

DR. JOHN MACK

In Pursuit Of The Meaningful

by Sean Casteel

When Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard psychiatrist Dr. John Mack released his first book about his research into alien abduction, entitled simply *Abduction*, in 1994, it was major news in many different quarters. That a doctor and author with such impressive credentials should take seriously the stories told by people who claimed to have been taken by aliens from the normal plane of reality into another, quite different plane—something a large segment of the academic establishment generally regarded as tabloid newspaper drivel—was very important to the UFO community, whose members now felt they had an ally in their battle for “scientific respectability.”

But Dr. Mack also had many detractors, among them an investigative reporter from *Time Magazine* who successfully infiltrated Mack’s working group of abductees and published an account of her faked hypnotic regression sessions with him. The Harvard academic establishment also considered censuring Mack for conducting research that went beyond the usual established medical limits and pursued otherworldly knowledge.

Mack’s new book, *Passport to the Cosmos* (Crown Publishers, 1999), marks his return to the battlefield of the abduction controversy—what it means, how best to study it, the transforming power it apparently exerts on those who experience it, the dire warnings of apocalyptic, environmental doom these beings continually communicate to abductees, and where the collective destiny of the human race may be heading.

In the following interview, Dr. Mack talks frankly about the new book as well as what lies ahead for his Program for Extraordinary Experience Research (PEER) as they delve ever more deeply into the great defining mystery of the current age.

UFO: What sort of new ground does *Passport To The Cosmos* cover? What have you learned since the publication of *Abduction* five years ago?

MACK: From my perspective, the new book is totally different. *Abduction* was a kind of mapping of territory through case studies which were in sufficient detail to try to set out the basic dimensions of the phenomenon of so-called “abductions.” There was some interpretation of it, but pretty much there were case stories of these experiences. This book attempts to identify principal, meaningful themes that have emerged for me over the past 10 years of doing this work. And it goes much more deeply into the meaning of the phenomenon. I draw out of the phenomenon the epistemological and ontological questions that it raises and that any investigator must address so that their ideas don’t seem to come across as philosophically naive or without appreciation of the complexities of consciousness and reality that this introduces. So there are chapters on that.

There’s a chapter on the very powerful energetic elements—light and energy elements—that accompany the phenomenon and are deeply felt by the experiencers. Both the light, of course, which they see when the experiences begin, but also the intense experience of vibratory energy in their bodies that they relive when you go over the experiences and which in itself brings one into the whole realm of energy-biology, energy-physics. Subtle energies. Fields that are emergent, but again, this phenomenon requires that we know more about it if we’re going to understand it.

Then I get into the whole information/communication element which has to do with the way in which the beings, through the eyes or through telepathic communication or through monitors on the so-called “ships,” convey information about the state of the

world, provide technological knowledge to experiencers, but above all, demonstrate inescapably the devastation to the planet that this (human) species is causing. Those communications end up being devastating confrontations to the experiencers with the ecological desecration that this one species is bringing about.

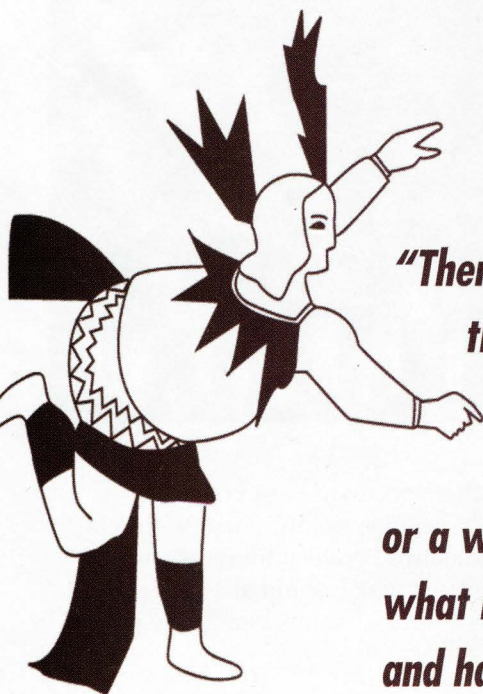
Also, they are shown a complex web of life, how all living things are interconnected. All of this being information that has been known by native peoples throughout time but which is lost in the extreme secularization of the mind in the West.

