

## Presidential Address

# AFTER THE WHITE CROW: INTEGRATING SCIENCE AND ANOMALOUS EXPERIENCE

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### ABSTRACT

In this edited version of the 1996 ISSSEEM Presidential Address given at the annual conference in Boulder, Colorado, Dr. Wesch outlines some unique issues for “scientifically-inclined mystics” and “mystically-inclined scientists.” The nature of anomalous experience tends to produce profound personal effects on the experiencer, creating conflicts for the supposed objectivity of the scientific method if that experiencer is also a working scientist. Using the “White Crow” metaphor from William James’ 1896 Presidential Address to the Society for Psychical Research as a starting point, problems of “fear of psi,” negative reactions of friends, family and colleagues, and loss of openness are explored. A personal solution to living on the bridge between the mystical and the scientific is offered.

**KEYWORDS:** Anomalous, psi, esp, science, mysticism

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he temptation in giving a talk like this is to try to be really profound, to get up here and say something earth shaking. . . to really tie it all together. There's real hubris in doing that, and I have enough trouble with the Coyotes as it is. That's why I always liked the "*Blind sages and the elephant*" story. We go around, each getting our little glimpses of whatever Cosmic truth that we're all interacting with, and then we get involved in arguing whether it's this piece or that piece that's the essence of the elephant. I don't know what the essence of the elephant is. But if we all talk to each other, we get a bigger picture of the elephant by sharing each other's experiences, like we do here at ISSSEEM.

Years ago, I had a mentor who was an Appalachian healer woman. One time in talking to her, I said, "I just want to know how everything works." <Laughter> Whoever it was that she "channeled" laughed and said, "What makes you think that your nervous system in its current form could stand that kind of energy? It would fry you to a crisp." Then she said, "It would help if you were less dense." And I said, "You mean like in Spirit?" She said, "Yeah, that would help a lot, and it could be arranged!" <Laughter> I said, "I think I'll keep struggling along on my own for a while, thank you." I'm still at it. When I was preparing this talk, I found a quote that said, "*Life is a game where the goal is to figure out the rules.*" That quote reminds me to tell you that I don't know what the rules are, yet. What that means for me is that I can relax because nothing I'm going to tell you is true in any ultimate sense.

All this speech can be is sort of a snap-shot of how one set of eyes have been looking at Reality over the last forty years. I really don't have a final conclusion; all you get is a progress report. This story isn't finished. The short abstract is that this speech is *a story about the stories that we have to tell ourselves in order to get by when you're walking this bridge between the mystical and the scientific.* It's my view on how you integrate two of the big life-long stories, one of which is science and the other which is the mystical. It's about how you keep both those stories running at the same time, in the same life. There is a tension and a peculiar set of issues to deal with in those of us who are identified with the scientific method and have also had direct, personal contact with the mysterious worlds of mystical phenomena.

## ENTER THE WHITE CROW

It is this specific dilemma that led me to think about the theme of this conference “*Science and Inner Experience.*” I later found a quote on the Internet by William James about the “White Crow” that seemed to indicate that personal anomalous or mystical experiences really had a big effect on scientists. I eventually found the appropriate essay and discovered that the quote was from his 1896 Presidential Address to the Society for Psychical Research that was published in June of 1896,<sup>1</sup> just a hundred years ago, and I said, “Ah, synchronicity again.” So we ended up with the White Crow as our conference symbol.

Dr. James said, “No part of the unclassified residuum of human experience has usually been treated with more scientific disregard than the mass of phenomena generally called *mystical.*”<sup>2</sup> (I don’t think the situation has changed a whole lot). But he also says,

. . . science to the contrary, when one looks at history, the phenomena are there, lying broadcast over the surface of history. No matter where you open its pages you find things recorded under the name of divinations, inspirations, demoniacal possessions, apparitions, trances, ecstasies, miraculous healings and so on. There never was a time when these things were not reported just as abundantly as now.<sup>2</sup>

I think that’s still true, maybe more so now. Then he created the “White Crow” metaphor, saying,

. . . if you wish to upset the law that all crows are black you mustn’t seek to show that all crows are black, it is enough if you prove one single crow to be white.<sup>2</sup>

Then he goes on to say, “My own white crow is Mrs. Piper.”<sup>2</sup> (Mrs. Piper was a trance-medium who could do psychic channeling.) He says,

In the trances of this medium, I cannot resist the conviction that knowledge appears which she has never gained by the ordinary waking-use of her eyes, ears and wits. What the source of this knowledge may be I know not, and have not the glimmer of an explanatory suggestion to make; but by admitting

the fact of such knowledge, I can see no escape. So when I turn to the rest of our evidence, ghosts and all, I cannot carry with me the irreversibly negative bias of the rigorously scientific mind, with its presumption as to what the true order of nature ought to be.<sup>2</sup>

Further, he says, “Science means first of all a certain dispassionate method. To suppose that it means a certain set of results that one should pin one’s faith upon and hug forever, is to sadly mistake its genius, and degrades the scientific body to the status of a sect.”<sup>2</sup>

**W**hen he summed up, one of his conclusions about paranormal phenomena was that these are valid phenomena, but they’re capricious, they’re discontinuous, they’re not easily controlled, they require peculiar persons, and their significance seems to be wholly for personal life. So much for the myth of objectivity and the scientist as separate from his/her subject matter. In this area, you have to deal with science as objectivity *and* subjectivity.

