

The Contribution of Spirit Release Therapy to Mental Health

Dr. Andrew Powell

Science and Spirit

In much of today's scientific community, soul centred therapies such as spirit release are regarded as pre-rational ¹, belonging to an era of superstition overthrown by the Newtonian revolution of the last three hundred years. The subsequent consensus reality asserts what is 'real' and what is 'imagination', reality being comprised of a universe that is physical in substance. There is nothing 'out there' that is not either physical, or something imagined by the mind. Such a view holds no truck with 'attached spirits'. How could there be a spirit without a body? This kind of material realism is essentially atheistic - there is no place for God or the angels, let alone spirit guides. ²

Yet the greatest scientists such as Albert Einstein have consistently shown awe and humility in the face of the unknown. They know that science throws a light on the mysterious workings of the cosmos, yet no more than the pool of light shed by a street lamp at night.

Both medicine and psychiatry today largely work by the light of that street lamp. Illnesses of the body are diagnosed and fixed like a car that has broken down and mental disorders are regarded as the result of faulty brain mechanisms. Recent advances in the neurosciences, such as PET and MRI scans, are cited in support of this 'objective' viewpoint. We live in a culture that is very intolerant of eccentricity and individuality, while subjective truth is discounted as lacking demonstrable validity.

In this scientific ethos, psychiatry is wide open to a pharmaceutical industry that idealises the neurochemical model of illness. Massive profits are to be made from life-long medication. Where, on the other hand, is the money to be made out of purely psychological, or even more so, spiritual aspects of health care?

Further, psychiatry has good reason to be reluctant to enquire into the 'paranormal'. A great deal of psychiatry has depended on agreeing what is 'normal' and then evaluating in what way, and how far, the mindset of any one individual differs from the consensus view. When a person deviates sufficiently from that norm, it is labelled psychopathology - disease of the mind. Jesus Christ would probably now be diagnosed as suffering from delusions of grandeur. And what would a psychiatrist make of the revelations of the saints and prophets, or of the visions of Julian of Norwich?

Yet to this day, we regularly encounter precognition, deathbed visions and out-of-body and near-death experiences. Telepathy, remote viewing and influencing, past-life and between-life regression, Spiritism, channelling and communications from the deceased abound ^{3,4,5}. And there is now strong evidence for psychokinesis, presentiment, mediumistic phenomena and distance healing, to name but a few? ^{6,7,8} What kind of science might allow for such things to be part of 'reality' every bit as much as the physical world?

The good news is that the advent of quantum theory has revolutionised what we take to be 'reality'⁹. The 'new physics' tells us there is no longer such a thing as 'objective reality' for there is no world of things that exists independently of consciousness. It is consciousness itself that creates the experience of the physical universe in which we live as embodied beings. More recently, the physics of string theory asserts that we exist in a vibrational cosmos of at least eleven dimensions! Together with this we have good evidence that everything is connected to everything else, like one unimaginably vast hologram; we human souls participate in a collective consciousness that transcends spacetime.

According to quantum mechanics, consensus reality, which gives structure and stability to the world of sense perception, arises from what technically is known as 'collapse of the probability wave', generated by millions of minds over time. Yet each of us has a capacity to collapse the wave in a place of our own making, transgressing the laws of classical physics. In one famous instance, Jesus turned water into wine! The materialisation of ectoplasm would be another example. We are shown that the veil between this reality and other dimensions is paper-thin.

The next question to ask is how might we distinguish between spirit communication and mental illness? One way of looking at this is whether the experience being reported is enhancing or disrupting that person's life. This is not absolute, in the sense that every life crisis is felt as shattering and yet contains the seeds of a new integration. But the aim must always be to find meaning and purpose in the crisis, with the chance of moving towards wholeness of being.

This is how one would distinguish between a Medium and someone whose life is blighted by the intrusion of voices that interfere with ordinary thinking. The phenomenology of the 'hallucinations' (i.e. hearing voices coming from 'outside' in the absence of any evident stimulus) may be identical to the experience of the Medium. But the significance for health as opposed to illness is entirely different¹⁰.

