powers exist."

"America is the country where we can lift our foot for the giant step that will let us understand this. People are ready here and nowhere else. But California is more open than New York."

What Can a Bent Key Help?

He says he does not believe that his power to snap spoons in two, bend keys, read minds, and fix watches comes from his mind. "I believe it is generated through me by an intelligent power in the universe. I believe in God, but I do not believe this is coming from God. The parapsychologists want to hear that my powers come from my mind because they want to believe that. But I don't want to discredit people, and I don't want to get into those heavier things. I want to keep what I have pure. After all, what can a bent key help?"



—Lisa Glodson

Geller holds a just-bent key.

"The important thing today is to learn to make psychic powers work for us," says Robert Mattson of the Academy of Parapsychology and Medicine here. "Our goal is to convince medicine that these powers exist and are helpful and must be used. We've been gaining a lot of support lately." Mattson says some of the acad-

emy's presentations on acupuncture and faith healing have drawn more than 1,000 persons.

Another psychic, Bob Hoffman in Oakland, is working with 40 psychologists and psychiatrists on psychotherapy. He says he has developed a psychic counseling method for the emotionally disturbed that "brings these people and the people around them to peace with themselves."

The activity in this burgeoning, exploding field has received little support yet from Establishment institutions and from government. "There is still little recognition from our intellectual community of the tremendous importance of this work," says Jeffrey Smith, emeritus professor of humanities and philosophy at Stanford. "We all have latent powers, and we all need to wake up to what is happening around us."

Underlying nearly all psychic investigation and all attempts at improving man's spiritual state is the attempt to further intuitive knowledge. Psychics, humanistic psychologists, and spiritualists agree that man can receive much knowledge and can become much more creative through his intuition. "I am not psychic," says Cohen, "but I believe that through developing my intuitive powers I can achieve more knowledge and understanding than a psychic, who is really only using another sense or two beyond the five we all already employ. I think man has to establish a balance between his rational and nonrational thought processes."

"We're in one of the few eras in one of the few places in the world that this kind of phenomenon is not taken for granted. There are a lot of people looking for meaning and direction today. It's really a terribly healthy thing."