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WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE FEATHER?

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I was pleased to attend a meeting of the Spirituality In Health-Care Network in Toronto in September of last year. One of the highlights was a lecture by Lucille Necas, M.D., FRCPC, on remote viewing. Lucille reported that this is a technique that many people are able to learn, “even when they consider themselves a bag of hammers when it comes to intuitive abilities.” Remote viewing allows a person to connect with any information in the universe, be it a physical object, idea, or spiritual reality. The method was developed by the US military for purposes of spying during the Cold War, but is now taught by David Morehouse for personal development. (There has also been extensive research done on remote viewing by non-military researchers, with meta-analyses demonstrating highly significant statistical probabilities, summarized and referenced in Benor, 2006.)

People learn to focus their minds so that they can connect with their intuition through the ‘Matrix’ of existence, which is the equivalent of what others have called the collective consciousness or holographic universe. To learn this technique, people practice this in groups. The group leader assigns numerical coordinates mentally to a ‘target,’ which can be a person, place, scientific question, or any other item the leader chooses. The group participants are given these coordinates and mentally invite information to appear on the screen of their minds. The individual images are then shared, to arrive at a composite response. This averages out the individual variability in responses, providing a more accurate composite picture.

I was bemused to hear Lucille report that the most important factor in learning remote viewing is the belief that you can do it.

This has been my personal experience in general, in developing intuitive, psychic and spiritual awarenesses, and I have made the same observations in the experiences of clients and colleagues. There are countless paths to these awakenings. Most of these include methods for quieting and focusing the mind, and for opening to intuitive and spiritual connections that all of us have but that many of us have not yet developed – particularly in Western cultures. It is notable that in some areas, such as the arts, business and sales, these intuitive connections are often acknowledged as important keys to success, and people will develop and nurture whatever approaches help them connect with their intuitive knowing of the rightness and wrongness of decisions. With time, people build confidence in these abilities and may come to rely upon them – just as they would rely on any other skill.

This acknowledgment of the importance of confidence in one’s abilities is much like the children’s story of Dumbo the elephant, who was born with such big ears that he was the laughingstock of

the whole circus. A little mouse befriended him and helped him gain confidence in using his ears to fly, giving him an allegedly magic feather that gave him this ability. As long as Dumbo held this feather, he believed he could fly and was a star performer.

Once, while flying in a circus performance, he lost hold of the feather, which blew away. He lost all his confidence and started into a nosedive, heading for a disastrous crash, with the panicking mouse riding along in his hat. Just in time, the mouse managed to convince him that he could fly without the feather.

So it is with our intuitive, psychic and spiritual awarenesses. When we gain confidence that we can connect with them, by whatever feathers of our choice, we can soar to great spiritual heights.

Self-healing abilities

We all have vast capacities for self-healing. People have cured themselves of depression, habitual stress responses, chronic pains, multiple sclerosis, cancers and other illnesses (Benor, 2004; 2005; Dienstfrey, 1991; Hirschberg and Barasch, 1995; O'Regan and Hirshberg 1993; Roud, 1990). A question not often asked is, "Why do we *not* activate these capacities more often?" I believe that the principal reasons are that many people don't know they have these capacities and many are uncomfortable with the thought that they might have such abilities.

Western medicine has focused so much on the physical body that it has become generally accepted that addressing the body is the principal way to deal with physical dysfunctions. While acknowledging that mind and emotions may influence the body, very little efforts are invested in educating the public about this.

Medical attitudes towards self-healing have also been negatively biased by research. Self-healing is a nuisance to researchers because it makes it more difficult to demonstrate effectiveness of research interventions. Double-blind studies rely on comparisons of groups of people given the experimental treatment and groups that have no treatment, which serve as a comparison against which to gauge the intervention effects. The difficulty is that the suggestion inherent in giving a treatment, on the one side, and the expectations of receiving, on the other side, encourage self-healing. This has been labeled the placebo reaction. The fact that people can activate these self-healing abilities makes it more challenging to demonstrate the efficacy of an external intervention.

Viewed in this light, placebo reactions are not to be avoided, but rather explored, refined and utilized to maximize the benefits of suggestion – especially as placebos have no known dangerous effects.

Yet, because neither doctors nor the public have been educated to cultivate self-healing, which relies on mechanisms that are intuitive and for the most part reside in the unconscious mind, self-healing remains unfamiliar and therefore appears mysterious or even unlikely to occur. In many cases, the unfamiliar makes us uncomfortable, even to the point that we may be startled or frightened by it.