Psychiatry has finally begun to acknowledge this difference. In ICD -10, the diagnostic manual used in the UK, there is now an entry for trance and possession disorders (F44.3)¹¹ in which *'there is a temporary loss of both the sense of personal identity and full awareness of the surroundings; in some instances the individual acts as if taken over by another personality, spirit, deity or 'force.'* However, ICD -10 further goes on to say that *'only trance disorders that are involuntary or unwanted, and which intrude into ordinary activities by occurring outside (or being a prolongation of) religious or other culturally accepted situations'* should be included here.

Mediums can be reassured that the psychiatrist is not entitled to make a diagnosis of mental disorder! But what then of spirit attachment? This is difficult, since we have to bear in mind that attachment undoubtedly occurs in relation to a person's vulnerability. Such vulnerabilities include illnesses, bereavements, and emotional and physical traumas, as well as inborn sensitivity. But they also include disorders of brain function such as arise in cases of severe depression, drug misuse and schizophrenia. In other words, a person may have a mental illness and also suffer from spirit attachment, a case not of 'either/or' but 'both/and'. This is why it is so important that a careful assessment is made in every case.

The Spiritual Universe

Throughout history, in every culture that has acknowledged the presence of spirit, there has been a deep concern with the relationship of the human soul to the discarnate world. There is less agreement about how the discarnate world is structured. Each major religion comes to a view that it holds firmly to be true as doctrine. Then there is the problem of what to make of evil. Is evil palpably a thing in itself and if so, is it to be 'cast out' into the darkness where it presumably belongs (for it could not exist provided the universe did not somehow provide for it)? And if this is so, what does it say about the nature of the Godhead from whence it must have arisen? Or should we understand there to be a polarity in all things, that neither good and evil can exist without each other, and that our task is to acknowledge and hold the balance while finding compassion for the 'shadow' side of human nature, and so disarm it with love. Or is evil based on 'ignorance', the sheer failure to realise the golden rule that ultimately we are all one, and therefore that to harm another is to harm oneself?

This is not the place for theological debate, but the established religions have portrayed heaven as a dwelling for the virtuous whilst the unredeemed are cast into outer darkness. In the shamanic and spiritualist traditions, however, the universe is instinctively recognised as holographic, hence the saying 'as above, so below'. This is a far cry from the view of heaven as a place just populated by the good and great, with the bad incarcerated in another place called hell. Emanuel Swedenborg¹² and Allan Kardec,¹³ most notably, make it clear that spirits are attracted to the stratum which resonates with the level of their own spiritual development, and there are many such levels. Similarly, in life we attract spirits to us according to our vibration, for contact is established on the basis of this same sympathetic resonance - like attracts like. All great spiritual masters have taken the path of unconditional love and spirit honours their virtue. Likewise, every Medium committed to working with 'the light', receives help from spirit, and the communications that are received are uplifting and inspiring.

On the other hand, acknowledging only the 'light' ignores the 'shadow' side of the psyche, which exists in every one of us. Facing our shadow can be our greatest challenge and our greatest teacher. Remember also that from the quantum perspective there is ultimately no 'inside' or 'outside' - striving for our own redemption and the redemption of others is ultimately one and the same thing.

The approach to the shadow side that I am going to describe here is that of the Spirit Release Foundation. Initially called the British Association for Spirit Release it was founded in 1999 by Dr. Alan Sanderson, a psychiatrist, and a small group of medical and complementary practitioners. The Foundation now numbers around 170, a mixture of doctors, health professionals, healers and intuitives and will soon be affiliated to the British Complementary Medicine Association. While fully acknowledging the long-standing dedication of all who work in the field of attachment/possession (including in the UK the College of Psychic Studies, the British Union of Spiritist Societies and, for the Church, the ministry of deliverance), it was felt time for a new impetus in this field, one which would include practitioners who were experienced in psycho-spiritual therapies but not necessarily Sensitives, Mediums or holding any specific religious affiliation.