Then I get into what I call the symbolic or shamanic element that infuses the thinking, feeling, communication of experiencers, as they are affected by these experiences, bring them into a whole other kind of "languaging," or a whole other kind of experience—which is more like what native peoples and shamans have had to deal with and have known throughout history. The world becomes perceived in terms of links of meaning, symbology, archetypal notions of birth, death, rebirth. All of which links the phenomenon to the wisdom/knowledge of native peoples. Again, this is material that



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PHOTOS BY RICHARD J. CUTTING



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was only touched upon in the first book.

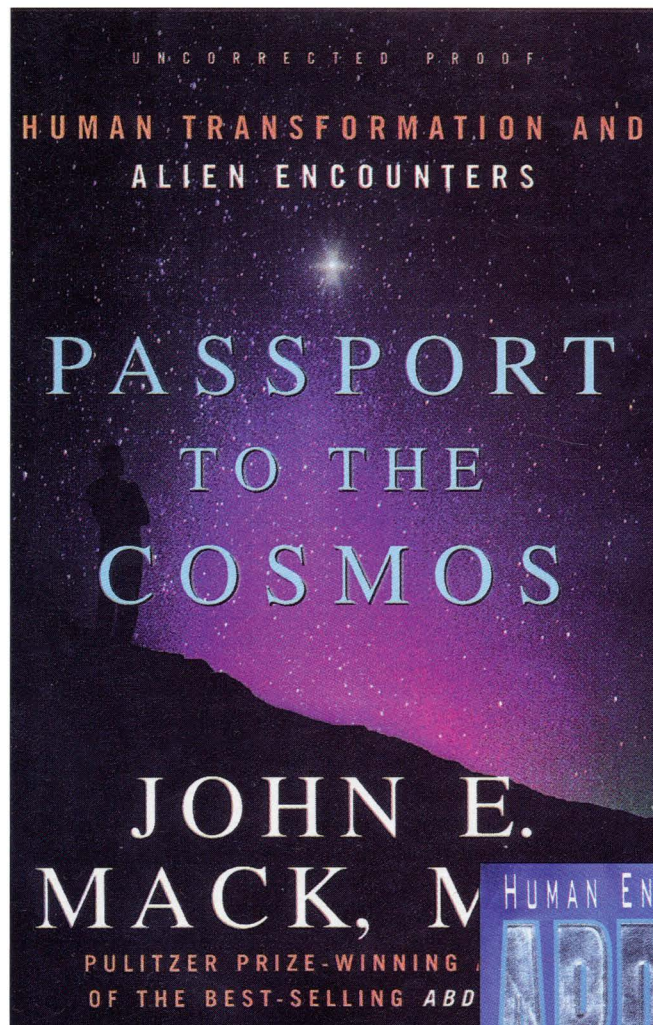
UFO: Is there more to the shamanic connection?

MACK: I present three cases of shamans from different parts of the world who have had these experiences—to show that this is not limited to our culture, although it's interpreted differently in other cultures. This is not simply a Western, techno-space type of phenomenon. It's known in different ways throughout the planet. So there are similarities and differences in those cases.

UFO: What about the trauma that is so often a part of the experience?

MACK: I also deal with the relationship of traumatic aspects of the phenomenon—which is real and something I don't underestimate. But I show that this very traumatic element contains within it the possibilities of transformation. It's not just these bad aliens doing mean things to Americans or something like that. They grow. They become open to a deeper kind of spiritual awareness. Their consciousness is opened. And I have a whole chapter on what I call "Returning To Source," which is the reconnection—I can't say connection—but the reconnection of individuals to the "divine intelligence" or the "creative principle in the cosmos," what people generally around the world have called "God." But that word has so much negative baggage that comes with it that I don't use it.

