

Assessing Modern Psychic Phenomena

Ron Rhodes

A recent Gallup poll revealed that 32 percent of Americans believe in some sort of paranormal activity. The same poll revealed that 38 percent of Americans believe ghosts or spirits can come back and visit people on earth.¹ That means over one third of Americans—over 100 million Americans—believe in ghosts. Moreover, 73 percent of America’s teenagers have participated in psychic related activities, with more than seven million claiming to have personally encountered a spirit entity.² No longer can the paranormal be considered a fringe idea.

Understanding the World of Psychic Phenomena

Today’s paranormal landscape is littered with unique words that may seem like a foreign language to many people. It therefore makes good sense to briefly define some key terms.

The word *occult* comes from the Latin word *occultus* and literally means “hidden,” “secret,” or “concealed.” The term refers to hidden or secret knowledge, to that which is beyond the range of ordinary human knowledge.³ The word *paranormal* is similar, referring to that which goes *above or beyond* the normal, beyond what a person can sense with his five senses.

A *psychic* is a person who can allegedly perceive and interpret the

high-speed frequency world of the spirits. As a backdrop, psychics believe the spirit world vibrates at a faster frequency than the material world. These spirits allegedly send communications faster than living people are accustomed to. Psychics claim to have the ability to discern these rapid-fire messages.

A psychic *medium* is an individual who claims the ability to reach through the alleged thin veil that separates the spiritual and physical worlds, attune to the fast vibrations of the spirit world, and communicate messages from individual spirits on the Other Side to people on earth. Psychic John Edward says, “As I speed up and they slow down, across the great divide between our two worlds we meet somewhere in the middle and communicate.”⁴ The term *medium* suggests that the person is a “go-between”—that is, a *mediator* or *middleman* between the spiritual and physical worlds.

Psychics often utilize various forms of *divination*. This word refers to the attempt to foresee or foretell future events, thereby discovering hidden or secret knowledge. Divination was commonplace in biblical times (Deut. 18:11; 1 Sam. 28:3,9), often taking the form of witchcraft (Num. 22:7; 23:23; Josh. 13:22), interpreting omens (Gen. 30:7; 44:5), or astrology (Dan. 1:20; 2:2,10,27; 4:7; 5:7,11,15). Modern psychics often claim to have a variety of paranormal powers, including:

Telepathy—the receiving or sending of thoughts to another person.

Precognition—involving a supernatural knowledge of the future.

Clairvoyance—literally, “clear vision,” the ability to see something beyond natural means about the past, present, or future.

Clairaudience—literally, “clear hearing,” the ability to hear, via the “psychic ear,” various sounds, names, and voices that vibrate on a higher frequency in the spirit realm.

Clairsentience—literally, “clear feeling,” the ability to perceive a pro-

jected emotion from nearby or from another (spiritual or astral) dimension, and experience that emotional sensation within the medium's actual body.

Psychometry—the ability to psychically sense the history of an object—a brush or a photograph, for example.

Automatic handwriting—the ability to write words without apparent awareness, the source allegedly being a dead person's spirit or a paranormal entity from the etheric dimension.

As we explore the psychic attempt to contact the dead, additional unique terms emerge. *Spiritism* embraces the belief that the human personality continues to exist after death, and that these personalities can be contacted in whatever spiritual plane or dimension they are in.

Another word for spiritism is *spiritualism*. From a historical perspective, Spiritualism as a religion is perhaps the oldest religious cult in existence. Every known civilization has practiced it to one degree or another. Historical studies reveal mediums being mentioned in many ancient sources, including the Bible and the literature of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Chinese, and Greeks.⁵

Most spiritists believe that each human being on earth has a *spirit guide* who provides wisdom from the great beyond. Psychics claim to be in conscious contact with their spirit guides. Lesser attuned human beings say their spirit guides typically manifest their presence via a hunch or sudden inclination to do something.

Most psychics explain spirit guides in terms of the process of reincarnation. The idea is that when a person dies, he or she goes to the *Other Side* (through a tunnel, into the "white light," roughly equated with heaven) where communion with other spirits is enjoyed. After an indeterminate time—ten years, 100 years, 500 years, or whatever—each spirit allegedly incarnates into another human body. Before incarnating into another body, the person allegedly asks someone he or she trusts on the *Other Side* to be his or her spirit guide.

