

THE
BENT SPOON



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In the landscape of paranormal media, there are traditionally two unique, yet separate, brands. One geared toward the believers, and the other more skeptical in nature. The problem is that the true believers rarely, if ever, embrace a skeptical attitude or ask tough questions of their community; instead preferring to surround themselves with like-minded individuals that reinforce their own belief systems. And the skeptics, likewise, promote science and critical thinking largely to those already open to it, or who are active participants in the skeptical community. This results in an echo chamber effect, wherein the same ideas are bounced back and forth, guru-student relationships are inadvertently created, and neither side ends up learning much about the other.

Enter: The Bent Spoon.

The Bent Spoon is a skeptical magazine for the true believer. Within its pages you will find Q&A between those with opposing viewpoints, interviews with leading investigators and thinkers, as well as articles which will not only provide in-depth analysis, but also be critical of both believers and skeptics alike. Along with reviews, comic strips, and other lighter fare, The Bent Spoon hopes to foster an attitude of outreach, forming a middle ground where believers and skeptics can come together and have a conversation about the issues and questions we've all given thought to.

The Bent Spoon. Where extraordinary claims meet ordinary explanations.



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IN THE NEWS

Another new video of mysterious lights fails to impress me. Seen here is a screen capture of a recent video, purported to exhibit strange aerial phenomena that multiple articles claim “are not moving like any known aircraft”. I happen to agree. To my eyes, they appear to be moving like hand held objects, reflected in the window that the cameraman is filming through. While I can’t completely prove that my hypothesis is correct, I can provide some supportive evidence.



<http://youtu.be/nn6CNUEYjs0>

Exhibit A:

For the first six seconds, what appears to be a window frame is visible on the right hand side of the video.

Exhibit B:

beginning at 0:09, the auto-focus begins malfunctioning. It is my opinion that this occurs because the camera is alternating focal points between the pane of glass and the sky.

Exhibit C:

At 0:55, when the object “vanishes”, it does not disappear all at once, but in a way that appears that the lights used to reflect off the window were covered by a dark, solid, opaque object.

If I were to guess, I say this illusion was created by a small LED flashlight.





In a similar case, these two photographs were captured a week apart in the UK, Chatham and Essex respectively. To my eyes, these photos were created in basically the same manner as the previous video, illustrated in the diagram below.



ADDENDUM

...Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation...

Writing a news column for the Bent Spoon has become arduous. The paranormal community, it seems, has no more puzzles left to offer me. Just a constant stream of less than mediocre photographs and videos.

I'm often asked why I am skeptical of the paranormal. I need only to point to the collecting heap of unconvincing "evidence" offered in vain by cookie cutter paranormal investigation teams, with their night vision cameras and clever acronyms. They fail to adapt their methods and, in turn, fail to make progress, which fails to impress me.

Do you disagree with me?

I extend an open challenge to anyone who feels they have legitimate, convincing evidence of the paranormal, to send it to the Bent Spoon, wherein I shall explain and duplicate it to the best of my abilities.

Can you stump us?

-Nicholas Callis
Co-founder of the Bent Spoon

STIGNOTA



When I was told that this issue of The Bent Spoon would be covering miracles, I instantly knew I wanted to tackle the phenomena known as stigmata.

Crucifixion

Before we get into stigmata, it would first be important to talk about Jesus, a convicted criminal, who was crucified sometime around the 1st century AD. Jesus is believed by Christians to be the son of God, God and savior of the world from death and damnation.

Anyway, sometime in the 1st century AD, Jesus was arrested and sentenced by Pontius Pilot. Jesus was to be flogged before suffering an excruciating death by crucifixion. Death by crucifixion was a brutal way to die. Basically, an individual would be tied or nailed to some type of wooden pole or cross and be left to hang there until death. Death could take days and ultimately the individual usually met their end by asphyxiation; this was due to difficulty inhaling because of the hyper-expansion of the chest muscles and lungs. However this doesn't rule out dozens of other factors that could have caused death of the individual; for example, infection due to scourging or flogging

or simply just dehydration. Now when an individual was crucified, they could be held to the cross a couple of ways. The convicted individual was either tied by rope or nailed through the wrists and ankles. It is also possible a combination of both was used, for example the feet were nailed in through the ankle and the arms were tied at the wrists, this seems to be the most common form of crucifixion. Most paintings and other depictions of the crucifixion of Jesus show that he was crucified by nails that were inserted through the palms of his hands. Though, some scholars argue that this is not the correct location that people would have used when crucifying an individual; the correct location would have been above the wrist, between two bones called the radius and the ulna. However, other scholars say that the Romans usually tied people during crucifixions. "It was normal Roman practice to bind the convict to the cross by ropes, not to nail him to it." (Cohn, 1963, p. 219) "...of the three oldest representations of the crucifixion...one, a brown jasper...shows Jesus hung by his wrists from the cross...These triats correspond to Roman prac-

tice..." (Morton Smith, 1978, p. 61)

The portrayals of Jesus' crucifixion also show his feet one on top of the other with one long nail going through the front of them. However, this may not be accurate either; it is possible that Jesus and other individuals who were crucified had their feet nailed through the ankle to the side of the post. Though it has to be said that some scholars say that most individuals that were crucified by the Romans were tied by the arms to the cross or wooden pole and just left to hang. The crucified individual would press their feet to the sides of the cross, or utilize a ledge that was about midway down the cross, and push themselves up to breathe.

To quickly sum it up, historically it is more accurate to say that Jesus was hung on the cross instead of nailed and the only book that says Jesus was nailed to the cross is the Gospel of John, which was written 100 years after the death of Jesus. And if it is true that Jesus may have been hung by rope or nailed through the wrists (which are both more likely than being nailed through the palm), people that suffer stigmata have some

explaining to do.

Stigmata

Now that we went through a quick overview on crucifixion and the crucifixion of Jesus, we can get into the stigmata phenomenon.

People that claim to have stigmata are claiming that they suffer from the wounds Jesus endured from the crucifixion.

The wounds magically appear in the palms of individual's hands, on their feet, sometimes they suffer from flogging marks on their back and on their foreheads from when Jesus wore the crown of thorns.

These marks appear supernaturally and are a gift from God.

These marks also miraculously heal and leave no scars.

Some people who claim to suffer from stigmata say that their wounds give off the odor of sanctity, which is a pleasant perfume like scent of flowers.

The first case of stigmata happened to an individual named St. Francis of Assisi, in which his biographer, Thomas of Celano, wrote in the year 1230 about St. Francis' account:

"...the marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet, just as he had seen them slightly earlier in the crucified man above him. His wrists and feet seemed to be pierced by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on his wrists and on the upper sides of his feet, the points appearing on the other side. The marks were round on the palm of each hand but elongated on the other side, and small pieces of flesh

jutting out from the rest took on the appearance of the nail-ends, bent and driven back. In the same way the marks of nails were impressed on his feet and projected beyond the rest of the flesh. Moreover, his right side had a large wound as if it had been pierced with a spear, and it often bled so that his tunic and trousers were soaked with his sacred blood."

