

Distant Feelings?

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Some years ago I was in a Manchester taxi on my way to take part in a television programme on near-death experiences. The driver was intrigued and told me about an experience with his twin brother. They had decided to go away for the weekend together with their wives in a caravan. For some reason, the brother decided to return home during the Saturday afternoon and the driver went to bed early. At 11 p.m. he was suddenly awoken by what seemed to be a blow to the head, but there was no sign of any harm. On returning to the city the next afternoon he phoned his brother to check if everything was OK. Pretty much, was the answer, although I did have an accident last night after a few drinks - I fell down the stairs and knocked my head. The time? 11 pm.

How are we to make sense of such a story? Just a coincidence? A vivid dream on the part of the brother? I doubt it. There seems to be a human connection that needs explaining. Parallel stories could be cited concerning the unexpected apparition of a friend to relative at the time of their deaths to someone close to them. A large number of these deathbed apparitions were analysed by pioneering psychical researchers in their study *Phantasms of the Living*, published in 1886. Instances of this kind are what C. G. Jung called synchronicity or meaningful coincidence. Sceptics look no further than coincidence for an explanation and let matters rest.

For me these kinds of experience are examples of what I call 'empathetic resonance', the capacity we have to experience another person's state of consciousness as if it were our own - from the first instead of the third person perspective. Telepathy - literally 'feeling at a distance' - is an example of this phenomenon. It seems that telepathic experiences can be of three kinds: *cognitive*, where a thought or image is perceived, *emotional* where a feeling is sensed, and *physical* or bodily where the percipient experiences an actual sensation.

Here are examples of the third kind: Mrs Joan Severn had been sitting quietly one afternoon with her mother and aunt, when the mother suddenly screamed, put both her hands up to cover her ears and said 'Oh, there's water rushing fast into my ears and I'm sure either my brother, or son James, must be drowning, or both of them'. The aunt was vexed and ashamed at her sister's behaviour, but the poor mother was quite insistent. Shortly afterwards, her uncle came up to the house looking ashen-faced with the news that his son James had indeed just drowned.

Psychometry, or object-reading, seems to operate according to the same principle. A friend of mine handed her signet ring to a sensitive and asked what her impressions were. The answer was three distinct sets of experience: material relating to my friend's own life. to that of her mother, and that of her grandfather. This was fascinating to her, since the ring had been given her by her mother, who had in turn had it recast from a ring belonging to her father. In such cases it seems that the ring provides a mechanism whereby the sensitive is able to tune in to past experiences of the owners.

Doctors sometimes seem to be able to diagnose a patient's condition using a form of empathetic diagnosis. The nineteenth century American physician Dr. Joseph Rhodes Buchanan even recommended the development of such techniques as part of medical training. He himself gives a number of clinical examples. After the visits of a patient with acute dropsy he used to suffer from depression. One evening he was made aware that the

patient was suffering by a sensation in his head which came on quite suddenly. This happened at 10.05 p.m. and subsided to become a restless feeling of depression within ten minutes. A similar condition repeated itself between four and five in the morning and induced Buchanan to take some relief. On visiting the patient at 10 o'clock in the morning he discovered that the symptoms and timing had corresponded. Colleagues in medicine and healing have told me of similar instances when they can sense the patient's condition in their own body.

In his laboratories in Mexico, Professor Jacobo Grinberg-Zylberbaum set up experiments to test communication between the brains of two people placed in separate Faraday cages. The first subject received a stimulus to the brain and the experiment was designed to test whether the second (receiver) subject had an evoked potential corresponding to the stimulus. Interestingly, the results were only significant in cases where the subjects had a strong empathic connection. I believe that this finding gives us a clue about the nature of the telepathic experiences described above: that they are more likely to occur when the two people involved are emotionally close.

Another incidence of empathetic resonance occurs in some cases of near-death experience in the life-review. The subject relives crucial episodes of their life but with one significant difference: they now experience the event concerned from the viewpoint of other people involved in it. A homely example is cited by Raymond Moody of a child grabbing her sister's Easter bucket because it contained a toy she wanted: 'I felt her feelings of disappointment and loss and rejection'. More generally 'I was the very people I had hurt, and I was the very people I helped to feel good'. A more dramatic example is given by Dannon Brinkley when he and a number of fellow soldiers blew up a hotel in Vietnam and he experienced the anguish and pain not only of those who lost their lives, but the knock-on effect to their relatives and dependents.

I believe that these experiences point in the direction of a qualitative 'field theory' of consciousness where the communication is mediated by an empathic connection of love. More profoundly, they imply a oneness or connectedness of consciousness at a deep level without which it would be impossible for us to experience empathetic resonance. Our minds seem to be less separate than our bodies. A clue is perhaps provided by incidents in the life of sages where they seem to be aware of events going on at a distance as if they were in a way occurring within their own consciousness. I could cite examples from Sai Baba, Daskalos, Padre Pio and the Bulgarian sage Beinsa Douno (Peter Deunov, 1964-1944).

Two of a number of instances in the life of Beinsa Douno spring to mind. One of his followers was a train driver and had gone to sleep at the wheel when his train was approaching a station. He was rudely shaken from his slumbers by the sound of his whistle going off inside the driver's cabin and woke to see Beinsa Douno with his hand on the whistle. He instantly disappeared, but later confirmed the story. On another occasion he was sitting round a fire in the Rila Mountains one summer evening with a group of his followers when he became aware that another group had got lost on their way up. A group at the bottom of the mountain had in fact lost their way so they stopped and prayed for guidance. Soon afterwards the figure of their teacher appeared and indicated the right path. Meanwhile, in the camp, Beinsa Douno had gone into a state of quiet concentration. When he came to, he described what was happening with the other group. Impressively, the accounts from the two groups were synchronised in time. In the first case the help was given uncalled for,

while in the second the prayer seems to have given the stimulus. In both cases it is as if the experiences were somehow registered in the field of Beinsa Douno's consciousness.

I am currently engaged on a study of the phenomenon of empathetic resonance and would be most interested to hear from readers with the following types of experience:

- 1) Synchronistic telepathy experiences, whether involving thoughts, images, emotions or bodily sensations.
- 2) Other experiences of meaningful coincidence
- 3) Deathbed apparitions
- 4) Synchronistic out-of-body and apparition experiences
- 5) Telepathic experiences involving animals
- 6) Instances of psychometry
- 7) Examples of empathetic diagnosis
- 8) Examples of life-reviews in the near-death experience

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