Some spirits—ghosts—do not enter the Other Side. Psychics claim that at death the majority of spirits proceed through a tunnel into the “white light” (the Other Side) following the moment of death. Some, however, allegedly refuse to enter the tunnel and choose instead to remain on earth, hanging around for any variety of reasons. For example, psychics say ghosts may think they are still alive, and hence choose to live on earth. Or ghosts may stay behind to avenge their murder, or perhaps to initiate contact with living loved ones. In any event, many people today claim to have encountered a ghostly apparition, or at least to have uncovered evidence that their house is haunted.

The Psychic View of the Afterlife

Psychics claim that following the moment of death, there is no judgment and no punishment. There is, however, a *life review* that takes place in which people see how they affected other people, whether it be positive or negative. Psychic James Van Praagh writes: “When someone passes over, they first attend a life review, during which they relive every single moment of their life, both the good and the bad. After this, many spirits feel a sense of regret over some of their actions or things that they said during their lifetime.”⁶

Psychics claim there are different levels (or planes) of heaven, and that people go to these different levels depending on how they lived their lives on earth. Those who excel in life and attain high spiritual awareness will allegedly reside on a higher level in heaven, whereas lesser evolved souls will reside on a lower level. There is a reciprocal relationship between life on earth and the afterlife.⁷

A common theme of psychics is that all religions are welcome in heaven. Indeed, in heaven there are said to be beautiful temples, churches, and synagogues that share the countryside, with altars of every religion, all coexisting in peace and respect.⁸ Psychic Sylvia Browne exults: “Methodists and Buddhists happily and knowledgeably pray side by side at Judaic services, Catholics and Muslims are utterly comfortable sing-

ing hymns of praise with the Shinto monks and the Baha'i. Joining to glorify God hand in hand is natural, necessary, and nurturing, as essential to our survival as the beating of our hearts."⁹

As believers in reincarnation, psychics teach that eventually all souls reincarnate into another body. The backdrop is that psychics believe that earthly life is a school. Part of our education on earth involves the law of karma. In simplest form, this law states that if one does good things in this life, he or she will build up good karma and hence be born in a better condition in the next life. If one does bad things in this life, he or she will build up bad karma and hence be born in a worse state in the next life. This means that what may appear to be an accident or even a natural disaster on earth is, in reality, not a chance occurrence.¹⁰ All things are based on karmic obligations. Everything happens for a purpose. "Your illness, or loss, or predicament is a part of your soul's growth," Van Praagh affirms.¹¹

Psychics tell us that every time we incarnate into a new body from the Other Side, we decide *when*, *where*, and *why*. We allegedly choose to incarnate and come to earth in order to learn very specific lessons—to grow spiritually.¹² Before incarnating, every person discusses his or her soul's growth with a highly evolved group of beings known as the Etheric Council. Through advice from these highly evolved beings, we decide on specific lessons to learn and the karmic debts we want to balance during this lifetime, which are then recorded on a psychic chart. Once we incarnate, our Master guide—a spirit guide—makes sure we stay on track.¹³

Immediately before we leave the Other Side to incarnate on earth, we allegedly have a personal meeting with the Messiah of our choice—whether Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad, or some other religious leader. They offer final spiritual counsel prior to our departure.¹⁴

Once we incarnate, we allegedly go through life living out what is contained on our chart, learning important lessons along the way. Once the process is complete and we die, we cross over to the Other Side yet again, where we eventually make preparations for *yet another* incarnation

to learn *even further* lessons. On and on the process goes, as we evolve to ever higher levels of spiritual attainment.

