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Current Research and Insights

**A Case of the Reincarnation Type?
Extraordinary and Unique Abilities
Reexamining *The Exorcist* Case
Fellow Travelers**

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Why EdgeScience? Because, contrary to public perception, scientific knowledge is still full of unknowns. What remains to be discovered—what we don't know—very likely dwarfs what we do know. And what we think we know may not be entirely correct or fully understood. Anomalies, which researchers tend to sweep under the rug, should be actively pursued as clues to potential breakthroughs and new directions in science.

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The Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE) is a professional organization of scientists and scholars who study unusual and unexplained phenomena. The primary goal of the Society is to provide a professional forum for presentations, criticism, and debate concerning topics which are for various reasons ignored or studied inadequately within mainstream science. A secondary goal is to promote improved understanding of those factors that unnecessarily limit the scope of scientific inquiry, such as sociological constraints, restrictive world views, hidden theoretical assumptions, and the temptation to convert prevailing theory into prevailing dogma. Topics under investigation cover a wide spectrum. At one end are apparent anomalies in well established disciplines. At the other, we find paradoxical phenomena that belong to no established discipline and therefore may offer the greatest potential for scientific advance and the expansion of human knowledge. The SSE was founded in 1982 and has approximately 800 members in 45 countries worldwide. The Society also publishes the peer-reviewed *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, and holds annual meetings in the U.S. and biennial meetings in Europe. Associate and student memberships are available to the public. To join the Society, or for more information, visit the website at scientificexploration.org.

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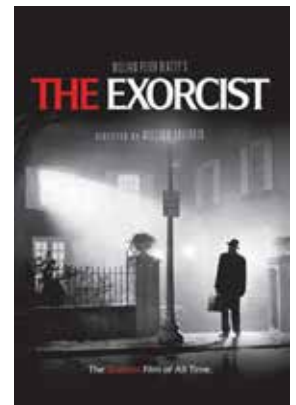
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I entered the emergency department through the ambulance bay and walked past the major medical rooms on my way to the physician work area. The resuscitation rooms are filled with specialized equipment and located near the ambulance entrance to facilitate immediate access to arriving patients. As I passed, I heard a familiar commotion and caught glimpses in my peripheral vision. A colleague barked out orders while other providers administered chest compressions and rhythmically delivered oxygen through the unconscious woman's endotracheal tube. I heard her ribs crack, as is common when frail elderly patients receive chest compressions.

I was about to log in to the computer when I became aware of a spiritual presence near me. A vibration began in the center of my being and radiated outward to the tips of my extremities, and reverberated back and forth until it filled every cell of my body. I'd had such experiences several times. I recognized what was happening, but I didn't yet know what to do with it. Then my unseen visitor asked for help.

I didn't know what help I could offer, or why this feminine presence would ask, but I left my computer and casually walked around the corner and into the resuscitation room. Because I was appropriately attired, known by the staff, and about to begin my shift, my entrance was inconspicuous. No one even looked up from their tasks. The physician in charge continued directing care, and everyone continued their assigned tasks. I had absolutely no responsibility for this woman's medical care. In fact, I think that is one of the reasons she came to me.

Because I'd just walked in, and because I was not involved in her care, my mind and heart were open. When I'm the physician in charge, particularly when it's a trauma patient or a medical resuscitation, I'm consumed with dozens of simultaneous medical decisions, diagnoses, treatments, procedures, and communications. In those circumstances, I rarely have spiritual experiences. On this day, however, I had none of those responsibilities. I was simply an open heart, in the present, receptive to another soul's request.

I walked to the side of her gurney and rested my hand gently on her right leg. It was the only spot not occupied by medical providers. No one noticed me. I touched her because I knew from previous experience that touch breaks unseen barriers and invites a spiritual connection. As the crowd of busy professionals continued their work, the essence or soul of this unconscious woman silently communicated with me. She asked if she could leave.

I was taken aback. Why would she ask me that? Why would she think I could answer? I was not her doctor, and this had nothing to do with her medical care. She wasn't asking for physical or medical help. She felt like a dear friend asking for reassurance. She was completely undisturbed by the commotion in the room or the consequences of their efforts. Our ineffable communication had already transcended those things.

In some inexplicable and instantaneous manner, I acknowledged her eight decades of honorable life. A flood of understanding flowed between us. We seemed to have known each other in another time. Then something came to me from eternity, as if I'd known it forever but forgotten. I silently suggested that if *she* wanted to leave, and if *she* felt it was the right time, then perhaps it was okay for her to go. It was her decision—entirely hers. As far as I know, no one else in the room was aware of our communication. I did nothing regarding her medical care. There was nothing for me to do. Everyone else was doing it. I just listened and silently shared the feelings that came through me.

