Spirit Possession and Telepathic Hypnosis

Terence J. Palmer
School of Theology and Religious Studies
Bangor University

First presented at the Afterlife Research Centre (ARC) at Bristol University on 4th July 2011.

Abstract

Spirit possession is a topic of supreme interest to anthropologists who study the phenomenology of spirit possession in shamanic practices in traditional religions around the world. The theories pertaining to spirit possession are generally centred in cultural belief systems and social consensus within the ethnic group or tribe. In modern Western societies the predominant theory is that spirit possession is an autogenic manifestation of a disturbed mind and treated accordingly. This theory is often transposed into the ethnographic cultural and societal context when the spirit possession is seen to be uninvited and destructive. However, there is scientific research that provides a conceptual framework that can accommodate spirit possession in all cultures and societies where the ontological status of possession entities is open to re-evaluation. This paper is an introduction to the experimental method and the discoveries of 19th century researcher F.W.H. Myers whose research revealed that telepathic hypnosis is a scientifically validated reality. This paper proposes that there is an explanation for spirit possession according to this concept. Examples of some of Myers experiments are presented.

Telepathic Hypnotism

The concept of hypnosis at a distance, or telepathic hypnosis, was first recorded by a disciple of Anton Franz Mesmer, the Marquis de Puységur (1785). He agreed with Mesmer that the influence of what they then perceived as magnetic fluid was not impeded by physical obstacles. This meant that the magnetiser could magnetise through walls and from one dwelling to another. Puységur was not content to accept the theories of others and commented:

This is the kind of thing that is impossible to prove by rational arguments and for which experience alone can provide certainty. For that reason, it is to men who are aware of this small part of their power that I now direct some recommendations about the best way to use it (Ibid, p.112-113).
Puységur was aware of the possible detrimental effects of inducing somnambulism at a distance, and he records cases where some patients, whilst on their way to visit him for a consultation, actually arrived already in a somnambulistic state. Puységur was also aware of other possible dangers:

Apart from this inconvenience, there is another one very much to be feared – the risk that some extraneous factor will interfere with the effect produced at a distance. If, for example, the effect one produces is somnambulism, one must know very well how susceptible this peaceful state is to being disturbed by the least extraneous circumstance, which can then cause truly miserable confusion (Ibid, p. 113).

In other words, the somnambulist who was not being guarded or directed by the magnetiser would be vulnerable to all kinds of circumstance that could cause problems. Two important factors emerge from Puységur’s observations regarding telepathic hypnosis: the importance of experience in contrast to rational argument in determining its credibility; and the vulnerability of the unsupervised subject. The importance of experience is a recurring theme throughout my thesis and the foundation of a revised epistemology, and likewise is the problem of vulnerability to the unprotected and uninformed on all matters concerning possession and other forms of spirit influence to the vulnerable mind.

Researchers who investigated this phenomenon in the 1880s include Janet, Richet, and Hericourt (Crabtree, 1993, p. 45). Distant mesmeric effects have also been reported by James Esdail (1846) in India, and by John Elliotson (1843) and Chauncey Hare Townsend (1844) in England.

Frederick Myers, like Puységur one hundred years before him, was not content to leave such phenomena to rationalist argument, and he sought to gather evidence to demonstrate that suggestion was not an adequate explanation for all hypnotic phenomena:

The evidence for telepathy – for psychical influence from a distance – has grown to goodly proportions, for a new form of experiment has been found possible from which the influence of suggestion can be entirely excluded. It has now, as I shall presently try to show, been actually proved that the hypnotic trance can be induced from a distance so great, and with precautions so complete, that telepathy or some similar supernormal influence is the only efficient cause which can be conceived (Myers, 1903b, p. 140).

Pierre Janet arranged for a series of experiments with his well-known subject, Madame B. (“Leonie”), and the first experiments were carried out with her at Le Havre by with the assistance of
Dr. Gilbert, a leading physician there. These experiments are described in the Bulletins de la Societe de Psychologie Physiologique, (1886) Tome I., p. 24, and in the Revue Philosophique, August (1886).

Myers expressed his ‘good fortune’ to be invited to witness the experiments of Janet with Leonie, and was impressed with the precautions taken by Janet to avoid any influences that could be attributable to the power of suggestion:

These experiments are not easy to manage, since it is essential at once to prevent the subject from suspecting that the experiment is being tried, and also to provide for his safety in the event of its success. In Dr. Gilbert’s experiment, for instance, it was a responsible matter to bring this elderly woman through the streets of Le Havre. It was needful to provide her with an unnoticed escort; and, in fact, several persons had to devote themselves for some hours to a single experiment (ibid).