The Comforting Goal of Modern Psychics

Almost without exception, modern psychics claim that the primary reason the spirits want to make contact with the living is in order to assure their living loved ones that they are okay. The dead can allegedly see their loved ones mourning over their deaths, and so they want to bring comfort by conveying that death is not the end, and that they are in a good place.¹⁵ Once living people hear from their dead relatives or friends via a psychic medium, everything changes in their perspective. “With the knowledge of no death, they are free to live life. In an instant, a life overwrought with grief becomes a life ready to live each day and each moment with newness.”¹⁶

Psychics claim that “the biggest fear mankind has is of death. If we can abolish the fear of death, we can begin to live life to the fullest.”¹⁷ Van Praagh says that “most people who come to me want closure with a loved one that has passed over or need proof that there is life after death. What I supply is the evidential detail. That’s what helps them realize there is no death.”¹⁸

Psychic Sign Language

Psychics often claim they receive only thoughts, feelings, and images from the spirits—something that may be likened to “psychic sign language.” Often these thoughts, feelings, and images are symbolic. The more fluent the psychic medium becomes in understanding the symbols, psychic John Edward claims, the easier it is for him or her to understand what the spirit is seeking to communicate.¹⁹ For example, if during a reading Edward senses a tightness in his chest, he may interpret that as meaning that the person died from a heart attack. If during a

reading Edward senses blackness in the chest area, he may interpret that as meaning that the person died of lung cancer.²⁰

Edward says he never hears conversational language. He says people sometimes get the wrong idea that he is simply repeating what he has verbally heard from a spirit. In reality, he claims he is interpreting and delivering symbolic information as fast as he can keep up with it. "I get scenes in my head without the sound. I so wish I were hearing voices, but I don't. They're thoughts."²¹

Edward claims that if he were able to hear conversational language, he would be a lot more accurate than he is.²² He says that if there are mistakes in communication, it is only because he is misinterpreting the thoughts, feelings, and images.

The "Fishing" Technique of Some Psychics

My personal investigation of psychics emboldens me to say that deception is very, very common among them. More specifically, there is substantial evidence that many psychic mediums today "fish" for information during psychic readings. For example, a psychic might ask a television studio audience something like this: "Do any of you have a grandmother whose name starts with S? Or R? Or maybe D?" (They keep mentioning common letters until they elicit a response.) Another common fishing line might go like this: "I am sensing a female figure. It's either a mom or a mother figure who has crossed over to the Other Side." It does not take a rocket scientist to recognize that a huge percentage of the American public has a mom or mother figure who has died.²³ Or the psychic medium might say, "I am sensing the presence of a male who is older than you." (Everyone knows an older male who has died.) Such lines are bound to generate significant response in a large studio audience. Once the psychic has received a response, he can then fish for other pertinent information.

For example, a psychic medium might fish for information relating to how a person died. When speaking to a client about the death of the

client's father, the psychic medium might say: "I'm sensing a pain in the chest area." If he receives a positive nod, he may ask if the father died of a heart attack. (Obviously, many people in the United States die of a heart attack.) If the psychic is wrong about a heart attack, he may say he senses a shadow in the body, and then ask if the father died of cancer. Or he might ask about the head area—perhaps a stroke. Because heart attacks, cancer, and strokes are statistically the most common causes of death in our culture, the psychic stands a good chance of success in nailing a person's cause of death in this way.²⁴ Many people today seem gullible to such deception.

In Some Cases—Genuine Contact

Sometimes I talk to Christian critics of psychic mediums who say all psychics are frauds. I've spoken to others who are sure that all psychics are in contact with demonic spirits. I suggest that the more balanced assessment is that both fraudulent activity *and* demonic activity best explains what is really going on in the broader world of psychics.

On the one hand, there can be no doubt that many psychic mediums often utilize a fishing technique to derive information from clients. Moreover, I think it is hard to deny that some psychic mediums cheat, passing off information as derived from heaven when in reality it was derived via research prior to the session (some psychics even utilize the services of private investigators). Based on what I've been able to discover, I would guesstimate that well over half of what goes on among psychic mediums is fraudulent in some way.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to conclude that *all* psychic phenomena involves hoaxes. I am convinced that some psychics engage in genuine contact with spirit entities—but the spirit entities *are not* departed human beings, as psychics claim, but rather *demonic* spirits.²⁵ My old colleague Walter Martin is, I believe, correct in his assessment that "not *all* psychic or spiritistic phenomena can be exposed as fraudulent. There is a spiritual dimension that cannot be ignored. Authentic spirit-

ists draw their power from the one the Bible calls ‘a roaring lion’ who seeks ‘whom he may devour’ (1 Peter 5:8), who is Satan.”²⁶ One psychic I spent several hours observing in person, Kevin Ryerson (Shirley MacLaine’s psychic), gave rather convincing evidence of genuine spirit contact—that is, contact with an *evil* spirit. From such spirit contact come many “revelations,” including that there is no sin, no death, no hell, and that all people of all religions are welcome in heaven (see 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:1).

