

# MIND OVER MATTER

## PLACEBOS AND SELF-HEALING

**The materialist, mechanistic, reductionist model based on Newton's scientific theories is being replaced by a new paradigm that incorporates holographic reality and the variables of mind and consciousness while acknowledging that we are all cosmically connected.**

by Bevis Beauvais  
© August 2016

Email:  
bevisbeauvais@yahoo.co.uk

*The artist is always present beside the geometrician, and will be able to bend the formulas when necessary.*

— Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879)

### Scientific Limitations

Some clear thinking, intelligent and independently minded people, particularly if they are what is considered by conventional standards to be well educated, find it difficult to fully accept anomalous phenomena, regardless of whether such things involve psychic abilities, apparitions, UFOs or even hypnosis and the placebo effect. This instinctive scepticism, when it is self-aware and not driven by unconscious emotions, derives from the fact that institutional science has no paradigm or framework to explain how or why such seemingly atypical phenomena might occur.

Consequently sceptics are forced to explain reported events in terms of the dishonesty, gullibility or even insanity of the observers, even when those same observers are credible scientists with impeccable reputations. But, as wiser minds advise, we do well to remind ourselves that the materialist assumptions of conventional science are treated as self-evident truths and therefore have become akin to religious dogma. True science is neither an ideology nor a dogmatic belief system: it is a method of enquiry. We may therefore legitimately question materialist assumptions and their concomitant belief system and ideology when they do not adequately encompass the research data.

*Materialism*, being the doctrine that whatever exists is either physical matter or dependent upon matter for its existence, restricts our view of life and Nature. One of the things which continually hampers a useful integration of psychology and medicine, as well as prevents a fuller understanding of quantum mechanics and its application to other sciences and disciplines, is the materialist habit of failing to make a meaningful distinction between the brain and the mind. Scientists are also apt to forget, sometimes even deny, that our inner world of thought and feeling and the outer world of physical action are equally real.

Properly speaking, the brain, being made of matter, is merely a part of the body, whereas the mind is something altogether different since it is non-material or *spiritual* in nature. Science does not much like the notion of spirituality—and understandably so, since it harks back to an age when the Church not only held sway over scientific endeavour but could also determine the life or death of an enquirer into truth.

In Philip Kerr's historical detective novel *Dark Matter* (2002), it is considered by Isaac Newton that the Spanish Inquisition's use of the rack "would explain why so little science emanates from that country". He continues: "God knows

how many great scientific minds were stunted when Galileo, the greatest mind of the century, was tried for heresy."

But *spiritual* does not necessarily mean *religious*, for it was once an everyday secular idea hinted at in English grammar, which taught that there are two types of things of which we can be aware: *concrete nouns*, being the palpable objects that we can actually touch, like apples, trees and snakes; and *abstract nouns*, being the intangible spiritual qualities that we sense, like love, life and wisdom.

By shunning the spiritual to concentrate on the materialistic, science views all things, including people, as mechanisms to be explained without recourse to *teleology* or intentions and goals. It uses *reductionism* to explain these machines by breaking them down into parts. Human behaviour is therefore ultimately reduced to the study of inanimate matter as living things are understood in terms of chemistry and physics, which themselves are reduced to atomic and subatomic particles.

Creative thinkers have been prophesying for decades of the time when this outdated Newtonian mechanistic, materialist and reductionist science would give way to a new vision of life and the cosmos based more firmly upon the findings of quantum mechanics that are already now a century old.

A new *holographic paradigm* for the universe, springing from physicist David Bohm's ideas of *holomovement* and *implicate order*, has been developed and popularised by talented writers like Michael Talbot to provide a workable metaphor to bridge the gap between matter and mind and between science and anomalous phenomena in both their commonplace and more exotic forms.

Einstein was never happy about the uncertain and

stochastic nature of quantum mechanics and was unshakeable in his belief that there were hidden variables still to be found. Today physicists like Roger Penrose seem to affirm that mind and consciousness constitute those variables. Both the *uncertainty principle* and the *observer effect* had hinted at the role of consciousness in shaping reality from the earliest days of quantum mechanics.

Meanwhile parapsychology, which connects the two islands of physics and psychology, has evidence that minds can affect other minds through telepathy and can affect matter through telekinesis, while the *experimenter effect* suggests that observations in all sciences will be

affected to some degree by the minds and intentions of the scientists who make them.

