

BELIEF

With most men, unbelief in one thing springs from blind belief in another.

—G. C. Lichtenberg (1742-1799)

German physicist, writer

Belief represents a mental acceptance of, or a conviction concerning, the truth or actuality of something. As such, belief is bracketed by a mental dynamism that actively excludes competing beliefs. Facts to the contrary are often insufficient to alter strongly held beliefs. Nowhere is this seen more clearly in contemporary society than with beliefs regarding a truth or actuality of *psi* or other *anomalous experiences*. Despite a world literature replete with such descriptions of such events across both centuries and cultures, despite extensive scientific investigation across decades, and despite reports that events of this kind have now been experienced by the *majority* of individuals in our culture, there yet remains among many an energetic, vocal and skeptical resistance to accepting the truth or actuality of anomalous experiences. Only by addressing and ameliorating fears stimulated by paradigm shifts can change in belief be allowed to occur. Gentle persistence best describes the atmosphere in which real change occurs—confrontation may change behavior without effecting internal change.

In this issue we are drawn further along the path carpeted by mystery, carried and supported by methods of science. Jerry Wesch, in the 1996 ISSSEEM Presidential Address, *After the White Crow: Integrating Science and Anomalous Experience*, borrows from William James, that seminal American psychologist of a century ago, the metaphor of a “white crow” to describe our current bridging task. Through gentle, intriguing story-telling and analogy Wesch describes his walk along the path in a way that gives light, direction and advice to aid in our travels together. Here no question of truth or actuality arises, but merely a question of how best to integrate such experiences in our lives in the interest of growth.

The classic paper, *1896 Society for Psychical Research President's Address* by William James, provides startlingly contemporary background for the values-issues that we face in our field today. In concert with current belief is James' statement, "The spirit and principles of Science are mere affairs of method; there is nothing in them that need hinder Science from dealing successfully with a world in which personal forces are the starting point of the new effects."

In creative exemplification of modern methodology, *Towards a Complex Systems Model of Psi Performance* by Dean Radin and Jannine Rebman points to just how far conceptual and methodological advances in investigating anomalous phenomena have carried us beyond the Nineteenth Century. Application of computer technologies and training of "neural nets" allow more sensitive direction of patterned phenomena than descriptive or conventional statistical analysis of the past.

Finally, Douglas Richards, David McMillin, Carl Nelson and Eric Mein report upon a experimental investigation of a classical device, the Radial Appliance, whose use was frequently recommended by Edgar Cayce for improvement of circulation in the extremities. Comprised of both a double-blind controlled and self-controlled clinical study, the results provide some confirmatory evidence regarding the effect of the appliance on peripheral circulation.

Altogether these papers represent a challenge to conventional beliefs, and provide us an opportunity to examine our attitudes, and our mental flexibility. What are the "white crows" of our own experience, the inexplicable events that often channel our beliefs about "reality" in our lives. Why do we believe as we do, and how do our beliefs—however based in experience they may be—limit our ability to fully experience the next white crow experience and the one beyond that in its own terms, rather than imposing beliefs based on *past experience* to "explain" it. If through these considerations we come to more fully appreciate the exciting experience of the scientist in the moment of observation of truly new phenomena, our circumspection will be of value. If we come to experience through the eyes of the healer the satisfaction of bringing into "balance" energy that was not so before, our increased sensitivity will be of value. If all of us, with our multiple different facets and interests learn how to better explore our varying beliefs about anomalous experiences together, it will be of value.

As we watch the process unfold, it seems inevitable. Hmm. . . with that belief in mind, will we limit our observing, and miss something *truly* important?

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