

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet  
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Editor: Kent Harker

DOUSING THOSE DOWSERS  
by Don Henvick

I'm minding my own business one evening when a call comes in from Bill Bennetta wanting to know if I'm up for a new project. Is the Pope Polish? Bill, educator-type that he is, has steam coming out his ears about a course being offered by Santa Rosa Junior College. The J.C., ever on the lookout to make an extra buck or two, is offering a non-credit course in "Dowsing, The Art of Finding."

The college administration figures it's kosher to lend their name and facilities to the teaching of any kinda junk just so long as they print a teeny disclaimer in their catalogue saying the Secretary will disavow any knowledge of this course if someone is killed or captured. Bill figures that peddling "respectability-by-association" is more the activity of young women engaged in questionable night services out on the street corners of the Tenderloin.

Well, anyway, Bill wants to take a crack at this course. The instructor will conveniently pack thousands of years of dowsing miracles into four hours on a Saturday morning. Not only will we be regaled by a dowser who has been a guest lecturer at the parapsychology dept. of Sonoma State U., but we will learn how to dowse, too! Bill has lined up a hydrologist, Gene Boudreau, who has all the poop on the dearly-held notions about water witching that have kept the dowsers pointing their sticks lo these many years.

The plan is for us to sign up for the course, catch the instructor in a couple of whoppers and try to maneuver him into a real test of his skills. Then Bill will send the college a letter telling them they ought to be ashamed of themselves pawning off this stuff as education. Bill says, "We'll be doing a public service."

I ask, "Will it be fun?" When he says sure, I say, "Count me in."

We send in our registration and cogitate on the problems we've set for ourselves. None of us have seen this guy teach and we don't know how he structures his class or whether he will be in the mood to tolerate a bunch of skeptics standing up in his class and telling him where to get off. Even if we don't get thrown out on our wiseacre ears, our only audience is likely to be true believers, and I doubt they paid their money expecting to hear that

it's a bunch of hooley.

We figure our best hope is to keep a low profile and give the guy plenty of rope with which to hang himself, keep a complete record (including tape recording) of what's said and done, and then work him over in print. Of course, maybe this dowser will be the greatest thing since sliced bread and we can kiss our \$11,000 reward good bye.

September 19 dawns and all of us would-be dowsers trundle over to Santa Rosa ready to dowse up a storm. It's only a month after the Harmonic Convergence so there's still plenty of positive vibration lying around to help us get in tune with nature and stuff like that. We mosey into the classroom and have our first rude awakening as the instructor immediately recognizes our hydrologist, Gene Boudreau. So much for the element of surprise. Gene explains he's there out of curiosity as Bill and I pretend not to know each other so we still might come across as true believers.

Our teacher, Greg Thompson, gives us a brief history of dowsing, explaining that it must work because generations of superstitious people around the world can't be wrong. Oh, okay. That's not EXACTLY what he said, but that's what he meant. Honest. If I told what he said over the course of four hours you wouldn't believe me. This guy rambles so much he's like an intellectual tumbleweed. In fact we had a hard time pinning him down on any particular statement because while he's telling us how he's such a good teacher, his sentences are practically incoherent. Honest.

Okay, if you insist. I've brought a tape clip with me of him explaining how dowsing works and how he might have been able to use it to find a kidnaped child if the vibrations had only cooperated. Think I'm hard to understand? Wait'll you hear this. Okay, roll the tape, Kent.

"It is concluded that we all possess a sixth sense. We can program this sixth sense to be very accurate in the art of finding. If you can program your mind 100%, your results will be 100%. One out of ten people can dowse. The only people who can't dowse are those that look me straight in the eye and say 'I can't dowse.' It's very hard for me to tell you how I dowse because there isn't words...there's no basic understanding of it at this point in time. Because basically my desire or my hope of this course is that enough people get involved in this that we get kind of like a Charley's-Angels type of group together because then you've got a force that is, you know, out there, and let's say another Tara Elizabeth Burke is kidnaped in Santa Rosa. Well five or six people, that's about all you need to keep you covered. Because believe me, television doesn't lie that much to a certain degree."