Let us not forget that in 2 Corinthians 11:14 the apostle Paul sternly warned that “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” There is substantial scriptural evidence that Satan is a masterful counterfeiter. For example, Satan has his own *church*—the “synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9). He has his own *ministers*—ministers of darkness that bring false sermons (2 Cor. 11:4,5). He has formulated his own *system of theology*—called “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 2:24). Satan has his own *throne* (Rev. 13:2) and his own *worshippers* (13:4). He inspires *false Christs* and self-constituted *messiahs* (Matt. 24:4,5), employing *false teachers* to introduce “destructive heresies” (2 Pet. 2:1). He sends out *false prophets* (Matt. 24:11) and sponsors *false apostles* who imitate the true (2 Cor. 11:13). In view of this, while some psychics may genuinely think they are in contact with departed humans, there is good biblical reason to suspect they are in contact with deceptive demonic spirits, especially since many doctrines communicated by these spirits directly contradict the Bible (1 Tim. 4:1).

The Accuracy Rate of Psychic Predictions

The history of psychic predictions is riddled with failure. For example, not a single psychic foresaw what must be considered the most important and defining event of 2001: the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City. Since then, there has been a preponderance of false predictions. In 2004, major psychics made many false predictions, including that our troops would be out of Iraq that year, Martha Stewart

would not go to jail, and North Korea would launch a nuclear attack. In 2005, major psychics made many other false predictions, including that our troops would be out of Iraq *for sure* that year, the giants would win the series against Cleveland in game seven, and that all the miners associated with the 2005 West Virginia miner's tragedy would live (all but one died). They had a similar dismal record for 2006.

In one highly publicized case, Sylvia Browne was asked by despondent parents the state of their missing child. They asked if the child was still alive. "No," Sylvia said. As the mother broke down in tears, Sylvia informed the parents that young Shawn was buried beneath two boulders. They wept inconsolably, utterly crushed with grief. Four years later, Shawn was found alive and well with his abductor, Michael Devlin, in Kirkwood, Missouri.²⁷

Of course, on their television shows, many psychics seem spot-on accurate. Viewers are generally unaware, however, that each half-hour episode of John Edward's *Crossing Over* TV show requires six hours of taping. Why so? Because the editors of the program must carefully pluck successes from a whole mass of misses that are set forth during the taping.²⁸ Further, for several hours prior to the actual taping, some of Edward's assistants socialize with audience members, leading some critics to suspect that they are engaged in information-gathering.

What about those times when psychics *do* seem to be accurate in a prediction? Several observations are in order. First, an occasional "hit" in a sea of "misses" is not impressive. Second, some accurate "hits" are due to the cards being stacked in the psychic's favor—such as a psychic who predicted continued Palestinian hostility toward Israel. Third, some accurate hits are nothing more than lucky guesses. For example, I could "predict" that American troops will be out of Iraq in 2009, *and it could happen*.

Ready with Excuses

When psychics make a wrong prediction or set forth inaccurate in-

formation during a psychic reading, they always seem to have an excuse ready at hand. For example, when psychic Char Margolis appeared on *Larry King Live*, she made a number of obvious errors. Covering herself, she said these errors may be due to “trickster energy” (trickster spirits).²⁹

When psychic James Van Praagh had some major misses on a different *Larry King Live* broadcast, psychic John Edward (also on the show) suggested that the information must be meant for someone else, either in the listening audience, a friend, coworker, or relative, someone in another building nearby, or perhaps someone in the past or in the future, known or unknown. With this kind of latitude, psychics can apparently never be wrong.³⁰

In quite a number of cases, psychics describe dead loved ones in ways that seem foreign to the memories of the living. Psychics have their excuses ready. They claim that people undergo changes once they “cross over” to the Other Side. When a person dies, he or she sheds the human body along with all worldly limitations. Physical weaknesses are gone. Emotional burdens dissolve. Our negative aspects soften, and our positive aspects become highlighted. For this reason, psychics advise their clients not to expect their loved ones to be exactly as they were while alive on earth. This is a very handy excuse, since psychics often get personal details wrong about those on the Other Side.