Logic, reasoning and other left-brain processes as Dumbo feathers

Western society focuses heavily on linear logic and reasoning. Schoolwork forces students to exercise left brain functions constantly for understanding *about* how the world works. Reading, writing, math, science, history, philosophy and many other topics require memorizing of masses of facts and how to manipulate them into essays and memorize them by rote for exams. We are left with little resources of time and training in *experiential learning* about ourselves. See Table 1. Left and right brain functions.

Table 1. Left and right brain functions	
<u>Left Brain</u>	<u>Right Brain</u>
THINKING	FEELING
Linear	Gestaltic/Patterns
Outer senses/objective	Inner senses/subjective
Logical	Intuitive
World of matter	Worlds of energies
Prefers rules	Spontaneous
Prefers frameworks/boundaries	Prefers relationships/interactions
Sequential, Either/or	Parallel, Both/and
Product	Process
Understand Self-healing	Experience Self-healing

Experiencing and exploring whatever is unfamiliar often raises anxieties and fears. Because our right-brain functions are rarely developed or even mentioned or discussed in school, these are largely unfamiliar to many people. We are uncomfortable when we are not holding onto our Dumbo feather of linear logic and reason. See Table 2. Right and left brain functions. Do you have any visceral, feeling reaction in reading this table, relative to your internal reaction in reading Table 1?

Table 2. Right and left brain functions	
<u>Right Brain</u>	<u>Left Brain</u>
FEELING	THINKING
Gestaltic/Patterns	Linear
Inner senses/subjective	Outer senses/objective
Intuitive	Logical
World of energies	Worlds of matter
Spontaneous	Prefers rules
Prefers relationships/interactions	Prefers frameworks/boundaries
Parallel, Both/and	Sequential, Either/or
Process	Product
Experience Self-healing	Understand Self-healing

Some people will feel a queasiness in reading Table 2, which anchors the focus in right brain functions that are unfamiliar as anchors in the experience of reading tables. The lack of a border in Table 2 may also be mildly unsettling.

Understanding our fears of our intuitive and psi (psychic) abilities

Intuition includes pattern recognition, psi abilities, and collective consciousness. Because such abilities are right brain functions, they make many people in Western society uneasy. Here are a few of the many reasons that people are uncomfortable with psychic awarenesses and healing (Benor 1990):

1. *Psi conflicts with prevalent paradigms*, forcing us to re-examine our basic hypotheses about how matter, energy and mind interrelate (Tart, 1984). As we become aware of psi, we also become aware that we may have to postulate new scientific paradigms which include information transfer and action at a distance without physical interventions. Modern physics took several decades to demonstrate through experiments and mathematical formulae that rules of classical physics do not apply in the quantum physics domain – however counter-intuitive this appears when translated in to everyday language (Benor, 1994/ 2003).

2. *Our material culture shrinks from non-material interventions*. Western medicine has been particularly stringent in avoiding research errors, fearing to accept as being valid any treatments which might possibly be more in the realms of placebos (self-healing) than representing effects of the outside interventions.

Modern psychology, dealing in non-material, in intrapsychic and interpersonal problems and interventions, has denigrated parapsychology out of anxieties that psychology might have greater difficulty itself in being accepted by the dominant medical establishment.

We forget a truth stated by Francis Bacon: “All the perceptions both of the senses and the mind bear reference to man and not to the universe, and the human mind resembles these uneven mirrors which impart their own properties to different objects...” This was restated by Albert Einstein: “It is the theory which decides what we can observe.”

3. Western materialistic beliefs exclude the possibility of psi. We are indoctrinated in our Western society, which is expert at manipulating matter, to believe that accumulation of material wealth is the primary goal and measure of personal success in life. We build elaborate safeguards around our material possessions, including our bodies. Many see themselves as existing only in the flesh and come to fear excursions outside of or potential intrusions into their bodies, be they through psi, healing, out-of-body and near-death experiences, or death.

We have become separated and distanced from that which is not matter. (Even our language prejudices us, telling us that mystical and spiritual things are ‘*immaterial*’ and that things that are unimportant ‘do not *matter*.’)

