

WHAT IS CHANNELING? with ARTHUR HASTINGS, Ph.D.

JEFFREY MISHLOVE, Ph.D.: Hello and welcome. Our topic today is one that's been on the mind of many people in recent years -- channeling, trance mediumship, spirit communication. My guest, Dr. Arthur Hastings, is a very distinguished scholar in this area. He is the dean of faculty at the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology at Menlo Park, California, and a past president of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology. Dr. Hastings is also the senior editor of a book called *Health for the Whole Person*, which recently won the Medical Self Care Book Award. Arthur, welcome to the program.

ARTHUR HASTINGS, Ph.D.: Thanks, Jeffrey. It's nice to be here.

MISHLOVE: Channeling is a subject that confuses so many people. We think of it in terms of spirit guides; we think of it in terms of entities. What do you make of it? So many people think it's pure fraud.

HASTINGS: Well, channeling is the name that we now give to people who say they're getting communications from the spirits or from some other dimension or from some beings or entities, and they're passing these messages on to us. So it's what we used to call a trance medium, right? Or as you said, spirit communications. In recent years, the last two or three years particularly, there's been an amazing increase in people who are presenting themselves as channels.

MISHLOVE: I've just seen it's extraordinary. Every person, all my old friends, are doing it.

HASTINGS: You can hardly walk down the street without bumping into somebody who's channeling.

MISHLOVE: It's becoming a fad, and I should think that because of that many people will tend to distrust it.

HASTINGS: I think it's going to get a lot of attention. There are going to be TV shows on it. Shirley MacLaine's books have popularized the idea, and in the last fifteen years perhaps there's been a steady increase in it, which I think is reaching a peak right now.

MISHLOVE: Many people have probably read the Seth books by Jane Roberts. I think they're among the most popular literature today that's based on so-called channeled material.

HASTINGS: Jane Roberts was an Elmira, New York person who started off with an ESP group, started getting messages on a Ouija board, and the messages were said to come from a being named Seth.

MISHLOVE: The messages proclaim themselves.

HASTINGS: That's right, they announce that. Jane then found that she could go into a trance -- that is, she could put herself in a light hypnotic state -- and take on a quite different personality, and this is the personality that presented itself as Seth. Seth was a talker and a teacher and a preacher, so to speak, was very psychologically oriented, gave a great number of teachings, dictated books that have sold two million copies by now.

MISHLOVE: Volumes of material.

HASTINGS: Very sophisticated material.

MISHLOVE: People then argue on her behalf, or on behalf of the idea of channeling, that Jane Roberts herself could never have written books of this magnitude, of this profound depth, and so on.

HASTINGS: Well, they are very sophisticated. I think it's a debatable point whether Jane or some other person could not have sat down and really constructed material of that sort. I think you could get an argument either way. It's not unknown in channeling history. For example, in the 1920s there was a lady named Pearl Curran who got messages from a spirit named Patience Worth.

MISHLOVE: Now, when you say spirit, do you take Patience Worth to be a real spirit, or shall we just say that's what this voice called itself?

HASTINGS: Well, it was again messages on a Ouija board. The board spelled out, "After many moons again I come," and it was signed, "Patience Worth."

MISHLOVE: This was a big social phenomenon in the 1920s. Many of those books were best sellers then as well.

HASTINGS: Patience Worth wrote poems, dictated stories. She wrote short stories that won national short story awards, through the Ouija board. Now, was she a spirit, or was this part of Pearl Curran's own personal unconscious or superconscious?

MISHLOVE: Or a pen name?

HASTINGS: Or a pen name, yes. Well, Pearl Curran herself was the wife of a doctor, I believe, in St. Louis -- was not particularly well read, had no particular capabilities at art or music or writing. So if this was a part of her subconscious personality, then you have to say she really had very deep abilities -- and maybe all of us do -- that didn't come out consciously. Now, the other side of it is, maybe this was a being on the other side, trying to come through Pearl Curran. Most of the novels and stories were very inspirational in tone. One was, for example, the life of people in the days of Palestine about the time of Jesus. And then there were poems which were against war, which were for spiritual development. So it had a moral tone to it anyway.

