

THE ETHICS OF MEDIUMSHIP

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I am often asked 'what is the state of mind in which one is most able to function as a sensitive'. I believe that the beginnings of this state lie in the development of an inner calm which is free from distraction or desire. The slightest effort to consciously produce evidence will inhibit this condition ... In mediumship the goal is not only to be at one with oneself, but with all else in the universe.

When Prof. C. G. Jung lectured before the Society for Psychical Research in London on July 4, 1919, he chose as his subject "The Psychological Foundations of Belief in Spirits." During the more than four decades that have passed, Jung whom Aldous Huxley has called the "Sage of Zurich" has given much additional thought to the psychodynamics of spiritualism and mediumship. It was also the subject of a discussion that I was privileged to have with Prof. Jung at Ascona, a few years ago; it gave him the opportunity to check his impressions and ideas with someone whose lifework has centered around mediumship -- and it gave me a chance to put many, many questions to Jung, most of which proved as puzzling to him as they were to me.

Whereas most men seem to become more set in their ways, and more conservative in their views as the years go by, Jung has happily remained ever-searching, ever-questioning. Thus, while he told his London audience in 1919 that he considered psychic phenomena purely as "exteriorized effects of unconscious complexes," he is much less dogmatic today. In that early address to the S.P.R. Jung said that he saw "no proof whatever of the existence of real spirits, and until such proof is forthcoming I must regard this whole territory as an appendix to psychology." Today, however, as his London lecture is republished in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960) Jung adds the following comments:

"After collecting psychological experiences from many people and many countries for fifty years, I no longer feel as certain as I did in 1919, when I wrote this sentence. To put it bluntly, I doubt whether an exclusively psychological approach can do justice to the phenomena in question. Not only the findings of parapsychology, but my own theoretical reflections, outlined in 'On the Nature of the Psyche,' have led me to certain postulates which touch on the realm of nuclear physics and the conception of the space-time continuum. This opens up the whole question of the transpsychic reality immediately underlying the psyche."

Jung boldly states the dilemma of modern science as it confronts apparent evidence of paranormal happenings. In all the intervening years, the possibility of man's survival of bodily death has failed to arouse widespread scientific curiosity. A set of dogmatic materialistically oriented explanations of the human condition remains the bible of physical and psychological sciences. Whatever research takes place -- and the Parapsychology Foundation, Inc., of which I am the President, seeks to throw some light in this direction -- is of necessity on a scale that is exceedingly small, compared with the magnitude of studies devoted to missiles, and the machines of war and destruction.

Prof Jung's intellectual evolution, from youthful skepticism to serene uncertainty, sets a worthwhile example for all of us. Glancing over my own earlier writings, I note that in the conclusion of "Adventures in the Supernormal," originally published about a quarter of a century ago, I wrote as follows: "If I say that I know that the dead survive, that communication with those who have gone beyond is possible and does occur, and that the human consciousness is capable of perception in other levels of experience, I know these things out of my own knowledge and experience." Would I state this concept in the same manner today? Well, not exactly. I have seen and heard a good deal since I first put these words on paper. I would now be inclined to say that I have "been in receipt of communications that would suggest human survival and mediumistic contact between the living and the dead."

My increased caution in speaking of life after death is directly linked with a heightened appreciation of the responsibility which a sensitive, like myself, has to all those who ponder the great question of survival. This responsibility is two-fold: it concerns those who are bereaved, and who seek refuge or sustenance in communication with those who have died; and those who are sincerely concerned with the significance of mediumistic phenomena as a key to a fuller understanding of man's mind and world, his philosophy, religion and science.

I am not one who assumes that the gift of mediumship necessarily brings with it greater insight into the phenomena of that mediumship. For some ten years, in the 1920's, I underwent rigorous training as a sensitive, under the guidance of Hewat McKenzie, who maintained the British College of Psychic Science. He was a strict disciplinarian and discouraged excessive curiosity on the part of mediums. McKenzie did not discourage social contact between mediums and sitters; he tried to screen out all information that might, through the medium's conscious or unconscious knowledge, seep into trance communications. I remember how McKenzie, as well as Sir Oliver Lodge, the Nobel Prize winning physicist and pioneer psychic researcher, cautioned me against devoting myself to any study of their writings. Although they were firmly convinced of the reality of the phenomena, as scientists they instinctively understood the danger to the medium whose "homework" might include the study of spiritualist concepts. Such a medium might well give back to the inquirer his own beliefs in an unconscious effort to be obliging. This is what psychologists now call "doctrinal compliance," when they refer to a patient's efforts to please the therapist by a too willing acceptance of specific psychological dogma. While I used to rebel on occasion, against McKenzie's restrictive regimen, I nevertheless recognized, even then, that mediumship requires special attitudes and codes of behavior.

Thus, when I speak of the ethics of mediumship, I do so with a high regard for the principles that McKenzie and other researchers expressed and translated into action. There is no question, and I feel sure that advanced psychologists will bear me out, that the death of a friend or a close relative leaves a person particularly wide open to a variety of impressions and reactions. For weeks and months, this great personal loss throws its shadow over the individual's existence: he may teeter between psychological withdrawal and escape; he may suffer spiritual damage or achieve a higher level of understanding of the relationship between life and death.