A Christian Assessment

There are quite a number of points that can be made in assessing modern psychic and ghost phenomena from a Christian viewpoint. Because of space limitations, I will summarize only the most important of these. Those interested in a more substantive treatment may consult my book, *The Truth Behind Ghosts, Mediums, and Psychic Phenomena*.³¹

The Truth About Ghosts

A thorough investigation into ghostly phenomena, involving years of research, leads me to suggest the following:

Ghost Phenomena Is Predominantly Experience-Based. One cannot help but note that much of the so-called evidence for ghost phenomena is based on experience and feelings, not on objective data. It is fair to demand that if one is going to make extraordinary claims, one must back up those claims with extraordinary evidence, not mere feelings or experiences.

Many ghost reports involve a person's peripheral vision. Experts tell us that peripheral vision is very sensitive to motion. Peripheral vision, of course, does not focus on specific shapes but rather simply detects motion. Some people, when they sense a random motion outside of their focused view, jump to the conclusion that a ghost just went by. In reality, it may be as simple to explain as a car driving by that caused a brief reflection of light to shine into the house. *Experience can be deceiving.*

Another problem is that people's experiences may not necessarily be accurately reported. There is an all-too-common tendency for people to embellish what they have experienced, often adding sensational details to make their stories seem more interesting and fascinating. (This tendency has been documented in relation to the UFO reports of Roswell citizens.³²) This tendency makes it very difficult to trust many of the accounts people have given through the years of alleged encounters with ghosts.

Awakening from Sleep and Ghost Phenomena. A key factor that would seem to undermine many reports of ghost activity is that they often involve a person coming out of a deep sleep state. When a person wakes up from sleep, his cognitive and perceptual abilities may be on the weaker side, and he may think he is experiencing something which is in fact not real. It is even possible for a person to wake from a dream, and still think he hears voices in the house. Once the person completely wakes up, such strange experiences vanish.

Night Fears. Some people might have a night fear and wrongly at-

tribute it to ghostly or paranormal phenomena. During a night fear, people can experience a variety of symptoms, including shortness of breath, rapid breathing, irregular heartbeat, sweating, nausea, a sense of detachment from reality, and overall feelings of dread. A night fear involves an intense fear of something that poses no actual danger. Some people, in such a state, may wrongly interpret their experience as a ghost haunting their house.

Misinterpretations Are All-Too-Easy. A number of people have claimed house hauntings when in reality they have probably just misinterpreted the data. Claiming a ghostly intrusion simply because an item seems to be missing from the refrigerator or because a painting in the living room is suddenly hanging a little crooked is unconvincing.

The Power of Suggestion and Conditioning. An interesting psychological phenomenon is that people tend to see what they have been conditioned to see. At the height of the European witch craze that took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—a situation in which people had become *programmed* to see witches—there were virtually thousands of reports of flying witches. “I wouldn’t have *seen* it if I hadn’t *believed* it” seems a fitting twist on an old maxim.

In like manner, because of the many movies, television shows, and books that people have been exposed to about ghostly phenomena, one could argue that people have become *programmed* to expect the paranormal. Hence, when a person’s peripheral vision detects movement, or perhaps a person experiences feeling a chill, that person may jump to the conclusion that a ghost may be present.

Fraudulent Claims. Researchers have uncovered a number of fraudulent claims, especially as related to ghost photography. I have personally showed alleged ghost photographs to a professional photographer, who immediately commented on how gullible people can be. He noted it would take little skill to accurately reproduce such “ghost” photographs using common photographic techniques.

The Connection to Occultism. One might get the idea from reading the above that I dismiss *all* alleged ghost encounters as either fraudulent, a misinterpretation of the data, sheer subjectivism (“I feel like I’m being

watched”), or something experienced upon awakening from deep sleep. This is not the case, however.

While I believe there is good reason to suspect that *many* alleged ghost encounters can be explained in this way, I also believe there are cases in which people are genuinely encountering a spirit entity—though, as noted previously, *not a dead human*. I believe some people are encountering *demonic* spirits (see 1 John 4:1; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). It is highly revealing that many who claim to have encountered such spirit entities have some prior involvement in the occult, such as spiritism, necromancy, séances, or perhaps even playing with a Ouija board. I have observed over many years that such occultic involvement invariably leads to spirit contact.