Intuition and spiritual healing waken us to the limited range of the material explanations of our world. These transpersonal connections threaten our grasp on linear reality. Whately Carington (1946) speculated that people with a grounding in Cartesian, linear causality may fear that if psi is accepted (not having examined the evidence. and believing psi to be a magical belief) then a Pandora’s box of magical explanations will be opened for all science to be attacked on irrational grounds.*

4. *It is human nature to resist change*. Consensual descriptions of reality provide culturally comfortable norms for relating to our material, social and psychological worlds. Such descriptions provide a psychosocial constancy which saves us from frequent readjustments, but at the same time can become rigid and bind us into beliefs and manners of relating to the world which are limited, thus distancing us from reality and eventually stultifying.

Our materialistic Western world discredits the world of healing and of the spiritual – to which healing opens experiential doors. Even many of those who might benefit physically from healing shy away from it when they sense it is starting to challenge their agnostic or religious beliefs.

Most people accept the word of authority figures rather than investigate matters themselves. It is easier to reject ‘paranormal’ evidence than to question accepted beliefs.

5. *Sophisticated psychological defenses may be activated to deny healing*. Michael Balint (1955) points out how researchers in healing may utilize the psychological defenses of projection and

idealization in ways that are quite sophisticated – to protect the observer/participant from psychological discomforts of dealing with unconventional phenomena.

Projection states that the uncanny power which produces parapsychological phenomena dwells not in us, everyday normal people, but in mediums, in healers, in waters, in woods and caves, or in God's unfathomable grace. We research workers must be acquitted without any question, since we are only studying the phenomena, and not producing them. Our interest in them is entirely objective and has nothing to do with our own emotions, our instinctual gratifications, our unsolved problems, or our personal involvements.

...*idealization*, the second defense mechanism, comes into force... The working of these two defensive mechanisms can perhaps be demonstrated in the case of religious healing as at Lourdes. By invoking unfathomable supernatural forces, *i.e.*, God's grace, any human involvement is *eo ipso* excluded, and the religious or scientific research worker can get away with him 'professional hypocrisy' unchallenged. However, his guilt feelings compel him to maintain a hyperobjective attitude, demanding unrealistically strict standards...

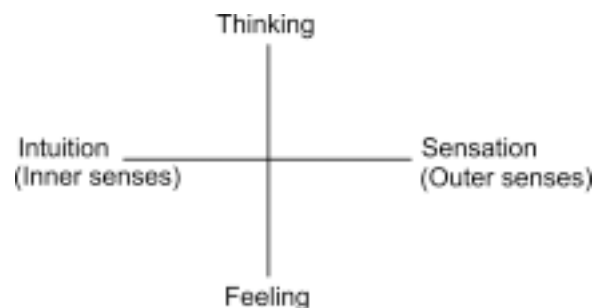
Balint points out that unreasonably strict criteria have been required by parapsychologists for physical improvements to be accepted as true healing, including instantaneous recovery and permanence of changes.

...these criteria are grossly exaggerated, *i.e.*, ambivalently idealized. They correspond only to very old and profound human desires, but never to reality...

Thus many researchers intellectualize their way out of their own discomforts. By insisting, for instance, that healers perform on demand, researchers have assured themselves that they will be unlikely to encounter an event that might upset them.

6. Car/Jung (1967) pointed out that everyone has a personality style which is dominant on one or two or four parameters which are paired in polar opposites. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Jungian polarities



Most people who elect to study and work in academic or industrial scientific pursuits are superior in thinking and sensation functions. These are requisites for their work. This means that they will be uncomfortable with material which relates to feelings or intuitions, respectively, their inferior functions.

This can relate to healing in several ways. First, the thinking and sensation types will have difficulty grasping that which pertains to non-material interventions, and even more difficulties with spirituality, ineffability or noesis. If it cannot be spelled out clearly, measured and repeatedly and reliably reproduced, its existence for them is more than just questionable. It would demand the activation of their inferior (intuitive/feeling) functions to perceive and appreciate. It is thus hard for them to understand that such material has any validity. Second, they would not even want to invest

of themselves in exploring these realms, as this would require the activation of those inferior functions with which they are uncomfortable. Third, since psi functions are present in everyone and seeping via unconscious channels into conscious awareness, they are likewise functioning in those whose superior functions are sensation and thinking. These types would then have to work extra hard (unconsciously) to repress and deny awareness of inner aspects of themselves which make them uncomfortable.