The important finding to deduce from modern physics and parapsychology is that minds may affect both matter and other minds. Our positive thoughts, meditations and prayers are therefore a factor in health and healing, as are our negative thoughts and feelings both towards ourselves and others. As well as having

obvious consequences for medicine and clinical psychology, these findings carry enormous ethical implications for teachers, entertainers, propagandists and advertisers, regardless of whether they are well or ill intentioned or whether or not vested interests are involved.

### Hints of Mind Power

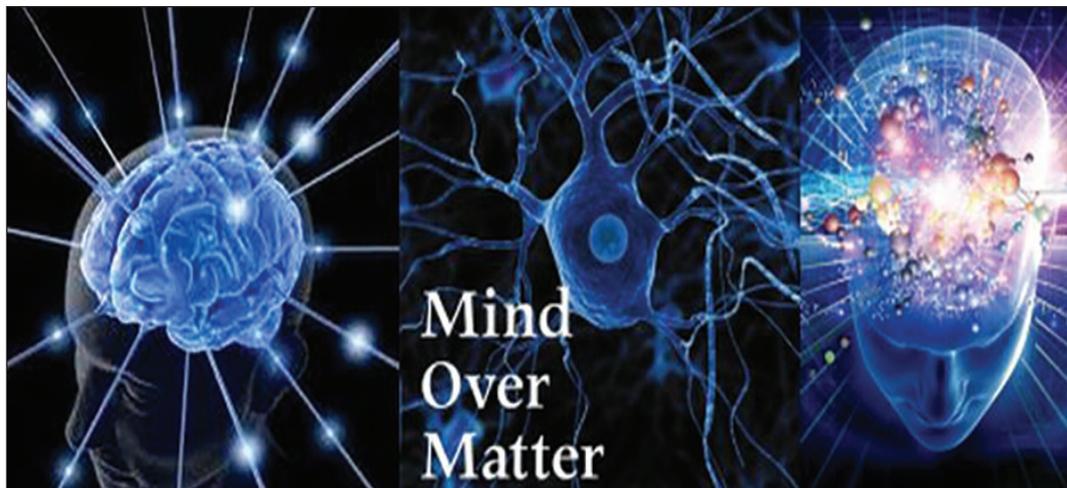
These days we are all aware of the placebo effect in which a patient's health is enhanced by the consumption of an inert and harmless substance.

A BBC programme on the subject documented cases of placebos improving the performances of athletes, alleviating the symptoms of Parkinson's disease, healing

a broken back more quickly, and even altering blood constituency from its expected state at high altitude.

The documentary highlighted the psychosomatic origin of the placebo effect by a demonstration of tooth extraction under hypnosis without an anaesthetic, where again the power of the mind was evident.

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The inescapable conclusion is that a patient's beliefs and expectations are responsible for the placebo effect and that such cures and health-enhancing phenomena are *psychogenic* in origin since they are not caused by an active biological compound.

Interesting though the documentary was, it could have gone much further, although it is understandable that such a high-profile mainstream program might err on the side of caution.

The psychologist and author Stan Gooch was less hesitant in his work *The Secret Life of Humans* (1981) and recounts trawling through medical journals for unexplained cases. He found many interesting examples, one of which even suggested the possibility that DNA had been recoded. Today this might be explained in terms of various genes being switched on and off, and classified as *epigenetics*.

Gooch related a case of a congenital condition called *ichthyosis* where the skin has the appearance of a crocodile-like texture. The patient had the condition all over his body except for the head, neck and chest. Skin grafts became the same as infected areas within a month, but Dr Albert Mason successfully used hypnosis to cure the left arm: "From a black and armour-like casing the skin became pink and soft within a few days." This was repeated for the other areas of the body and was about 90 per cent successful. Coded DNA instructions appear to be capable of modification.

We are told that our brain stops growing fairly early in life but is still able to increase its capability through making connections between neurons. And yet study of the hippocampus region responsible for spatial mapping seems to suggest otherwise, since

scans of London taxi drivers demonstrate a correlation between hippocampus size and the number of years they have worked as a cabby. We may not be as genetically restricted as we believe, and *neurogenesis*, or the regeneration of neurons, is a distinct possibility.