In September of 1918, an individual named Padre Pio started to suffer from stigmata while listening to confessions. This phenomenon lasted till his death in 1968. Though a lot of people believed that Pio was holy and that his stigmata was authentic, many also believe Pio to be a fraud. Historian Sergio Luzzatto says that Pio was using carbolic acid to cause his wounds; there is testimony from an individual by the name of Maria De Vito who says Pio ordered 4 grams of the acid from her. She also stated that Pio wanted her to keep it a secret and that he was using the acid as a sterilizing agent on needles during the Spanish flu epidemic.

Conclusion

Though some people really believe that individuals bear the wounds of Jesus Christ, there is really no scientific evidence to say that such a phenomenon exists. One major red flag is that the only time these individuals start to bleed is when they are not being watched, which means that these wounds are most likely self-inflicted. However, there are a couple of clever tricks that

can make it look like the wounds just appear; for example, the use of caustic soda can cause mild skin irritation upon hours of drying on the skin. For a painless way to give the appearance of stigmata, spread a little iron chloride on one hand and potassium thiocyanate on the other. Allow both colorless chemicals to dry, then press your hands together as if you are praying. The chemical reaction will cause blood-red marks on both palms. Strangely, every picture and documentary I have seen with people who claim to have stigmata contain wounds that look very similar to the results that are produced when using chemical reactions on the skin. However, we can't say, 100 percent, that stigmata doesn't happen, we can only say there is absolutely NO evidence that it really occurs.

UNRAVELING THE SHROUD OF TURIN



The Shroud of Turin is a single length of weaved linen, measuring 14 feet by 3.5 feet, which the faithful say depicts both the front and back images of the crucified Jesus Christ, imprinted there by supernatural means during his resurrection. What can we learn from the history of the Shroud? Does science back up this claim of a supernatural event? Does the Shroud correspond to Jewish burial traditions of the age? Upon examination, the totality of the evidence paints an incredible picture.

I. A Condensed History of the Shroud of Turin

To believe that the Shroud of Turin was the burial cloth of Jesus, you must accept that no one knew of its existence until 1353. Before that time, there is simply no record of the Shroud existing. No talk of a miraculous linen bearing the image of Christ's crucified body, no record of an archaeological excavation uncovering it. Nothing. It was either the best kept secret in history, or something very strange was going on.

The existence of what we now know as the Shroud of Turin begins to come into focus in 1353 when a small church in France, known as Our Lady of Lirey, was built, at least in part, to hold what they

were claiming was "the true burial sheet of Christ." This, as you can imagine, took the Church in Rome very much by surprise. What was this burial sheet of Christ they were referring to?

A Bishop named Henri de Poitiers investigates the matter and finds what can only be described as an incredibly troubling scene. He finds the Shroud being used in a bogus miracle cure scam, with the church paying people to fake illnesses and then "recover" when in the presence of the Shroud. While certainly not the first or last case in history of a church swindling the faithful, it is disturbing nonetheless.

Another Bishop, Pierre d'Arcis, contacted the Antipope of the era, Clement VII, with another striking blow. It seemed that an artist, possibly even working as a forger at the bequest of the church, was admitting to responsibility; confessing that he had painted the image on the Shroud. In a letter, Bishop d'Arcis said much, but the most damning sentence read, "the truth being attested by the artist who had painted it, to wit, that it was a work of human skill and not miraculously wrought or bestowed."

Of course, it must be stated that this confession is not backed up with the artist's name and would be considered hearsay in a modern

court. Still, based on the investigation and the reports of his two bishops, Clement VII was convinced it was fake and set about correcting the wrong. While he allowed the Shroud to continue being displayed, he did so only when a few conditions were met. One, it could not be accompanied by any incense or candles. Two, the Shroud must be given no honor guard to protect it. And three, most disparaging of all, was that the Shroud must be accompanied by a disclaimer which read in part, "it is not the true Shroud of Our Lord, but a painting or picture made in the semblance of representation of the Shroud."

The Shroud did not make its way to Turin, Italy, the destination which gave it its modern day name, until 1578, gifted and traded for various reasons in between. But the record is fairly clear. The first appearance in history of the Shroud of Turin, now visited the world over by both curiosity seekers and the pious, was in the commission of a fraud.

II. Scientific Examination

The true believers often point to one particular examination of the Shroud performed in 1978 by STURP, the Shroud of Turin Research Project. STURP was a collection of scientists and investigators who tested several hypothe-

eses of just what may have caused the image of the crucified man to appear on the linen. Using X-rays, fluorescent light, and micro-chemical evaluations of the fibers, they looked for signs of oil painting, of watercolor, and even stains from oils that would have been used during the anointing of a body. Their tests found nothing of the sort. They did, however, publish the findings that sticky tape samples pressed and pulled from the Shroud contained hemoglobin, and tested positively for serum albumin. This, they indicated, was enough to warrant their belief that the Shroud contained actual blood.

These results have not only been debated, but they also ultimately mean very little. Blood has never been found on the Shroud itself, only on sticky tape samples. Plus, the existence or absence of blood on the Shroud would say nothing about whether or not it is authentic. Any blood could easily have come from one of the examiners. It could have come from anyone who came in contact with it throughout history. To be fair, the blood has never been linked to Jesus of Nazareth.

Still, many have held the findings of STURP as proof of a miracle. Despite the fact that the final report said that much of how the Shroud was created was still a mystery, they left the door open that it could have been a supernatural event. Of course, basically saying, "I don't know what caused this so it must have been a Miracle," is a fallacy of logic known as the Argument from Ignorance. "I don't know" is a perfectly acceptable conclusion for one to come to when you don't have enough evidence, or do

not have the technical know-how to draw a better one. But postulating that simply because you can't figure something out must mean that the Shroud defies all known laws of physics is not a proper use of reason, either in scientific or non-academic discourse.

Furthermore, another member of the STURP team, who resigned in protest over different personal and professional clashes in ideology, brought forth evidence that indicated the Shroud of Turin was indeed nothing more than the work of a clever artist. Walter McCone, a chemist and one of the world's foremost experts in microscopy, testified that the image of the body, as well as the blood were actually made of two distinct artist's pigments in common use in the Middle Ages. The body, he says, was red ochre, and the blood was red vermilion tempera paint. Furthermore, all standard forensic tests for blood on the linen came back negative.

Plus, real blood turns a brown or blackish color with age. The alleged blood on the Shroud of Turin is colored anywhere from yellow to red, as if it has barely aged at all. Why this very clear and serious discrepancy, if the blood were real?

III. Other Analyses

Earlier, in 1973, a Swiss criminologist by the name of Max Frei had examined the Shroud, taking his own sticky tape samples. These samples were found to

show pollen grains from extinct plants indigenous to Palestine during the time of Christ. Was this conclusive proof of the Shroud's authenticity?

Not quite.

Frei was not exactly known for his impeccable credentials. Later in his career, he studied the handwriting of a purported collection of the personal diaries of Adolf Hitler and found them to be genuine. Soon after, these same diaries were proven to be a hoax. His mistake seems to have come from comparing other forgeries with the diaries instead of known writing samples of Hitler. This is simply not the error of a professional, but that of someone who had no business analyzing questioned documents from a forensic perspective. Needless to say, this was an enormous embarrassment to Frei.