It is far easier to denigrate and reject that which a healer presents than to explore within why one is uncomfortable with it.

7. The lack of replicability of healing phenomena in experiments, and their irregular occurrence in clinical healing settings has been used as a reason to question their existence. In the physical and social sciences we presume we understand an aspect of nature when we are able to manipulate it so as to produce the same results repeatedly and predictably under given circumstances.

Healers have not been able to produce results with reliable consistency. Effects are observed in some healing treatments but not in others, with little apparent regularity in the patterns of occurrences. The same healer might succeed a number of times and fail a number of times and we have not isolated the critical variables which can explain – much less predict – when healing will occur or not. Early studies of prayer healing produced significant effects (Byrd 1988; Harris, et al 1999; Sicher, et al 1998; Walker 1997); more recent studies showed no effects (Aviles et al 2001; Benson, et al 2006; Krucoff, et al 2005). Thus the physical scientists claim that healing phenomena are probably due to chance variations in the disease, ‘spontaneous remissions’ or other, unaccounted factors rather than results of healers’ interventions.

Healers claim that skeptical observers may inhibit the effectiveness of their treatments. Skeptics derisively object that healers are evading scrutiny with such hedges.

Though patterns of psi performance in the laboratory have been observed, these may have been discounted as evidence for psi because they do not occur predictably. It is not uncommon to find that the first few trials in a series produce positive results while subsequent trials produce chance results,

Unusual patterns have been found in areas of conventional science as well (Collins, 1985). New processes for crystallization, developed in a particular laboratory, may be impossible to replicate in other laboratories – until the originator of the process visits personally to demonstrate how to do it. It may be that beliefs and/or disbeliefs of the experimenters facilitate or block the reactions.

It may be found that morphogenetic fields must be built in order to achieve this (Sheldrake, 1988). That is, our collective acceptance of a phenomenon may need to be strengthened, and our collective disbeliefs weakened, before it will manifest in a more regular and repeatable manner in research studies.

I believe with Bernie Siegel (1987) that “...all healing is scientific. The problem is science’s inability to measure or document what occurs.” The observed lawfulness of healing requires careful study and clarification *on its own terms*. My guess is that shifting factors of boredom, beliefs and needs of participants shape the results into these observed patterns, along with numerous external factors.

8. Healing has laws that differ from those of other sciences. Unreasonable demands are made of researchers of healing. It is ludicrous that scientists from other fields should suggest that their rules for evidence should be applied in healing – just because in their own fields these are the rules that have helped to organize data into comprehensible and predictable units and gestalts. It would certainly be nicer, neater and less complicated if this worked. The fact that it does not work does not mean that healing does not exist or merely represents the esoteric fantasy systems of

credulous people. Should we accept that love or compassion do not exist, just because we cannot assign units of measurements to these factors in our lives?

Overcoming our discomforts with self-healing

The best way to get comfortable with self-healing is to explore experientially some of the ways of understanding and clearing our inner selves.

It is often helpful to have a map of where we might choose to go, along with descriptions and explanations of the potential journeys. For instance, I explain WHEE (Wholistic Hybrid derived from EMDR and EFT) as a remedy for the mistake we make in letting a little child program our lifetime computer. In order not to suffer from painful feelings, a child will run away from them or bury them. We store negative feelings in our right brain and in our body. The right brain says to the left brain, "You don't want to know about this, do you?" and the left brain agrees, "No, I'd rather not feel this and would just as soon forget about it." So right brain and left brain pretend the feelings are not there – though right brain is fully aware of them and ever alert to avoid letting these feelings rise to consciousness. In doing WHEE, we bring right and left brain together as we focus on issues and then they dissipate – because we are not running away from them.

While such explanations may be as much helpful myths as a physical and/or physiological realities, they satisfy the left-brain wish for logic and reason to explore into new and unknown territories. Holding onto the Dumbo feather of such a map, we are then less anxious about proceeding into experiential engagements with new methods.

Most of the people I work with as clients or in public presentations are open to exploring relaxation, imagery, meditation, bioenergy field sensing, muscle testing (to connect with unconscious awareness), WHEE and other approaches. If anyone is uncomfortable with any of these, I encourage them to trust their intuitions and feelings and not explore these areas until they can be comfortable with them. I also encourage them to explore what it is that makes them uncomfortable, asking whether they are willing to work on that discomfort, to understand it and release some of the discomfort. In most cases, the adult will to overcome problems can override the childhood anxieties about exploring buried feelings and memories. Following successful and satisfying releases of old, buried hurts and angers, many no longer need to hold onto their feathers. They know from their successful transformations that they are able to fly and to enter similar territories, even when these, too, are as yet unexplored.