MISHLOVE: Much of this channeled material does have kind of a moral tone or spiritualistic tone to it.

HASTINGS: Yes, we're in a period now where almost all of the channels are giving us spiritual messages. They're spiritual teachings -- contemporary channels that are currently now at the time of this program, and may continue, or may pass on. People like -- well, I shouldn't use that term.

MISHLOVE: Entities?

HASTINGS: Yes. Communicators, like Ramtha, Emmanuel, Lazaris -- channels.

MISHLOVE: Well, a lot of people now are very much involved in what's called A Course in Miracles, in which Jesus Christ supposedly dictated this three-volume text to a psychology professor at Columbia University.

HASTINGS: That's one of the more sophisticated, one of the better ones, and those books have sold more than three hundred thousand copies without anything but word-of-mouth advertising.

MISHLOVE: And anything but praise for them, as far as I know, as well.

HASTINGS: There are study groups following it. There are people who write articles about it. So there's an example of channeled literature that is really having an impact on people's spiritual and psychological development.

MISHLOVE: You know, I think it's important to mention this, because as I recall, Julian Huxley, the great biologist, at one point said that if spirits exist, why do they always put forth such drivel? Back in the early nineteenth century, the days of the great mediums, it seemed as if a lot of the spirit communications were very unimportant, nonsensical, not profound at all.

HASTINGS: Yes, that's really true, and you find the same thing with channels. Some of them are very profound, very thoughtful and important kinds of messages. Others are mediocre, and some you wouldn't take the time of day for, they just aren't that significant.

MISHLOVE: One of the great spirit mediums was Eileen Garrett, who founded the Parapsychology Foundation. They did some incredible studies with her, in which they measured her brain waves while she was channeling her spirit guide and otherwise, and they noticed a completely different pattern.

HASTINGS: She had four spirit controls, which we would call communicators or beings now, and each one of these had a different personality pattern, and her own brain wave pattern was different for each one. Did you know that Ira Progoff interviewed her in a very deep way, and then interviewed each of her spirit guides?

MISHLOVE: No, I'm not aware of that.

HASTINGS: What he would do would be to get into conversations with them. Progoff is a psychoanalyst, a Jungian-oriented analyst, and what he found was that as he got deeper and deeper he got just pulled into a very deep conversation with one of her guides, which was a sort of a Ramtha guide, and another one which was sort of a spirit of wisdom.

MISHLOVE: When you say sort of a Ramtha guide, what does that mean?

HASTINGS: Well, he announced himself as Rama. He said he was the spirit of wisdom, I guess it was, and so he represented creativity and wisdom and so on. Then she had another one who represented Logos, the ideas and concepts. What Progoff concluded was that these were not separate entities, but they were a very deep part of Eileen Garrett connecting with an archetypal energy, and then being personified, much like you might create a personality out of your car and it might mentally sort of speak to you. But in this case it was a personality being created.

MISHLOVE: Now, an archetypal energy in this sense -- what does that mean?

HASTINGS: Well, Progoff has the idea that there are forces or energies that represent or reflect our accumulated wisdom, or our idealized idea of compassion, or of healing, in kind of a nonphysical space, similar to Jung's collective unconscious.

MISHLOVE: Almost like mythological figures.

HASTINGS: Yes, that would be a good comparison. But they're not imaginary; they have some reality, if only in our own imaginary construction of them. So he felt that Eileen Garrett was tapping into those very mythological, archetypal forms, and giving them a name and a voice, when she was in the trance state.

MISHLOVE: In other words, you might say at one level there are depths within each of us which are just extraordinary. Probably we all have more potential than we realize, and that goes very deep. And then that touches something else which really transcends the personal.

HASTINGS: Yes, that's exactly the idea, exactly. And I think that's one of the major ways of looking at the experience of channeling, and how people are able to tap these kinds of sources.