But what about his work with the



c 1978 Barrie M. Schwartz

Shroud?

Other scientists disputed his pollen findings. Pollen experts pointed out, for example, that they were missing olive, something that was so common in the area it undoubtedly should have been present. The samples also have been said to look new; similar to lab specimens, even. These results were also never replicated, with the pollens not showing up on any of the other samples taken later by members of the STURP team. So how did Frei manage to get such amazing results and no one else did? Strange, indeed. McCrone himself examined the samples and found them to be nothing extraordinary. Whispers of sample doctoring on the part of Frei began to be heard and many now question his credibility in examining the Shroud at all.

Another analysis also proved quite inconsequential to determining whether the image on the Shroud was the crucified Jesus. Avinoam Danin, an Israeli botanist, examined photographs taken of the Shroud by Alan and May Whanger in 1995 and identified what he believed were images of flowers from the Middle East imprinted upon it. Later, in 1998 and 2000, he viewed the Shroud in person at an exhibition and stated, "I saw the plant images without any photographs and (my findings) are a fact and not an artifact."

But of what use is this? There is no corroborating evidence of these flowers' existence on the Shroud, only Danin's opinion from viewing photographs and seeing the Shroud at an exhibition. He has never examined the Shroud personally. And the idea that he saw images

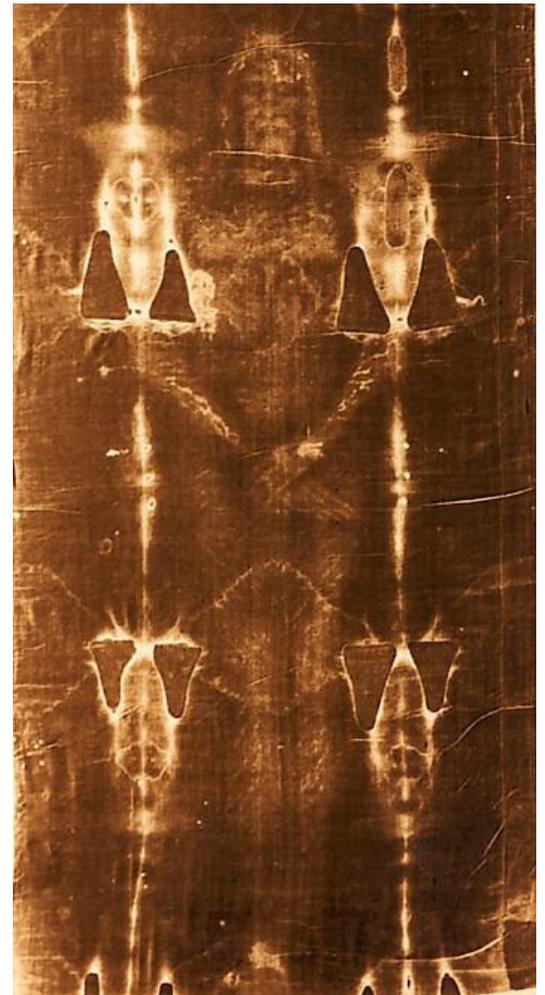
in the Shroud means nothing anyway. People see faces in clouds. They see Jesus in grilled cheese sandwiches. Plus, even if it were true the images Danin witnessed were the actual flowers he believed them to be, it doesn't change anything about whether or not the Shroud is authentic. Again, flowers could have come in contact with the Shroud at any time through its history. It simply doesn't prove anything in and of itself.

IV. Carbon Dating

In 1988, the Vatican agreed to have the Shroud dated by three independent labs - Oxford University, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, and the University of Arizona. On-hand with the Shroud of Turin were textile experts brought in to ensure samples were taken from the original linen, and not from any of the patches added later to cover holes where it had been burned in 1532. The process was video taped to ensure chain of custody.

The three labs used a precise form of carbon dating for the procedure known as accelerator mass spectrometry. Along with the fabric from the Shroud, they were also each provided with three cloth swatches of known age to act as controls. The experiment was blinded; no lab knew which cloth was which, so substitutions could not be made.

When the results came back, the labs had carbon dated the Shroud from a range of 1260-1390 A.D. with a degree of 95% certainty.



The cloth had been scientifically proven to be of Medieval origin, and originating at roughly the exact same time the Shroud first appeared in history at Our Lady of Lirey church.

Of course, as with any clash of faith and science, there has been controversy. Different labs have since tried to cast doubt on the findings, and many people believe that the 1532 fire skewed the test results. But, according to top experts in the field, that just isn't so.

Microchemist Dr. Walter McCrone, whose work on the Shroud we have covered, stated, "The suggestion that the 1532 Chambery fire changed the date of the cloth is ludicrous. Samples for C-dating are routinely and completely burned

to CO2 as part of a well-tested purification procedure. The suggestions that modern biological contaminants were sufficient to modernize the date are also ridiculous. A weight of 20th century carbon equaling nearly two times the weight of the Shroud carbon itself would be required to change a 1st century date to the 14th century. Besides this, the linen cloth samples were very carefully cleaned before analysis at each of the C-dating laboratories.”

Harry Gove, the physicist who is considered to be the “father” of the carbon technique used, also finds the doubts to be preposterous. He said that in order for that level of contamination to occur, the cloth would have to be one-third pure contamination and two-thirds cloth. This, he says, would have been

easily visible to the naked eye, let alone the critical examination of the textile experts on-hand when the cloth samples were taken.

V. Jewish Burial Traditions

With all of this information related to the scientific testing of the Shroud given, we can now turn our attention to another important part of the puzzle - that of Jewish burial traditions during the time of Christ. Surely, if the Shroud of Turin is the true burial cloth of Jesus, it should match the traditions of the time and be in-line with the gospel accounts of his burial.

But, it doesn't. On either count.

At the time of Christ, bodies of the dead were to be washed and anoint-

ed with oils. The face and head of the deceased were also shaved before the body was put in its wrappings. All of this should be done within 24 hours of death. Then, and only then, could the body be placed in its initial tomb.

John 19:39-40 says, “And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.”

“Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.”

If the Shroud is authentic, why is no trace of the myrrh and aloes found on it? Why is the image on the linen that of a long-haired



bearded man when, by Jewish law, Jesus would have been shaved? And why is there any sight of blood on the Shroud? Should a man dead for hours continue to bleed? Wasn't his body washed, as per the traditions of the time?

The Old Testament is also very clear in its mention of multiple linens, with a separate veil for his face. John speaks of the facial napkin from his head being away from the rest of his burial clothes after the resurrection.

From John 20:7, "And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself."

If the Shroud is real, why does Christ's face show up at all when there was said to be a separate veil over it? If, as the Bible states, there were "linen clothes," why does only one single piece of linen exist as "The Shroud"?