He may then seek the comfort and encouragement he used to get from this person's presence and advice. But such séance room encounters are charged with psychological

elements that are simply not present in everyday meetings. For a living person to speak to the departed is, no matter what, quite different from an ordinary conversation. We know that even things said over the telephone, and even more so in letters, may carry weight that they would not have in a face-to-face conversation.

Therefore, everything that the medium apparently communicates from a discarnate entity is given pseudo-omnipotent qualities by the person who receives it. Add to this the fact that the sitter has most likely suffered a loss which has created a great emotional void, a fierce hunger for reassurance, and you have a constellation that calls for extreme responsibility. Of this, the medium must be conscious. Yet, she must remain detached, she must resist being caught up in a whirlpool of sentiment, she must not let herself be pressured into "producing" phenomena, if only "for the good" of the bereaved person. That way lies disaster.

Too many inquirers are unable to control their desire to impose their will upon the medium, and it is here that the medium must also know strength. Surely, the role which spiritualism willingly assigns to the medium, as the "high priestess" of a body of truth, has sorely tempted many sensitives who have become tired of the open hostility of the scientific world. The need for approval is common to all mankind, whether sensitive or not. To insist that the medium exhibit a strength of character which the non-sensitive is not required to demonstrate, might seem too strict an injunction. Yet, this must be the case, if the medium wishes to develop his or her abilities to the fullest.

Much of the fraudulent production of phenomena is due to the excessive demands of inquirers and to the essential passivity of mediums. While we know very little about the psychodynamics of mediumship, we do know that the trance state, especially, is a passive one; the medium in trance is subject to influences akin to those of a person in a hypnotic state. It is therefore easy to understand that a person or group of persons almost ruthlessly eager for "something," for a "good piece of evidence," or simply for just another chat with "Mother," will create pressures that a medium may well be unable to resist -- and thus, consciously or unconsciously creates phenomena, custom-made, as it were.

This situation is disastrous for everyone concerned. Particularly where money changes hands, where a medium may be financially dependent upon the "success," so called, of her sittings, upon the satisfaction of the "customers," greed and fear are likely to take over. At the *British College of Psychic Science*, there was no financial contact between mediums and sitters; there was no need for a medium to "sing for her supper." Today, much of the flummery that goes on inside séance rooms is due to the fact that money changes hands, whether it be called a fee or a "love offering."

There is no question whatever that gifted mediums are capable of setting up psychological defenses that will prevent them from providing "evidence" where none exists. But it is necessary, I think, to point out without equivocation that public pressure for "results" is probably the singly most destructive factor in mediumistic phenomena. We hear, over and over again, of séances that are clearly rigged, that smack of cheap stage magic, collusion, and fakery. But who ever stops to think just where the guilt lies? I feel that the public must finally bear the greater part of this burden.

We have, in recent years, experienced an avalanche of books that cater to selfishness in

religious observances. Books with such titles as *"Pray Your Way to Success"* are indications of a spiritual illness from which this era suffers. When a man or woman comes to a medium, wishing to speak to an entity, only too often there are questions that refer to the purchase or sale of property, to inheritances and other material matters. Thus the greed which the sitter brings with him to the sitting may in turn infect the medium, creating an atmosphere which results in false phenomena.

But as long as the public does not change its attitude, it is up to the mediums themselves to adhere to an ethical code, such as Hewat McKenzie preached and practiced.

The medium will do well to withdraw herself from the ideas thrown out by the inquirer; she must regard herself as a mechanism, clear and simple, through which ideas flow. This will happen only when she takes little notice of the inquirer, but puts herself into a receptive mood. This is a mood that does not seek to prove things but accepts the flow of events and ideas to be perceived and known.

If the medium allows herself to be thus used, things will happen of themselves -- a technique old as wisdom itself, modern as Zen. One allows the feminine or perceptive principle of the unconscious to emerge and thus one is not swamped by the demanding consciousness of the self or the inquirer. This instructive feminine element is, according to Jung, the common property of all mankind. It cannot be coerced; it must be respected and nurtured.

Thus, if the medium respects herself, she does not hurry this process, the unconscious will of itself converge to produce an insight valuable in all shades of one's own life experience, and of a necessity it provides the mirror in which the spiritual sustenance reveals itself to bring release from self-consciousness, to strengthen the inner will of the being, and to finally aid others to sustain themselves.

I believe that mediumship need not be a breaking-down of the personality, but a state of wholeness. Thus does the secret of the integrated personality become at once an alertness that permits the self to be in step with the world of events. But it must also be passive enough to allow things to happen from within and at the same time to be capable of feeling, thought and action. One must learn to achieve passivity and calm. One represses nothing but permits the self to reveal itself in wholeness. One accepts the positive and negative sides of one's own nature to distinguish them and so set free within the self the permanent essence of personality.

I am often asked 'what is the state of mind in which one is most able to function as a sensitive'. I believe that the beginnings of this state lie in the development of an inner calm which is free from distraction or desire. The slightest effort to consciously produce evidence will inhibit this condition. What is needed is a unique contemplation, one in which a perfect union of the senses occurs, creating an inner freedom in which the mind is alive to its inner promptings as well as the outer scene which confronts it. It is quite the opposite of the Eastern view of contemplation which demands the withdrawal and isolation of the mind from all objects and persons. In mediumship the goal is not only to be at one with oneself, but with all else in the universe.