Lessons from hypnotherapy

Under hypnotherapy, people can demonstrate feats of extraordinary strength, such as lying rigidly stiff, with only their heads and feet supported between two chairs. Warts may be eliminated, even under a very light trance. The hypnotist simply suggests that after several days (commonly two weeks) the warts will fall off – and in a high percentage of cases they actually do. It should be noted that numerous forms of suggestion other than hypnosis may be just as effective in removing warts – such as painting the wart with food coloring (Dreaper; Sinclair-Gieben/ Chalmers, Ullman 1959).

Hypertension (high blood pressure) responds well to hypnosis (Benson 1977; Deabler, et al.), as does asthma (Aronoff et al.; British Tuberculosis Association; Collison). Bone fractures can also heal more quickly under hypnotic suggestion (Ginandes/ Rosenthal). In isolated cases, it has even been shown that traumatic bleeding may be halted through hypnosis. Patients who are prepared for surgery with hypnotic suggestions bleed very little during their operations (Aronoff et al.; British Tuberculosis Association; Collison).

Another form of bleeding that hypnosis has been helpful in controlling is hemophilia. Persons suffering from this condition lack particular biochemical clotting factors, due to genetic defects. This causes them to bleed profusely from even the slightest cut, often for days. They may even die from a minor cut if they are not treated. Yet with hypnosis hemophiliacs can undergo dental extractions, a procedure that normally could be fatal to them (Dubin/ Shapiro; Fredericks). In one investigation, the need for blood transfusions in a group of child hemophiliacs was decreased by a factor of 10 over the period of a year, through the application of self-hypnosis (LaBaw).

Theodore X. Barber, who researched hypnotic phenomena for many years, reviewed many studies on the physiological effects of hypnosis (1961, 1984). He found that many of the results achieved with hypnosis can be equaled by subjects who apply their own willpower, enhanced with suggestion, to physical tasks – *without hypnotic induction* (Barber 1984; Barber/ Wilson 1978). Barber maintains that what is commonly assumed to be a special mental state that is induced under hypnosis does not actually represent an altered state of consciousness or trance. Rather, it appears to be the unconscious mind of the subjects believing they can do things, given confidence by the hypnotists. Critics of his views propose that all subjects who follow suggestions are, in effect, in a state of hypnosis. Barber counters with the criticism that studies of hypnotic phenomena rarely include a control group that is given suggestions without hypnotic induction (Dienstfrey 1991). When Barber studied both modalities, he actually found that suggestions without induction were superior in producing many effects (Barber/ Wilson 1978).

The presence of a confident hypnotherapist, along with suggestions that give permission to activate one's self-healing capacities, appears to be another Dumbo feather. People have the capacities to create these changes in themselves, but do not activate them until an outside person gives them the confidence that they can do so.

Religion as a feather

In navigating the uncharted seas of life, the feather of religion may offer hope of certainties that for many people are comforting, allaying anxieties about death and promising continued life in the beyond. The down sides are that many religions tend to teach that their feather is the only valid one to use; teachers and authorities within each religion tend to be invested in holding onto the power that their feathers confer upon them, discouraging congregants from exploring and experiencing the benefits of other feathers; and personal explorations of spiritual experiences may also be discouraged.

Science as a feather (discussion from Benor 2006)

Belief in scientific theory offers numerous feathers. Scientism has become in many ways the religion of the Western world, in an existence exclusively focused on and explained by materialistic theories. Modern science can be the equivalent of a religion when it assumes it has the ultimate answers to explain life, the universe and everything; when it resists or even refuses to consider alternative theories; and when it discounts out of hand observations and theories that are not currently popular, such as psi (psychic) abilities and spiritual healing – for which there are substantial bodies of research evidence.

Many scientists claim to have the sole and exclusive explanation for the workings of the world and all that it contains. They assume that increasingly refined linear analyses of all matter and of all of nature's processes will ultimately explain every aspect of the cosmos; that mind is the product of brain; and that when the brain dies, mind ceases to exist. Sadly, like other fundamentalist religions, this sort of *scientism* is also exclusive. At its worst, scientism may respond to challenges to its axioms with the illogical venom of the religious fanatic attacking the heretic.