So the word that the experiencers tend to use, and which I use, is "Source," with a capital "S," or "Home," with a capital "H." And they have very deep and moving, really spiritual expres-

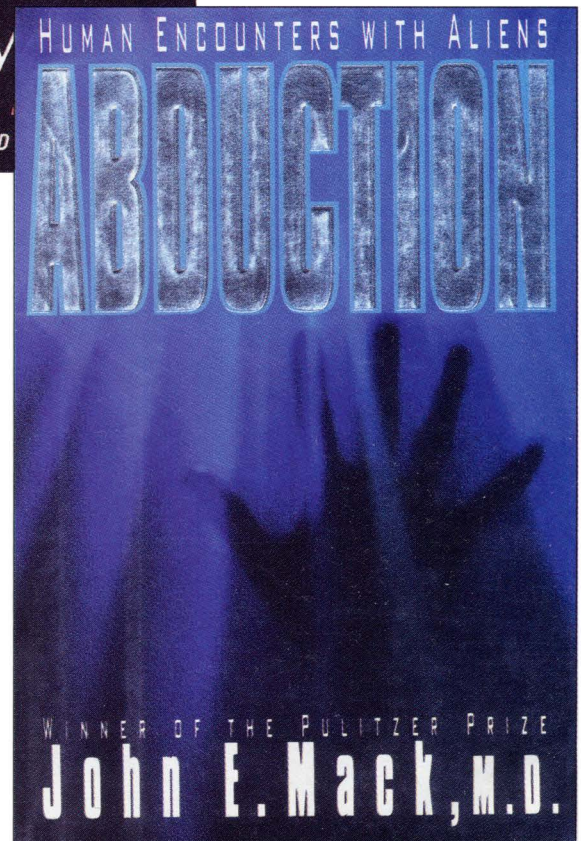


sions in their work with us. But the trauma and the fear has to be addressed by the facilitator, and the person has to be enabled to move through that or the phenomenon ends up being aliens poking their bodies and doing mean things to them. And to stop with that would lose the meaning.

UFO: Do the hybrid children show up in your research?

MACK: I also do deal with the hybrid thing, the hybrid project that Budd Hopkins discovered and which is very important. But I see the hybrid project in the context of the ecological devastation, because the beings communicate over and

over again to the experiencers that the hybrids are a race that will preserve whatever element—I don't say "genetic" because I don't have specific biological proof of genetic elements here—but will preserve elements of the human as it's combined with some other principle that appears to come from aliens or whatever these beings are. And the hybrids are creatures or beings that can exist in the future, someplace, somewhere—I don't understand it in ordinary space/time language—but will exist in some dimension when and if the seemingly inexorable destruction of life on this planet has reached the point where humans in our present form and many



other species are not viable.

And then finally, I deal with relationships between humans and the beings, which again at a superficial level looks like the beings are just

looking upon the experiencers as material for their reproductive needs or to replenish their stock or something like that. But if you go further with people and explore more deeply the relationships, it turns out that humans sometimes have a very, very deep, profound connection with these beings that for many of them transcends the power of any relationships they've had in the purely human dimension. So, overall, I see the phenomenon as reflecting some kind of bringing-to-us or coming-to-us from the cosmos of some beings or intelligence that is affecting the consciousness and lives of the people who have these experiences in extraordinary ways. And that the phenomenon has a great deal to teach us about who we are, reality, how we relate to the Earth, how we relate to one another, where our destiny may be taking us, what the choices are before us. It's a "game-changer," as somebody said to me. It's a lot of different things.

UFO: What's going on with your situation at Harvard?

MACK: I'm not reluctant to talk about it, but there's not a lot to say. There was this investigation in 1994 and 1995 that ended up with a letter from the Dean saying that I should do my work meeting the standards of the Harvard Medical School, which were never explicitly spelled out. Kind of left for me to find. There were things that I think I already know to do.

One of the difficulties in that period was that I was so new to this phenomenon that the kind of science which the medical school would want to see, which would be experiments, physical proof, the reproducibility of the phenomenon, comparison studies that would clarify the relationship of this phenomenon to other kinds of human experience or mental states—none of that could be done until the very nature of the phenomenon was identified and spelled out. After that was done,

and what we concentrated on in the first few years, we've [since] had a number of different projects.

UFO: Can you touch on what some of your plans are for PEER in the future?

MACK: We're studying how to look at this phenomenon from the

So we assembled a group of 20 scholarly people, some from inside the university, some from outside. People in anthropology, history, science, theology, philosophy, physics, astrophysics, psychology, psychiatry. To think together about, "How do you approach something that doesn't fit?" So we've had one meeting and we're

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multidisciplinary point of view. That's one of the things I was encouraged to do by the Harvard committee, to meet with other colleagues. They weren't so eager to do that during the early period, because they thought it was all a kind of madness. But little by little, they've come to agree that something is going on here. We just don't know what it is.

in the process of writing [it] up. . . and seeing where it takes us.