Would you like to hear the whole four hours worth? I didn't think so. Next time when I tell you he's incoherent, just trust me, okay? At any rate, he goes on telling us about all the dowsers who were burned at the stake in the Salem witch trials, (Huh?) how

scientists are baffled by the way salmon can find their way upstream (Oh yeah?) and let's not forget the mystery of the SPARROWS coming back to Capistrano like clockwork (whaaa?). It's that old sixth sense (could be a song title). All God's chillun got it, but it takes \$35 to learn how to use it correctly.

Thompson then goes into the classic water dowsing theory. That there are little streams and big streams underground, some of them go this way and some of them go that way, but they can't hide from the dowsing rod. You want proof? Okay, just drill deep enough at a spot that's been dowsed and you'll find water. So there. Of course the U.S. Geological Survey tells us that, "In a region of adequate rainfall and favorable geology, it is difficult to drill and NOT find water." But what do those scientists know? They can't even figure out how sparrows get back to Capistrano.

Thompson is feeling his oats now and lets us know about his heroic efforts during the drought a few years back when he ranged through Marin County, finding water for desperate Yuppies whose hot tubs had run dry. He dowsed over 300 wells -- 24 in just one day. Gene, our hydrologist, is too charitable to point out information he has that Thompson was fired for drilling dry holes 60% of the time, while Thompson says he found only one or two percent of the drillings without water.

Thompson now proves his amazing powers by dowsing a stream running right under our very own classroom! Silly me, I've left my drilling rig home so I can't test his prediction. But never fear, he will show us how we can find that stream ourselves. He takes one side of the rod while each of us takes turns on the other side, walking with him across the room. Sure enough, when we reach that spot, the rod twists in our grasp and points downward. Son-of-a-gun. A little observation discloses that the rod is held in such a tight, awkward position that the slightest inward turn of the wrist will make the stick move violently downward. I watch Thompson do this cooperative dowsing with the other 12 members of the class and in 12 cases his wrist moves slightly inward just before the rod points down. Probably just a coincidence.

Once Thompson shows how sensitive we all are to dowsing water with a little bit of help from him, he unpacks his case full of dowsing instruments and sets us all loose individually to find water in the classroom. Bent coat hanger wires whirl, pendulums rotate and wooden and plastic Y-shaped rods twist in our grasp. There seems to be underground streams everywhere, even on the roof, as the hard-to-hold rods twist upwards often, sometimes bopping us in the nose. Bill, Gene, and I try to point out the incongruity of this flailing about, but nobody seems to notice while they're in the throes of this "learning" experience.

Water dowsing has its pitfalls, Thompson points out. In the tradition of his father and grandfather, he declines to predict at what depth drills will find the water he dowses or how much they will find when they do hit it. His reasons are eminently sensible.

If he makes a prediction that water will be found at two hundred feet and no water is found when the drill reaches that level, customers will be less likely to pay for even more drilling. Maybe it's his acumen as well as his remarkable dowsing skill which got our instructor elected President of the Redwood chapter of the American Society of Dowsers. There is a lesson in there for all of us who would follow in the master's slightly damp footsteps.

Thompson points out that he has specifically programmed himself to dowse for water and so he isn't planning to find hidden objects himself (Drat!), but will demonstrate how other things can be dowsed, even at a distance. On the classroom wall is a map of Africa, which Thompson continually calls a country. (Country, continent, so what? They both start with "C.") He's gonna dowse on the map and find the biggest gold deposits in....you thought he was going to point to South Africa, didn't you? Wrong, pyrite-breath! The stick has conclusively shown that the really, really big chunks of gold are hiding in the hills of northeast Cameroon. The map lists that area as having only forests and agriculture, but it was probably drawn up by scientists, the same guys who still haven't figured out that ESP is what brings the sparrows back to Capistrano. Remember, you heard it here first: if you want to find the Mother Lode, go prospecting in Cameroon.

Now that we are assured we can program ourselves to dowse objects other than water, it's time for the big graduation exercise. Thompson will borrow jewelry items from the class -- pure metals and stones being preferred -- and hide them outside and give us a chance to dowse 'em up. He points out that he will leave a little of each item showing so if the dowsing rods don't point exactly to each article we can look for it a little and that won't really be cheating. He explains that, "If I hide something, it's so you can find it. If I'm hiding it from you so that you cannot find it and if you start thinking that I've hidden it from you so that you can't find it, you're not gonna be able to find it." Winston Churchill could not have expressed himself better.