I guess the spirits probably don’t care about a  $p < .05$ , but they do care whether you get enlightened. These “White Crows,” in my experience and in the writings of some other people, have as part of their characteristics a compelling, powerful sense of reality. These things are “real-er than real,” and they easily evolve to very strong beliefs about their meaning. You get whacked by a vision, and pretty soon you think you know what it means, and away you go. It’s easy to do that, scientist or not—to become a true-believer in your own experience and your interpretation of it. That’s an important part of the dynamic I want to address—the loss of perspective, and, at the same time, the fact that these events appear to be set up not to change beliefs, but to crack beliefs. To be guiding, to be life-changing or life-guiding. That’s been my experience and conclusion about them. A scientist in the mystical realms invariably gets personally involved.

## ISSSEEM AS A HOME FOR “CLOSET MYSTICS”

When I came to my first ISSSEEM Conference five years ago, I said, “Oh my God, this is my tribe. These are the kind of people that I’ve been searching

for. I've found them again." It's been that kind of quality that has made this a safe place to come and share who I am, and learn who you are and share our stories about Reality. I think of this Presidential Address as a kind of tribal ritual. It's really intimidating to stand up and try to talk like an Elder in a community of elders. We are the elders of a new tribe, that I guess now includes 40+ million people in this country, if you believe the polls. So, that's a big tribe. And if you look at the data, the average number of years of mystical seeking in this room is over 15. That's a long time, and most of us are about 50 years old. So, we are the elders of this new tribe. It's intimidating and exhilarating to share with my peers, teachers and elders.

Two years ago, when we surveyed the 1994 conference attendees regarding their beliefs and their personal experiences of anomalous phenomena, we discovered that this is a highly educated, highly experienced group of travelers in subtle domains. Over 95 percent of the conferees reported anomalous experiences . . . things like ESP, psi phenomena, energy healing. In fact, over 70 percent of the attendees at that conference either could see or sense the energy bodies. However, when we asked them about what had happened to them in their social contexts, 84 percent of them had problems with other people, personally or professionally, about their involvement in the "funny stuff." They had some form of "negative experience" happen to them from their social network. At that same conference, Charles Tart talked about the fear of psi, and its manifestations in science and personal life.<sup>3</sup> He got a standing ovation. I thought that a talk about this bridging function, this living in two worlds, would be useful.

Over the last couple of years, I also started talking to myself and to other people about being a "closet mystic." When you say that, people get it on one bounce. They understand what you're talking about. It's this sense of living a double life, where you have your scientific credentials (I'm an NIH-funded researcher) and, in some other place in your life, you keep your mystical experiences and beliefs. I don't talk about this stuff very much when I go to Northwestern Medical School to collaborate with my research colleagues. They know I'm a little weird, but they don't know how weird (until now).

There is a really interesting phenomena associated with this "closet." Now that I have started "coming out," I go to places and talk about the "funny stuff"

like when I was on a panel at the national biofeedback conference in Atlanta, reviewing the scientific evidence for subtle energy healing. Nobody said a word at the talk. It was very well attended, one of the best attended sections of that whole conference, but nobody said much or asked any questions at the time. Then, in the receptions, in the hallways, and in the coffee bar, the braver members of the audience would come up, look carefully over their shoulders, and say, very quietly, "That was a really interesting talk. Now, you may not believe this; you may think I'm crazy, but let me tell you what happened to me." And what invariably follows is some encounter with mystery. You get an account of a death-bed apparition, a psychic warning, or some profound synchronicity that was life changing. You get a story of an out-of-body experience, some powerful healing experience, or even a strange encounter with electronic gizmos or streetlights. Anybody here have funny experiences with streetlights? Yeah, there's a few of us here; power companies get real confused when their lights go on and off at strange times and they can't find anything wrong.