MISHLOVE: You know, another research finding that has intrigued me is the work being done now on multiple personalities, where an individual who's considered highly neurotic and has different personalities, usually not very enlightened, they also show the same distinct brain wave patterns when the different personalities are coming through. Do you think there's a relationship there?

HASTINGS: It could very well be that some of the people who present themselves as channels are actually in a kind of benign or non-neurotic multiple personality, as though the channel part is a subpersonality of them -- maybe embodying greater wisdom or understanding than they might have in their own conscious self, but it still could be a part of them. Now, some of the research on multiple personality shows that even with people who are seriously disturbed, there is often one of their personalities that is a positive, constructive, wise helper, and if you can evoke that part of the person, then that part may help the other, disturbed parts get together and heal.

MISHLOVE: Is there a danger for people who might want to become involved in all of this channeling, as so many people are now? Are there any studies that suggest that these spirit mediums are less healthy, or don't live as long, or have certain problems?

HASTINGS: They talk to themselves. Well, I'm kidding. There are several problems. One is, if people are interested in doing channeling, my suggestion is don't do it, because anytime you are changing your conscious level of awareness you are in a sense opening a door, and the door might be open to parts of yourself that you don't like. It might be open to spirits, if that's what's going on, that might be dangerous. A Ouija board is sort of like opening your door on a dark night. You don't know who might come in. So that's one thing. A second thing is that you can be possessed by your enthusiasm for channeling. I know of some people who channeled, who were doing channeling, still are doing channeling, who get totally fixated and caught up. They are listening to their other voice, they are listening to the voice of the channel, they can't wait to get back to it. Like some people get addicted to computers, some people get addicted to chocolate, some people get addicted to being channels.

MISHLOVE: Many of these trance mediums have followers who seem to be addicted. Lazaris is a very popular one, who claims never to have been in a physical body, and yet many people who are in physical bodies come to him for advice, as if he should know.

HASTINGS: Yes, good point. Some channels give advice, and people follow it religiously. Some charge high amounts for their workshops.

MISHLOVE: They encourage their followers to invest in various business projects that may be profitable to the medium.

HASTINGS: A group of us have been working a little bit in this area, and I know one lady who apologized for only having been channeling for nine months. She sort of looked very sorry and said, "I don't even have a business card yet." So there you have a new job opportunity for people.

MISHLOVE: It's a growth industry.

HASTINGS: A growth industry, yes -- labor-intensive growth industry. But there is that, and one channel is giving out information that there are going to be earthquakes and natural disasters, and people are moving -- selling their property, selling their goods, moving to the Northwest or some other part of the country.

MISHLOVE: There was quite a rage back in 1969 when Edgar Cayce, a well-known channel, had predicted, or people assumed he had predicted, that California was going to fall into the ocean. I know people who invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in rescue equipment.

HASTINGS: Oh, really? And did it fall?

MISHLOVE: No. Well, how do we evaluate this kind of material, Arthur? Some of it seems very sublime. Certainly from the point of view of parapsychologists, some of the material coming through one would say is psychic -- it is accurate extrasensory information. And yet quite a bit of it seems to be the product of a fantasy or a delusion, or a mixture of these things.

HASTINGS: Yes, you have to really use your judgment and not take everything as the word of authority. It's very easy to believe, for many people, that if somebody's on the other side, then they must know everything. Well, I remember a statement made by transpersonal psychologist Charlie Tart, who said, "Dying does not raise your IQ." What that means is just because somebody is on the other side and says they're on the seventh plane, or that they're the spirit of your great uncle George or the spirit of Einstein, that doesn't mean that they have any more perspective, any higher knowledge, than they might have had here. There are people here who think they know a lot, and you wouldn't take their advice on a bet. The same thing is true of some channels. So you needn't give over your emotional authority to somebody speaking just because they're saying things that sound good and they're presumably from the great beyond. And I think that's true not only on earth, but with channels who are bringing information through from outside their consciousness. It's very impressive when they say something psychic, like, "I see you living in a house that has two stories, and there's a picket fence around it, and you had a little dog named Spotty, or Alphonse, when you were a child."