One more question. Why does the hair of the man in the image on the Shroud fall straight down? The long hair of a man lying down would be falling back, toward whatever he was laid on. The fact that the hair on the Shroud falls straight down is more indication of an artistic rendition; looking more like a man standing up rather than lying in a tomb.

VI. Conclusion

Many doubts remain about the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin. For the record, even the Vatican doesn't recognize the Shroud as the true burial cloth of Christ. It is interesting that, as recently as May

of 2010, Pope Benedict XVI called the Shroud an "extraordinary Icon," when an icon, by its very definition, is a painting or representative symbol. Though his statements have contradicted themselves at time, he does seem to recognize it is not an actual relic of Christ.

To answer our own doubts and questions about the Shroud's authenticity, we must turn away from faith and reverence and, instead, look at the science and historical records.

And the science and history make it clear.

The linen cloth now known as the Shroud of Turin appeared out of nowhere in 1353, and was being used in a faith-healing scam by a church in Lirey. The testimony of two Bishops at the time convinced Clement VII that it was nothing more than the work of a clever artist, and should not be billed as the true burial sheet of Christ. Scientific examination of the Shroud backs this up by carbon dating it to exactly the same period of time as its appearance in history.

The authenticity of the Shroud of Turin is also called into question by comparing it with the gospel accounts of Christ's burial and resurrection. They clearly do not match and, in fact, have major contradictions between them. For the Shroud to be real, you would have to believe that not only are the gospels wrong, but that traditionally respectful burial practices of Jews at the time were completely thrown out the window in the case of a man they called the son of God.

Yes, questions remain about the

authenticity of the Shroud, but only for the faithful and others who seem to want too desperately to believe. While I think the Shroud should be displayed, and even appreciated for what it means to people, we can't just ignore the evidence which points to a medieval forgery. Instead, these facts must be accepted and taught for the benefit of anyone seeking knowledge. To do otherwise is to delude yourself. And why anyone should feel proud of doing that is one question that has no good answer.

MIRACLE? I DOUBT IT



Miracles, what are they? Do they really happen in life? Well I guess that all depends on what someone considers a miracle. Throughout my life I have heard people label everyday things as miracles, an example of what I am talking about can be found in the movie *Bruce Almighty*, a blockbuster hit starring Jim Carrey as Bruce Nolan and Morgan Freeman as God. The premise of the movie is a fun one, I must admit. It's about a man named Bruce Nolan (Jim Carrey) who is down on his luck and blames God for everything that is going wrong in his life. Finally, after Bruce feels like he has hit rock bottom, he challenges God (Morgan Freeman) that he can do a better job at running things. God accepts the challenge and goes on vacation. However, after Bruce inevitably messes everything up, there is an interesting dialogue between the two about miracles in which God (Morgan Freeman), says this:

“Parting your soup is not a miracle Bruce, it's a magic trick. A single mom

who's working two jobs, and still finds time to take her son to soccer practice, that's a miracle. A teenager who says “No” to drugs and “Yes” to an education, that's a miracle. People want me to do everything for them. What they don't realize is THEY have the power. You want to see a miracle, son? Be the miracle.”

I like this quote but at the same time I hate it very much. To me, a single mother working two jobs that still finds time to take her children to practice is a strong willed woman, doing what she has to do for her children...not a miracle. A teenager who says “No” to drugs and “Yes” to an education, he/she is just making smart life choices... not a miracle. To me, calling these amazing acts of courage, smarts, and strong will a miracle is highly insulting to the individual who accomplished the task. Why do I say that? Well, first we have to ask ourselves what exactly is a miracle? Well, I think philosopher David Hume defined it best as “A miracle is a transgression

of a Law of Nature by a particular volition of the deity or by the interposition of some invisible agent.” So though these acts people perform on a day to day basis all over the world, though magnificent in their own right, they are nothing more than ordinary and they do not defy or violate any laws of nature, and to say that these acts performed by people that are no doubt working hard, is an act of something supernatural such as a deity or some invisible force is nothing more than plain ignorance and highly disrespectful.

If one is only meaning miracle to mean achieving something hard in life or describing an event they felt should have gone one way but went the opposite, then that isn't the proper usage of the word. For example: I am very close with an individual, who I will not name, that claims she experienced a miracle in her life. About 20 years ago this individual was brutally raped and stabbed repeatedly. She tells the story in such detail that she remembers the

smell of the blood and yellow-white fatty tissue that gushed out of her arm when she was being stabbed. Before ending the story, she will explain that it is a miracle that she is still alive, that God must be watching her, or that God must have some type of guardian angel watching over her. It is a very powerful story. However, I wonder if she ever takes into consideration what she is saying to all the people who were products of rape and murder. To imply that her event was a miracle and that she is special in the eyes of God would mean if God exists, He plays favorites. It would also imply that God doesn't care about the individuals that were not so fortunate to survive such brutal crimes. If God sent this miracle her way, why did he even allow the rape and stabbings to occur in the first place? The individual in the story calls this event a miracle for one reason; it gives some type of meaning to her experience. It isn't the fact that her loud screaming had her neighbor's call 911. It isn't the fact that her attacker just happened to miss cutting any vital arteries, which would have caused her to die of blood loss. In her mind it was a gift from some type of deity. However, even this isn't a miracle. Millions of people survive brutal attacks every day and have been

for thousands of years. Therefore it isn't breaking the Laws of Nature when these events still happen.

So again, what is a miracle? As Hume said, it would be something that violates the Laws of Nature by the will of a deity. I will give a short list of things that would be considered miracles, by the definition given by Hume:

That a supreme being created the universe and all living things such as plant, animal and man.

The world wide flood, sent by a deity to destroy all life, except the chosen few that got to live on a boat, with two of every animal.

Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying God.

God talking through a burning bush, which isn't consumed within the flames.

Moses parting the Red Sea.

Elijah being carried up to heaven in a burning chariot.

Jonah being swallowed by a giant fish for 3 days, only to be regurgitated safely onto land.

Jesus turning water into wine.

Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus raising Jairus's daughter from the dead.

Jesus walking on water.

Jesus feeding a multitude of people, 5,000 and 4,000 at different times. He did this with

only enough food to feed a couple men.

Jesus rising from the dead.

Now these would be and are considered miracles, if they really happened. However, why is it that no historian has these accounts marked down as happening? As most probably know, the Bible is not a historically reliable text. I think biblical scholar Bart Ehrman says it best in his book *Jesus, Interrupted* when talking about the possibilities of miracles happening:

“To understand why, we need to consider how historians engage in their craft. Historians work differently from the way natural scientists work. Scientists do repeated experimentation to demonstrate how things happen, changing one variable at a time. If the same experiment produces the same result time after time, you can establish a level of predictive probability; the same result will occur the next time you do the experiment...”

Historians work differently. Historians are not trying to show what does or will happen, but what has happened. With history, the experiment can never be repeated. Once something has happened, it is over and done with...

That is the problem inherent in miracles. Miracles, by our very definition of the term, are virtually impossible events. By their very nature, (they) are always the least probable explanation for what happened. This is true whether you are a believer or not. Out of the six billion people in the world, not one of them can walk on top of lukewarm water filling a swimming pool. What would be the chances of any one person being able to do that? Less than one in six billion. Much less...

