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ASSOCIATION FOR EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION OF EVIDENCE FOR SURVIVAL

The Darkness Dialogue

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The grand conference room of the Gettysburg hotel was once the lobby of an elegant bank. There are chandeliers hanging from the intricate tray ceiling and, near the current entrance, a massive door guards the opening to the bank's now-empty vault. Sitting near that steel behemoth, while awaiting the start of the next session, the old man and I shared a few thoughts about what a neat setting the vault might provide for a séance. Would the tons of steel and concrete deter the spirits? There certainly would be no problem restricting access, or achieving the total darkness that so many spirits seem to require.

"I note," he said, "that the system by which you propose to rank cases for the Survival Top 40 excludes any incident that is not sufficiently illuminated to be observed clearly. Do you think all of the reports from darkened séance rooms are fallacious?"

"It isn't what I think that matters," I replied. "As you know, the Top 40 are supposed to be the cases that are most likely to convince the reader that we do live on. Since most folks, quite rightly, are suspicious of what might occur under cover of darkness, I am reticent to include

such cases, even if I have no reason to suspect fraud."

"But have you ever considered that total darkness can reveal as well as hide?"

"No. Can't say that I have."

"Well, consider that if you've been sitting in the dark for a long time so that your eyes are as well adjusted as they can get and you still can see absolutely nothing, then anyone or anything that moves easily and precisely about the room must possess inhuman powers of sight.

"We have testimony from scores of participants in hundreds of pitch-dark séances that something intelligent was capable of moving about rapidly without bumping into any furniture or person. Likewise, many sitters have spoken of being deftly touched, tapped, and even kissed in a way that no human could duplicate without sufficient illumination. In addition, comments revealing a clear view of the room are often made by seemingly disembodied voices."

Later, I retrieved this passage from Findlay's *On the Edge of the Etheric*² in which he is discussing sittings with the medium John C. Sloan:

¹ Allen, Miles Edward, *The Afterlife Confirmed: Even More Convincing Evidence from the Survival Files*, Momentpoint Media, 2013. This book is available on Kindle and in print from Amazon.com.

² Findlay, Arthur, *On the Edge of the Etheric: Or Survival After Death Scientifically Explained*, 1931, pp. 135-136.

"[A spirit] reprimands someone for sitting with his legs crossed, which is one of the first things a novice at a séance is told not to do. The novice, thinking that as we are sitting in the dark no one will see him, sometimes disobeys this injunction, but forgets that the darkness is no darkness to them, that they see us clearly, and everything we do. A tap by the trumpet on the culprit's head, and a polite request not to cross his legs, invariably proves this; in fact, I have never known a mistake to be made. ... Other instances have occurred, quite apart from the regular voice phenomena, to show that the etheric intelligences present can see in the dark. I shall mention a few.

"At the close of a sitting, just before the farewells are said, I have often held out my watch and asked the time, and on every occasion, when the lights have been turned on, I have found the reply correct almost to the minute, and this be it remembered is done in the dark and when no luminous watches are in use. This correct time telling, moreover, occurs after a sitting of from two to three hours. Again, if I hold my finger in any direction it will, on request, be gently touched with the trumpet; no fumbling, a clean gentle touch. Any part of the body, on request, will be cleanly and gently touched, either ear, the nose, the left or right knee—an impossible thing, as I have proved, for any human being to do in the dark."

And all this long before the invention of night-vision goggles.

"Furthermore," my companion pointed out, "there is another aspect of darkness that argues for the reality of spirit intelligences. That is the impossibility of a medium carefully studying a sitter's demeanor and posture in order to seemingly read her mind. As Findlay states, 'It might be possible for a human being with the deductive faculty of a Sherlock Holmes to have some

idea of our thoughts in daylight, from a study of our facial expressions, but in the dark, never.³

"Finally, the inability of séance participants to see in the dark sharpens their aural acuity and eliminates visual cues that could be misleading. The right clothing, a pair of spectacles, maybe even a beard, in dim light, combined with the desire to believe, can result in a false recognition. But the voice alone is not so likely to be misidentified.

"To us, darkness is blindness. If spirits see 'with their minds' then everything would seem to be illuminated whether or not there was any light present."

Even though I do not plan to eliminate the requirement for clear observation from the Top-40 ranking system, I see the validity of these points, and so include them here for further consideration by both researchers and skeptics.

Not Seeing Is Believing

Cases that depend upon eyewitnesses are, of course, seriously weakened when the witnesses cannot see clearly. But, when the medium or percipient is blindfolded or otherwise in the dark, the evidentiary value can be greater. The best examples of this effect are probably cases involving the "Ouija" board.

