

BOOK REVIEWS

With the Tongues of Men and Angels: A Study of Channeling by Arthur Hastings. San Francisco, London, Montreal, et al.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991. 227 pp. Illustrations and photographs. References. Index. Appendix.

Sometimes it is important to go back and reexamine a book that has been overlooked. This is a review of such a book: *With the Tongues of Men and Angels*. Arthur Hastings, its author, sets himself two tasks and does very well at addressing them: What is the nature of channeling? What is the significance of channeling for us? These are questions worth attention, not least because the phenomena of channeling has been around for thousands of years and defies all attempts to explain it away. It is so compelling that even the exposure of occasional frauds has not slowed the public's interest. Perhaps this is because, as Hastings states, fully 15% of the population—in the United States today that would be approximately 41 million people—report hearing voices and receiving guidance. I do not know where Hastings got that astounding—at least to me—figure, but it conjures an arresting reality.

Hastings approaches his subject with an open mind—a surprisingly rare attitude, as anyone who takes the trouble to look at the literature of channeling quickly discovers. Whether it is called *channeling*, *mediumship*, *automatic writing*, *guidance*, *prophecy*, or any one of several other names, as a rule it excites more passion than insight. Hastings also writes with a light touch, which, for anyone doing research in this area, will be much appreciated. With the notable exception of Jon Klimo's recent and excellent *Channeling*,¹ much of the modern literature on this subject is famously insubstantial, and the more serious studies, dating mostly from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are so turgid and self-important, whether espousing or denigrating the subject, that reading them becomes an act of penance.

Hastings begins his exploration where it should begin, with a discussion of just what we mean by *channeling*, and he makes the important point that this is a big umbrella that covers many different beasts. He settles on this as his definition of what channeling is.

Channeling refers to a process in which a person transmits information or artistic expression that he or she receives mentally or physically, and which appears to come from a personality source outside the conscious mind. The message is directed toward an audience and is purposeful (p. 4).

¹ Klimo, Jon. (1998). *Channeling: Investigations on receiving information from paranormal sources*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

This is a more subtle definition than it may appear at first reading. Was Edgar Cayce a channel? With a few exceptions, he did not channel discarnates or dead people, claiming that his source was what he called the *superconscious mind*.² That is hardly the same thing as Frederick Bligh Bond, who reconstructed Glastonbury Abbey following guidance he received in automatic writing sessions from sources who claimed to be the monks who once inhabited the ruined Abbey.³ But both Cayce and Bond share one thing: They provided testable information that could be independently verified. This is quite different from the Ramtha persona channeled by J. Z. Knight. Like Bond's monks, this was presented as a discarnate source, but the Ramtha material is very short on testable information, running instead to long philosophical discourses. The key words in Hastings' definition are "outside the conscious mind." In that sense, yes, Cayce was a channeler. Under this definition, the same could be said of Rudolf Steiner, but what about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,⁴ Brahms,⁵ and Copeland,⁶ all of whom reported hearing the music that they wrote down. That would take channeling into the waters of creativity and intuition, and Hastings admits as much. He decides to focus his book on channeling with a defined source. This helps the structure of his slender book, but I could not help wishing he had taken a broader rubric, since while critics may deride channeled "masters" such as Ramtha, they can hardly avoid the mastery of a Mozart sonata or a Housman poem, and there is clearly some kind of connection here.

Having laid his groundwork, Hastings plunges into actual cases, some, such as Cayce, well known to millions and others, such as Pearl Curran, a St. Louis housewife who channeled the poetry, novels, and plays of Patience Worth—reportedly an English woman of the 17th century—are now virtually unknown except to scholars such as Stephen Braude, who has written extensively about this case. Phenomenon such as the Curran/Worth material, once widely popular and ranked equal to the work of Amy Lowell and Edgar Lee Masters, illustrate yet again the connection between creativity and channeling.

Even more provocative is the mathematical genius Srinivasa Ramanujan, a largely self-educated East Indian whose work is one of the great mathematical accomplishments of the age, and who said some of his theorems came from Indian goddesses—a fact mostly ignored in the biographical canon about this remarkable man.

² Edgar Cayce Reading 254–67.

³ Bond, Frederick Bligh. (1918, 1921). *The gates of remembrance: The story of the psychological experiment which resulted in the discovery of the Edgar Chapel at Glastonbury* (2nd and 4th eds.) Revised. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

⁴ Delaney, Gail. (1984). Creativity in music. *Proceedings of the Association for the Anthropological Study of Consciousness*. Annual Meetings.

⁵ Abell, A. M. (1964). *Talks with the great composers* (pp. 19–21). Garmisch-Parten-Kirchen: G. E. Schroeder-Verlag.

⁶ Delaney. *Loc Cit.*

Hastings goes on to cite a long list of other musicians and artists who channeled (albeit not the type of channeling that meets his definition), and once again, I found myself wishing Hastings had addressed the issue of creativity in the context of channeling to a greater degree. Although, given his definition, this “open channeling,” as he styles it, was not the focus of his book.

Hastings does, however, make some very important points, both about channeling as he defines it and about open channeling. A study of this subject reveals first the “variety of skills demonstrated”; second, that the creation of this material is “effortless, immediate, and spontaneous”; third, that the skills demonstrated are not only above what the channeler can attain in the normal waking state, but often rise to the level of real genius; fourth, that the material often has a profoundly spiritual, if usually nondenominational character proposing the interconnectedness of all life; and fifth, that channelers are not psychotic, abnormal, or dysfunctional—or at least no more so than the general run of the population.

This case history information, which makes up the bulk of the book, is fascinating, and most of it is little known. But more important than the case history material is the framework in which Hastings places it. He does not shy away from calling a fraud a fraud, and he gives the reader a clear path for evaluating what is going on. He also includes considerable material from the formal *psi* literature, which goes almost entirely unremarked in most books on channeling. My only complaint here is that I wish he had gone into greater detail on the relationship between remote viewing and channeling. Both, after all, are examples of anomalous cognition.

I particularly appreciated the section on the relationship between channeling and religious prophets. This is very touchy stuff that most scientists avoid altogether, and some religious find offensive: If it is God talking to you, how dare you call it channeling. Yet, at their core, most religions are channeled, and if only because of the slaughters and mass suicides that are such prominent features in the landscape of religious channeling, this subject deserves the closest attention. Hastings’ observations make a real contribution.

Similarly, his section on various theories and models of channeling provide what is probably as comprehensive and cogent a take on this aspect as will be found anywhere.

At the end of the day, Hastings achieves what many aspire to achieve and few attain in the field of the paranormal: a sensible well-grounded *but accessible* examination of a highly controversial subject.

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Reaching for Reality—Seven Incredible True Stories of Alien Abduction
by Constance Clear. San Antonio, TX: Consciousness Now, 1999. x + 230 pp.
\$16.95, paperback. P.O. Box 15994, San Antonio, TX 78212.