Myers uses extracts from Janet’s report (1886) to emphasise the simple fact that the subject was being hypnotized from a distance by Dr. Gilbert, not only with no influence from the power of direct suggestion, but against her will:

October 3, 1885. M. Gilbert tries to put her to sleep from a distance of half a mile; M. Janet finds her awake; puts her to sleep; she says, “I know very well that M. Gilbert tried to put me to sleep, but when I felt him I looked for some water, and put my hands in cold water. I don’t want people to put me to sleep in that way; it puts me out, and makes me look silly.” She had in fact held her hands in water at the time when M. Gilbert willed her to sleep.

October 9. M. Gilbert succeeds in a similar attempt; she says in trance, “Why does M. Gilbert put me to sleep from his house? I had not time to put my hands in my basin” cited in (Myers, 1903b, p. 140).

Myers collected accounts from many other reliable sources for evidence of ‘telepathic hypnosis’. He further cites one such account, contributed by a Dr. E. Gley, that was published in Tribune Medicale in May 1875, of a fourteen year-old girl, that initiated a series of over one hundred experiments conducted under a variety of conditions (Myers, 1903b, p. 143).

It could be argued that had modern theorists been aware of the outcomes of these experiments, and Myers’ theories to explain them, then the course of experimental hypnosis would have taken a very different path. Furthermore, I very much doubt that the seemingly magical phenomena exhibited by professional stage hypnotists would prove so fascinating for a gullible and uninformed public. It is the wider implications of Myers’ theories that begin to impinge tentatively on our most commonly held beliefs about the nature of mind and our subliminal influences on each other – for
good or for ill. It is my contention that the concept of *hypnosis at a distance* is the very core of the concept of spirit possession, and my thesis argues for this hypothesis.

**Telepathy as a spirit law**

Myers came to believe, as a direct consequence of discoveries from his and the experiments of others that, in addition to the known laws of the physical universe there are laws that govern the spiritual nature of man, and he concluded that the first law of the spirit world is the law of thought-transference, or *telepathy* (Myers, 1903a, p. 86).

Myers’ discovery of the law of telepathy has had far reaching significance in modern research into the nature of consciousness. It has been demonstrated that the ability of one mind to communicate with another has been confirmed by modern research into psi phenomena (Radin, 2006) and distant healing practices (Targ & Katra, 1999). The law of telepathy is fundamental in Spirit Release Therapy (SRT), as it enables the SRT practitioner to communicate with a patient at a subliminal level of consciousness and with those spirit entities that are influencing him (Hickman, 1994). Telepathy is hypothetically one means by which a spiritualist medium interacts with those spirit entities that provide information (Myers, 1884).

Among Myers’ earliest experiments that were designed to investigate the ‘rapport’ (or community of sensation) that he presumed was at the root of mesmerism, were those that tested the ability of one person to transmit a strong taste to another.

**Sensory transmission of taste**

In the taste sensation experiments the taste to be discerned was known only to the experimenters; and the sensations experienced were verbally described by the subjects (not written down), so that all danger of involuntary muscular guidance by the experimenter was eliminated. Gurney describes in great detail the nature of the experiment and the precautions taken in order to avoid any risk of fraud or collusion between agent and percipient. Below are extracts from his precautions published in *Phantasms of the Living*:

> A selection of about twenty strongly tasting substances was made. These substances were enclosed in small bottles and small parcels, precisely similar to one another, and kept carefully out of the range of vision of the subjects who were moreover blindfolded, so that no grimaces made by the tasters could be seen. The subjects had in fact no means whatever of knowing, through the sense of sight, what was the substance tasted (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886, p. 52).

Smell had to be guarded against with greater care. When the substance was odoriferous the packet of bottle was opened outside the room, or at such a distance, and so cautiously as to
prevent any sensible smell from escaping. The experiments moreover were conducted in the close vicinity of a very large kitchen, from whence a strong odour of beefsteak and onions proceeded during almost all the time occupied. The tasters took pains to keep their heads high above the subjects and to avoid breathing with open mouth. One substance (coffee) tried was found to give off a slight smell, in spite of all precautions, and an experiment made with this had to be omitted (Ibid, p. 53).

I have constructed a table, shown below, from the data presented by Myers to show the relationship between what the agent tasted and what the percipient perceived. I have added a column to my table to accommodate an operational variable to signify the accuracy of the sense impression. I have used a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing a null accuracy and 5 representing 100% accuracy.