**I**'ve worked in AIDS research with a cohort of 1,300 gay men over the last eight years. They have told me a lot about the process of living a double life, and the pain that goes with splitting yourself up in some fundamental way. I thought that I really should address that split in mystically-inclined scientists, and the courage of the people who come here to share, and, in their daily lives, continually help educate and empower the people around us by telling their stories of mystery, their "White Crows." I think telling of our stories is in some way integral to the function of ISSSEEM. I think that being here in a fellowship of believers where you don't have to say, "Well, you may think this is crazy, but. . ." Where you can say, "This was my experience" and people say, "Yeah! I know about that!" You can get the validation and empowerment that helps keep you going when you go back home and try to make science and experience fit together.

## ISSSEEM: MYSTICALLY-INCLINED SCIENTISTS AND SCIENTIFICALLY-INCLINED MYSTICS

ISSSEEM began in 1989 as an idea whose time had come. Carol Schneider and T. M. Srinivasan hatched the idea over dinner and they recruited Elmer

Green, who recruited Penny Hiernu. Then they all recruited Stephan Schwartz, who was the first Editor of the ISSSEEM Journal, *Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine*. They believed that the times were right for a scientific organization that would provide a new vehicle for bringing together science, subtle energies, healing, and consciousness phenomena. The metaphor that emerged was that of *a bridge between the best of modern science and the best of ancient wisdom*. We thought initially that we'd have a setting where somewhat skeptical scientists interested in the phenomena of subtle energies could gather with practitioners and experiencers within the framework of pretty familiar scientific trappings. If you've been here all week, you have noticed that ISSSEEM is not like the American Psychological Association, for example. But we do have a peer-reviewed, well regarded journal, technical papers, and careful, rigorous theory building. And, this conference is an open place, safe from the skeptical, cynical attacks of more materialistic and less venturesome colleagues. We value both rigor and openness.

Seventy-five (75) percent of our members are academically credentialed people and the other 25 percent are credentialed by high levels of experiences. When we looked at our data on our membership from 1994, what we actually got was 90 percent were credentialed by experience with anomalies. It's just that a lot of them have scientific or professional backgrounds. This is a very high-level experienced group. That also made me think that talking about living on the bridge between science and mysticism is a good idea, to make the implicit, explicit in some way.

**W**e also get comments at conferences and in the mail that we should give up on science and scientists. That they'll never get it! The technical papers in the journal are too difficult to understand. We all know that healing (or whatever your favorite modality is) works, why do we have to do this blankety-blank research? The insurance companies, the doctors, the government, they won't believe the research anyway. And on and on and on. On the other hand, we get complaints that we can't let in the flakes and the charlatans. We don't want any quacks, here. That we need to have more rigor in our conference presentations. More data. We're not scientific enough in the Journal. We need to make "real" scientists more comfortable with us. So there's this dynamic tension between the scientific and the mystical in the organization. Those tensions can be very creative, and I think we've seen that here, in this meeting.

## LIVING WITH THE WHITE CROWS

I think for most of us, the path that led to this conference began with an encounter with the “White Crow,” some anomalous, cosmic-egg cracking experience. Mine started with baseball, and prayer. I’m ten years old, up to bat in the last inning of a little-league game and I’m saying, “Oh God, Oh God, Oh God, just don’t let me embarrass myself.” Runners on base, two outs. I prayed that the guy ahead of me would resolve it, but he drew a walk. When I got set, the world got very bright, and went into slow motion. Somebody turned off the sound and I knew from this presence behind my shoulder that the ball would go into right field and it would all be O.K. Well, the ball came floating in as big as a basketball—there was no way I could miss it. It cleared the second baseman by a couple of inches and rolled to the fence in right center field. Everything went back into real time and I stumbled down to first base and fell down, laughing. Meanwhile, two runners scored and the game was over. Everything was great, except my life has not been the same since. It made me a great believer in prayer, for example. There was a big growth in my willingness to pray over anything after that. But—it took me years and years to even try to tell anybody about that experience. The “funny” experiences didn’t stop after that, they just kept rolling along. I’ve come to appreciate the power of such highly personal and subjective events, both in my life and the experience of others.

One of my first conclusions was that these events are not random. You can encourage them, but they seem to have only immediate personal significance. They’re like hints and clues to sort of wake you up a little. Or get your attention. It feels like (I have to entertain this as an “as if real” belief) that I’m guided along by some unseen force, intelligent and usually gentle, whose intent is to teach me something by experience. I don’t know how many of you can understand that but I see a few nodding heads out there. When this happens, I’ve learned to laugh and say, “Oh, oh, coyotes! Here they come again!” My current spiritual practice is based on Native American processes. This is a coyote-bone whistle, and those guys are around all the time. Coyote’s role in the mythology is this . . . if you become too inflated, and cast a big shadow, coyote sneaks around behind you and bites you in some nether region, to make you aware of your blind spots.