Spirit Attachment

Studies of the Near-Death-Experience ¹⁴ confirm what was always conveyed through Mediumship, that for the great majority of people the dying process is one of blessed release from the constraints and demands of the physical body. A person's personal memories, beliefs, attitudes and emotions are unchanged by death but adjust to the world of spirit.

However, a minority of those who die fail to make the transition successfully. They become what is known as earthbound, because they remain mentally attached to the Earth plane and so cannot progress. The soul has died burdened by some idea or emotion which is so strong that it will not allow that soul to complete the normal dying process but instead causes it to remain in a dimension adjacent to the material world (the astral plane). Fear, anger, and obsessive love may predominate. Consciousness remains but often in a twilight state, with only dim awareness of the passage of time, and sometimes without realizing that death has taken place, particularly when the death was violent, leaving the soul in shock (a characteristic feature of hauntings).

Other spirits are unable or unwilling to let go of their earthly appetites, sometimes sexual or through addiction to drugs or alcohol and seek out someone still alive who shares their tastes; this makes attachment all the easier. The attaching spirit vicariously satisfies its unfulfilled appetites to the further detriment of the host - mental disturbance, depleted energy, loss of appetite, damage to health, relationships, career and even risk of suicide ¹⁵.

Not all attaching spirits are discarnate, for the negative influence of one living person on another should not be overlooked. Psychic attack can damage the health of the victim, both physical and mental, and cause pain, often severe, in various parts of the body. The person mounting the attack is likely to be using witchcraft, and the influence of demonic entities may well be implicated.

This brings us back to the problem of evil. A significant minority of spirits are found never to have existed in human form and their mission appears to be to harass, harm and eventually destroy the capacity for life and love, through what is known as 'possession'. These entities have traditionally been the object of exorcism by the Church, which is tantamount to repelling violence with violence. One archetype that frequently presents to the spirit release practitioner is that of the 'fallen angel'; these 'demons' are angels who succumbed to the influence of Lucifer and who lost touch with their own divinity.

Assessment

For Sensitives, this will be a matter of directly perceiving what is going on. Other practitioners will need to take a full history, identifying where possible the occasion of the attachment and the vulnerability that was, and still may be, present. The language of the client often gives a clue, for example, speaking of being 'unable to move on', awareness of the 'presence' of the departed loved one or feeling 'haunted' by memories of the deceased, and indeed sometimes openly speaking of feeling 'possessed'. It may be helpful to ask the client to look inside and 'scan' for any object, or presence, that feels harmful or disturbing, as this may become the focus of the work to be done. For instance, finding 'black stuff in the back of my head' gives a chance to engage the entity. 'You, black

stuff, I want to talk with you' will often evoke a response, though not necessarily a polite one. 'How did you get in, how long have you been in there, why are you with this person?' are some of the questions which follow and which elucidate the nature of the attachment and the course of action to be taken. This approach is called 'interactive' to distinguish it from the intuitive approach, though the two are by no means exclusive.

From the outset, it is always essential to explain to the client what is happening and to ensure that the belief system of the client is being fully respected. Where the interactive approach is being used, it is also necessary to have the client's consent to let the spirit speak through their vocal apparatus, for this is, however subtly, facilitating an altered state of consciousness.

Spirit Release

The approach of the Spirit Release Foundation is to work compassionately with the attaching spirit, calling on angelic assistance and support from the spirit world.

Release may be effected by encouraging the spirit to go back into the memory of its death and to understand the nature of its entrapment. This understanding, offered with empathy, usually leads to a letting go and the awakening of a desire to enter the light. This may happen on its own or accompanied by a loving spirit or group of spirits who approach and greet the lost spirit with that purpose.

When this is done, the client may sigh with relief, saying 'now it feels he/she has really gone for the first time!' An important healing aspect of this release work, especially where there have been traumatic circumstances surrounding the spirit's bodily death, is the opportunity to resolve 'unfinished business' and of having genuinely helped the troubled spirit to move on, often with a final and loving farewell. Once freed, the victim is likely to need ongoing healing and psychological support in order to restore the integrity of the psyche sufficiently to resist further attachment.