We take a good look at the proffered jewelry so's we can tune in on whatever vibrations there are, and off Thompson goes to prepare our Easter egg hunt. When he comes back we all go outside and, concentrating each in turn, we try to tune in. Once again the wires, chains and sticks do their bobbing and weaving acts all over the place. We must have stumbled upon an underground jewelry emporium but nobody seems to be finding anything despite their exertions. Nobody can accuse Thompson of making this stuff too easy to find!

Apparently he realizes that he's done too good a job of hiding the stuff in the grass and bushes, and as the minutes wear on, he starts sidling over to people to encourage them when they are hunting in an area close to where he's hidden something. And if they are far away, he drops a hint that, "Maybe over by the tree," for instance, "might be more productive." STILL no one finds anything, so it's time for more drastic action, such as, "It's more

over this way." "Now your stick is pointed right at it." "Do you see it?" "You're looking right at it. That's it!" "Now you've found it." With a dozen students to encourage and seven pieces of jewelry hidden in the area, it's becoming a very long hunt, since each piece is left in place after it's "dowsed" by one student so that the next student can have a chance to find it as well.

Slowly, painfully, a few students find a few of the items when Thompson is standing by doing his thing. A couple with sharp eyes spot one or two by themselves by looking, not by dowsing. As far as we can tell, NOBODY has actually dowsed a thing even though the sticks still keep bobbing away.

I've long since given up trying to dowse anything -- I haven't even seen anything -- so I've taken to hanging around Thompson when he encourages somebody to find something, so now I know where a couple of things are. Thompson asks who hasn't found ANYTHING yet and half the class gathers around. He's going to show them where a copper bracelet is hidden so they can sharpen their skills. As a matter of fact, he's going to go fetch the rest of the class to give a demonstration of how this thing is supposed to go.

I know the copper bracelet is hidden in the grass on the edge of the flower bed. Thompson is on the other side of the lawn. I'm looking at the bracelet. I fight with my conscience. I lose. While rooting through the bushes like everybody, I pick up the bracelet and move it ten feet away along the edge of the grass, partially hidden, as before.

He comes back with the whole class now and stands in front of where he THINKS the copper bracelet is lying, tells everybody it's right about there and invites them to start dowsing. The rods start flying around as some people figure they're picking something up while those who had "found" it before try to reaffirm their previous vibrations. When they zero in on where it's supposed to be, Thompson reaches down to get it and comes up empty. He knows it's been moved but doesn't know where. Does he dowse to find it? He does not. He has not programmed himself to find metals closer than Africa and can't apparently re-program himself for the one day each semester he teaches this course. However, he figures he has successfully programmed US in the last few hours and we start dowsing to locate the bracelet which lies ten feet away. Thompson contents himself with beating the bushes.

After several minutes of concentrated dowsing by us, another student eventually SEES the bracelet peeking from behind it's grassy hiding place. Nobody had come close to it by dowsing and our pitiable instructor has not even tried to dowse in his search for the missing dingus.

Now an effort is made to recover the remaining items so we can wind up the class. We begin to realize that while several people have seen most of the items, a few of them haven't been found by anybody. It also becomes clear that Thompson has forgotten exactly

where he put everything. We search a patch of crabgrass repeatedly for a tiny necklace, but the sticks pass over it without effect when people assume it too has been moved. But then Bill discovers it hidden deep within the same patch of crabgrass.

The search narrows down to one item no one has seen since Thompson hid it: a crystal pendant. We search the bushes. We search the grass. Nothing. Bill remembers that Thompson successfully did his map dowsing in order to find all that gold, so he draws a map of the bushes and invites Thompson to dowse that in order to find the pendant. Other students are still dowsing the area, but Thompson ignores the map and the dowsing paraphernalia and continues to grub around on his hands and knees in his search. I'm getting pretty fed up with crawling around on my hands and knees and ask him repeatedly why he doesn't dowse the damn thing up and be done with it. The answer is always the same. "I'm programmed to dowse underground water, not objects, so it wouldn't do any good; besides I teach this stuff -- I don't do it."