Historians cannot establish that miracles have ever happened. This is true of the miracles of Mohammed, Hanina ben Dosa, Apollonius of Tyana - and Jesus."

This is why we don't see history books filled with tales of miracles.

Do miracles really happen in life? Sadly I would say no, just because there is no solid evidence that miracles really occur. Of course, perception of events is highly subjective. My friend says it is a miracle she is alive. I chalk it up to a series of fortunate and natural events that took place which saved her life. Again, let's look quickly at the definitions of miracles:

-The Philosophical

Definition of A Miracle: A miracle is a transgression of a Law of Nature by a particular volition of the Deity or by the interposition of some invisible agent.

-The Historical Definition of A Miracle: A miracle is always the least probable explanation for what happened. Therefore, it can't be used as a historically accurate account.

The appeal to a miracle in my opinion is just a way to substitute a true explanation of what really happened. It is intellectual laziness. To just infer "God did it" and move on will never accomplish anything. In closing, I would like to reword the quote from Bruce Almighty:

"Parting your soup is nothing more than an illusion, Bruce, it's a magic trick. A single mom who's working two jobs, and still finds time to take her son to soccer practice, that's a magnificent expression of being strong-willed. A teenager who says "No" to drugs and "Yes" to an education, that's a true sign of intelligence. People want me to do everything for them. What they don't realize is I am just an illusion, a way to simplify answers to the hard questions of the world. What people don't realize is that they have the power to figure

out these answers without resorting to miracles. You want to see a miracle, son? Why? Learning the true cause of these events is much more fulfilling."

I think I would have loved it if those were the words from God.

THE BENT SPOON

Here at The Bent Spoon we always appreciate feedback, whether it be criticisms, compliments or suggestions. The Bent Spoon also accepts article submissions but they do not necessarily have to be from a skeptical viewpoint. If you are a true believer and love to write, The Bent Spoon's new section titled "The Open Forum" may just be the place for you. With the intentions of keeping the dialogue open between true believers and skeptics, we feel "The Open Forum" might be the perfect opportunity to do so. It will show the believers viewpoint with at least one skeptical rebuttal.

Please send all inquiries and submissions to
TheBentSpoon@live.com

Thank you.

THE
BENT SPOON

BLINDED BY THE LIES

Tracking Dannion Brinkley's Continuous Fabrications



Dannion Brinkley tells a lot of tales to a lot of people. Some of them are even true. For instance, it is a fact that, in the early evening of September 17th 1975, he was struck by lightning while on the phone at his house. But the stories that came out of that - the events related to his alleged out-of-body experience - are predicated upon a pack of lies.

In his book, "Saved By the Light," Dannion recounts his story and embellishes upon the details. He claims that he was dead for 28 minutes. During this time, he floated above his body, watching as his wife attempted to revive him in the moments after the lightning strike. He says he heard a paramedic pronounce him dead. Later, he talks about traveling to heaven, where he met and spoke with angels, saw a crystal city and cathedral of light. And then, he woke up in the hospital just before being taken to the morgue.

It is an incredible story; one that saw his book at the top of the New York Times bestseller list, as well as spawning a highly rated television movie. Dannion has since used his notoriety to become a psychic, charging \$250 for a half hour reading [1], and a spiritual advisor, lecturing to large groups of people around the world about the "secrets" he found in the light - secrets

that you, too, can share - if only you can afford tickets at places like the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. But if his story were true, we can reasonably expect that he would have told a similar one in the days following his injury. But it's not, because he didn't. In fact, he told a remarkably different story at the time, and continues to change the details to this day when confronted.

Carl Langley was a newspaper reporter for the Augusta Herald at the time of Dannion's ordeal. He interviewed him, and in the September 19th 1975 edition, published a story about the incident titled "Phone Call Almost Cost Him His Life." The story as Mr. Brinkley told it then is dramatically different than the one he tells now in his books and interviews [2]. Remember how Dannion said he was dead for 28 minutes, and the paramedic pronounced him dead? Langley's newspaper article says otherwise:

"Frantically, Mrs. Brinkley began pounding away on her husband's chest, stopping only to grasp his tongue and pull it away from his windpipe so he could breathe.

"I was out for a few minutes, and she saved my life," Danny said. With breathing restored, Mrs. Brinkley called the paramedics."

How long did Dannion, or Danny

as he was called then, say he was out for? "A few minutes." Who saved his life? His wife. And it all happened before the paramedics even arrived!

But there's more. Remember, Dannion also tells people that he woke up in the hospital later, after having traveled to heaven and talking to angels. But that is definitively contradicted by Dannion's own doctor, who was interviewed by investigative journalist Jon Ronson in the film, "Reverend Death." Dr. Gilmore Eaves says he was at Dannion's side within an hour of his brush with lightning. Was Dannion terribly hurt? Was he talking about his incredible Out-of-Body Experience?

"When I saw him he was completely lucid," Dr. Eaves said. He tells Ronson that he read stories later about how Dannion Brinkley had been pronounced dead and how he recalled a sheet being pulled over his head. But as Dr. Eaves says, "That's just not true." Nor did he ever tell him about seeing a light or seeing a cathedral.

In the film, Ronson actually goes to see Brinkley himself, showing him the article by Carl Langley in the Augusta Herald. Brinkley laughs it off, explaining that he was young and embarrassed and, "wasn't gonna start ranting and raving

about a near-death experience.” He states that it is true that his wife, by pounding on his chest, did bring him back to his body, but that then he left it again. That is a dramatically different account; one that seems clearly invented on the fly after being cornered with his earlier statements [3].

But the film “Reverend Death” came out in 2008. It is three years later now, and Dannion has had some time to make up a new version of what happened. In a video posted on his website on May 18th of 2011, Dannion now claims to not remember much about the days of the events in question, which is funny since he has never had problems remembering in radio and television interviews before. Dannion says now that he was paralyzed for “6 or 7 days,” and couldn’t talk. So did Langley just invent the quotes in his article when he spoke with him the day after the lightning strike? Did Dr. Eaves have an imaginary conversation with a “completely lucid” Dannion Brinkley at the hospital? If Dannion’s newest story of not remembering details and being paralyzed and unable to talk is true, why didn’t he tell this to Ronson during the filming of “Reverend Death”? It is a complete and total contradiction to give interviews to newspaper reporters that your wife saved you after a few minutes, then write books claiming you were dead for 28 minutes and spoke with angels, to then saying your wife did save you but then you left your body again immediately after, then saying you don’t remember the details, to then saying everyone else is lying about everything except you because, hey, you were paralyzed and couldn’t talk at the

time. It is also interesting that he has waited until after Mr. Langley and Dr. Eaves have passed away to say all this [4].

The truth is that Dannion Brinkley is a fraud. He has invented a fictional story about an Out-of-Body experience to sell books. He has given people false hope about heaven, angels, and crystal cities, and has made a fortune doing it. That type of cruelty makes him among the worst people imaginable. When confronted with his fictions, he changes his story or infers that everyone else is lying about what happened.

