

References

- De Brosse, Marie-Therese. *Enquete sur les Enlevements Extraterrestres*. Paris: Plon, 1995.
Deuteronomy 34:6.
- Hopkins, Budd. *Intruders*. NY: Random House, 1987. pp. 4.
- Jacobs, David M. *Secret Life*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992.
- Jacobs, David M. *The Threat*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998.
- Maaseh Merkhahab, v. 714–718 in Janowitz, *Poetics*, p.51.
- Meerlo, Joost A.M. *Hidden Communion: Studies in the Communication Theory of Telepathy*. New York: Helix Press, 1964.
- Stillings, Dennis. Cyberbiological studies of the imaginal component in the UFO contact experience. *Archaeus*. volume 5, 1989.
- Sturrock, Peter. *The UFO Enigma*. NY: Warner, 1999.
- Thompson, Keith. *Aliens and Angels: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991.
- 2 Kings 2:1–15.
- Vallee, Jacques F. *Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers*. Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1969.
- Vallee, Jacques F. *Messengers of Deception: UFO Contacts and Cults*. New York: Bantam, 1979.
- Vallee, Jacques F. *Confrontations: A Scientist's Search for Alien Contact*. NY: Ballantine, 1990.
- Vallee, Jacques F. *Forbidden Science: Journals 1957–1969*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1992.

Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters by John E. Mack. New York: Crown Publishers, 1999. 306 pp. \$24.00. ISBN 0-517-70568-0.

The jacket to *Passport to the Cosmos* informs us that with this book, Harvard psychiatry professor John Mack “further solidifies his reputation as a brave pioneer on the forefront of the science of human experience.” Don’t judge a book by its jacket. Although Mack’s intellectual bravery is self-evident, *Passport to the Cosmos* can only solidify his reputation for taking a *non-scientific* approach to the abduction phenomenon. His first book on the subject (*Abduction*) was widely criticized for its lack of science, and the scientific perspective is no more evident in *Passport to the Cosmos*. It is not that Mack rejects the scientific method per se; nor does he assert that it can make no contribution to understanding alien abductions. Rather, as Mack’s readers quickly learn, he champions the position that alien abduction experiences “will not yield their secrets to the methodologies of science” (p. 9).

Instead, Mack argues that “the most powerful evidence [regarding the alien abduction phenomenon] is subjective,” that “we must make...a clinical...judgment” regarding the objectivity of abduction accounts, and that “findings” regarding the abduction phenomenon should be considered confirmed when “other observers discover the same or similar things” through their own subjective processes (p. 12). In lieu of hypothesis testing, scientific assessment, and experimental replication, *Passport to the Cosmos* focuses on “meditative, intuitive, contemplative, intersubjective, bodily, and non-sensory ways of knowing” (p. 38). Using these approaches, Mack develops a detailed explanation for the purpose and ontology of the abduction phenomenon.

As someone professionally attracted to the teachings of Freud, Mack may be inherently sympathetic to the development of complex and elaborate theoretical schema based on clinical, rather than scientific, observation. In any case, he attributes his investigative preferences not to any predisposition, but as a response to what he believes abduction experiences (as reported to him by well over 100 experiencers) demand. For example, it is his impression that “the agent or intelligence” behind the abduction phenomenon seems to be “parodying, mocking, tricking, and deceiving the investigators...inviting us to change our ways...of learning...of knowing and observing” (p. 10), that the phenomenon provides “incontrovertible experiential evidence of a transcendent reality” (p. 38), and that it is “so far outside of the laws of physics...that [it] may require a new paradigm of reality” (p. 9). Thus, he asks his readers to abandon their “tendency to form questions according to logic that is characteristic of the human mind as it applies itself to the human world.” (p.xii). This plea seems especially directed at “how some academics may defend a strictly materialistic world view” (p. 35), a position he regards not as a reflection of their reasoned assessment of available data, but as a psychodynamic response which “above all...underscores a fear of the unknown and keeps at bay ...the knowledge of invisible realms” (p. 34).

The open-minded will allow for alternate “ways of knowing.” Nonetheless, individuals attracted to an organization advocating *scientific* exploration (e.g., SSE) may be disappointed with *Passport to the Cosmos*. Others, especially those with a spiritual outlook on life, may appreciate this book for its focus on human development, and the positive perspective with which it views alien abduction reports. Indeed, its author sees the abduction phenomenon as “one of the most powerful agents of spiritual growth, personal transformation, and expanded awareness that is now affecting people on this planet” (p. 222), and sympathizes with experiencer reports of aliens “as emissaries or messengers from the creative principle...bridging the gulf ...between humans and ‘the One’...[who] assist us with the transition on Earth...calling us to continue our evolution” (p. 223).