Lesser-known early psychoanalytic literature contains an example of an adult of small stature increasing their height after therapy, following an analysis that uncovered a family history in which their diagnosed neurosis had been traced to domineering relatives. Elsewhere and more recently it has been discovered that electrical stimulation induces growth of new teeth, even after the second set has been completed. In both cases there appears to be more genetic flexibility than we might suppose.

And then there is the matter of scar tissue. Deepak Chopra's *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind* (1993) tells us that our cells are constantly being replaced as old ones die. Every three months our skin is composed of completely new cells, while bones are renewed within 12 years. Although the form of each new cell is identical to the old one, its substance is made of entirely new matter taken from the intake of food and air. Is it not strange, therefore, that the scar tissue is also replicated? Instructions will not have been coded into our genes at birth since it has been acquired by way of an environmental event, i.e., an injury. It is rather like the ghost of Leonardo da Vinci replicating the *Mona Lisa* painting from the blueprint of his original sketchbook but including the blemishes of damage and ageing processes that affected the painting over the years.

We might dispute whether our bodies are built and repaired solely on instructions from DNA being passed *linearly* from cell to cell like Chinese whispers. After all, we know very well what genes do: they ensure that the necessary amino acids and proteins are created at the required time. But there is no evidence that the genes specify *morphology* or form.

Philosophies of ancient and esoteric schools of thought suggest that the substance of material objects and living bodies alike are patterned into form by an overarching field of influence, which they call a *spirit*. By analogy, we might recall school physics lessons when iron filings were patterned into flux lines by a magnet emitting the invisible and intangible influence that science calls a *magnetic field*.

Cambridge biologist Rupert Sheldrake, a heretic to all intents and purposes, has proposed the theory of *formative causation* and

popularised the term *morphogenic fields* to account for the global or holistic growth of bodies and organs. He draws the analogy that even though the necessary materials may be delivered to a building site at the required time, we do not expect them to assemble themselves into a building. Similarly, DNA delivers the raw materials but does not specify the form in which they are to be arranged.

Like all good heretics, Sheldrake was pilloried for voicing unorthodox views, although in print rather than upon the stake. Mercifully the scientific establishment became less inquisitorial over the years, for while *Nature* reviewed *A New Science of Life* (1981) under the title "A book for burning?", *New Scientist* described his equally heretical *The Presence of the Past* (1988) with such words as "tour de

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force", "engaging" and "provocative". But original minds like Sheldrake's will always ruffle the feathers of complacent elites, not least because they secretly suspect he is more sincere about science than they.

## To Please or To Harm

Less sensationally than the aforementioned examples of epigenetics, the broadcasting corporation could have informed its British licence fee payers how the placebo response can be elicited in conjunction with actual medicines to increase their effectiveness by setting up a patient's positive expectations through the doctor's confident and optimistic "bedside manner"—a quaint term easily forgotten in our high-tech era.

Further still, the programme could have discussed the possibility of treating some ailments without any medicine at all, based purely upon exercise, diet and what might be termed *the power of positive suggestion*.

But perhaps the most glaring omission of the documentary was a discussion of what might be called the *negative placebo effect*, whereby a patient's health actually deteriorates, sometimes even fatally, as a result of negative expectations.

The word *placebo* comes from a Latin word meaning "I shall please". Similarly, negative instances of the phenomenon have been termed the *nocebo* effect from the Latin word meaning "I shall harm". The use of the term *nocebo* in medical contexts has been more ambiguous than the use of *placebo*. A consistent and practical use of these terms would employ *placebo* when health is enhanced by *positive* attitudes and expectations, and *nocebo* when health deteriorates from *negative* expectations.

Anthropologists had coined the terms *placebo* and *nocebo* to describe rituals used in primal societies with benevolent or malevolent intent respectively, where belief plays an important role. Dramatic examples of *nocebo* effects would be someone dying a "self-willed" death after being ritually cursed by a witch doctor, and a person dying of fright after being bitten by a non-poisonous snake. Researchers draw parallels between this phenomenon and cases within modern industrial cultures where fatal medical prognoses are followed by a premature death that occurs even before enough time has elapsed for an illness or malignancy to ordinarily have developed sufficiently to cause loss of life.