Dead Humans—Not Available for Earth Visits

The Bible sets forth substantial evidence that dead humans are not available for earth visits as “ghosts.” Death for the believer involves his or her spirit departing from the physical body and immediately going into the presence of the Lord in heaven (Phil. 1:21-23). This is why, when Stephen was being put to death by stoning, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). Second Corinthians 5:8 confirms that to be “away from the body” is to be “at home with the Lord.” The point is, *departed Christians are not still on earth but are with the Lord in heaven, where they remain in intimate perpetual fellowship with Him.*

For the unbeliever, death holds grim prospects. At death the unbeliever’s spirit departs from the body and goes not to heaven but to a place of great suffering, *where they are involuntarily confined, and not permitted to contact the living* (Luke 16:19-31). Second Peter 2:9 tells us that the Lord knows how “to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.” The point is, *the departed unrighteous are not still on earth, nor do they have access to earth!*

Hence, whatever people think they are encountering at alleged haunted houses and hotels is most certainly *not* the spirits of dead peo-

ple walking around. If a person is encountering any spirit entity at all, it is a *demonic* spirit.

Heaven—For Believers Only

Heaven is the splendid eternal abode of the righteous—that is, those who have trusted in Christ for salvation and have therefore been *made* righteous by His atoning sacrifice. Only those who believe in Christ are “heirs” of the eternal kingdom (Gal. 3:29; 4:28-31; Titus 3:7; James 2:5). The righteousness of God that leads to life in heaven is available “through faith in Jesus Christ *for all those who believe*” (Rom. 3:21, emphasis added). Clearly, heaven is for believers in Jesus Christ, not for all human beings indiscriminately.

Other religions *do not* lead to God or to heaven. The one sin for which God judged the people of Israel more severely than any other was that of participating in heathen religions. Again and again the Bible implies and states that God hates, despises, and utterly rejects anything associated with heathen religions and practices (e.g., Dan. 1:20; 2:2,10,27; 4:7; 5:7,11,15). Those who follow such idolatry are not regarded as groping their way to God but rather as having turned their backs on Him, following the ways of darkness. The *only* means of salvation, and entrance into heaven, is faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Judgment Follows Death

Contrary to the comforting idea taught by psychics that all people will face a non-threatening “life review” after death, Scripture soberly warns that all people—both Christians and non-Christians—will face God’s judgment. More specifically, Christians will one day stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:8-10; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 2 Cor. 5:10), at which their lives will be examined in regard to the things done while in the body. This judgment has nothing to do with whether or not the

Christian will remain saved, but rather has to do with the reception or loss of rewards based on how one lived as a Christian.

The horrific judgment unbelievers face is the Great White Throne judgment, which leads to their being cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). Christ is the divine Judge, and those that are judged are the unsaved dead of all time. Those who face Christ at this judgment will be judged on the basis of their works (vss. 12-13), not only to justify their condemnation but to determine the degree to which each person should be punished throughout eternity in hell.

Reincarnation—A False Doctrine

Reincarnation, a foundational belief of psychics, is problematic on many levels. For example, if the purpose of karma is to make human nature better, why has there not been a noticeable improvement in human nature after all the millennia of reincarnations?

One could also legitimately argue that the teaching of reincarnation and karma tends to make people passive toward social evil and injustice. In reality, belief in reincarnation serves as a strong motivation *not* to be a “good neighbor” and lend a helping hand. After all, if one encounters a suffering person, it must be assumed this person is suffering *precisely because* he or she has not yet paid off the prescribed karmic debt for the sins committed in a previous life. If one should help such a suffering person, it will only serve to guarantee that the person will be born in a worse state in the next life to pay off the karmic debt that was supposed to be paid off in the present life. Further, the “good neighbor” would also accumulate more bad karmic debt for interfering with the law of karma in the suffering person’s life. It is a no-win scenario.

Certainly reincarnationists grossly underestimate the seriousness of the sin problem (Matt. 9:12; 12:34; 15:14; 23:16-26; Mark 1:15; 7:20-23; Luke 11:13,42-52; 15:10; 19:10; John 3:19-21; 8:34; 12:35-46). Indeed, the reincarnational belief that man can solve his own sin problem with a little help from karma (throughout many lifetimes) is itself a manifesta-

tion of the blindness that is part and parcel of human sin. We do not need a mere *karmic tune-up*; we need a *brand new engine* (new life from Jesus—John 3:1-5).