As Carol noted in her introduction, I started my career as scientist on this path early, also. When I was in high school, I had one of those “you walk by the shelf and the book falls off the bookcase on your foot,” kind of experiences, and found the proceedings of an international parapsychology conference in the public library in McCook, Nebraska. Now, I don’t know how it got there, but after I picked it up and looked at it, I just said, “Wow! Maybe I’m not crazy.” Here was this international scientific body that takes seriously the things that I’d experienced. I got really excited about that.

**O**ne of the spin-offs was a senior science project on ESP. We ran 100 subjects, all girls, in a card guessing protocol. My buddy Richard and I even got a few dates since we didn’t have an IRB at that time. The only thing we found puzzling was that when Richard and his new girlfriend were in a condition of sizzle, they could produce astounding runs of card-guesses. They’d get 15 out of 20, 17 out of 20, from opposite ends of the house. Later they had this big fight but we had more runs to do to finish the protocol, so I made them do it. They couldn’t get anything; they’d get 0 of 20. So I concluded that love enhanced parapsychological contact and that research is very hard work.

## OVERVIEW OF WHITE CROWS

I want to take a short tour through the zoo of White Crows, just for a second, to point out how common these phenomena are all over the world, not just with us here in ISSSEEM. When you talk about anomalous experiences, you’re in really strange territory. The findings so far suggest things like: 1) effects can precede causes; 2) time and distance have no meaning; 3) boundaries between us dissolve; and 4) apparently intelligent, non-physical beings show-up everywhere. We’re not in Kansas anymore, Toto.

How many of you have had some form of anomalous experience? Look at all those out-of-the-closet people. How many of you have encountered a spirit or a non-physical entity of some kind? See, that’s over half and that’s a little higher percentages than you see in the general population studies, but these events are relatively common in population surveys.

How many of you have seen Michael Murphy's encyclopedia of well-documented paranormality, *The Future of the Body*?<sup>4</sup> It looks back through recorded history at all the anomalous things that human beings have done; it shows that we're really not dealing with something new. Strange things have been happening all along. Other surveyors say that in a 1985 Gallup poll, 43 percent of subjects reported an unusual or inexplicable spiritual experience. Forty-three (43) percent! This is just a general poll. For ESP experiencers, other surveyors found 58 percent in 1973 and 67 percent in 1984. For reports of contact with the dead, it was 27 percent in 1973 and 42 percent in 1984. The conclusion from the surveyors was that no one familiar with history, anthropology or psychology can deny that such phenomena occur. They say also that while many of the phenomena are in the context of intoxications, ritual or meditative disciplines, most seem to be spontaneous.<sup>5,6</sup>

**F**our of these phenomena are really very well supported scientifically. You can go to the parapsychology literature and you find that for three forms of ESP (telepathy, clairvoyance, and pre-cognition), there's enough data and good, methodologically rigorous studies to satisfy anybody but the most cynical of debunkers. Other phenomena, like the near-death experience, the out-of-body experience, and apparitions, have been very well studied and surveyed. The conclusions about *how* all these work, the mechanisms, are shallow right now, but for ESP and related anomalies, over 50 percent of respondents in most surveys have them and the laboratory data is clear that they happen. One interesting finding in this stack of studies is that 95 percent of telepathy is crisis oriented, involving people that are emotionally connected.<sup>7</sup> How many of you have had that experience?

Psychokinesis, mind over matter, is also well-reported and fairly common, around 7% in surveys. In fact, it's ubiquitousness is reflected in the popular song, *My Grandfather's Clock*—stopped when the old man died. Twenty-seven (27) percent of spontaneous PK phenomena have to do with clocks starting or stopping or behaving strangely. For out-of-body experiences (OBE), 15 percent or so of the general population report the out-of-body, floating away experience. If you ask student populations, you can get as high 50 percent responses!<sup>5-7</sup>

I ran across a fellow who had spontaneous out-of-body experiences, the husband of a client of mine. She told me that she wished he would come talk to me

because often when he went to sleep, he would find himself floating out of his body up to the ceiling. Now he was scared to go to sleep. On the shelf over my desk was Bob Monroe's *Journeys Out of the Body*.<sup>8</sup> I pulled it down and gave it to her. She took it home, he was much relieved, and I never saw the book again. He still wouldn't come talk to me.