We never do find the crystal pendant -- either someone has walked off with it or it's been trampled into the ground. Then again we might have searched in the wrong area because Thompson never could remember exactly where he had hidden it. Almost all the class has drifted away an hour after the scheduled finish when Thompson finally admits defeat and pays \$65 to the disgruntled owner of the lost pendant.

This final foul up has robbed us skeptics of the chance to get in a few choice comments during the class review which didn't happen. However, our wondrous dowser WILL offer the course again next semester. I won't be there, however. I'll be digging up all that gold in the highlands of Cameroon. I'm gonna leave when the sparrows return to Capistrano.

## LOTTO BUNCO

by Richard Cleverley

Are there those who have special psychic powers? If we can believe the likes of Uri Geller, the answer is yes. If we are to believe certain recent proclamations the answer is in the affirmative, for full-page ads have been placed in local papers nationwide advertising that for \$1 (postage and handling) psychically determined lottery numbers will be sent free. Full-page ads cost in the \$2,000 to \$20,000 range, depending on the paper and where the page is.

The idea portrayed in these kinds of ads is that since the advice is free, the promoters cannot have ulterior motives. Let's suppose a psychic in one of these promotions only wishes to help the disadvantaged by helping them to win big bucks in lotteries. Can he/she be certain only the disadvantaged will respond to a huge newspaper ad? The size of the ad says that who answers is less

important than how many answer.

Now, I am suspicious, because lots of numbers usually means the operation is designed for the advertiser rather than the advertisee. The second question I ask relates to those alleged powers. If, indeed, one has powers of precognition why wouldn't he/she win all the lotteries in the world and then open a research center to help advance the study of these putative powers; or why, if one's only motivation is humanitarianism, would he/she not use the winnings in some humanitarian way?

Well, all of this is just a little introduction to show that the promoter might have other than altruistic motives. In fact this is similar to relatively well-known scams. Because the psychic claims his/her information is from some unknown source, he/she may be above prosecution by comparison with investment firms who have done similar operations and been prosecuted.

To make the scheme clear and convincing, I need to simplify the methodology to see the essence. Let's make an imaginary lottery in which the prize is awarded to the person with the correct number from 1 - 100. Now, suppose we send 100 letters, each with a different number to 100 people before the lottery. In each letter we tell the addressee we have some special power to predict the outcome of the lottery, and we are giving this information free. What is the probability that we will correctly "predict" a winner? Of course, we are CERTAIN. At least one person is going to believe we have done something incredible.

I say at least because the psychology of the psychic rules more heavily in his/her favor than it would be for "regular" people. What I mean is that a psychic gets credit for close. If the number, for example, is 17, the psychic may get credit for 71, 16, 18, and, if you want to stretch it, include 8 ( $1 + 7$ ), 6 ( $7 - 1$ ), and 7 ( $1 \times 7$ ) and other combinations that seem close. If the seer is close this time, maybe next time she/he might be right on. Even though lottery money is not paid for close, the psychic get the benefit of doubt. In any event, at most 99 people will simply discard the letter because nothing eventful occurred.

Now lets expand our operation, and instead of 100 letters, we send out 100,000 using the same formula: each letter has a different number from 1 - 100; i.e., we will have 100 sets of letters. This insures 100 hits, so there are now at least 100 people who believe we are invested with some arcane power.

We now have at least 100 believers who have had what they consider irrefutable proof of the validity of our powers. They are ready, willing, and will do everything in THEIR power, albeit mundane power, to be able to tap into our ready source of advance information which will help them get rich. Their greed blinds them to some very elementary questions that might otherwise stop them.

The second phase of our ruse is to contact those who got the

"correct" information -- we know who they are. We probably won't even have to do that because, in our initial letter we told them they could contact us later for additional information. Of course, the second round is not free. But isn't such information worth a very great deal? If the winning lottery number returned \$25,000 (remember, this is just an example for simplicity, not for accuracy of odds!), \$2,000 would not be too much to pay for such information. If only half of our marks respond at \$2,000 that is a cool \$100,000, all for the cost of the postage.