Figure 3 Table of taste transfer. Adapted from Gurney et al. 1886 p. 53.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taster</th>
<th>Percipient</th>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Answer Given</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Vinegar</td>
<td>A sharp and nasty taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Mustard</td>
<td>Mustard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Mustard</td>
<td>Ammonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>I still taste the hot taste of the mustard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Worcestershire sauce</td>
<td>Worcestershire sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M. G.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Worcestershire sauce</td>
<td>Vinegar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Port wine</td>
<td>Between eau de Cologne and beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Port wine</td>
<td>Raspberry vinegar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Bitter aloes</td>
<td>Horrible and bitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Alum</td>
<td>A taste of ink, of iron, of vinegar. I feel it on my lips, it is as if I have been eating alum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Alum</td>
<td>E perceived that M.G. was not tasting bitter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
aloes, as E.G. and M. supposed, but something different. No distinct perception on account of the persistence of the bitter taste.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Nutmeg</td>
<td>Peppermint — no — what you put in puddings — nutmeg. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Nutmeg</td>
<td>Nutmeg 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>Nothing perceived 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>Nothing perceived. (Sugar should be tried at an earlier stage in the series, as after the aloes, we could hardly taste the sugar ourselves). 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>M.G. &amp; M.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Cayenne pepper</td>
<td>Mustard 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Cayenne pepper</td>
<td>Cayenne pepper. After the cayenne we were unable to taste anything further that evening. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Carbonate of soda</td>
<td>Nothing perceived 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Caraway seeds</td>
<td>It feels like meal – like a seed loaf – caraway seeds. (The substance of the seeds seemed to be perceived before 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A 100% result would have produced a total of 140 points. A score of 70 is 50% which might be expected from guessing, and a score of 28 would suggest a total failure for the experiment. The score of 101 indicates a 72% success rate.

Gurney comments on the accuracy of what may appear to be mistakes in some percipient’s interpretation of their taste sensation:

..it will perhaps be thought that even some of their mistakes are not much wider of the mark than they might have been had a trace of the substance been actually placed upon their tongue (Gurney et al., 1886, p. 55).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>E.G. &amp; M.</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Cloves</td>
<td>Cloves</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Citric acid</td>
<td>Nothing perceived</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Citric acid</td>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Liquorice</td>
<td>Cloves</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Cloves</td>
<td>Cinnamon</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Acid jujube</td>
<td>Pear drop</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Acid jujube</td>
<td>Something hard, which is giving way – acid jujube.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>E.G. &amp; M.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Candied ginger</td>
<td>Something sweet and hot</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Candied ginger</td>
<td>Almond toffee. (M.G. took his ginger in the dark and it was some time before he realised it was ginger.)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

101
Another factor that ought to be considered is the effect that a preceding strong bitter taste would have had on the inability of percipients to taste sugar which followed. Discounting the sugar results would have reduced the total to 98 divided be 3 less items, giving a success rate of 78.4%.

**Classification typology of sensory impressions**

As an aid in the scientific analysis of their experiments, Myers, Gurney and Podmore gave classifications to the types of impression that influenced a percipient:

**Class (a)** is where the impression is sensory and externalised, and where the perception of the person seems to see, hear, or feel that which he instinctively refers to the outer world (Gurney et al., 1886, p. 186). The above cited experiments on the transmission of taste sensation would fall into this class.

**Class (b)** is where the impression is not sensory or externalised. The impression is of an inward or ideal kind – either a mental image or an emotion, or a blind impulse towards some sort of action. This class of impression is relevant to cases of compulsion and obsession which are signs that indicate the possibility of spirit possession.

**Class (c)** is where the perception is sensory without externalisation. For example; a physical feeling of illness when there is sympathetic resonance or physical rapport between a healer and his sick patient. Other types of impression that Gurney and Podmore classify include:

**Class (d)** dreams,

**Class (e)** in the hypnogogic state between sleep and waking,

**Class (f)** where the impression is reciprocal and each of two persons exercise a telepathic influence on each other.

**Class (g)** are collective cases where more than two people experience the same telepathic incident.

There is another class of telepathic communication where the percipient is not influenced or affected in any way, but where the agent projects a part of his consciousness to see the percipient. It is this type of communication that I cite examples of below. The reason for illustrating these examples is relevant to SRT practice where the practitioner needs to be aware of the spiritual health of the patient whilst in the absence of the patient. In SRT practice this type of one-way interaction is useful if there is suspected resistance on the part of the conscious awareness of the patient, or if an attached entity is avoiding detection (Hickman, 1994).
Where the above experiments on taste sensation were conducted with the knowledge and agreement between all participants, the experiments that I now cite were conducted without the knowledge or agreed participation of the recipient.