MISHLOVE: That tends to get to people.

HASTINGS: That's right. And so they think, "Well, gee, they must know all about me, and they can tell me what to do." Not necessarily true. And some are very good psychologists, so to speak; some are good therapists; some are just commonsensical; some are not at all.

MISHLOVE: Some of the great literature that's ever been written has come through channels -- William Butler Yeats, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Robert Louis Stevenson.

HASTINGS: Now let's see. Yeats wrote a book called A Vision. What about Emerson?

MISHLOVE: Emerson claimed that his essays came to him while he was in a trance-like state, virtually asleep, through automatic writing. He would wake up and see the essays written, and he wrote that he then read them with great interest.

HASTINGS: I wish I could write that way.

MISHLOVE: Of course he's regarded as perhaps the greatest essayist in American literature.

HASTINGS: That's right. That brings up a curious point, because was he really channeling, or was he simply calling on his superconscious or subconscious mind?

MISHLOVE: Or his higher self, or something like that.

HASTINGS: Yes.

MISHLOVE: Is there any way that you can even answer that question?

HASTINGS: You know, I don't think you can, and I'm a little bit concerned, because in channeling the communicator comes through and says, "I am so and so." Well, we don't know whether that's an honest presentation -- "I'm Medion, coming through from outer space, through this vehicle" -- or whether it's just a convenience, because we need to identify something as a name, and there's kind of an effect, like an actor on the stage taking a name, to present itself.

MISHLOVE: I'm glad you brought up theater. My mother has been an actress in community theaters. For example, she played the role of Blanche DuBois in A Streetcar Named Desire, a very powerful female role, and for weeks afterwards she would feel this character come and possess her, like trying to take her over -- a fictional character, certainly not a spiritual entity. Many people in the theater describe this experience, where they become in their best performances possessed by the characters. It's as if it's describing some kind of a dynamic, something about human personality that we don't understand too well.

HASTINGS: Authors will often describe how they will start to write a play or a novel, and the characters will come to life in their imaginations, and act out the story that the authors haven't even figured out yet. There's an interesting channeling story along this line. Charles Dickens was writing The Mystery of Edwin Drood when he died. He was in the middle of it, so it was incomplete. Well, several of his colleagues, living authors, tried to complete it in Dickens' style. Then a few years later a medium named Thomas James, in Massachusetts or Vermont, somewhere in New England, got dictation from Charles Dickens to finish that novel. Many people who have read it say it reads just like Dickens.

MISHLOVE: Critics.

HASTINGS: Yes.

MISHLOVE: You know, there are many cases like this. In Brazil, for example, I've done some work with Luis Gasparetto, who goes into trance and produces paintings in the style of the deceased artists -- Degas, Picasso, Monet, Manet, Toulouse-Lautrec, Modigliani -- and in five minutes he finishes a painting. Or Chico Xavier, who produces great literature, or Rosemary Brown, who produces music this way in England. Some critics seem to feel that what they're coming up with is authentic. Others don't.

HASTINGS: Some of the really good quality work, I think, if it were written by the composer or the author in his or her lifetime, would be accepted, and others I think would be somewhat more doubtful. But that's true of any author or composer, so I don't know if you can get any conclusion one way or the other on most of that material. Now, the spirits who are doing this, if indeed it's spirit, say, "We're doing this to prove that man is more than his body. We're doing it to prove survival; that's why we come through." I think you also have to ask yourself the question: if you're on the other side -- let's assume there's another side, and you're on the other side -- what would motivate you to want to hang around earth and speak to us poor earthlings here?

MISHLOVE: Well, let's say hypothetically that I was fascinated by the question; while I lived, I was trying to prove it. For example, parapsychology researchers who die have been said to come back, for the very purpose of finishing the work they started on this side. The strongest evidence, I think, for life after death comes from these cases where researchers in parapsychology would appear to mediums in different parts of the continent, or even the planet -- in India, in England, in the United States -- and each give them a fragment of a message, which when put together could be assembled and could constitute a whole message.