But I want a better deal, one in which I don't even have to spend my money mailing anonymously. Direct mailing is inefficient and costly. Many might not even open the envelope. The winning number might go unnoticed. So I will advertise widely in local newspapers, which will have a double advantage: 1. This will select only those who want information and, 2. We can put in a clip-out address and require the mark pay us a paltry \$1.00 for postage and handling for the information. If the recipient is unimpressed, he/she is unlikely to grumble for a buck. With our trusty computer to crank out the numbered letters, we are even free of overhead!

Back to the example. If the advertising is effective and large numbers respond to the ad, I could potentially make beaucoup bucks on round two with no investment other than the greed and gullibility of the public. If all 100 of the successes in the above example return requests for round two, I now have a certain winner among them. One person is GOING to win the \$25,000 on the number I "foreknew" for him. Will he sing to the heavens for the net \$23,000 he has won?

When fraud, lying, cheating, and just gross incompetence in parapsychology are the rule more than the exception; when years of intense effort on the part of parapsychologists themselves has not produced a replicable experiment, what is a skeptic to think? Uri Geller, world-famous psychic, has been caught cheating in virtually every trick he has done -- there is documented (video and audio tape, personal witness, etc.) proof, yet he continues to claim he has powers bestowed upon him by extraterrestrials. He passionately asserts his powers are real and that he does not use trickery.

There might be some heretofore unknown power in the universe that certain people are able to tap into. If that is the case, it would be a revolution as momentous as Einsteinian physics. In fact, it would turn physics and the Law of Cause and Effect inside-out: we believe that the cause must precede the effect, and psi countermands that axiom.

Since such incredible good could be accomplished with psi, and such enormous sums of money could be saved, and so much pain and suffering could be alleviated at least or eliminated at best, it is beyond comprehension that those who profess to have the greatest psychic powers would not do everything in their NORMAL power to cooperate to help science study and harness this power. The blind could learn psi ability and function more like the sighted, greatly

increasing the scope of their other abilities. Instead of expensive and dangerous space programs we could have sensitives go on so-called astral projection trips to the nether parts of the galaxy to study the secrets that lie in wait for the betterment of humanity. Remote viewing could take the place of expensive and hazardous spy satellites.

Since psychics allege they can alter computer memory, the same could nullify the nuclear threat of the enemy, for all missile systems rely on computer telemetry for accurate delivery. The billions saved on Star Wars could be better used on world hunger. Medical technology is expensive and often perilous, with its intrusive methods deemed necessary to determine what is taking place inside the human body. If psychic energy can be used to see into and manipulate physical matter by psychokinesis, medicine could be revolutionized.

If Dr. Salk had the polio vaccine and refused to allow it to be tested for any reason whatever wouldn't he have been guilty of genocide? Psychic fraud is easier to pawn off on the public because we don't even know if there is such a thing as psi. In fact if parapsychologists would cooperate with skeptics to try to nail this thing down a desirable by-product would be the exposure and reduction of fraud. This would advance the cause of parapsychology and help protect an unsuspecting and trusting public.

[Mr. Cleverley is a free-lance skeptic in Sacramento.]

## SEPTEMBER MEETING

by Michael Sorens

On September 29 in Campbell, skeptics were treated to an engaging presentation by Jim Wheeler on so-called Ancient Astronauts. A videotape engineer by trade, Wheeler has also been an amateur archaeologist since 1973, concentrating on the areas of South and "Middle" America (the Yucatan peninsula to Panama). He has studied the Mayan, Aztec, and Inca cultures and can read Mayan hieroglyphics.

Wheeler's talk began with a discussion of von Daniken, whose claims were compared to the evidence Wheeler himself saw and photographed at three favorite "AA" sites: the Polenke sarcophagi, the Peruvian Nazca lines, and the statues on Easter Island. Von Daniken's most successful claim to fame was his very popular book, "Chariots of the Gods".

After his first 5-week trip to Colombia and Peru in the early seventies, Wheeler concluded that von Daniken had "an incredibly active imagination," ignoring many facts and embellishing others to a point of unrecognizability. Von Daniken has an extremely narrow focus, according to Wheeler, seeing only what will support his theories. But his wild concoctions have had some beneficial

effects: they have made many skeptical of archaeological claims and have drawn popular interest to the field of archaeology. Many of von Daniken's young readers went on to study legitimate archaeology when they grew up.