Since placebo and *nocebo* responses are governed by

a patient's attitude and expectations, and since we know from psychology that people's attitudes are more likely to be influenced by a credible source, then it is apparent that the manner and bearing of medical practitioners strongly influence a patient's thinking because doctors are almost universally viewed within our culture as authoritative and therefore highly credible sources.

Further, and very significantly, a doctor's diagnosis may elicit a placebo or *nocebo* response even before any treatment has begun. Psychology would predict this both in cases where a negative prognosis is verbally given to a patient and sometimes when a doctor gives a positive prognosis while concealing the negative reality

of the situation, since there may be some non-verbal leakage of information in which the doctor's body language gives the game away.

Despite its undeniable reality, the placebo response has not been as fully utilised as one might expect, owing to the sociology of the academic, medical and pharmaceutical communities.

Overworked GPs come under pressure from powerful international pharmaceutical corporations using aggressive and highly sophisticated marketing strategies in their eagerness for profit and the recuperation of heavy investment in research and development programs.

Corporations are financially capable of skewing research data within a scientific field dependent upon limited resources by subsidising independent studies with their own commercial interests in mind, which are then publicised by insufficiently critical journalists of mass media outlets rendered timorous by their want of scientific credential.

As well as commercial pressure from the pharmaceutical industry comes that stemming from surgical reliance on sophisticated and expensive technology, since manufacturers and operators are additional beneficiaries vying for a percentage of hospital budgets.

Consequently finance, vested interests, target culture and politics may all complicate the medical decisions made by even the most intelligent and independent-minded doctors already working under stressful conditions and with responsibilities that are part and parcel of their daily workload.

Admittedly, clever marketing and selective presentation of statistics for a relatively ineffectual drug may induce a positive belief in GPs whose subsequent expectation and endorsement may elicit a placebo

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response in the patient. But there are still unpleasant and harmful side-effects to consider and there is the question of ethics: are alternative forms of medicine and healing being driven underground by powerful commercial and political interests?

### Science and the Observer Effect

The placebo responses that highlight the role played by the mind in physical health would be interesting enough in themselves, but there is another dimension of experience which must be mentioned for the sake of completeness. This is the *observer effect*, which occurs in both modern physics and parapsychology when the form of an objective phenomenon under study is influenced by the subjective perception of the observer. In physics we have the oft-quoted example of light manifesting as a waveform or as a particle depending on how an experiment is set up and measured or observed.

For a more intuitive understanding of the observer effect, we have the Magic Eye pictures or even simpler optical illusions where an at first seemingly chaotic array of colours, lines or figures may, upon closer inspection, transform themselves into a meaningful picture only after our mind has imposed meaning upon them, since perception has now been combined with understanding.

We might also consider that observer effects are apparent in most areas of psychology, since subjects' minds under research or therapy react to what is happening to them. If someone is asked to remember their past and given means of elaboration through free-association or dream interpretation, they may recall or reconstruct previously unconscious ideas and experiences which then become a part of their conscious memory and experience and therefore a potentially modifying influence upon their everyday thinking, perception and behaviour.

In parapsychology, an observer effect is evident when the outcomes of experiments are affected by the belief system of the experimenter, with sceptical scientists less likely to observe instances of *psi* phenomena (telepathy, precognition, clairvoyance and telekinesis) than their open-minded colleagues. This is known as the *experimenter effect* and occurs despite stringent controls introduced to remove subjective bias.

Great care is taken to ensure that the subject of the experiment cannot witness any non-verbal cues such as facial expressions or verbal tones that could leak information. And *double-blind* experimental designs are used in which neither subject nor scientist is aware of the precise nature of the data and trials under observation. We therefore have evidence under

scientifically controlled conditions of minds affecting other minds without any intervening influences from sensory information—hence the term *extrasensory perception* or ESP.

Another instance of the observer effect apparent to parapsychologists is the way in which anomalous phenomena are reported by witnesses. Strange lights appearing in the sky above a Stone Age burial mound are reported according to the individual belief system of the observer. A Christian may see angels while someone else reports the same phenomenon as flying saucers. Whatever an anomalous phenomenon is in itself is beyond the categories of our perceptual system and so our mind clothes it in the form of something it already knows. Not everyone in the crowd at Fátima saw the Virgin Mary or heard her voice as the children did: some people saw a bright light and heard buzzing sounds.

