

Mistress of Endor' within a chapter devoted to the separate but related 'Biblical World' - and even suggests that the reader recite some of his translated incantations aloud. I preferred not to do this, mindful of what might happen if I accidentally summoned something I couldn't successfully put back. This, in itself, shows how captivated I was with the whole thing. And this, for me, was the real triumph of *The First Ghosts*:

that the author took the dry clay of long-hidden cultures and made it *live*.

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Evelyn Elsaesser, Spontaneous Contact with the Deceased. Winchester: iffBooks, 2023. 332pp

This book is based on a survey conducted by Evelyn Elsaesser, Chris A. Roe, Callum E. Cooper, and David Lorimer. It is a major contribution to research on after-death communication (ADC) and also to evidence for life after death.

ADCs are spontaneous and initiated by the deceased, without intention or solicitation on the part of the experiencer. They are direct and without the use of mediums or other devices such as psychomanteums.

Subjects completed a 2- to 3-hour questionnaire consisting of 194 items in English, French, or Spanish. A total of 1,004 questionnaires were completed. The respondents consisted of 853 women, 144 men, and one "other." Women responding more to questionnaires is fairly common, but research shows that men experience ADCs as often as women. My own experience is that if men know you are interested and accepting of ADCs or other spiritually transformative experiences, they will tell you about them but won't write them down. The age range of the sample was 18 to 89 years, with a mean age of 51 years.

A large number of cases are presented in narrative format, and the evidential cases are mixed with the non-evidential cases. It is important to remember that, while "evidential" ADCs are "gold" to researchers seeking evidence of life after death, both types are meaningful and treasured by the experiencer. I know this because I am one of the cases included in the non-evidential ADC group. The study includes

subjects who were awake, asleep, falling asleep, and waking.

One type of evidential ADC is that which occurs before the experiencer was notified by conventional means that their loved one was dead (i.e. phone call, e-mail, or personal visit). These accounted for 21% of the cases. These cases are even stronger for evidence of life after death when the death was not anticipated; this was 44% of cases. The study also includes 4 rare cases, including that of 2 shared death-bed visions and 2 shared death experiences.

A majority of the messages from the deceased include: 1) that they are "alive and well" in the afterlife, 2) messages of love and reassurance, 3) encouraging the loved one to come out of their grief, 4) sometimes the prospect of future reuniting, and 5) sometimes the dead ask for forgiveness.

Returning to evidential information, 24% of experiencers received previously unknown information and 21% also said others perceived the contact. About 12% were frightened by their ADC, but 32% of that group reported that their fright decreased as their ADC progressed. In spite of this, most of the messages were positive. The study included ADCs from strangers (aka, ghosts) in their sample.

Of the deceased who appeared, 53% were men and 33% were women, 4% children, and 9% "other." Parents, in-laws, and surrogate parents were most often seen, followed by spouses and

sweethearts. Before the ADC, 69% of the experiencers believed in afterlife; after their ADC, 93% believed in afterlife.

Sceptics have often dismissed ADCs as self-generated by the experiencers' grief. Much of the data of this study refutes this. This is especially true of ADCs which happened before the experiencer has been informed by conventional means (such as a phone call) that the person had died. Also, ADCs from a third person in which the experiencer is asked to transmit the information of the ADC to another. We can't explain this, but it is often speculated that the deceased cannot "get through" to the loved one and contacts someone who is more sensitive.

One of the most important effects of the ADC is its positive effect on the bereavement process. For 36% of the experiencers, the ADC was life-changing; 49% found it important; 9% found it moderately important. ADCs had a significant impact on the experiencers' religious beliefs and spirituality.

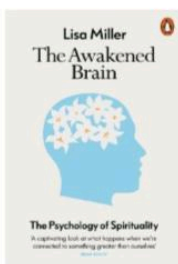
In summary, this is one of the most important books ever written on evidence of life after death in general and ADCs in particular. As an academic who has gone through life asking, "SHOW ME YOUR DATA," I am ecstatic about this landmark book. Also, as a person who never gets tired of reading individual spiritually transformative experiences, this book is a delight!

Ken R. Vincent

Lisa Miller, *The Awakened Brain: The Psychology of Spirituality*. 272pp, Penguin, ISBN 978-0-141-99103-0, £10.99

The inner and outer journey of a scientist

This is a book for our time: a personal and yet scientifically valid exploration into the overlap between the evolution of professional psychology and the process of spiritual awakening.



Lisa Miller is a professor in the clinical psychology program at Columbia University, Teachers College, and holds a joint appointment in the department of Psychiatry at Columbia Medical School. She describes how, through a series of projects, analysing factors

affecting depression, associated MRI scans and related case studies, she has been able, during the course of her career development, to demonstrate that spiritual awakening can often offer a more effective response to depression than that offered by conventional psychiatric, medicinal or psychotherapeutic ones. Her work represents a major breakthrough in bringing humankind's inner dimension into mainstream medicine, identifying links not just between

spirituality and clinical depression but a clear material physiological mechanism.

She includes mention of, for example, work by Dr Brad Peterson at Columbia, using neuro imaging techniques, which identify a thinning of the brain's right cortex, in individuals with depression and other mental illness. In another MRI study referred to, "the subjects for whom spirituality and religion were highly important had a healthier neural structure than those for whom spirituality and religion held medium, low or no importance." (p150). Science is finally seeing a spiritual mind (or transcendence consciousness as I would call it) showing up in their physical measurements. Some of us might question why we need scientific proof when, inwardly, we know this anyway, but we still live in a material world. Paradoxically, it may require scientific measurements to prove that there is something beyond the physical, before the mainstream can accept it. That being the case, the more people we can get to read this book and discuss it, the more rapid can a spiritual awakening proceed.

Whilst most of the examples and analyses presented relate to depression, Prof Miller also addresses other mood disorders, addiction and