The most fascinating part of the talk to me, and which Wheeler had the most material on, was Easter Island. In fact, he provided us with a fascinating account of the local history collected from the natives.

Though only about 15 miles across, Easter Island had 10 distinct tribes of people believed to have been descendants of Peruvian explorers circa 1400. Each tribe constructed its own variation on a central theme of the statues, though all the statues originated from a single quarry near the eastern edge of the island. As statues were hewn out of the mountainous walls of the quarry, they would be deposited upright in storage holes dotting the landscape around the quarry. Many of these are still there today, along with several examples of unfinished statues, still not completely cut from the walls of the quarry.

It appears that the job of hauling the statues to their destinations was more difficult than the cutting, otherwise there would be very few, if any statues, left at the quarry. The average statue weighs about 60 tons, and some weighed over 200 tons! Some had a "topknot," a reddish-brown, 10-ton cap perched upon the head. Raising a statue would have been a difficult task by itself, but placing a 10-ton lid on top boggles the mind, except for the fact that all of this has been done in recent times, recreating systems the original stone workers may have used. Each tribe would place its statues in its own geographic boundaries, mounting them upon stone platforms either singly or with as many as 7 others.

There are some 600 statues on Easter Island, according to Wheeler, constructed during the period of 1450 to 1680. One driving force for constructing them was the competition between the various tribes on the island: each wanted to outdo the other in quantity or in size.

Around 1680 almost all of the statues were toppled; some were literally decapitated by placing a stone on the ground in such a fashion that the falling statue would strike the stone at the neck position. The statues have elongated ears simply because the carvers did; photographs of current natives show earlobes stretched to twice the length of the normal ear.

As to how the statues were formed, very simple techniques have been demonstrated by a U.C. Berkeley professor. The trick is to use small oblate rocks as hammers. The hammer rock would be held in both hands and sharply twisted at the point of impact with the quarry piece. This action chips off flakes from the quarry stone in a very precise fashion. The hammer stone would then be allowed to rebound after impact, thus lessening the fatigue of the masons. Numbers of these hammer stones litter the quarry site. The skill

of the stone cutters was remarkable for the precision they were able to achieve with this simple but effective method.

"Irrationally held truths may be more harmful than reasoned errors." -- T. H. Huxley

## EDITOR'S CORNER

Extra sensory perception (ESP), the paranormalist term that attempts to describe a new information channel, is an empty construct, without meaning. It only says how we DON'T gain the information. Negative definitions have the advantage of being so nebulous and broad that it is impossible to refute or challenge them. Defining a horse as "not a tarantula" does not clarify matters.

The (non)explanation of ESP (or the more contemporary term "psi") presumes that we understand perception and cognition, when in truth, we are only at the beginning of such understanding. Even something as ordinary as recall is not fundamentally understood. Who was the first president of the U.S.? Washington's name instantly appears, often accompanied by a "picture." How is that memory so readily available? We do not know.

Although we do not understand the mechanisms, we do understand the subjective nature of memory and perception if the stimuli are very concrete. It is known that our mental processes are like filters and mirrors, sifting and reflecting information as it is processed against our cultural and educational experiences. The final product that is released to our consciousness may be a distortion of the sum total of information. We are unaware of the PROCESS of thinking -- only the RESULT of thinking appears to our cognizance. Modern psychology coupled with increased understanding of brain physiology has clarified some of the problems. One of the best books on the subject of parapsychology and perception, J. E. Alcock's "Parapsychology: Science or Magic" sheds a flood of light on the subject. The studies cited in this article are from his book.

An interesting study conducted by psychologists Brown and McNeill found that student subjects, given words whose definitions they thought they might know but could not instantly recall, could, with amazing accuracy, give the number of syllables, the first letter, or a homonym. The students were then given some other task to completely distract and consume their attention for a period and the correct information more often than not popped into their consciousness. Everyone has experienced this phenomenon and it indicates we have much information of which we are not conscious. Another manifestation of this is information that we just know but cannot logically defend; we call it gut reaction or intuition. (In

fact, I believe the definition and very concept of intuition is suspect. Since we don't understand the processes of cognition, how are we able to state that we know something "without the use of rational processes (intuitively)"?