Feeling, seeing, hearing, or sensing the presence of a deceased person is one of the most common paranormal experiences, crossing all cultural boundaries. Raymond Moody says that maybe two-thirds of widows will report some kind of contact with their deceased husbands, and perhaps 75 percent of parents who have lost a child to death will have an apparitional experience, either a presence, a visual and/or auditory apparition, or some other kind of sign that's personally convincing.<sup>9</sup> The studies all across the world—Iceland, Europe, Australia, U.S., U.K.—show 25-35 percent of people will report that phenomenon.<sup>10</sup>

**M**ental health professionals often treat these experiences as pathologic. My abnormal psychology professor said, "Here's an example of a primitive sub-cultural belief. When I worked in the VA Hospital in the mountains of North Carolina, I had this veteran who came in with a psychotic episode. We treated him and his focal symptoms cleared up. He seemed to be O.K.—except on rounds every morning, he'd report that his deceased grandmother's spirit would stand at the foot of the bed at night and talk to him. So we figured the man's still having hallucinations, and we'd raise his Thorazine a little bit. Then the family came to visit. The doctor said, "You know, we can't let George go home, he's still having these visions of grandma at the foot of the bed every night." They said, "Well, I'll be darned! We wondered where grandma's ghost went." The patient was discharged within ten minutes.

I want to detour a little bit and tell another personal story that was a teacher for me. In 1973, while I was on active duty with the Air Force in Washington, D.C., I had a period of intense agitation on the night of December 13. I was beside myself. Finally I took 25 mg. of Valium and went to bed, telling my wife, "Boy, this Air Force duty must be really getting me down." About an hour later, my brother called and said my father had died of cardiac arrest. So I got emergency leave and we flew home. When I got back to western Nebraska

the next day, my mother is going along just fine. The clinician in me said, “Mmm, bad sign.” I got her out on the porch and said, “What’s going on? You’re too calm about this.” She said, “Well, when I woke up this morning, I felt your father next to me, and he said in my ear, ‘I’m O.K., just come to the funeral home and sit with me for a while, and that will be fine.’” Now my mother is a very level-headed, sod-house-born farm woman. She found this reassuring and, although she went through the grieving process, she went on with her life in a very good way. I think it was a very significant event for her, and it really got my attention about the power of these events for making our lives easier in hard times.

**T**he near-death experience is a very striking example of the territory that’s been struggled over by the materialists, and the scientists, and the mystics. The literature is replete with very good descriptions from Moody and Ring and other folks.<sup>9-12</sup> Perhaps 30-40 percent of people who have close-to-death or clinical death and resuscitation experiences will have some aspect of the classic near-death phenomenon. While I was getting ready for this speech, I read some more of Ring’s stuff, and his conclusions got my attention. He says, “What’s wrong here is that, although these phenomena occur very frequently in the near-death setting, they are identical to mystical awakenings.” It confuses us because they’re in this high-crisis place, but these NDE’s are the same things that happen when you put yourself in crisis on top of a vision quest hill. By not eating, not drinking, being dehydrated for four days, and praying, singing, and dancing, it does things to you. Other kinds of visionary experiences are induced by crisis, intense spiritual practices, or happen spontaneously.

## AFTER THE WHITE CROW

What was interesting to me was not so much the reported similar features of these NDE and other anomalous experiences, but what Ring said about the nearly identical pattern of after-effects of everything from near-death experiences, to visionary encounters or psi phenomena, to even the UFO abduction phenomenon. One of the practical approaches to anomalous phenomena is that you can look at what they’re good for, what purpose they seem to serve in human affairs. He says the after-effects of all these phenomena include a

profound emotional opening, a joyful, more full expression of emotion, and a deeper experience of emotion. You get intellectual illumination, where you can “get it” all in one flash. You find movement toward interconnectedness, love and compassion for all living things, a loss of the fear of death, and enhanced physical vigor. You get reappraisal of materiality as a goal in life, that is, you don’t chase the gold ring anymore. These experiences seem to lead people to look more toward inner values or family values or service or some other non-material value. You see the development of a sense of mission or purpose, a change in personality, and enhanced psychic powers and events. If you have one of these experiences, then the doors of consciousness open and then all kinds of unusual things begin to happen and people are transformed in some fundamental way.<sup>11</sup>

Charles Tart says that one impact on people when they have these experiences (and this is a real kicker for anybody with scientific, materialistic, reductionist kinds of background training) is that *after people have these kinds of experiences, they often develop an absolute conviction that the Universe is an intelligent, living organism, inherently loving and meaningful, of which we are inherently a part, not a meaningless accident.*<sup>3,13</sup> I can vouch for that one personally, but it’s hell to deal with if you’re trained in a scientific background.

One of the things I thought was very interesting was that there is often a sense of need to work toward the good of humanity as a whole, or for the good of the environment in particular. The hypothesis that Ring offered is that this whole class of phenomenon, including our White Crows, are triggers, instigators, pushes toward the evolution of humans to another level, something that’s been hinted at, or described by thinkers over the centuries.<sup>11,12</sup> Mystics have made the point that humans are unfinished, still evolving, for centuries, even life after life. The possibility seems to be that the White Crows in their personal significance have to do with nudging some individual, or group, along the path.