Some readers might feel that these statements are rather extreme. Consider how many of the following statements you feel are accurate – according to the teachings of modern science. Charles Tart (1995), a transpersonal psychologist, has written a Creed that states the prevalent Western scientific beliefs, following the format of the Christian Nicene Creed.

I BELIEVE - in the material universe – as the only and ultimate reality - a universe controlled by fixed physical laws - and blind chance.

I AFFIRM - that the universe has no creator – no objective purpose - and no objective meaning or destiny.

I MAINTAIN - that all ideas about God or gods – enlightened beings – prophets and saviors – or other non-physical beings or forces – are superstitions and delusions. – Life and consciousness are totally identical to physical processes - and arose from chance interactions of blind physical forces. – Like the rest of life – my life – and my consciousness – have no objective purpose – meaning – or destiny.

I BELIEVE – that all judgments, values, and moralities – whether my own or others – are subjective – arising solely from biological determinants – personal history – and chance. – Free will is an illusion. – Therefore the most rational values I can personally live by must be based on the knowledge that for me – what pleases me is Good – what pains me is Bad. – Those who please me or help me avoid pain are my friends – those who pain me or keep me from my pleasure are my enemies. – Rationality requires that friends and enemies be used in ways that maximize my pleasure – and minimize my pain.

I AFFIRM – that churches have no real use other than social support – that there are no objective sins to commit or be forgiven for – that there is no divine or supernatural retribution for sin or reward for virtue – although there may be social consequences of actions. – Virtue for me is getting what I want – without being caught and punished by others.

I MAINTAIN – that the death of the body – is the death of the mind. – There is no afterlife – and all hope of such is nonsense.

Tart hastens to add: “Incidentally, I want to assure you that this is not an attack on Christianity, only an educational exercise.”

Scientism is an insidious religious belief because it cloaks itself in a mantle of alleged knowledge that is supposedly based on objective findings from research. While many scientific theories have been systematically tested and confirmed, the rules of good science state that any theory can be amended or overturned by research evidence that contradicts the underlying hypotheses. Many in the field of science are not open to considering alternatives to popularly held beliefs, despite clear evidence suggesting new possibilities.

You may wonder, how can science become scientism? The answers to this question are many-layered. Great leaps of faith are commonly taken about the validity of basic mathematical hypotheses and their relevance to the real world. We tend to accept the theories we are taught as though they are firm and fixed truths about the way the earth and skies and everything between them are held together and function. There are mathematical formulas explaining how subatomic particles interact; how molecules of nutrients enter our cells and waste chemicals exit; or how stars and galaxies were created and expand across the universe. However, all of these are just theories. The formulas are a best fit between the observations and how we presume the atoms, and body chemicals and stars actually relate to each other. If the theories predict new findings that are then confirmed, they are validated. The fact that there are different concentrations of chemicals inside our body cells, compared to their concentrations outside the cells suggested that there must be a pumping mechanism in the cell membrane that creates and maintains these differences. Sure

enough, it was discovered that there are enzymes and biochemical 'pumps' that maintain the required concentrations of ions inside and outside the cells.

Often enough, new observations do not quite fit the explanatory hypotheses, so theories have to be tweaked and adjusted. In high school chemistry I was taught that the nucleus of the atom had tiny electrons circling around it like our planets circle around the sun. Subsequent findings demonstrated that electrons are more like waves and their paths around the nucleus are better described as clouds of probability positions where the electrons might be found. Sometimes the new findings completely invalidate the theories and we have to go back to the drawing boards. The Big Bang theory of the universe appeared to explain how the universe was created, throwing out an enormous quantity of matter that expanded across the universe, coalescing into stars and galaxies. Eventually, it was predicted that gravity would slow the expansion and that everything would then start to come back together. New findings show that galaxies appear to be moving apart at an accelerated pace that is incompatible with the Big Bang theory. A new theory will have to be proposed to explain this.

Scientists, however, often resist challenges to their theories. They may even defend them with vehement, irrational and personal attacks on opponents that differ very little from the sorts of infighting that are common between diverse religious authorities.