HASTINGS: Yes. So one motivation might be to prove that they survived death. And it occurs to me that another motivation might be sort of a missionary motivation -- to want to do some good and spread the word among people.

MISHLOVE: It was the missionary motivation, after all, that led to the conquest of the New World.

HASTINGS: That's true, that's true.

MISHLOVE: So there might be something to that.

HASTINGS: You asked the question is there some danger in this, and in addition to missionaries, who we hope are good-natured and positive people, there may also be dangers from the communicators -- whether it's part of your unconscious self, perhaps tapping some negative feelings and energies, or whether it's people or beings on another side that might have some negative thoughts, feelings, and energies.

MISHLOVE: Certainly there is the position that fundamentalist Christians take, that this is all demonic.

HASTINGS: Yes, and that if you open yourself to this, then you are letting in negative and evil forces. Now, I think that is much more a fear than it turns out to be actual in practice. There are more evil forces in people than there are on the other side, in my estimation, and if we could clear up our own difficulties, I think we would go a long way towards keeping our psychic space unpoluted. That brings up another question, though, and that is, does the channeling have any relationship to the qualities of the individual who is doing the channeling? Do you get a better level of message, so to speak, from people who have worked on themselves, who are more spiritually devoted, who are religious in nature, or who are at least psychologically healthy?

MISHLOVE: What do you think?

HASTINGS: I think the answer is yes.

MISHLOVE: You know, I met the Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford, who channeled the Course in Miracles material, and they used to say they never did get it. They felt sort of untouched in some way. At least they were humble about it in that sense. They thought the material they were channeling was much more lofty than anything that they would have actualized in their own lives.

HASTINGS: I think that's generally true. Most people who do channeling are bringing out messages that are more wise, or higher, or whatever, than they would do in their run-of-the-mill, mundane experience. Now that's natural. Would you be interested in channeling if it were a lot of garbage, nonsense, and stuff that you could dismiss?

MISHLOVE: No, I have other things to do with my time.

HASTINGS: That's right. Nor would people pay five dollars or fifteen dollars or a hundred dollars to come and listen to you do that, or buy books or whatever, or be inspired by it.

MISHLOVE: Let me ask you this, Arthur. Looking at the best of the channeled material, do you think that we can reasonably entertain the hypothesis or the suggestion of the spiritualists, that these are higher spiritual entities, enlightened beings that are coming to help us?

HASTINGS: That's a pretty difficult question. I wouldn't go that far yet, because while some of the evidence that you can look at, the teachings and how they're produced, point that way, you can also suggest some other possibilities. What I would say is there are many channeled teachings that are worth listening to, that you can learn from, and that are a real contribution to our culture and society, and if you have the intelligence to hear those, then I think it's to our benefit. If you accept everything that comes along, you're going to get that, and you're going to get a hodgepodge of other stuff, and it's probably not going to do you much good. But if you look at the great spiritual traditions, several of them really relied on certain kinds of channeling. The Hebrew prophets, when they say, "God put words in my mouth," perhaps that was channeling. The book written by Mohammed, the Koran, was dictated to him.

MISHLOVE: The Book of Mormon.

HASTINGS: The Book of Mormon was received by Joseph Smith, and some of the later teachings of Smith. Then our current channels, many of them have very powerful teachings.

MISHLOVE: And if you combine these religious teachings with some of the great works of literature -- Mozart claimed that he wrote his music by kind of hearing it.

HASTINGS: That's right. He heard it and wrote it down.

MISHLOVE: One might say that our whole civilization has in some ways been affected by channeling, so whether we agree with it or not, perhaps we would admit that it's a cultural phenomenon that certainly deserves our attention.

HASTINGS: Perhaps it's a way we have of getting messages to ourself that might not always come through our conscious construction.

MISHLOVE: Arthur Hastings, it's been a pleasure having you with me. Thank you very much.

HASTINGS: Thanks, Jeffrey.