I think there is a rational process, but it is just not available to the conscious part of our brain. As evidence of this, it seems that only highly trained physicists get "intuition" about the decay activity of mesons, and only highly trained programmers get "intuition" about some complex software difficulty.) Gifted people often describe themselves as bystanders to material that arises to their consciousness they know not from where. It has been suggested that the real seat of rational and creative power lies in the unconscious.

A study by N. Maier demonstrates the extent to which we are unaware of our own thought processes in problem solving. He hung two strings from the ceiling in his laboratory far enough apart that a subject could not hold one and reach the other. The task was to tie the strings together. There were various objects lying around the room. If the subject had not solved the problem after several minutes, Maier casually set one of the lines slightly in motion, and typically, within 15 seconds the subject would tie a weight to one of the lines and swing it like a pendulum and then catch it while holding the other. In debriefing, each subject was asked how he discovered the solution. Even persistent probing failed to produce more than a 30% acknowledgment of the hint.

Without the probing, Maier concluded that almost all were not aware of the hint. As further evidence, he twirled a string (a useless cue) prior to swinging it, and nearly all reported that the twirling had been helpful. All this indicates that we are not conscious of all the sensory channels of information available to us and not attentive to when and how we process that information.

More startling direct and empirical evidence has been found in modern neurosurgery from patients who have undergone split-brain operations. Brain physiology shows that the left hemisphere controls the right half of the body and the right hemisphere, the left body. It is further demonstrated from injury and surgery that the left brain governs rational processes (e.g., language, mathematics) while the right brain controls non-verbal skills (e.g., artistic ability, recognition of faces). In a normal person, the two sides are in constant communication.

Studies of epilepsy victims who had had their cortical fibers connecting the two hemispheres severed in an attempt to control severe seizures have increased our understanding of perception. These subjects appeared, at first, almost completely normal. Concentrated studies, however, revealed some intriguing results. The right side of our retina receives information from the left visual field and sends only to the right hemisphere (the left side of the retina, the right visual field, etc.).

When these patients, looking straight ahead, held an object in their left hand out of the direct line of sight, they could not describe it but could later select the object from among several. Their left- brain was not receiving information so they could not verbalize what their right hemisphere was in fact perceiving. Where there is no surgical interruption of the physical connections, evidence still suggests that one hemisphere or the other may be more or less active or dominant at the moment of a given perception. Hence, one may never safely say he or she is aware of all factors.

If this is not complex enough, we tend to retrospectively justify our actions even when there is no causal connection. When subjects committed to a post-hypnotic suggestion to open a window are asked why they did so, they usually respond with something like, "Because it's hot in here." The left brain imposes itself on our experiences when the reality may be entirely unrelated; it tries to fit information to match the context of its perceptual set (primitive beliefs). This emotional verses the rational (right- vs. left-brain) has been tested with fascinating results (LeDoux, et. al.)

When subjects have had the corpus callosum severed, but other nerve bundles left intact, the left-right connection is interrupted so that the two hemispheres cannot communicate and compare information. We may experience something for which we have no left-brain awareness and be unable to describe it. But our rational system, as in the case of the post-hypnotic suggestion, may assign it to something nonetheless, inventing something consistent with the individual's belief system.

It is often said that the senses are not to be trusted. This is a substantial misstatement of the truth, for our senses, unless parapsychologists are correct, are all we have. The adage must be qualified a little to say UNTRAINED AND UNCRITICAL senses may be untrustworthy.

Sensory information is never direct; it must pass through the brain -- our filtering, mirroring system. The raw data that are available in the real world are objective, but with our biological central processing unit as a filter between us and that real world, awareness of and training that filter is essential to understanding the world outside our minds.

Before science must entertain the notion of information allegedly available outside sensory channels, we must be able to nail down brain function in assimilating and processing sensory information. Parapsychologists would do well to join "normal" psychology to spend their resources settling first things first.