Dannion has since written two more books about two more near-death and out-of-body experiences he has had. He claims to have been saved by the light, and to have found both peace and secrets in the light. But the more he talks, and the more you look into his story, the more you’ll find yourself blinded - not by the light, but by his lies.

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DR. INDRE
VISKONTAS

When it comes to having some type of paranormal belief, skeptics are in the minority. Does neuroscience have anything to say about our obsession with the paranormal?

Do you mean that skeptics have no paranormal beliefs? And that we're obsessed with the paranormal? or that other people have the beliefs and skeptics are obsessed? or that other people are obsessed with the paranormal? Frankly, I think that most people (skeptics excluded) don't think that much about the paranormal. If pressed, they'll say that they believe in the afterlife, or that miracles happen, or that ESP might be real but in general, they haven't given much thought to the subject. And when you ask them what they consider a miracle to be, or what is paranormal, they don't have a ready definition at hand. They feel that they have experienced many things that are difficult to explain, or that might seem to indicate that there are forces outside of those of nature, like precognitive dreams, or odd coincidences, and these experiences have led them to believe that the world is a mysterious place. I think we are obsessed with making sense out of chaos: we want to be able to predict things that are difficult to predict because they are complex. Examples include the weather, the stock market, trends, other people's behavior, when we will die and so on. Paranormal beliefs give people a sense of control over some of these chaotic factors: if there is a divine power looking out for me, then I don't have to worry so much about the deci-

sions I make day-to-day because I'll turn out fine in the end, as long as I follow a prescribed set of rules. If I can go to a psychic who will tell me what my future holds, I don't have to be so frightened of it. Neuroscience has a lot to say about many of these ideas, but I'm not sure which one you'd like me to focus on.

It seems that when people are introduced to information that proves a belief they have is wrong, they often simply hold to their original belief even harder. I've heard this called "the backfire effect." Why do our brains work like this, and are there good ways to counteract it?

Yes, that's true. Some studies show that the way in which the argument is made can influence the extent to which a person will accept it or fight it. We are very social creatures and, in fact, some neuroscientists argue that the exponential proliferation of our neocortex, the newest part of our brain both developmentally and phylogenetically speaking, correlates with social group size. That is, the larger the neocortex, both in our ancestors and among our closest primate relatives (and other mammals, for that matter), the larger and more complex the society in which the species existed or exists. The neocortex is the part of the brain that supports many of the most complex and arguably most 'human' of our traits: language, decision-making, evaluating one another's beliefs and intentions. So if our brains evolved in an environment where good social skills were adaptive, then we can

look at cognitive biases through the lens of social interactions. Now evolutionary psychology can only take us so far, and I'm indulging in a fair bit of speculation here, but I would argue that the backfire effect is a result of the fact that it was likely very adaptive to know whether the person you are arguing with is a friend or a foe: in your social circle or in your enemy's. If you associate him or her with the 'out-group', that is, someone outside of your social circle who might be hostile, then you will question the validity of what he/she is telling you more vigorously. If it's a person you consider kin, or friend, you'll be more trusting. If your social circle is knit together with some belief in the paranormal, and an outsider comes along and tries to talk you out of your belief, you will engage in counterarguments (often silently, in your head) with every point that he/she brings up. This counterarguing is a very effective mnemonic tool if you want to remember your own beliefs. By actively engaging with the material, you are making it more memorable but what you will remember is selective - you will look for evidence confirming your beliefs (called the confirmation bias) and you will remember the counterarguments that you generated more readily than the opposing information that you took in passively. You'll also find your own counterarguments more 'truthful' because they are familiar to you (illusion of truth bias - things that are familiar seem to ring more true). The end result will be that you will come away more firmly believing your view, rather than the

opposite. What can we do to combat the backfire effect? A few strategies come to mind. One is to try to break down the 'outgroup' barrier and to demonstrate that you're a friend not a foe. Another strategy is to make your case more memorable - using multiple approaches to demonstrate the evidence, using pictures in addition to words (picture superiority effect), encouraging the individual engage with the evidence (ie collecting fossils or asking questions themselves) and hammering it home over and over and over. This strategy seems to be working for climate scientists, who use converging evidence, and different marketing strategies from feature films to grassroots efforts to get their point across. Although in any given encounter, it's hard to change a person's ingrained beliefs, over time, attitudes can shift.

One case I remember in particular involved a girl who had cancer and underwent medical treatment. However she also decided to ingest "magic" or "holy" dirt. Thankfully her cancer went into remission, but instead of giving credit to medical science, she believed it was the "magic" dirt. Why does this happen? People preferring to go with the supernatural as an explanation instead of medical science?

I think you're referring to Desi in Colorado. She did give credit to medical science, though you're right in remembering that she also believed that God was healing her via the dirt from Chimayo. She acknowledged that the help

that she received from God was spiritual in nature, and that without the radiation treatments she would not have survived. So I wouldn't say that she completely neglected the part that medical science played. There are scarier stories of people who do, in fact, eschew chemo in favor of 'alternative treatments' that have not been proven to be effective. Those stories break my heart and make me very angry at the snake oil salesmen who allow these people to line their pockets. I think it happens because, unfortunately, not all medical treatments (in fact most of them) work for every single patient in the same way. And many of the treatments do have serious side effects. So a person gets frightened by the description of the side effects, then hears some 'miraculous' story about another patient who had a similar problem and was 'cured' via a non-invasive alternative method and finds that path more attractive. Combine this situation with a fervent belief that prayer and/or God, or the healer, or whatever, will save him so long as he has faith and it makes sense for him to choose the alternative. The problem is that medical science is honest about its shortcomings: the doctor will tell you that while 50% of patients will improve with few side effects, 25% will improve but experience serious side effects, 5% will show neither improvement nor side effects but 20% of patients have serious side effects with no improvement. The doctor has this information because multiple studies have been conducted and the side effects and rate of improvement are well-known. The alternative

medicine or supernatural cure was very likely not subjected to rigorous testing, so no one knows how (in)effective it is and the 'healer' is under no obligation to tell you. We're not very good at understanding probabilities so the simpler supernatural cure seems like a better option if there is a strong belief that it will be curative. I'm not advocating that doctors should avoid giving out this information, but, rather, that we need to be more skeptical when that information is not available, as is the case for many miracle cures. There is also a distrust of traditional medicine in some social groups. People see doctors as making lots of money and big pharmaceutical companies as motivated solely by profit. The healer, who comes from an impoverished background, or a belief-system that is similar to the patient, is more relatable and therefore considered trustworthy - we're back to the ingroup/outgroup problem.

I read an interview with you once where you seemed hesitant to label yourself as a "skeptic." Having interacted with the skeptical community at conferences, and appearing alongside many prominent skeptical activists on "Miracle Detectives," has your feeling changed?