I stepped back from the gurney as her last signs of cardiac activity ceased. She rose from her physical body and stood in the air, filling me with incomprehensible light and glory. She lingered for a moment that seemed much longer, as if time had slowed just for us. Her countenance was calm and pleasant. Her form resembled her now lifeless body, but she appeared much younger, as she may have looked in her physical prime.

She surveyed the commotion with a profound sense of peace, an ethereal peace that settled over me and took me to

a glorious place. Then she calmly, almost casually, turned to leave. Pausing, she looked back and thanked me. Then she was gone. As I walked away, I heard my colleague, in military time, pronounce her death. I didn't need his declaration; I'd seen her leave.

I walked back to my computer and logged on. That's how my day began. I don't know why this beautiful soul felt she needed my help, and I'm not sure if or how I helped her. I just know she asked, and she was grateful. In my experience, the essence of a fellow traveler—that portion of a soul we seldom see or hear or feel—is always grateful for our help.

This was not an isolated experience for me; nor was it my first. Just one month before my twelfth birthday, my 15-year-old brother, Stan, died in a farm accident. I witnessed the devastating impact his death had on my parents, but I thought I'd passed through it unscathed. Things would be different after June 18, 1973, but I didn't understand how. Twenty years after his death, Stan came to me. He told me I needed to go visit with our mother because there were things she'd never told me about his death.

I sat with my mother a few days later. Tears streamed down her face as she spoke of her oldest son. "I always knew where you were in the house before Stan died because I could hear you singing," she said. "After he died, you stopped singing."

I don't remember the singing or stopping, but she does. The experience must have impacted me in some primal way. It must have changed who I was. In my teenage years, I began hearing voices—mostly Stan's. I didn't tell anyone about the voices. I assumed others heard them as well. Sometimes they helped me; on one occasion, they saved my life.

When I was sixteen years old, with a brand-new driver's license, I piloted two friends in a Volkswagen Beetle, down a narrow country road, in the dark, at 60 miles per hour. No one wore seatbelts then, at least not in that car. A calm voice spoke to my heart: "You need to slow down."

I wouldn't have listened to my parents at that age. I was rebellious. I certainly wouldn't have listened to an authority figure. I don't think I would have listened to God if he'd been in the seat next to me. But I knew that voice. I felt it. I experienced it. And, for some reason, I listened. I slowed down as I rounded a corner. I met a pair of headlights I'd later learn belonged to a Cadillac. The damage was substantial, but no one was injured.

As I accepted the voices, I began experiencing the source of the messages in other ways. I hesitate to say I saw messengers because people equate that with physical sight, with corneas, retinas, rods and cones, and the occipital cortex. If that's how it worked, the people standing nearby would see the same things. When I experience messengers, the images bypass the retina, the optic nerve, the optic chiasm, and the cortical interpretation. I experience them in a pure, unadulterated way. Sometimes it seems almost physical, but it's deeper, richer, and soul-changing. It's not just interacting with another being in a profound way; it's realizing myself in a more profound realm, and remembering who I am.

Every scrap of human experience has value. Every shred of every encounter with every soul teaches me something. Each interaction yields an opportunity to connect with others, to hinder their progress or to move them along their path. And each interaction writes on my soul and changes me. One experience, in particular, helped me realize I'm not good at predicting who it will help or how.

I still remember a patient I met on a winter night. He was cold, wet, and homeless. As I entered the room, I glanced at his feet. His shoes, if you could call them that, were worn and riddled with holes. Through the holes in his shoes, I could see the holes in his socks. His feet were blistered and swollen. It wasn't frigid enough to freeze his feet, but he had minor cold-induced injuries. The relentlessly wet socks, and walking several miles daily, had taken a toll. He'd walked from the shelter to the park, from the park to the shopping district, and from the shopping district back to the shelter. That was his daily trek. In my mind, I could see his path in the snow.



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My patient and I were the only two people in the room. He didn't have much to say. Neither did I. We both knew what needed to be done. I grabbed a washbasin and filled it with tepid water. I faced away from him, but I could see his distorted reflection in the chromed paper towel dispenser. He watched pensively. I moved toward the end of the gurney. He repositioned himself and reached for his shoelaces. He grimaced as he leaned forward. I could tell it was painful for him. I took over the task as he leaned back onto the pillow with a look of appreciation.

I removed his tattered shoes and the remaining threads of his socks. I found no evidence of infection or serious thermal injury, just some blisters, some swelling, and maceration. I lowered his feet into the water and squirted some soap on a washcloth. I looked up occasionally as I gently washed layers of the city from his feet. His hair was long, his beard unkempt, his clothing disheveled. He'd struggled with addictions. He was the antithesis of everything the world around him had labeled as success.