**Intended astral projection**

To illustrate the principle of astral projection, the case cited below is taken from an edited version of Myers’ *Human Personality* (Myers, 1903b, p. 204), where he reports that the experiment succeeded on the first trial. The agent was Miss “Edith Maughan” (now Mrs. G. Rayleigh Vicars), and the account is taken from the *SPR Proceedings*, (vol x. P. 273).

One night in September 1888 I was lying awake in bed reading. I had recently been studying with interest various cases of astral projection in Phantasms of the Living, and I distinctly remember making up my mind that night to try whether I could manage to accomplish a projection of myself by force of will-concentration.

The room next to mine was occupied by a friend of mine [Miss Ethel Thompson], who was an old acquaintance, and not at all of an excitable turn of mind. I perfectly recall lying back on my pillow with a resolute but half-doubtful and amused determination to make Miss Thompson see me. The candle was burning on a chair at the side of my bed, and I heard only the ticking of a clock as I “willed” with all my might to appear to her. After a few minutes I felt dizzy and only half-conscious.

I don’t know how long this state may have lasted, but I do remember emerging into a conscious state and thinking I had better leave off, as the strain had exhausted me. I gave up and changed into an easy position, thinking I had failed and needlessly fatigued myself for an impossible fancy. I blew out my candle; at the instant I was startled by hearing an indistinct sound from the next room.

It was Miss Thompson’s voice raised slightly, but I could not distinguish more than the actual sound, which was repeated, and then there was silence. Soon after my clock struck two (A.M.), and I fell asleep.

Next morning I noticed that Miss Thompson looked rather tired at breakfast, but I asked no questions. Presently she said, “Had I gone into her room to frighten her during the night?” I said I had not left my room. She declared that I seemed to her to come in and bend over her and disappeared immediately thereafter. From what she said I concluded it must have been between one and two A.M. Her own account is in the possession of the Psychical Society. All I have to add is that I was in my ordinary state of health, and not at all excited, but merely bent on trying an experiment (Myers, 1903b, p. 204).

The second example was first reported in the *SPR Journal*, (vol. VII. P. 99). This case is especially interesting in terms of being *reciprocal* as well as *experimental*. The main objective of the agent was to discover something of the recipient’s condition, and the intention to manifest an apparition of himself was only secondary.

On the 5th July, 1887, I left my home in Lakewood to go to New York to spend a few days. My wife was not feeling well when I left, and after I had started I looked back and saw her
standing in the door looking disconsolate and sad at my leaving. The picture haunted me all day, and at night, before I went to bed, I thought I would try to find out if possible her condition. I had undressed, and was sitting on the edge of the bed, when I covered my face with my hands and willed myself in Lakewood at home to see if I could see her. After a little, I seemed to be standing in her room before the bed, and saw her lying there looking much better. I felt satisfied she was better, and so spent the week more comfortably regarding her condition. On Saturday I went home. When she saw me she remarked, “I don’t know whether I am glad to see you or not, for I thought something had happened to you. I saw you standing in front of the bed the night (about 8:30 or before 9) you left, as plain as could be, and I have been worrying myself about you ever since. I sent to the office and to the depot daily to get some message from you.” After explaining my effort to find out her condition, everything became plain to her. She had seen me when I was trying to see her and find out her condition. I thought at the time I was going to see her and make her see me (Myers, 1903b, p. 205).

These early experiments show what appears to be the extraordinary ability of one person to access another from a distance, and this is precisely what SRT practitioners do when helping those patients or clients who may be troubled by spirit entities (Hickman, 1994). Myers insisted that the terms supernatural and paranormal are irrelevant and that all human so-called ‘psychical’ experiences are normal (Myers, 1903a). In their search for explanations for the presentation of how a phantasm can present itself to another person, and how that person (the percipient) can perceive it, Myers, Gurney and Podmore demonstrated that these are not extraordinary abilities at all, but something that ordinary people are themselves capable of (Gurney et al., 1886).

The Case for Possession

Evidence to support the case for possession comes from a variety of sources including the eyewitness testimony of exorcists (Baglio, 2009), psychiatrists and observers of possession phenomena (Fiore, 1987), the subjective experiences of patients who have been able to access altered states of consciousness (Modi, 1997), and the subjective experience of ecstatic and mystical states in traditional religions and shamanic practices (Lewis, 2003).