A number of research projects have grown out of this meeting. More sophisticated psychological tests. One of the physicists who was there has a project to interview experiencers to learn more about the nature of the cosmos. We also have a research project that is

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occurring in collaboration with the Department of Neurology at one of the Harvard teaching hospitals, to rule out temporal lobe epilepsy. Meanwhile, we have a comparison study of 40 abductees, so-called, and 40 people control group-matched for age, education and gender, which shows that this is not a phenomenon that reveals any particular psychopathology or any personality characteristics that would in themselves distinguish the abductee population from any other group.

And we're also completing a study at PEER called the Multiple Witness Project. It's funded by a scientific group, the National Institute of Discovery Science, that looks at cases where there is more than one witness to the abduction. That is, when a wife or a husband or a friend is present during the experience so there is validation of the experience by somebody else. In other words, one of the arguments being that these are psychological experiences that come from the internal world of the persons themselves. If you show that there are other people around them who saw one or more element of the experience, or participated in one or more element, and can report that, it lends credence to the reality of the phenomenon.

We also have a very extensive educational program at PEER. An event occurred on November 16 in New York City called "Exploring The Heart Of The Mystery." With our clinical director and one of the experiencers, I presented to a rather diverse audience where we are with the phenomenon. Also, our work is being recognized by national and international groups that are not just UFO groups, but groups that are interested in what this is saying as a vision for the human future and changes that are occurring in consciousness and science.

We were also invited to present our work at "The State Of The World Forum" in San Francisco in October

last year, the series of meetings started by Mikhail Gorbachev to look at what we're learning in different fields of human activity that might be constructive in terms of the major problems in the world. In other words, this is not the whole phenomenon. Our work in particular is beginning to be recognized as having meaning beyond the UFO field.

UFO: Can you tell me about your recent visit to see the Dalai Lama? What's the relationship between the Dalai Lama's spiritual orientation and the alien abduction phenomenon?

MACK: There have been two visits to see the Dalai Lama that I've participated in. The first was in 1992 with a group specifically related to the abduction phenomenon, where a group of researchers was invited to meet with His Holiness to see what this phenomenon could mean for consciousness and for global identity and change. This was a very small group, and His Holiness was very interested in the phenomenon and entered the mystery with us and recognized the reality of these beings and of the phenomenon and had some ideas about what was happening to disturb the peace of the universe that brought these beings to communicate so directly with humans on the Earth plane.

The other meeting, which took place in September, was called "Synthesis," and was sponsored by a group called The Institute For Global New Thought, which is a religious group with churches throughout the Midwest and the West. About 30 or 40 professionals or scholars from many different fields like education, media, science, medicine, economics and politics were invited to dialogue with His Holiness about what these different fields could contribute to our understanding in relation to the major problems on the planet, to help reduce suffering. There were also, in addition,

70 or so witnesses who were there to support the process and were an integral part of the meeting.

And out of that dialogue, again, a number of projects have emerged. One of the things that His Holiness addressed was the fundamental problem of the unequal distribution of resources on the planet and all the difficulties that derive from that. And each of our fields, for example, has something to say about that. Clearly, that's related to economics, it's related to environmental studies, it's related to health, it's related to war and peace. It's perhaps the central difficulty underlying most of the fundamental human problems.

So that in a sense was the centerpiece of our collaboration in Dharam Sala, which is a hill-town in the Himalayas of Northern India. It's where he has set up the Tibetan government-in-exile, and he resides and operates there as both the political and spiritual leader of the Tibetan people. And as you know, [he] struggles with the tremendous problem of the Tibetan/Chinese relationship.

UFO: Is there anything you wish to add, some final comment you'd like to make?

MACK: Yes. I see this [UFO] phenomenon. . . as one of a number of different phenomena—such as Near Death Experiences, crop formations—that demonstrate "influence at a distance;" non-locality, so to speak. All of which indicate that our notions of reality are much too limited, and that we are connected with seen and unseen forces at a cosmic level that tell us we are not who we thought we were. . . that are challenging the whole sort of ontologically isolationist position or attitude of the Western intellectual enterprise.

So I see all these phenomena, of course including the abduction phenomenon, as opening us up to a different sense of ourselves, of our relation to the universe. And this includes the return of the experience of the divine, of the sacred, which is lost, particularly in the West. ●