I could have delegated my task to another, but I was richly blessed by my small act of service. As I washed his feet, something happened that I can only describe as miraculous. A veil

was drawn back. I saw who he was. I looked upon something sacred. In this man who had neither possessions nor the esteem of the world, I saw the glorious and indescribable nobility of every soul who suffers. I saw that portion of him that was divine. I saw God.

I have no medical explanation for my experiences. Some of my friends have spent their careers studying near-death experiences, like Bruce Greyson, MD, Raymond Moody, MD PhD, or Pim van Lommel, MD. Other physician friends have had near-death experiences, like Eben Alexander, MD, or Mary Neal, MD. We've all discussed these things. None of the proposed mechanisms withstand scientific rigor or scrutiny, but at least they are being discussed. To my knowledge, however, no one has even proposed a theory for the shared-death experience I had with the dying woman or the spiritually transformative experience I had with the homeless man. I just know I was wide awake, perfectly alert, and taking no medications or mind-altering substances. Other physician friends have also had shared-death experiences when patients died, but they're not willing to talk yet.

I experienced a tiny taste of empathy for that homeless man as I walked through the snowy hospital parking lot in my socks and drove home with cold wet feet. He'd left in my shoes. I had given so little. I had a heater in my car and a dozen pairs of shoes at home. I had a home.

I wept that night as I thought about what I'd experienced. I'd entered a hospital room thinking I would provide service to another soul—and perhaps I did, in some small way—but I soon realized he was ministering to me. My patient was giving me the greater gift. Since then, I've seen every soul differently than I did before. Every human being is a fellow traveler. When I see all souls equally, when I stop judging and labeling, then I find my path, and I can help others find theirs.

I had frequent experiences in the Emergency Department—several per year, give or take—but chose not to speak of them. I'm not sure why I remained silent. Some experiences seemed too sacred to discuss. Perhaps I was concerned about my reputation or how my colleagues would respond, though I don't recall thinking that. I just know that six months after I stopped seeing patients, I suddenly and inexplicably felt it was alright to share. I began tentatively, first to trusted friends, then more broadly over time.

As I wrote the concluding pages of my book, *Not Yet*, my brother came to me again. He said, "Keep going." Initially, I thought he was referring to the book, but I was literally typing the last lines at the time. A few weeks later, on my way to my first public speaking engagement, my feelings changed. A young couple sat next to me in the airport lounge and asked about my trip. The tenor of the conversation shifted when the woman asked what I'd be speaking about. As I shared the subject with her, her eyes brightened, as if she'd been given permission to discuss a forbidden topic. "My grandfather just died," she said, "and he's come to me." She took one of my books and caught her plane. And I caught mine.

I was an emergency physician for 25 years. I estimate I cared for more than 60,000 patients, so you might imagine

my surprise when a voice whispered, "You'll help more people with this book than you helped as a physician in the emergency department." Now I feel differently about my brother's admonition. When he said, "keep going," he wasn't talking about my book. He was telling me to keep sharing, to keep helping others.

My experiences continue. In fact, they are more frequent now. One such defining moment came recently while at a friend's speaking engagement. I wasn't speaking; I just went to support him. As he often does, usually to my chagrin, he engaged the audience in an activity, asking them to stand and pair off, facing each other eye-to-eye. The only person more uncomfortable with the activity than me was the man standing next to me. He looked like he wanted to climb under his chair. He turned quickly to the woman at his left—I assumed she was his wife—but she'd already turned to her friend. With no other choice for either of us, we faced each other.

We did our best to maintain eye contact, but the person in front of me struggled. He kept looking away. He became emotional and twice brushed away tears. At one point, I looked away also to make things easier for him. As I did so, a flash of moments marched through my mind. I saw myself earlier that very day, refining my personal mission statement: I Exist To Help Souls Heal. It's on my website, Facebook page, and business cards. It's who I am.

Committed to my credo, I reengaged the man in front of me, determined to love him enough to help him. I looked through his eyes and into his heart. His lip began to quiver. We hadn't said a word, but I saw his wounds. I knew him. I discerned how powerful the experience was for him, how much he needed it. When we concluded, he embraced me. Without offering any explanation, he thanked me. I thanked him in return.

I reflected on our encounter for days and spoke to others who had attended the event until I discovered the man's name. I connected with his wife on Facebook. She invited me to visit Andrew in his hospital room. I arrived on Christmas Eve. He was recovering from surgery and looked well. His wife sat on the other side of his bed. I could feel how much my efforts meant to her.