In addition, whilst Myers and his colleagues were attempting to understand the phenomena associated with hysteria, the spontaneous somnambulism of sleep-waking preachers, automatic writing and obsessive compulsions, he arrived at inescapable conclusions. It was not Myers’ intention to investigate possession per se, but to gather evidence to support the hypothesis that man has a soul that survives physical death. His theory of possession emerged as an explanation for phenomena where he could find no alternative explanation, such as those demonstrated by spiritualist mediums such as Stainton Moses and Mrs. Piper:
The Moses-Piper group of trance phenomena cannot be intelligently explained on any theory except that of possession. And I therefore think it important to consider in what way earlier phenomena have led up to possession, and in what way the facts of possession, in their turn, affect our view of these earlier phenomena (Myers, 1903b, p. 347).

These insights led him to delay presenting his final conclusions for ten years whilst he considered the possession hypothesis to explain earlier phenomena such as multiple personality:

It is in this chapter that the main difference lies between what I should have written ten years ago, and what it seems to me not only permissible, but even urgently necessary to write today. It is what must be said about Possession that the great change has come (Myers, 1903b, p. 345).

He continues by commenting on the value of the possession theory:

The theory of possession actually supplies us with a powerful method of coordinating and explaining many earlier groups of phenomena (Myers, 1903b, p. 347).

Myers hypothesised that possession is a more developed form of motor automatism in which the automatist’s own personality is temporarily displaced and there is a substitution of personality where writing or speech is being given by a spirit through the entranced organism (Myers, 1903b, p. 345). Myers’ claim was that the automatist falls into a trance and his spirit partially quits the body and leaves the body open to a more or less perceptual vulnerability to a spirit world:

The claim, then, is that the automatist falls into a trance, during which his spirit partially “quits his body”: enters at any rate into a state in which the spiritual world is more or less open to its perception; and in which also – and this is the novelty – it so far ceases to occupy the organism as to leave room for an invading spirit to use it in somewhat the same fashion as its own is accustomed to use it (Myers, 1903b, p. 345).

Myers hypothesis that when the spirit of the automatist leaves the body the brain is left temporarily uncontrolled and this enables a disembodied spirit to enter and take control of the brain’s mechanisms and abilities in varying degrees. He also suggests that in some cases, such as Mrs. Piper, two or more spirits may simultaneously control different portions of the same organism (Myers, 1903b, p. 346).

Myers acknowledged proof of the identity of possessing spirits by their ability to reproduce by speech or in writing certain facts which belonged to the spirit’s memory and not to that of the automatist (Myers, 1903b, p. 346). Myers further asserted two primary factors that gave evidence of possession, ‘the control by a spirit of the sensitive’s organism and the partial and temporary desertion of that organism by the percipient’s own spirit’ (Myers, 1903b, p. 347).
Myers considered the evidence to suggest the withdrawal of the legitimate spirit of the host. Firstly there came the splits in personality that are characteristic of dual or multiple personality (ibid). Secondly these splits in personality gradually gave way to the predominance and eventually ‘complete control of all supraliminal manifestation’ (ibid).

Myers developed this idea with his artificially induced hypnotic trance and demonstrated that a quasi-personality can be created to occupy the organism and take control. Myers identified those characteristics that enable the differentiation between artificially induced possession and genuine spirit possession:

Hypnosis trance has created for us, with perfect facility, situations externally indistinguishable from what I shall presently claim as true possession. A quasi-personality, arbitrarily created, may occupy the organism, responding to speech or sign in some characteristic fashion, although without producing any fresh verifiable facts as evidence to the alleged identity (Myers, 1903b, p. 349).

It is therefore important that the identity of the possessing entity is validated by external evidence. For example, if an entity gives specific instructions for treating a sickness and claims to be the spirit of a deceased doctor, then there should be evidence that that doctor lived at some time.

Myers observed that the body and brain of a person (the organism) is used by a possession spirit as an ‘instrument’ in the same way as the legitimate spirit of the person uses the brain and its body:

The phenomena of possession seem to indicate that the extraneous spirit acts on a man’s organism in very much the same way as the man’s own spirit acts on it. One must thus practically regard the body as an instrument upon which a spirit plays – an ancient metaphor which now seems actually our nearest approximation to truth (Myers, 1903b, p. 356).