The other thing that came to me is that we’re the norm. If normal means, what’s the majority, well, we’re it. So, what’s the problem, how come we spend all our time struggling to get accepted, keeping our mouth shut, trying to see who we can talk to safely, and to avoid being persecuted in our academic or personal settings. Why is there no money for research in these incredibly

important areas? A rounding error in the NIH budget, for example, for studying healing.

## SCIENCE AND FEAR OF THE WHITE CROWS

Here's the problem. What the Scientific Revolution in 1500 overthrew was a world-view that Willis Harman describes thus:

. . . in the world view of the pre-scientific person, the universe is alive and imbued with purpose; all creatures are part of a Great Chain of Being, with man between the angels and the lower animals. Events are explained by divine purpose or by their function in a meaningful world.<sup>14</sup>

After that was toppled, what came in was:

. . . it is essentially a dead universe, constructed and set in motion by the Creator with subsequent events accounted for by mechanical forces and lawful behavior.<sup>14</sup>

**I**n the first view, there was overwhelming evidence for the working of enchantments, the existence of miracles, the presence of witches and other beings of supernatural powers. After this scientific revolution, all those things were dismissed as imagination, or delusion.

How many of you thought that pre-scientific world sounded pretty good? A living interconnected universe—we like that. Here's the problem. In that model, the pre-scientific model, Reality was all interconnected, but there was only one interpretation of it, and that belonged to the church in the Western world. And, if you didn't agree with that interpretation, you were a heretic, and we all know what happened to them. In fact, when you talk about this stuff to people and you really probe into what the discomfort with anomalous experiences is about, people invariably bring up witch hunts and burnings.

I think there is something archetypal imbedded in us that relates to the fear. It's not a neutral topic. It is as if we know that sometimes bad things have happened to people who were too open about their knowledge of these layers

of reality. I want to point out also that the witch hunters were not skeptics. The witch hunters were deadly serious about their belief in these other, alternative realities. It's not just the disbelievers that are a problem in paradigm shift; it's the believers, the ones who say, "Not only is it true, but you shouldn't be involved in it, and we'll teach you not to be."

What are the factors that make otherwise rational persons behave so strangely with regard to the paranormal? Particularly when, as Charles Tart says, "*Science in its ideal form is actually a tremendous spiritual vocation with a commitment to stay open to reality no matter what you'd like it to be.*"<sup>13</sup> Gee, that sounds like what the gurus say. You know—you explore, but you stay open, and more inclusive to whatever is true. I really loved the earlier speech by whoever had the slide up here, "Scientism as Fundamentalism." There's a lot of fundamentalism in both the religious organizations and in the scientific world that we keep bumping into. And there are some thoughts from the literature about what this persecution and stigma is about. Charles Tart called it "fear of psi,"<sup>3</sup> and I'll use that terminology, but it really applies to all of these alternative world views, experiences, and languages.

**T**art and Braude and others say that this fear, this resistance, is largely unconscious but almost universally present, even in us.<sup>3,15,16</sup> You think that's true? Is there any resistance in us here in ISSSEEM to these things? Nah! Braude says what scares us is the specter of psychic power, psychic snooping, telepathic influence, and potential malevolent uses of psychokinesis.<sup>15,16</sup> That's one way to look at it. And what happens in his opinion is that scientists often set up their experiments in a way that they get  $p < .05$  but the effects are so small that you have to run thousands and thousand of trials to see them. Obviously, nothing to be afraid of.

However, there have been large scale, very powerful effects shown and not followed up. The hypnosis literature is replete with powerful demonstrations of something called "telepathic hypnosis," from before the 20th century, but these effects haven't been followed up since the turn of the century. EEG training for synchrony between people, producing big jumps in parapsychological phenomena between the people so trained hasn't been followed-up since 1978. I haven't noticed a lot of people out there building copper walls, either. It's a big effect, and it's not followed up. So there is resistance in some way to this anomalies thing being real and powerful.

Dr Tart invented a thought experiment that went like this. “O.K. We have a new procedure that will make you totally telepathic with everybody within one hundred yards. How many of you would like to have that procedure done to you? Oh, by the way, it’s permanent.”<sup>3</sup> His results in asking that question both formally and informally were universally negative. There’s something about this stuff that’s scary. One of the things I think is particularly scary is the unalterable and continuous changes in self-awareness that are a side-effect of doing paranormal work—that it continuously brings up your own personal growth issues. Oh dear!

The Lakota medicine man, Fools Crow, says that if you’re going to be a hollow bone for the Great Spirit to work through, you have to work real hard on keeping that bone clean. That’s no small task in personal growth and personal integrity. He also said something about working with ordinary spirits, incidentally. He said that he knew how to do those things but that you have to keep in mind that “Being dead don’t make you smart.”