Our visit bypassed the usual formalities. It felt like we already knew each other.

He spoke as if he knew why I'd come, like he'd been waiting for me. Before I could ask, he volunteered his view of our shared experience. He'd only recently commenced his spiritual journey, moving from things temporal and mundane to things profound and eternal. His understanding had come quickly, accelerated by his health challenges. He was no longer afraid of death. "When I looked into your eyes that night, I knew you were a fellow traveler," he said. "I knew if I shared my story, you'd understand."

I wept as he spoke. I think we all wept a bit, but we weren't sad. Despite his health challenges, the room was filled with an unconquerable joy that transcended earthly peril. We'd found each other. A few weeks later, Andrew died. Those were our only two encounters in this life, but they were perfect. I hardly knew him, but I miss him.

We are all fellow travelers, helping one another. I wish I had learned more about that in medical school.

The Jeff Olsen Story

LATE IN MY SHIFT, in March 1997, a nurse grabbed me by the arm, and insisted I accompany her to the trauma room. She was the only person in the emergency department who knew I sometimes saw people outside their bodies. She knew because she saw them too, and we'd talked about it.

I had no intention of being involved in Jeff Olsen's care. There were other physicians in the trauma room already. I wasn't needed, but I moved in that direction because this nurse kept tugging at my arm and insisted Jeff's wife was with him. Everybody in the department knew that his wife and 14-month-old son had died at the scene. It was part of the medical report. We knew Jeff had extensive injuries. He'd been extricated from the mangled vehicle, stabilized to the degree possible at a local hospital, and then flown to our trauma center.

I had no responsibility for Jeff's medical care. I was simply an observer. When I entered the trauma suite, I saw the usual army of professionals surrounding his gurney. Bits of an unconscious and battered body were visible through the cracks between personnel. I saw the usual flurry of activity and heard the hum of voices. Then everything faded into silence, like a television show with the sound turned off. People's lips still moved—they could still hear one another—but the room fell silent for me. A tingle—almost a vibration—radiated outward to the tip of each digit. The hair on my arms and neck stood at attention.

The treatment area was large, with an elevated ceiling. Jeff's wife, Tamara, stood in the air above the gurney. We'd never met, but I knew her. She calmly surveyed the room, sometimes looking toward me, sometimes toward her severely injured spouse. She had a pleasant countenance and a warm, welcoming disposition. She had long, wavy, blonde hair.

I walked to the gurney and looked at Jeff for the first time. I looked at his badly injured legs. People moved around me, all doing their respective tasks. Tamara continued to watch over my right shoulder. I may have felt for a pulse in his left foot. I don't recall for sure. I thought or said out loud, "He's going to lose the leg." I just knew.

Though facing Jeff, I could still see Tamara behind me. I could see her as clearly behind me as I could see him in front. I could see in every



Jeff Olsen

not a surprise. It feels more like a confirmation than a revelation.

I love such moments because everything reorders. Nothing trivial or temporal matters. I see souls as they are, without the filters that incline me to separate and label them. I see everyone as alike, and I love them all, including myself—something that is difficult when I'm in the trappings of mortality. I love such moments. I wish I had more of them, except that such experiences make it hard for me to find contentment in this world.

After Jeff went to the operating room, I pulled off my gown and shoe-covers, and finished my shift. I wouldn't see him for a month. That same persistent nurse who introduced us, insisted I visit him again. He was still in the hospital, now without his left leg, trying to recover from multiple surgeries and other trauma. As the nurse explained why we were there, Jeff began to weep. He cautiously divulged that he had left his body at the scene of the accident and met his deceased wife in her perfected state. "You have to go back," she'd told him. "You have to raise our other son." That was just one of his profound experiences.

Jeff Olsen and I are still good friends today, more than two decades later. While he was saying his most profound good-bye to Tamara, I was saying hello. She's visited us both since. On one occasion, she cautioned me, "Don't let anything interfere with your friendship." We still honor her wisdom.

—Jeff O'Driscoll

Robin Johnson

JEFF O'DRISCOLL received his M.D. from the University of Utah School of Medicine. He is board certified in internal medicine and is a fellow of the American College of Emergency Physicians. He practiced emergency medicine at a level-one trauma center, teaching students and residents, for 25 years, and served as chairman of the department for eight years, receiving awards and publishing articles for service quality in the emergency department. He is the author of the award-winning memoir *Not Yet: Near-Life Experiences & Lessons Learned*. Dr. O'Driscoll sees clients for intuitive mentoring and speaks internationally. He can be reached through his website jeffodriscoll.com.



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