*Insofar as the propositions of mathematics give an account of reality,
they are not certain; and insofar as they are certain, they do not describe reality.*
– Albert Einstein (1941)

Practical considerations may contribute as well to the rigidities of scientism. Beyond the problems in building a worldview on mathematical constructs, human nature may lead scientists to ignore the rules of their profession. Scientists often resist questions and have a hard time considering challenges to their theories. They may even mount bitter battles to defend them, refusing to accept new evidence. When one looks at the practicalities of working in science, these reactions are not surprising. Professors' jobs, professional status and even their careers may be threatened by a challenge to the theories they have developed and are researching. It takes several years to obtain a research grant. To have funds cut off by evidence suggesting that basic hypotheses are flawed may leave researchers up a creek of science without a way to crawl, much less paddle forward. So when their theory (and with it, their livelihood) is threatened, they will be highly motivated to defend it and to attack the proponents of a new theory.

The whole grant application process is also biased towards resisting new ideas and innovations. Those who sit on research grant boards have established their credibility within popularly accepted frameworks of science. They are unlikely to approve funding for a study that might threaten their positions.

Journals have a peer review system that employs (can you guess?) similarly oriented and motivated scientists. Innovative authors are therefore likely to have their papers rejected.

So while science teaches a method that requires intellectual clarity and honesty, these requisites for rigorous science are liberally ignored, and scientism becomes a fundamentalist religion.

Interestingly, many senior scientists have come into mystical awarenesses and spiritual awakenings, after many years of participation in the church of scientism.

Modern science itself is based on the idea that the universe is governed by invisible principles, the laws of nature. These laws are essentially intellectual because mathematical equations are things that exist in minds. They're not physical things you actually encounter in the world. You don't look through an electron microscope and see Schrödinger's equation among the molecules, or look through a telescope and see Einstein's equations written in the

sky. They are invisible governing principles. But they are conceived of in an extremely limited and noncreative sense, as abstract mathematical equations rather than as living minds with creative power. Creativity is supposed to come into the evolutionary process through blind chance.

[I]nsofar as people believe that mathematical equations are the ultimate truth, this is a form of idolatry. It treats manmade mathematical models as the ultimate reality.

– Rupert Sheldrake (Fox and Sheldrake 1996)

Enhancing the feather effect

Clearly, the feather effect is part of the spectrum of suggestion. Anything that will enhance suggestive effects will enhance the feather effect.

The congruence of teachers with their teachings is an important factor in enhancing confidence in what they want to convey. WHEE practitioners, hypnotherapists and other practitioners in the healing arts are more effective when they themselves have experienced the therapies they practice so that their recommendations come from a place of personal knowledge and confidence.

Having once experienced success in flying, in using a therapeutic technique, or in exploring any other new experience, the second and later times will be that much easier.

Flying without feathers

In Western society, despite prevalent discouragements, most people who have deep personal spiritual experiences have no question as to their validity. Their spiritual awakenings occur with a clarity, freshness, and intensity transcending awareness of ordinary life events. They know without question that these are not just stories they are making up to explain the mysteries of life: when they clearly sense the presence of someone dear to them after she has passed on; when they encounter the Being of Light in a Near-Death Experience; when they sense a mystical awareness of their oneness with nature; or when an angel touches their life in a time of need. These spontaneous mystical experiences are also consistent in with reports of meditators who have worked systematically for years to reach enlightenment. These potent inner experiences feel as real – sometimes even more real – than experiences in the everyday world perceived through our outer senses. They suggest that at least some religious teachings may be based on realities which modern science has led us to discount or even to denigrate. Our acceptance of scientism's disparagements of spiritual experiences is, to a great extent, the result of our distancing ourselves from direct experiences of spirituality. We are led to believe that the way to study anything properly is to be *objective*, to not be personally involved in the phenomena we are observing, lest we fool ourselves into believing something that is merely a product of our imagination. Many of us simply accept these societal opinions and don't take the time to explore spiritual dimensions ourselves.

We can also learn deliberately to soar into spiritual realms – initially with feathers, then without needing them. A teacher, a congregation, and religious icons may all support our spiritual awakenings and developments. At the same time, they may become feathers that we continue to hold onto – out of lack of confidence in our abilities to fly on our own. With continued practice, we may connect sufficiently with our personal spirituality to be able to fly without external help.

The ultimate in human spiritual experiences is our transition through death. In this journey we must travel alone. It is here that our personal development stands us in greatest stead.

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