When the entity encountered is demonic, practitioners using the interactive method may try the approach advocated by Bill Baldwin¹⁶. By calling on angelic help, the entity is surrounded by a 'net of light'. Fearing destruction, it becomes amenable to advice and can be directed to go inwards. At first all is dark. Then it discovers a light within that contrary to expectations does not burn but feels good. As its soul opens to the light, the entity is flooded with contrition for what it has done and is then able to be guided towards the angelic host, where atonement can be made and forgiveness found.

However, when a recalcitrant demonic entity is encountered, an experienced Medium should be consulted who, by working with his/her Guides, will endeavour to remove it so that it cannot inflict any further harm. Protection against psychic attack is essential in such cases, as well as healing being given to the client to repair the damage caused by the entity.

A short case history:

James sought help for depression and alcohol abuse. Always lacking in confidence, he had dropped out of university and found work in the art trade. When James was 28, his brother Ivor shot himself. James found the body in a

nocturnal search. The family was devastated. James began to drink heavily and became chronically depressed. After many years of unsuccessful psychotherapy and medication, he requested spirit release on the advice of a friend.

James readily entered an altered state of consciousness and the brother, Ivor, spoke through him. Ivor explained that he was now ready to move on, but said that their mother's need was holding him in the Earth plane. He was asked to approach the mother through his guardian angel and request his release. This he did, after which he found himself freed to go into the Light.

The contact with his brother prepared James for letting go of his own emotional ties with the mother. He required just two more sessions for healing. Two years later, he is happily married and working as a gardener. There has been no recurrence of depression or alcohol abuse.

Spirit Release Today

How might spirit release therapy hope to be more widely acknowledged as a mental healthcare resource?

There are two ways in which this could happen. The first would call for a major paradigm shift within science, with the recognition that our spacetime is nested within a multiplicity of other dimensions, that consciousness is primary and enduring while matter is secondary and transient, and that we are all participants of a living, spiritual cosmos.

Unfortunately, this is not going to happen without a quantum leap in the evolution of human consciousness, in which soul becomes the guiding principle. The resistance of the ego to paradigm change is an age-old characteristic of the human mind, as Galileo discovered when he spent the last ten years of his life under house arrest for reporting that the earth went round the sun.

The other way forward is to be entirely pragmatic and to look at spirit release therapy as an important psychospiritual therapy, while setting aside any question of what might be the ultimate status of the energies or entities being encountered. It has long been recognised that working with the beliefs of the patient brings the best results¹⁷ and for some, the concept of spirit attachment (and release) comprises a coherent, explanatory model.

As to the actual mechanism, it is not necessary to prove or disprove the presence of entities. To the clairvoyant, the presence of spirits is self-evident, yet the sceptic will argue that even the best outcome using spirit release therapy does not in itself prove the existence of spirit attachment as an energetic reality.

What about the interactive approach? It will doubtless be maintained that we are dealing with dissociative phenomena similar to that of multiple personality and that the dialogue is therefore taking place with a split-off aspect of the person's own mind. Nevertheless, efficacy can be demonstrated on the black box principle of input, throughput and output, without knowing how it is achieved. Most important is that the intervention is helpful to the client.

Keeping an Open Mind

While Newtonian science is based on the principle of either/or (an object cannot be in two places at the same time, for example), the quantum universe knows no such bounds. Technically called superposition, sub-atomic particles exist and do not exist at the same time; they can be everywhere and nowhere at

once! And where space was once thought to be an empty vacuum, we now know it as the zero-point field, swarming with energies of unbelievable magnitude ¹⁸.

Nature in her wisdom has largely shielded us from the impact of these energies, so that our personal, everyday consciousness can get on with raising families, holding down jobs, living to the full emotionally and, when we have spare time, puzzling on the nature and purpose of life. But in an altered state of consciousness, whether through psychedelic drugs, hypnotherapy, meditation or simply stilling of the mind, we find ourselves in touch with very different worlds ¹⁹.