Occam's razor suggests that, faced with the choice of deciding between competing explanations, the one requiring fewer assumptions is more likely to be correct. Parapsychology takes the almost arrogant position that we know everything about sensory processing and must therefore resort to non-sensory hypotheses -- whatever

that means -- to describe anomalous events.

## RAMPARTS

[Ramparts is a regular feature of "BASIS", and your participation is urged. Clip, snip and tear bits of irrationality from your local scene and send them to the EDITOR. If you want to add some comment with the submission, please do so.]

Why does it always have to happen in California? Alas, the gurus of the ghastly have learned where the Yuppies money is. Are Californians more avant-garde or simply more able to finance their gullibilities?

Skeptic JOHN TAUBE sent an article from "IMAGE", a mag of conspicuous consumer indulgence in which the wonders of a new body treatment are touted.

If multiple, double-blind studies are the norm for standard science, in a carefully conducted single-sighted study of one, an American Zen student, Michael Stusser, brought the wonders of the orient to the West. Mr. Stusser suffered from a bad case of sciatica (a painful inflammation of the sciatic nerve) to the extent that he could not sit for more than five minutes at a time. Imagine what that would do to your meditation sessions in the lotus position.

After trying all the best available nostrums in Japan -- acupuncture, faith healing, karmic concentration -- he was urged to try the "kosoburo": an "enzyme" bath. In the middle of this nouveau-mud experience, not only was his consciousness raised, but the sciatica as well. That was it. California, here he comes.

The treatment is a concoction of "fermentation of cedar or fir fiber with rice bran. Plant enzymes added to this mixture catalyze a reaction that biologically generates heat of up to 140 degrees." Well, if it's natural it can't hurt, is current wisdom. I think any of our medical doctor subscribers would have something to say about these sessions in a 140 degree gunk pack. (In fact, "BASIS" would be pleased to print responses from our many M.D. subscribers about the psychological and medical possibilities from such an experience.

While the mud baths of Calistoga are enjoyed by the visitors for the sheer pleasure, Stusser makes medical claims that "his concoction helps draw out toxins...." He gives his clients a special enzyme tea drink with the wallow, and offers, "No one really understands how it works. Some people have dramatic experiences."

I am having a dramatic experience in the sitting portion of my anatomy.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

There have been several comments to me over time about the hotline acronym, LATRUTH. The rub seems to be one of smugness at least and sheer arrogance at most. I don't think there is anyone in BAS who thinks he/she possesses the Truth; as I look over the articles in "BASIS" I do not see assertions to the effect that we have all the answers. Maybe in our zeal to press the cause of rationality our case is overstated -- we realize we are preaching to the converted -- but I don't think we want to come across as arrogant.

I consider the acronym a useful device. Even a little amusing because it ruffles the feathers of those who oppose us. It has a mnemonic function that is simple and effective. When I am in my office and want to make that last minute call to check for changes I still dial 415-LATRUTH. When a BAS representative does a radio or TV show, they give out the phone acronym and people remember it. In fact, a BAS antagonist told me that he can't get LATRUTH out of his craw. He can't forget it no matter how hard he tries. (I have wondered if he calls when his friends aren't looking.)

Take the digits of the phone number, find a catchy acronym that is less arrogant and maybe we can get it changed. First prize is a subscription to the "National Enquirer".

## ANIMAL LANGUAGE

In the last CSICOP conference, the topic of animal intelligence in general, and animal language in particular, was addressed. Members of the research staffs of various facilities were invited to speak, but none saw fit to present their side to skeptics.

BAS has the rare opportunity to hear from a volunteer staffer, Ms. MITZI PHILLIPS, who worked directly under Penny Patterson. (Ms. Patterson's tireless work with her famous protege, Koko, the talking gorilla, has given her an international reputation.) Koko has captured the hearts if not the minds of people world-wide. Koko and Penny have been the focus of media attention over the past five years, especially since the "National Geographic" cover story featured Koko with her pet kitten.

This will be an excellent opportunity to question, from a skeptical point of view, the work-a-day routine at the Gorilla Foundation.

Join BAS on Tuesday, November 24 for this important presentation. See the Calendar for details and directions.

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Opinions expressed in "BASIS" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of BAS, its board or its advisors.

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