In addition to concluding that the abduction phenomenon is aimed at increasing humankind’s awareness of its own divinity, Mack also finds it “quite possible ...that the protection of the Earth’s life is at the heart of the abduction phenomenon” (p. 88), a conviction stemming from the environmental messages experiencers frequently report receiving from their alien hosts. These messages, he believes, serve as “an opportunity or a gift, a kind of catalyst for the evolution of consciousness in the direction of an emerging sense of responsibility for our own and the planet’s future” (p. 280). But none of this, he feels, can make “much sense...without positing an ultimate or overarching creative principle or intelligence in the cosmos that is doing its work through this and related phenomena” (p. 272). Accordingly, he postulates the following ontology:

From some primal beginning...the work of a God force...all matter/energy emerged.... Human beings, having been formed originally by the God force,

retained some experience of a relationship to it.... But sometime in [the eighteenth] century...many people in Western society...lost their sense of connection with the Divine, the sacred realms, the Source, God, the Creator.... The loss of our relationship to nature and the Creator instills in us a great longing.... So we turn to one or another form of addiction and to the increased consumption of material goods to fill the hole within us that this spiritual bankruptcy has brought about.... It is not surprising that ...the Earth's capacity to sustain human life will soon collapse if no fundamental change occurs.... Evidently, what we have been doing to the Earth has not gone 'unnoticed' at a higher cosmic...level. Some sort of odd intervention seems to be occurring here. We are not, apparently, being permitted to continue on our destructive ways (pp. 272–275).

The intervention to which Mack refers is not one of direct physical force. Rather, he believes that “when it comes to our responsibility for the fate of the Earth, the ‘method’ seems to be to bring about psycho-spiritual growth or the expansion of awareness” (p. 110). The central dynamic for this process is the abduction experience’s “world or mind-shattering impact...bringing about a state of ontological shock” (p. 207), which, through the physical and psychological trauma it induces, “carries...the possibility of profound personal transformation and spiritual growth” (p. 208).

Whatever its purpose, this interaction between our own and normally “unseen” realities alters the debate about whether or not abduction experiences are “real.” While making clear his “conviction that the phenomenon itself is in some way real, not simply the product of the imagination or subjective experience of the abductee” (p. 245), Mack repeatedly emphasizes that the events experienced by abductees “manifest *in* the material world but seem not to be *of* it” [original emphasis] (p. 9). For example, abductions themselves may not be “real purely in a literal, physical sense” (p. 8), i.e., abductees may not be “literally physically taken” (p. 15), the physical manifestations of abductions (nosebleeds, skin lesions, etc.) “should not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the phenomenon itself exists entirely in the material world” (p. 15), reported hybrid creatures “might not exist in material reality as we know it” (p. 14). And despite the “intense...terrible, awkward, or sometimes poignant qualities that characterize [reported] human/alien relationships” (p. 245), Mack remains “doubtful that [they] are occurring simply in our material world” (p. 266).

Rather, he views the alien abduction phenomenon “as one among a number of occurrences currently confronting human consciousness...which might be described as crossover phenomena.... These phenomena seem to violate that barrier...between the forces of the unseen world and the material realm, giving us glimpses...of other realities” (p. 9). This view is reinforced for Mack by the relationship he observes between abduction experiencers’ “rich and meaningful world of symbols and archetypes that take them far beyond the level of everyday psychological or material reality” and the similar world “familiar to indigenous peoples, especially to shamans, native healers, or spiritual leaders”

(p. 135). In this regard, four chapters of *Passport to the Cosmos* are devoted to the experiences of a Brazilian shaman, a Native American healer, and a South African medicine man.

Along with abduction reports, these experiences convince Mack of a cosmos “filled with beings, creatures, spirits, intelligences, gods...that have through the millennia been intimately involved with human existence. In some instances, it would appear certain of these entities may even cross over the divide that we created in order to keep unseen realities and mysteries apart...from the material world” (p. 269). As he has explored the abduction experience with increasing depth, Mack has become “less certain...about when the abductees are speaking of something that happened to them literally in this material reality and when they are communicating events...that happened to their subtle, astral, or energetic bodies “ (p. 272).

In summary, *Passport to the Cosmos* weaves abduction experiences into a grand and majestic tapestry depicting nature and evolution in a “multiverse” where entities from other realms and dimensions purposefully impact our reality, consciousness, and spiritual selves in order to bring about a greater awareness of their own “higher” consciousness and save humankind and its environment in the process. But is any of this true?

In a recent article in the *MUFON Journal* (May 2001), British ufologist Jenny Randles describes various approaches to investigating UFO phenomena. Mack’s method would seem to fit her “way of the mystic,” which “rejects as a total explanation the path of reduction and reason” and for which “the quest for answers becomes a personal crusade for spiritual enlightenment” (p. 18). Like him, Randles sees merit in this approach when other methods (including “the way of the scientist”) “have all failed to progress” (p. 20) our understanding. But whatever value we may grant it, we must acknowledge problems with this approach as well, particularly its inability to verify hypotheses (beyond some personal sense of subjective validity), or to comparatively weigh hypotheses (other than intuitively) in regard to parsimony (the number of unverified assumptions they require).

The renowned physicist Richard Feynman once said “Science is a way of trying not to fool ourselves.” In taking the “way of the mystic,” rather than “the way of the scientist,” has Mack fooled himself? More fundamentally, in recognizing the limitations of science should we, like Mack, ask less of it? Or in recognizing the limited extent to which science has been applied to the anomalies, should we, in the spirit of Feynman, ask more of science instead? Ultimately, *Passport to the Cosmos* must raise these questions in the minds of all who are interested in advancing the study of anomalistic phenomena.

STUART APPELLE
*Professor of Psychology and Associate Dean,
 School of Letters and Sciences
 State University of New York, College at Brockport
 sappelle@brockport.edu*