When someone has the misfortune to suffer from the disturbance of brain function we call schizophrenia, it seems very likely that the psyche becomes porous to energies that were never intended to flood in ²⁰. Likewise, when the emotions of the bereaved connect them to the energies of the deceased, we should hardly be surprised that communications take place, which transcend spacetime.

The eternal attribute of consciousness is a wonderful thing, but so is spacetime, for without it our bodies would not exist and we would be deprived of the chance of growing in wisdom through the trials and tribulations of life. When our actions are occasioned by love and tempered with humility, we find ourselves aligned to the workings of the universe with a harmony of spirit that makes us tolerant of prejudice and accepting of differences. This will give the best chance for spirit release therapy to find, in the fullness of time, its place as a recognised and valued contribution to mental healthcare.

References

1. Ellenburger H. (1970) *The Discovery of the Unconscious* Basic Books NY.
2. Freud S. (1927) 'The Future of an Illusion' Reprinted (1953 – 1974) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* (ed. and trans. J. Strachey) Vol 21. London: Hogarth Press
3. Powell A. (1998). 'Soul Consciousness and Human Suffering' *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 4 (1): 101-108. Also www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/publications/index.htm
4. Powell A. (2001) 'Beyond Space and Time – the Unbounded Psyche' in *Thinking Beyond the Brain* Ed. Lorimer, D., Floris Books Also www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/publications/index.htm
5. Powell A. (2001) 'Inspiration and Persecution: Messages from Self and Beyond' *Network – The Scientific and Medical Network Review* 77: 17 - 21 December 2001 and *Nexus* Vol. 9:3 2002 as 'Quantum Psychiatry: where science meets spirit'. Also www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/publications/index.htm
6. Radin D. (1997) *The Conscious Universe* Harper Edge: New York
7. Schmidt H. (1987) 'The strange properties of psychokinesis'. *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 1:103-118
8. Fontana D. (2004) *Is there an Afterlife?* O Books UK.
9. Powell A. (2002) 'Putting the Soul into Psychiatry' www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/publications/index.htm

10. Powell A. (2002) 'Mental Health and Spirituality'
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/publications/index.htm
11. ICD-10 *Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders* Geneva: WHO 1992
12. Swedenborg E. (1758) *Heaven and Hell* Swedenborg Foundation West Chester PA (2000)
13. Kardec A. (1857) *The Spirits' Book* Federacao Espirita Brasileira. Rua Souza Valente 17 20941-040 Rio-RJ Brazil (1996)
14. Bailey L, Yates, J. (1996) *The Near Death Experience* Routledge: London and NY
15. Sanderson A. (2003) 'Spirit Release Therapy. What is it and what can it achieve? – a clinical presentation of therapist and patient perspectives'
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/publications/index.htm
16. Baldwin W J.(1992) *Spirit Releasement Therapy, A Technique Manual* (2nd Ed.) Falls Church, VA. Human Potential Foundation Press
17. Frank J. (1963) *Persuasion and Healing* Schocken Books NY
18. McTaggart L. (2001) *The Field* HarperCollins
19. Powell A. (2003) 'Consciousness that transcends spacetime – its implication for the therapeutic process' *Self and Society* Vol. 31 No. 4 Also
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/publications/index.htm
20. Divaldo F. (1979) *Obsession* (Tr. Donato E, Miranda H). Sao Paulo Industria Grafica e Editora S/A (1980)

About the Spirit Release Foundation

The objectives of the Foundation are: to enhance holistic health through awareness and understanding of spirit attachment and spirit release, to introduce this awareness and understanding to health-care practitioners and others, to provide training and support in this field, and to encourage research into spirit attachment and spirit release. The Foundation offers a three-stage training for accreditation in Spirit Release Therapy, building the practitioner's skills in both interactive and intuitive methods, featuring theoretical and practical work, with case supervision and a professional code of conduct. Further information can be found on www.spiritrelease.com

This paper can be downloaded from:

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/specialinterestgroups/spirituality/publications.aspx

The author wishes to thank the Spirit Release Foundation for material used in the article.

© Andrew Powell 2005