**T**here are other sources of uneasiness with psi from our personal developmental history—that children are often really afraid of being aware of their parents’ thoughts and feelings. Children learn how to stop this psi stuff. We also learn, as a kind of social grease, not to be too aware of each others’ thoughts and feelings; it’s kind of a polite, “Emperor’s new clothes” phenomena. But, I thought, more powerful, was what Dr. Tart calls “repression of the spiritual self”<sup>13</sup>—avoiding all of the personal material and challenges that comes up when you are transformed in awareness. Humans will often avoid being too “different” and these experiences can make one feel *real* different!

So, in summary, there is resistance to anomalous experiences and we have to be aware of that denial, in our cultures, in our presenters, in the research, and in our own lives. What happens to us after these White Crows come to call is that you’re less and less able to deny or resist the reality of the phenomena, in my experience, if you are willing to stay open

I cannot stay closed off very well anymore. I turned away from all spiritual work for 5 years after I’d had a big disappointment in love. I thought God had sent me a soulmate, and it turned out not to be true. I was angry and I said, “I’m not going to do any of this spiritual stuff.” Five years later, I felt



like I was dying. So then I prayed, “Oh God, I’m ready to do it again.” Then in short order, I got the letter about ISSSEEM, I got an invitation to go to a drumming circle and I was introduced to my Native American teacher—all in the next couple of weeks. So, it was like, “Oh, O.K. We’re ready to go again.”

## CONCLUSIONS

If one defines science as an idealized search for truth, either as a complete system of understanding everything, or for practical applications that are useful and helpful in everyday life, then modern science is just another set of beliefs, another story that we tell ourselves about the nature of things that allows us to act and function in the world. The mystical is the same process, finding a better way to get by in the world. A lot of practical stuff comes out of the mystical teachings. I think finding a good story that you can tell yourself that includes as much as possible of Reality is what this is about. So, the last thing I’m going to talk about here is the story that I’ve learned to tell myself that helps me keep my feet in both camps, in the scientific and the mystical.

**H**ere are some things that have come to me over the years. I found a book that said that the first axiom of Hermetic magic is “All is Mind.” Wow, belief is important! John Lilly says that what we believe to be true becomes true within limits that have to be tested both experientially and experimentally—both parts of the story.<sup>17</sup> Sun Bear, a native teacher, said if a belief doesn’t grow corn, it isn’t worth much. So whatever you come to in these beliefs had better be practical; it must feed the people and nurture yourself. William James wrote about this practical function of belief one time when he had been in a deep existential depression. He read some place about free will and he decided to behave during the next year *as if* he believed in free will. And I think there’s something very important there. If you don’t know what’s true, at least you can start with an assumption or belief that you are willing to entertain “as if” it’s real. Then you can test it, experimentally, in the laboratory, or you can test it experientially in your life and practice. I decided one night to test the belief that I could send energy to a friend’s toothache in Maryland. We were both surprised that it worked!

I can’t claim authorship for the central belief that I have come to. I had been working with this Appalachian healer woman, and she had done something to

me energetically during a five day retreat. One night after that, I had a dream in which I was standing in a mountain cave. On the other side of the fire was this little bald man in an orange robe who says:

“The Goal is to become so aware of all the levels of all of the forces that determine your behavior that in any given moment you can make a real choice to put your energy behind the PLAN.”

I liked that premise for a story about Reality. That was about 15 years ago, but it's had a profound effect on me. It's got good stuff in it, it's got awareness—that variable is central to both science and the mystical—awareness. Science and mysticism both have powerful tools for extending awareness. Whether it's an electron microscope, or mindfulness, they're tools for working on awareness. Sometimes these tools come together, like in the EEG Theta training. I get to play in both worlds, science and the mystic. All I have to remember is that there are different tools for different layers of different forces.

It's got all of the “layers.” I like general systems models and theories that remind me that we're all holons, we're all parts, we're all wholes. It's all nested and multi-layered and complex. It ain't simple, and on the other hand, it has system and structure to it. All I have to do is to keep my “truth-testing” going in both models. The truth-testing—does it grow corn? Does it have validity in a scientific sense? Those guard me against conclusion-jumping, that premature closure that makes us dogmatic and rigid as scientists or mystics. The more you can stay open, the further you can run out on the limb of understanding, I think.

It talks about choice, which I've always felt was important. How we choose is what God will ask us about next time. You know, when you go around for your review like in the NDE's? How you chose, from where, from what intention. I believe that intention and choice have power, they change things. So, it's got that in it, and I like that, too. It gives my energy a part in the whole, with purpose. I like that.

It also gives you responsibility. I remember one night, at Council Grove, a bunch of us young ones were sitting around the fireplace saying, “Yes, we're

going to get all this knowledge about Consciousness, and we're going to understand how it all works, and we'll have all this power. . .” Alyce Green was listening and when she got up to go to bed, she looked at us and said, “Knowledge *is* responsibility.” You have to evolve wisdom, not just knowledge.