### Questioning Mindless Medicine

The recent institutional craze is for dementia of varying descriptions, all of which are considered with little more than philosophical and historical prejudice, to be diseases of the brain rather than the mind. Naturally, pharmaceutical companies and their *genetic-determinist* colleagues in the scientific world are waiting in the wings to take away the fearful problem they have laboured so hard to bring to our attention.

If we consider dementia as a problem of the mind and culture rather than merely of the brain, we are obliged to look into the stress and social neglect of modern life. What is the effect upon the lonely and elderly of watching hours and hours of toxic television involving constant news of serious crime? And of "entertainment" programmes, obsessed with those very same crimes, vividly portraying graphic violence and psychological menace? Nor should we forget those high-powered disorientating advertisements that bombard minds with increasing frequency, which as a form of propaganda and brainwashing strategy would certainly be outlawed by the Geneva Convention if practised upon captives.

But while the boundaries between fact and fiction are constantly blurred for everyday folk, they are never certain even for specialists. If someone has an enormous growth on their throat as depicted in the photographs on cigarette packs designed to scare people off smoking, then a tumour seems obvious. But many cancer cases stem from the diagnosis of reported symptoms leading to internal tests at the microscopic level, where there is considerably more ambiguity since they rely on subjective judgements based upon a statistical prediction of outcomes.

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While the elderly remember relatively few cases of the disease when they were young, today we are told that one in two of us may expect to have some form of cancer during our lifetime, as if the condition is somehow normal.

Often people in good health only find out they have cancer when a routine health check tells them they have signs associated with the disease and they are referred for hospital tests. Sometimes folk suffering moderately ill health may find their commonplace complaints are nowadays part of a catch-all symptom complex for cancer test referral. Channelled along the test path and in a state of panic, such patients act out a tragically familiar tale: told they now definitely have cancer, they begin the decline that continues despite an armoury of aggressive treatments with alarming side-effects until the end is reached which everybody was expecting. How much of this is nocebo and potentially avoidable?

A drug's clinical trial success rate for a group of patients, compared to a control population sample using a sham treatment, forms the basis for any pharmaceutical claim to cure an illness. But a true base rate for comparison would come from a group who were never told they had symptoms requiring treatment in the first place. This would show the natural development and outcome of a symptom or symptom complex.

Unfortunately such data does not exist and cannot be obtained without consent and the consequent possibility of triggering a nocebo response with the diagnosis. This is another example of the challenges that the observer effect presents.

Additionally we are obliged to consider the possibility that the perception of phenomena is altered through the experimenter effect, which is especially relevant in the light that doctors of varying temperaments and outlooks are seeking signs at a microscopic level of uncertainty.

Self-evidently, human beings are more difficult to study than machines because they and the doctors who treat them have complex entities called *minds*, which is why the materialist paradigm is of limited value beyond the discipline of mechanical engineering for which it was designed and where it has proved useful.

### Inside, Outside and the Cosmic Hologram

Conjuring up in our mind's eye (and without our spouse's or partner's knowledge if we are sensible) an image of our favourite film star upon a beautiful beach in a lovely location, we might add a number of artistic touches such as the sound of the sea and gulls and the sight of the sea breeze blowing through their hair. And

yet if, while we are doing this, a scientist scans our brain, they will have a much less inspiring picture since all they see is a diagram showing patterns of neuronal activity brightened up with a few artificial and arbitrarily contrived colours. The subjective picture in our mind and the neuronal map of our brain are two entirely different facets of life.

If instead of this fantasy we were actually on a beach with our film star, then, in the yogic conception of things, it would be said that the film star's image in our mind's eye and their actual physical presence on the beach both exist in and emanate from the mind of God and that there is, therefore, no vital distinction between them since they are both composed of the same medium, i.e., the mind-stuff of God. The usual dichotomy of *subjective experience* (the film star's image in our mind) and *object* (the actual film star on the beach) is therefore partly illusory.

Further still, in yogic conception there is no true separation between us as a physical object and the actual film star as a physical object because, again, both exist within the mind of God and are therefore composed of the same divine mind-stuff. An analogy would be two whirlpools in a river which, while appearing as separate objects, are actually both composed of the same continuous medium—water in

this instance. Being composed of the same stuff, they may therefore influence one another by resonance transmitted through the water.