Boards covered with letters and numbers that could be pointed to with a small triangular table known as a "planchette" or "traveler" were often used by spirit seekers during the early 1880s. On February 10, 1891, Elijah J. Bond was granted the first patent on such a board. His business partner, Charles Kennard gave their version the name "Ouija," which he falsely believed was Egyptian for "luck." Parker Brothers bought the rights to the name in 1966, so I will use the generic "talking board" from here on.

Of all the diviner's devices, the talking board is the most popular. Perhaps this is because its low cost and ease of use appealed to many who wouldn't think of buying a crystal

³ *Ibid.* p. 173.

ball or learning to read tarot cards. Also, using the board is a social thing requiring at least one person and usually two people to touch the traveler and another to copy down the messages being spelled out. Before the advent of horror movies on late-night television, many young folks sought answers to burning questions (“Will I marry a handsome man?” “Does Frankie love me?”) from the board. This proved especially thrilling on dark and stormy nights amid flickering candles.

Unfortunately, not all encounters with the powers behind the board have been so innocent or harmless. Many people claim that playing with a talking board can open portals to other dimensions, letting in immoral or amoral spirits who revel in encouraging nasty deeds and may even try to possess the naive planchette pusher. The recommendations made for dealing with such interlopers range from prayer to envisioning white auras to trashing the board altogether.

Nevertheless, the talking board is hugely important because several of the best mediums and channelers employed it to make their initial contact with the spirit realms.

This author would, therefore, advise those trying out the talking board to exercise caution and common sense. Any messages coming through the traveler should be evaluated in the same manner as would commentary or advice received from any other stranger. As the Bible commands, “Do not trust any and every spirit, test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”⁴

Skeptics are quick to claim that the only thing coming through talking boards is the inner self of the user and that the results are either fantasy or repressed memories. These critics are often correct; but when the operators have no link to the information sources, the evidence is very convincing. And it gets even more convincing

when the operators are kept in the dark as to the location of the letters.

The Honorary Secretary of the S.P.R. for Russia, Michael Solovovo wrote an article describing how a certain Lieutenant Colonel Starck obtained previously unknown information while ensuring that the operators of the board could not be influencing the messages. Prior to each session, Stark would bandage the eyes of both women so that they could see nothing. Then he would write the letters of the alphabet in random order on a piece of paper and place it on a table between the women. He would next place their hands on the traveler — in this case, a small over-turned saucer with a pointer attached. As he asked questions, the traveler would move quickly and precisely to spell out the answers.

A similar approach was used by the Unitarian minister, Dr. Horace Westwood. This is his description of how his 11-year-old daughter, Anna, got started with the board: “So we let them try, one by one, and each pulled a blank, much to their chagrin, until Anna placed her little hand on the planchette. She had hardly touched it, when the indicator began to move with startling rapidity and with equally startling accuracy, spelling out words and sentences in complete and intelligent sequence.” Turning the board around had no effect on Anna’s remarkable ability, nor did blindfolding the girl. The next day Westwood drew the letters of the alphabet “higgledy-piggledy” on a large piece of paper. “Indeed,” he explains, “they presented such a confused picture that if I wanted to spell out any word, and with my eyes wide open, it was an effort to find the letters.” Such precautions proved pointless. When Anna was blindfolded and led to the scrambled board, the tumbler flew just as rapidly and the messages came just as intelligently as before.

⁴ 1 John, 4:1. See the document *The Sin of Speaking with Spirits* for information on Biblical injunctions regarding speaking with spirits.

One of the most inventive and certain methods of preventing operator input was devised by a circle of friends in Dublin, Ireland. They created a board consisting of letters on individual cards that could be arranged in any order. This display was then covered with a sheet of glass 22-inches square. The various arrangements had no effect on the rapid movements of the traveler or on the precision with which it spelled out meaningful messages. Neither did blindfolding the operators have any deleterious effect; nor did placing opaque screens between the blindfolded operators and the board. In other words, there was absolutely no way that either person touching the traveler could have any idea — via their normal senses — of what letters were being pointed to or what messages were being spelled out. Often, in fact, the operators distracted themselves with light talk and laughter even when serious messages of disaster or despair were being communicated through their darting fingertips.

In each of the three situations described above,⁵ the message(s) contained accurate information unknown at the time to anyone involved. But it should be emphasized that the ability to rapidly spell out *any* meaningful message when the location of the letters is hidden is, of itself, strongly indicative of spirit influence.

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⁵ For details on this and the preceding two descriptions, see case numbers 49, 67, and 40 in the Top 40 section.