I still feel like a bit of an outsider in the skeptical community but I have to say that by attending some of the conferences and events, I have met some truly wonderful people with whom I have much more in common than I thought. And I've had a lot of fun

too. I like to think of myself as skeptical by nature, though I eschew the label 'skeptic' just like I eschew other labels, such as 'liberal' or 'activist'. We're all more complicated than any label and I still have a hard time with some of the stereotyping that comes with the skeptic moniker. I'm also sensitive, as you can tell, to the ingroup/outgroup problem and by labeling myself as a skeptic, I worry that I'll lose a part of my audience that I truly want to reach. I almost feel that the skeptical movement will be better-served if the similarities between believers and 'skeptics' are just as obvious as the differences.

You have written and spoken about how our brains process memories, and how our recollections of these memories change over time. Briefly, could you discuss how and why our brain does that?

Memory is a vast topic because it comes in so many different flavors: skills and habits, facts about your life, facts about the world, your sensory memory and so on. But what I talk about most often, and what I've written about primarily, is our memory for events in our lives. I use the term recollection because we are re-collecting all the little bits and pieces of a memory and reconstructing it in the act of remembering. This type of memory is fascinating to me because it is one of the keys to our identities and it very much affects our beliefs and decisions. We think we remember personal experiences far better than facts, and so many of the decisions that we

make are based on our recollection of personal experiences. But remembering is an active process - and our current mood, beliefs, surroundings and other factors influence not only what we remember in this moment, but also how we will remember it in the future. The hippocampus, which is one of the brain regions necessary for this type of episodic remembering, is wired such that it can lay down new memory traces with a single encounter - you can learn forever that your co-worker Betty is allergic to shellfish even if there is only one occasion on which the subject came up. Years later, when planning a dinner party with Betty as an invitee, you might remember the time that you all went out to dinner after work and she had an allergic reaction, even if you haven't thought about it for ages. That's amazing! But you also need to forget all the irrelevant information that you encoded during the thousands of lunches and dinners that you shared with her over the years. In order to tease out the relevant from the irrelevant information, our episodic memory is influenced by things like the emotional salience of an event, by how often we've brought it to mind, by how similar the context in which the memory was laid down is to the context in which we currently find ourselves and many other factors. Without going into too much detail, the architecture of brain regions like the hippocampus enables these factors to affect memory. And when you recollect an event, you lay down a whole new memory trace, forever changing the way that you will remember that event in the

future. Why? because we're trying to sort out what's important from what's not. How? The trace itself becomes 'labile' or unstable during the recollective process. If you teach a rat that a particular box is to-be-feared (because it has been shocked there) and then you destroy its hippocampus, it will still show signs of fear when placed in the box. If you teach a rat to fear the box, then you destroy its hippocampus WHILE IT IS IN THE BOX (in the context, the rat is remembering the fearful event), it will no longer show fear when placed back in the box. The act of remembering made the memory for the event vulnerable to destruction. It's how we update information in our long-term memory stores. And it's likely very adaptive - you want to be able to change a memory if new information demonstrates that the situation itself has changed. When this system goes awry, as is the case in patients with PTSD, for example, it can be devastating.

Starring on the show "Miracle Detectives," you had to hear a lot of stories from a variety of people about events in their life they felt were miraculous. How did your training as a scientist help you during these interviews?

Thinking like a scientist helped me keep an open mind and to approach the problem objectively. I felt that I had a better handle on what were the relevant questions to ask, or the right experiments to perform, insofar as we could actually test the claim. My training helped me break

down the claim into testable ‘bits’ if there were any, and to devise a method of testing them. It also helped me understand why the claim was compelling to the person who experienced it, because I knew about cognitive biases and the power of personal experiences. But most of all, my scientific training has amplified my curiosity about the world and all its wonders. This curiosity made every interview fascinating to me, and the pursuit of new knowledge fueled me through long days and short nights of researching and filming.

Speaking as a scientist, can you talk about the problems you see in the way many media outlets report science news?

There are lots of excellent science journalists out there, but unfortunately, they are often overlooked in favor of the sensational story. But that aside, I think that perhaps the biggest problem is that often media outlets, in their effort to provide ‘balanced’ stories, over-emphasize minority opinions and factions within science. So fringe theories can get more attention than they deserve.

On the television show “Miracle Detectives,” there seemed to be a good balance between believer and skeptic. However with editing and having to cut things down to fit a time schedule, was there ever a time you felt the post production altered you in a way that made you say something you didn’t mean, or was there ever a time you felt they showed something in an unfair way?

Well, I’m clearly biased... and overall, I think they did a great job. But yes, there were many moments that I wish had made the final cut. There was so much great material left on the cutting room floor. I’m sure Randall felt the same way. Most of the time I felt that they were pretty fair in terms of characterizing my true feelings about a given story. But there was one episode, in particular, where I felt that they manufactured an emotion by cutting the footage so that it looked as though I was devastated that a particular experiment wasn’t going ‘my way’. I tried very hard not to let my personal beliefs color my interpretation of any experiment and I think, for the most part, I was successful in that. Ironically, in this particular case, my experiment was a slam-dunk in my humble (but accurate) opinion, so the manufactured emotion seems totally out of place to me. I think because that episode was so clearly a case of this is NOT a miracle, the editors were erring on the side of making it believable.

Was there ever a time during your time on “Miracle Detectives,” you felt that maybe doing this television show wasn’t such a great idea? Were you worried at all how you were going to be viewed by the skeptical community?

Oh sure. I had many moments of questioning the decision during the shooting, then in the waiting period before it aired, and even after it aired and I got tons of nasty hate mail and snide comments on the show’s blog. I

wasn’t worried so much about the skeptical community, because I didn’t really know many people who were part of it. I was more worried about my scientific community, what my friends and colleagues would think of the show and my role in it. It was a big risk for me. But I’ve never shied away from risks and I felt that I was good at the job and that the job needed to be done well. So I persevered and I have no regrets. I’m proud of the show and what we were able to accomplish. And when I get the chance to do a similar show again, it will be that much better for having had this experience.

“...BUT IT’S A CHARITY EVENT.”



“ Being involved in the paranormal community, there are a few things people do that make me grit my teeth more than others. For example, self justification or cognitive dissonance to make themselves (ghost hunters) feel better about charging someone for a service they think they are providing. People providing false information under the guise of education and charity is one that really gets me going. I have to make it clear, I am not against people doing events and or lectures on the topic of ghosts or the paranormal. Heck, I do them regularly myself. I just can’t stand it when people on the believer side of things try to make it sound like they are the foremost authorities in a field that doesn’t really exist, or they try to make it sound more important by labeling it a charity, as if that is somewhat impressive.