The analogy contains the interesting possibility that our two whirlpools may each be influenced simultaneously by a cause external to both that resonates through the medium of the water to link them through synchronicity. Taking this a little further, material causes may not always originate in material objects themselves or even in spiritual minds but may originate from independent and more highly abstracted spiritual causes.

Our foray into yogic conceptions allows us to entertain the possibility that material bodies and spiritual minds may not be as separate as we suppose them to be, since they are all ultimately composed of the same continuous medium: the mind of God, or perchance Goddess, or even some neuter Grand Architect of the Universe if one's fancy is so inclined. And being composed of the same medium allows the possibility that one person can influence another through resonance patterns set up by the mind. In other words, we have the potential to heal the bodies and minds of both ourselves and others through the action of the mind.

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This idea of the non-separation of material objects is sufficiently important to require one further analogy to fully drive it home. If we watch two people on television throwing a ball to one another, we perceive all three things as separate objects. But in reality, the people and the ball are all composed of the same connected material: the screen of the television. There is no true separation of objects or the mechanical causality between them since they are all created and moved simultaneously by an independent force, in this example an external radio or microwave signal.

The point of these analogies, as previous and more technically competent visionaries have already voiced, is that Eastern philosophy and modern physics have much in common. The old Newtonian idea of physical forces operating upon material objects in a purely mechanical and mathematically reducible universe is of limited explanatory power and requires updating. The conception of modern physics is that all objects are composed of the same quantum probability wave or, less abstractly, of the same *quantum field* which has now become a kind of modern *aether*—the *zero-point energy* (ZPE) field.

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In other words, the ancient idea of an *aether* (or ether), which was still believed in the 19th century to fill all vacuums but eventually became an outmoded scientific concept with Einstein's relativity theories, is now back on the drawing board. However, the *vacuum* is better termed the *plenum* since it is effectively no longer considered empty but full and might be expected to function through networks of nested hierarchies coordinated into holistic harmony with both horizontal and vertical harmonic order.

Where yogis and mystics speak of the mind of God, we may speak of the *cosmic hologram* or, more accurately, the *cosmic holograph*. This metaphor (and, of course, all scientific models and theories are only ever temporary metaphors) allows us to conceive of the objects and events of the observable phenomenal world as being controlled ultimately by a unitary source, that source being the entity that creates and moves the cosmic holograph.

We may now more easily entertain the possibility of psychic or paranormal phenomena since our new model of the world, unlike the dogmatic rationalist assumption, allows us to embrace anomalous scientific and experimental data which were hitherto considered

inadmissible evidence since the materialist philosophical model forbade their consideration. In our new paradigm, the transfer of extrasensory information or energy is now no longer impossible because there is no true separation between individuals either as objects or as minds since they are connected by the modern aether or ZPE field.

## Implications for a New Dispensation

When the long-overdue effort has been made to fully integrate psychology and medicine based upon the commonplace and indisputable placebo response, and when this synthesis is combined with the integration of physics and parapsychology in the light of the observer and experimenter effects, we may then have the beginnings of a workable science that begins to fulfil the full breadth of our human experiences and needs. This

may allow us to finally evolve beyond our sole and naïve reliance upon those religions that contain pure nuggets of spiritual wisdom adulterated with political dross and which consequently prove continually and lethally socially divisive. It may also allow us to improve our economic and political systems that always fail to quite bring us the peace, health and contentment we crave.

A science that teaches us as individuals and institutions to choose our thoughts, words and deeds more carefully for the impact they might have will help us work towards a social and ecological harmony founded upon an intelligent and responsible concern with the wellbeing of the bodies and minds of ourselves and others. This will provide a plateau from where we may explore our freedom of expression and the existence, or otherwise, of our souls and spirits—both within the three or four dimensions of this earthly realm we know of, and any of which we may currently be ignorant and unaware.

*In the creations of the human spirit, the rules have never been a fetter for any but ignorant mediocrities; they are an efficient help and stimulant for superior minds.*

— Eugène Viollet-le-Duc

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## About the Author:

Bevis Beauvais lives in an English village where he teaches drumming, plays guitar and writes songs. His degrees are in psychology and ethnomusicology. He listens to The Beatles and loves Nature. He can be contacted by email at [bevisbeauvais@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bevisbeauvais@yahoo.co.uk).