Scripture indicates that each human being *lives once* as a mortal on earth, *dies once*, and then faces *judgment* (Heb. 9:27). He does not have a second chance by reincarnating into another body. Scripture indicates that at death believers in the Lord Jesus go to heaven (2 Cor. 5:8) while unbelievers go to a place of punishment (Luke 16:19-31). Moreover, Jesus taught that people decide their eternal destiny in a single lifetime (Matt. 25:46). This is precisely why the apostle Paul emphasized that “now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

All Forms of Occultism—Condemned

While some psychic mediums, such as Sylvia Browne, claim they have a gift from the Holy Spirit, the utter folly of such a claim is evident in the fact that the Bible harshly condemns *all* forms of occultism, divination, and sorcery. Leviticus 19:26 commands, “Do not practice divination or sorcery.” Leviticus 19:31 instructs, “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them.” The Old Testament is clear that a person who consorts with familiar spirits is cursed by God (Lev. 19:31; 20:6). So heinous was this sin against God in Old Testament times that sorceresses were to be put to death (Exod. 22:18). We read in Leviticus 20:27, “A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.”

Second Kings 21:6 tells us that Manasseh “consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.” By contrast, “Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law. . . .” (2 Kings 23:24).

In 1 Samuel 28:3 we are told that Saul rightly “expelled the medi-

ums and spiritists from the land.” Later, however, we read that “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD, and even consulted a medium for guidance” (1 Chron. 10:13).

In Scripture, God categorically condemns *all* spiritistic activities as a heinous sin against Him. Deuteronomy 18:10–11 is clear: “Let no one be found among you . . . who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD.” Scholar Stafford Wright, in his book *Christianity and the Occult*, examined all such Old Testament passages on spiritism and concluded: “It is beyond doubt that the Old Testament bans any attempt to contact the departed. This is true of the law, the historical books, and the prophets. Is there the slightest sign that the New Testament lifts the ban?”³³

The Danger of Trances and Altered States

Psychic mediums often go into an altered state of consciousness when opening themselves up to spirits on the Other Side. Researchers have noted that such altered states can lead to harmful consequences. Indeed, Christian scholar Kenneth Boa has documented an increasing number of reports regarding people who have been harmed by such altered states.³⁴ Leon Otis of Stanford Research Institute has likewise documented that some who engage in altered states of consciousness develop increased anxiety, confusion, and depression.³⁵ It has also been found that the severity of symptoms is directly correlated with the length of time the person was in an altered state.³⁶ Researcher Gary Schwartz has documented that too much deep meditation—leading to an altered state—can hinder logical thought processes.³⁷ Researcher Arnold Ludwig found that “as a person enters or is in an ASC [altered state of consciousness], he often experiences fear of losing his grip on reality, and losing his self-control.”³⁸ These facts alone ought to be enough to dissuade people from wanting to increase their psychic skills, as today’s primetime psychics encourage them to do in their bestselling books.

What About the Medium of Endor?

Psychics and spiritists sometimes argue that support for their practices may be found in the Bible. They often refer to King Saul's experience with the medium at Endor as a proof that spiritism is acceptable (1 Sam. 28).

The biblical account of the medium at Endor is quite controversial, and Christians have expressed different views. A minority believe the medium worked a miracle by demonic powers and actually brought Samuel back from the dead. In support of this view, there are certain passages that seem to indicate that demons have the power to perform lying signs and wonders (Matt. 7:22; 2 Cor. 11:14; 2 Thes. 2:9,10; Rev. 16:14). This view is unlikely, however, since Scripture also reveals that death is final (Heb. 9:27), the dead cannot return (2 Sam. 12:23; Luke 16:24–27), and demons cannot usurp or overpower God's authority over life and death (Job 1:10–12).

A second view is that the medium did not really bring up Samuel from the dead, but a demonic spirit simply impersonated the prophet. Those who hold to this view note that certain verses indicate that demons can deceive people who try to contact the dead (Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:11; 1 Chron. 10:13). This view is unlikely, however, because the passage affirms that Samuel did in fact return from the dead, that he provided a prophecy that actually came to pass, and that it is unlikely that demons would have uttered God's truth, since the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44).