Myers placed emphasis on the need to verify new knowledge that the automatist could not possibly have known in order to arrive at the conclusion that a possessing spirit had taken control (Myers, 1903b, p. 356).

Telepathic Hypnosis and Spirit Possession

Myers’ experiments with hypnosis teach us is that what can be achieved in hypnosis is commensurate with what happens to our perception, imaginings, hopes and fears in everyday living. Our own delusions and false beliefs can be reinforced by auto-suggestion and imagination in defence of a fragmented or fragile ego or sense of self. Our own creative imagination can shape our interpretations to reinforce our own false autogenic (self-created) sense of self rather than accept our true Self and authentic spirit nature. On Man’s spirit nature Myers writes:

In my view each man is essentially a spirit, controlling an organism which is itself a complex of lower and smaller lives. The spirit’s control is not uniform throughout the organism, not in
all phases of organic life. In waking life it controls mainly the centres of supraliminal thought and feeling, exercising little control over deeper centres, which have been educated into a routine sufficient for common needs. But in subliminal states – trance and the like – the supraliminal processes are inhibited, and the lower organic centres are retained more directly under the spirit’s control. As you get into the profounder part of man’s being, you get nearer to the source of his human vitality. You get thus into a region of essentially greater responsiveness to spiritual appeal than is offered by the superficial stratum which has been shaped and hardened by external needs into a definite adaptation to the earthly environment (Myers, 1903b, p. 160).

Taking the above statement at face value, and assuming that Myers is correct, probably the best example of the concept of possession is provided by the stage hypnotist. The hypnotist takes possession of the subject by imposing his will on the organism whilst the conscious self dissociates from the body and observes itself. I am not aware of any published works on this hypothesis as it applies to stage hypnotism, but my own questioning of some subjects who have participated in stage performances confirm that they perceived themselves as if they were outside of their bodies and watched what they did in response to the hypnotist’s suggestions. Other subjects reported having no memory of what they did in response to the hypnotist’s suggestions at all. It may be hypothesised that those with no memory of the experience were dissociated to the degree that they created a sub-personality with its autonomous memory chain of the event that could only be recalled with re-hypnotisation. This hypothesis prompts us to question what memories the dissociated self might have. A similar question could be asked of the consciousness that becomes dissociated at the time a real possessing entity is in full and complete control.

Yet other participants in stage hypnosis, experienced themselves as remaining within their bodies, and believed what the hypnotist told them was real, when in reality what was happening in their mental perception was imagined. In other words, the hallucination was perceived as real according to belief but not in fact. The experience of this kind of hallucination is subjectively very real, and it is this notion of *experience* that is extremely important in our appreciation and understanding of these concepts. It is not possible to understand such notions until they are experienced personally. Intellectual understanding is not sufficient and is not a substitute for actual experience. In these situations the belief remains intact until such time as the hypnotist delivers a suggestion to cancel the hallucination, and it is only after the suggestion is cancelled, or overcome, that the reality of the situation convinces the subject that he / she has been given a hallucination by suggestion. This can be a profound and sometimes deeply disturbing experience.

Modern hypnosis theories ignore our spiritual nature and are therefore unable to acknowledge the spiritual nature of hypnosis. It is therefore no surprise that modern theorists are unable to explain the full range of hypnotic phenomena and the mechanisms that underpin them.
Hypnosis is a huge subject that has attracted the curiosity of philosophers, metaphysicians, surgeons, psychiatrists, psychologists and healers since the time of Mesmer. But the aspect of hypnosis that is most important to Myers’ concerns is telepathic hypnosis, which is the one that modern researchers have chosen to ignore at the expense of our understanding of human consciousness. It is to Myers that psychology owes a great debt in the formulation of a conceptual framework that accommodates a more holistic appreciation of human psychic experience, and yet to ignore the concept of telepathic hypnosis is to deny the debt altogether.

To ignore the importance of telepathic hypnosis is misleading to the student of hypnotic phenomena as Myers’ experiments will testify, and it is equally important that the evidence for hypnosis at a distance is presented in order to support the argument that hypnosis is a gateway to a vast array of psychological and spiritual domains.

Modern theories of hypnosis, being predominantly based on the power of suggestion, cannot explain the hypnotic power of silent hand passes (mesmeric technique), neither can they explain hypnosis at a distance, or the phenomenon of spirit possession, whereas telepathy, although not a complete explanation, does open an alternative avenue of enquiry.

Terence Palmer
tjpalmer101@btopenworld.com
July 2011

References