It also has a Plan. In the dream, “PLAN” was in fiery capital letters. This is not a little plan, this is *the* PLAN. It gives me a place to think about the big picture, that there is some over-arching something going on, even though I don't know what it is. I've always found it more appealing to believe as if real that the universe is alive, and that I'm a part of it, and that there's something more than ping-pong balls going on here.

**I**n the crisis of belief that we're currently experiencing, we need a new myth, a story about the stories that makes a place for both science and mystical experience. This previous idea I have talked to you about helps me write a story to live with. But others will come up with different stories. I think of the White Crows of experience of being like shamanic initiations, that wake us up, that crack our old beliefs, that dismember us in some way. They are like a response to our own need for evolution, from crisis of belief to crisis of belief. I just need a big enough belief that I don't have to go through these crises of belief all the time. Ken Wilbur is the latest of writers that says that this is all about evolution, there's something inherent in the human enterprise that is evolutionary in the cosmic order of things.<sup>18</sup> I think as we evolve our beliefs and learn more about our capabilities as beings, we'll learn that perhaps Dumbo's magic feather came from a White Crow. Think about that one.

The Monroe Institute used to publish transcripts from their Pathfinder teams that went out into inner space to see what they could find. I read one that just stuck in my head. The Pathfinder team encountered a non-physical being that told them that on Earth, there were two forms of simultaneous evolution. One was vertical—the evolution of souls. That process was the one that this being had participated in, and he/she/it was now trans-dimensional, and transpersonal. The other evolution was described as horizontal, the evolution of the capabilities of humankind as humankind. It occurs to me that one story about human history is to see these two evolutions as sometimes in cooperation, and sometimes in competition. We've had maybe 500 years of the ascendancy of the horizontal, with science as its religion, and humanism as its

value structure. There's no God, no Goddess, only the random magic of molecules and fields of energy. Maybe what we're now ready for is the return of the other half of Truth. Both forces right now think they have the essence of the elephant.

Now that we've had our spiritual wake-up calls, now that our White Crows have come to visit us, and we've started on our path, there are some things left unsettled. I do want to address one of them—to what degree are we influenced by intelligence(s) beyond the physical. This is one of my favorite areas of speculation, so I need to tell one more story.

**O**ne day I was complaining to the channeled entities that guided my healer friend/mentor. I said, “. . . You know you really have not been much help to Elizabeth. She's got all these powers, but she was born into this awful family and she's been poor all her life. She is mostly illiterate. She's very inarticulate. Why didn't you give her more help, you know, to make her life easier?” And the channeled entity said, “Well, Dr. Wesch, we searched long and hard to find this body, with these particular characteristics. You might say that Elizabeth is a prototype of some human possibilities. By the way, her soul will be well-rewarded; she is a volunteer for this mission.” I said, “Oh. Well then, what are these characteristics?” thinking I might learn something important. They said, “Well, she has virtually perfect photographic memory and eidetic imagery. That way, when she “sees“ what we tell her to, it becomes real immediately.” I said, “Whoa, that's pretty good. What's the next one?” They said, “Well, as near as we can tell, she has virtually unlimited capacity to transmit the energy of love.” I said, “Oh. And are there others?” They said, “Yes. There's a final characteristic. She's not so smart that she asks a lot of questions, like you do.” <Laughter> Maybe our research is not going on alone. Maybe there are other scientists involved here, from another level.

In conclusion, I want to give you some final advice; that's an elder's function, you get to give advice. Avoid cynicism like the plague! There are other ways to handle disappointment. Whatever story you like about Reality is really only temporary; if it goes away, if it gets disproved, if you have to give it up, don't get cynical. Somebody once told me that every deep insight involves the death of a tooth-fairy. So, if you've had a lot of dead tooth-fairies, you're probably making progress. As best you can, keep faith with both your inner experiences

and your scientific background and aspirations. You can be a mystically-inclined scientist, or a scientifically-inclined mystic. You really can. We have living examples among us. I think Elmer Green is one, for example. <Applause>. Apparently some other people agree with me.

I was given a quote on the way out here from Chicago—it sort of just landed on me like another White Crow. It is from the Zen Master, Dogan, who brought Buddhism from China to Japan. His advice for reaching enlightenment was that it requires “profound doubt, profound faith, and profound perseverance.” I think science and systematic inquiry is the path of profound doubt, and we need it. I think the mystical, the way of the White Crow, is the path of profound faith, and we need it. The support for the perseverance in searching and practice, we have to supply ourselves and get from each other, and that’s what ISSSEEM is about. Thank you.

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