A third view is that God sovereignly and miraculously allowed Samuel's spirit to appear in order to rebuke Saul for his sin. Samuel's spirit did not appear as a result of the medium's powers (for indeed, no human has the power to summon dead humans—Luke 16:24–27; Heb. 9:27), but only because God sovereignly brought it about. This view is supported by the fact that Samuel actually returned from the dead (1 Sam. 28:14), and this caused the medium to shriek with fear (see vs. 12). The medium's cry of astonishment indicates that this appearance of Samuel was not the result of her usual tricks.

That God allowed Samuel's spirit to appear on this one occasion should not be taken to mean that mediums have any real power to summon the dead. God had a one-time purpose for this one-time special occasion. This passage is therefore *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. That is, it simply *describes* something that happened historically. It does not *prescribe* something that people should expect in the future.

Psychics Beware!

Contrary to what psychics may claim, they are playing with fire when they engage in contact with spirit entities. Even psychics and spiritists themselves acknowledge that there are evil spirit entities or "evil energies" out there. That is why they try to take steps to protect themselves.

Marcia Montenegro, a personal acquaintance of the author, is a former psychic and occultist who is now a Christian. From her many years of involvement in occultism, she recalls the dangers:

As this writer's psychic abilities expanded, so did the frightening experiences. Many of this writer's friends and associates in the occult often had similar experiences. In fact, it is common practice for a psychic to call on benevolent protective forces or to visualize "white light" (supposedly for protection) before practicing a psychic technique, doing a reading or spirit contact. What do they think they are protecting themselves from? By doing this, the psychics acknowledge the existence of evil or harmful beings, but how do they know these beings are not disguising themselves as benevolent spirits or guides? What law says a white light is a barrier to evil entities? Why would such a light keep out any spirits? Maybe the evil entities have been laughing all these years at this flimsy "protection" as they fed false information to the psychics and pretended to be helpful.³⁹

I think Montenegro is right on target. Psychics are being duped by evil spirits. These spirits have had virtually thousands of years of practice in duping human beings, and they know how to put on a good disguise. Their goal is to lead the living to believe that death is not to be feared, that death is a simple transition, that all people—regardless of what religion they subscribe to—cross over into the Other Side, and that one need not trust in Christ for the joys of heaven (1 Tim. 4:1).

Make no mistake about it, the powers of darkness *hate* Jesus Christ with a seething hatred, and they will do anything they can to deceive people away from believing in Him. *The deception is enormous, it is hideous, and its scope continues to escalate with every passing day!*

Notes

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4. John Edward, *After Life: Answers from the Other Side* (New York, NY: Princess Books, 2003), xvi.
5. See, for example, Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, ed. Ravi Zacharias (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 263.
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7. Dru Sefton, "Van Praagh: Steering the Mediumship," *Kansas City Star*, May 17, 1998, Internet edition.
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9. Browne, *Life on the Other Side*, 122.
10. James Van Praagh, *Talking to Heaven: A Medium's Message of Life After Death* (New York, NY: Signet, 1997), 104.
11. James Van Praagh, *Heaven and Earth: Making the Psychic Connection* (New York, NY: Pocket

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12. John Edward, *One Last Time: A Psychic Medium Speaks to Those We Have Loved and Lost* (New York, NY: Berkley Books, 1999), 158-59.
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 14. Browne, *Life on the Other Side*, 218.
 15. "James Van Praagh—Exploring the Other Side," *Venture Inward*, June 1, 2005, Internet edition.
 16. Van Praagh, *Talking to Heaven*, 193.
 17. Stephanie Schorow, "Spirited Discussion," *The Boston Herald*, May 11, 1998, Internet edition.
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 27. Jon Ronson, "Sylvia Browne: Is She for Real?" *The Guardian*, October 27, 2007, Internet edition.
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 32. See Art Levine, "A Little Less Balance, Please," *U.S. News and World Report*, July 14, 1997, 56.
 33. Stafford Wright, *Christianity and the Occult* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1971), 112.

34. Boa, 163.
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38. Arnold Ludwig, *Altered States of Consciousness*, 16; cited in Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Answers to Tough Questions* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1994), 83.
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