I am almost positive a lot of people will read this and will disagree whole heartedly, even some of my closest friends. However, I must ask this question of them; How can you justify charging for information that is backed up by science or evidence? Does calling it “educational” or a charity make people feel better about this? I don’t care if all the proceeds are being donated to the establishment. The fact of the matter is, events like this are still charging \$25-\$150 per person to hear So-And-So talk about nonsense that

has never been validated, updated, or improved upon since 1870’s. Not one single piece of positive evidence exists within the realm of the paranormal. That is one simple fact that always seems to be left out of these lectures. In fact, most of these lectures promote ignorance as well in the guise of education. The statement “Well, science doesn’t know everything,” which I have heard spewed out of the mouths of thousands of paranormal investigators, just show proves one thing, that they have no idea how science works. This is called a Red Herring. Science never claims to deal with absolute facts (because it doesn’t) and science never ever claims to “know everything.” This again falls into this cognitive dissonance people use to justify why they are doing what they are doing. As if paying 35 dollars a head to see former cast members of Ghost Hunters and Ghost Hunters International talk about the same nonsense over and over is going to somehow stimulate your brain into thinking. As a matter of fact, anytime someone is standing up on a stage giving a lecture and appeals to the paranormal for an explanation of some type of happening is doing the complete opposite to stimulating your brain to think. They are just being intellectually lazy. Basically, what is being said is this: “I don’t know what caused this door on camera B to close on its own. We know the house has

had many claims of paranormal occurrences. Therefore, we conclude it was a ghost.” On what basis can one make this conclusion? I hear it time and time again at these lectures that are dubbed charities and falsely labeled educational.

Some people might say, “Well if these people want to pay their own money to hear people talk about something they are interested in, let them do it.” I agree, we live in a country where we have that right. And if that is all you got out of reading this article, then you missed my point completely. So let me reiterate here, I am not against paranormal conferences or lectures. In fact, some of them can be fun. I often attend them to debate people. What I am against is people titling them in a way to make them seem more important than they really are. “Oh, this is for educational purposes,” or “Can support our charity.” If you are really that interested in having a charity, do a car wash or a bake off. You are not offering anything to anyone by promoting false information littered with fallacious arguments.

OPEN FORUM

Why Skepticism is Losing the War
for Common Sense
By Phillip McErlaft

If you were to judge our society's critical thinking skills, you see an almost total lack of it. Our society is looking to be entertained not informed, which is scary in upon itself. Our lack of critical thinking is appalling and it shows.

An example of this is network news, not only do CNN, Fox News and MSNBC cater to the high school crowd with snappy catch-phrases and teaser clips of the next upcoming story after a break for their sponsors, these "news" organizations employ "hosts" instead of reporters. Let's use

Fox News as an example, Fox News is a really easy target with their opinionated personalities such as Glen Beck and Bill O'Reilly, Fox is also one of the quickest at "reporting" the news.

Fox News' "hosts" worry less about accuracy and more about trying to keep an audience occupied and entertained. An example of this is the recent charge against the CDC, which recently started an online program using a "zombie apocalypse" as a way to inform and teach in an entertaining and relatable way how a person could prepare for emergencies.

O'Reilly and Fox News how ever took upon themselves to blast the

CDC for the web page without even researching what the site was about. Here is the link to the CDC's site <http://blogs.cdc.gov/publichealthmatters/2011/05/preparedness-101-zombie-apocalypse/> as you can see these preparations could be adapted to any emergency. Fox News' stand on the issue is one of outrage, just like everything else, from striking public servants to Occupy Wall Street, according to Fox News it is all a commie plot to take away your jobs. The total lack of fact checking is not only lacking at Fox News but also CNN and MSNBC. How many times have you watched the news during the day and no matter how mundane the story is, that at the end of the day there are twelve "experts" commenting on the evils of Obama, Bush, Foghorn Leghorn and for the record I'll never vote for a rooster so cluck you Foghorn.

I think that these "news" channels should live up to their slogans, enough of this junk, just tell me how the people die and how many and why, leave your opinions out of it, I think dying sucks too and I don't need twelve out of work idiots to tell me that.

America's total lack of critical thinking is not just evident through the way the news is presented to us but also in our television shows as of now there are nearly 50 shows on the air that pertain

to the supernatural. The popularity in the paranormal has reached new heights, these shows showcase ghost hunting with state of the art equipment such as a jacob's ladder and other black and white monster movie props. While these devices look cool on TV, they have yet to produce any tangible results and the theories behind using them are flawed and at worse just made up. The scary thing about these shows is not that they are hunting ghosts, monsters, or what not, it is the fact that these shows set themselves up as "experts" and use "scientific methods". With no evidence and the apathy of a nation hooked on texts on their phones and TV shows based on basically unemployed slobs that somehow had a show made around them, case in point, the Jersey Shore. It is hard to think that critical thinking even exists. We need to incorporate critical thinking courses into schools at the middle school level. And soon.

My son brought this to my attention over Christmas weekend, and it made me think more about my ghost hunting experience. For instance, there have been investigations that I've been on where I'm hearing voices and no one in the room can hear what I'm hearing. It was happening so much that it literally started piss-

ing me off. Now during play back of video/recordings, sometimes, confirmation was made of what I was personally hearing.

Seems different age groups can hear different sound frequencies. Although I am older than the people I was with on these particular investigations, and I probably should have been the one NOT hearing as to the ONE hearing.

I would like to know your thoughts or opinions on the different frequencies and age groups, and how knowing this may affect ghost hunting in general and if this may explain why some hear things while others aren't hearing them. If this is possible with hearing, is it possible with sight also????

**Sincerely,
Michele Nardone**

It's true that human hearing decreases with age, losing the higher frequencies (around 16- 20 kHz), beginning as early as childhood. I should mention that there isn't a perfect correlation between age and hearing loss and that it varies between people. I, for instance, can barely hear above 14 kHz. As far as EVPs or disembodied voices being high frequency (up-

wards of 16- 20 kHz), that would mean that most people would not be able to hear them even when played back. If they are outside of the human hearing range (around 20 Hz- 20 kHz), then not only would you not be able to hear them, but they would also not be heard on recordings. However, from your description of the phenomena, this doesn't seem to fit your situation in my opinion. While I can only make armchair speculations, perhaps I can point you in a helpful direction. The most important thing that I can impart is that paranormal investigations are largely uncontrolled scenarios, meaning there are innumerable variables that couldn't realistically be accounted for. Unless you were in a recording studio, noise contamination is highly likely. For most of my life, I can recall laying awake in the middle of the night and listening to what I thought was the television or people holding a conversation outside of my room. There was no conversation, however. It was the amalgam of environmental noise from all around me. Things like passing cars, water pipes, and electrical hums. Together, these sounds combined to form random noise, something our brains don't deal with well. Like our natural tendency to find patterns in images, so to are we predisposed to find auditory

patterns.

Of course, I was not present during any of your investigations, so I can make no claim either way. As far as sight is concerned, I don't believe that the same principle applies as with hearing loss and age. If it were to be true, you would hear of people losing perception of blues and violets.

Always remember, consider every plausible possibility before creating one.

Thank you for your question,
-Nicholas Callis

If you would like to submit an article or have any questions or comments, please feel free to submit them to our Open Forum section by emailing us at thebent-spoon@live.com or contacting us on Facebook.

PAREIDOLIA OF THE MONTH



Sarah Crane has been awarded pareidolia of the month. The 38 year old woman claims she can see the clear face of Jesus Christ in her sock.

“We thought it would be good to make a little shrine for it - but unfortunately, when we moved it, the creases fell out a bit and the face isn’t quite as clear now.”

How dare you move a relic of the lord! It was obvious the sign was not to move the sock

