

# A FEELING FOR PSI

## Does Deep Emotion Underlie Psi? Michael Jawer Considers the Role of Emotion Based on Two Startling Accounts

I have long suspected that emotion – both as a bodily and neurological phenomenon that we can study and as an entirely subjective, dynamic experience – has tangible and perhaps fundamental connections with psi. The many reports in the literature that associate ghosts with murders, suicides and other tragic emotional events, the apparently precognitive dreams that relate to someone’s unexpected demise, poltergeist ‘agents’ who, investigators say, harbour pent-up stress associated with problematic interpersonal relations, and the seemingly clairvoyant knowledge that a terrible accident has occurred or is yet to take place – all these point to deep-seated or volatile feelings that somehow, anomalously, make themselves known across space–time.

In this article, I will share one remarkable example that I and my immediate family experienced as well as another, equally arresting and unexpected circumstance that occurred to a leading psi sceptic.[1] I will then explain what I believe underlies and conditions these events. The discussion will reflect what Carl Jung and Wolfgang Pauli described as synchronicities – objectively real ‘outside’ occurrences coinciding with an intensely subjective, ‘inner’ experience.[2] The fresh perspective I wish to add considers the ramification of deep or intense feelings, namely that they can traverse inner and outer worlds and make a meaningful coincidence extraordinarily striking.

### PERSEPHONE

My wife and I have owned several cats and dogs over the years. One of them was painfully shy, another exuberant and playful. Another was resolute and dashing – the cat equivalent of Sean Connery or George Clooney. And then there was Persephone. She was akin to Audrey Hepburn: sleek, intelligent and self-possessed. My wife got her as a kitten and the three of us quickly bonded. Later, she became attached to our daughter, Gabrielle, and vice versa.

Persephone was a jet-black Siamese, vocal, small (she probably never got above ten pounds) and remarkably demonstrative. There was rarely a doubt as to what she was thinking or feeling. Her posture, glance and vocalizations continuously conveyed her state of mind. We could tell when she was annoyed, anxious, determined, or blissfully restful. Most of all, though, she was loving. Unlike some cats, she enjoyed and sought out our company. For instance, whenever I was doing yard work or even relaxing in the hammock, Persephone would seek me out to keep me company.

She was also highly perceptive, attuned to what the people around her were doing and feeling. Many was the time we intended to take her to the vet, for example, being careful not to tip our hand, only to realize that she had gone into hiding. In other cases, she clearly knew when some family member was in distress. When I fell down a flight of stairs once, Persephone was instantly meowing and in evident agitation nearby. In a few other memorable instances, she seemed to be able to communicate exactly what she was feeling through her eyes. I vividly recall two such cases where her expression instantly conveyed, in words, what a person in the same situation would say.

At age fourteen, Persephone suffered a stroke. She recovered to a great extent, but we lost her a year-and-a-half later. In the days following her death, something happened that even now is stunning. In my estimation, it pertains to the deep and mysterious nature of feeling.

In the immediate aftermath of Persephone’s passing, our family was sorrowful, but the person most affected up was our twelve-year-old Gabrielle. She loved Persephone as much as anyone, had grown up with her, and the two often slept together on my daughter’s bed. In that bed was kept another constant companion, ‘Daddy Hoo Hoo,’ her stuffed gorilla. Daddy Hoo Hoo, aka DDHH, was about Persephone’s size and also furry

and black like our kitty. Gabrielle had grabbed DDHH for comfort when I had begun to bury Persephone and kept hold of him as we said a prayer in loving memory of our feline friend. Later, she went to bed and took DDHH with her.

The following morning, DDHH was apparently no longer in Gabrielle’s bed. We thought he might have fallen out (a common occurrence), but there was no sign of him on the floor, in the bed sheets, between the bed and the wall, or anywhere else in our daughter’s room. Over the next five days, my wife made it a point to scour the house in search of the missing gorilla. Gabrielle tried to remember where else she might conceivably have left him and we checked out all those places: not a trace.

Several nights later, my wife was consoling Gabrielle at bedtime. She remarked that perhaps DDHH had accompanied Persephone to wherever it is she was bound. Gabrielle appeared sympathetic to the storyline, but made it clear ‘I need him here with me’.

The next morning, I went into our daughter’s room to wake her for camp. I sat down on her bed and, once she had awoken, noticed a stuffed gorilla on the floor just by my foot. Thinking it must have been a ‘relative’ gorilla (Gabrielle owned a Mommy Hoo Hoo, Grandma Hoo Hoo, etc.), I gave it to her asking which other one it was. ‘Daddy Hoo Hoo!’ she exclaimed, and indeed it was he.

This seems truly bizarre because one of us would surely have seen the gorilla in a spot as obvious as next to the bed. After I had related this discovery to my wife, I gingerly inquired whether she might have decided, for some unknown reason, to put DDHH away for a few days. This seemed entirely uncalled for, as well as completely out of character for my wife, but I felt I had to pose the question because otherwise we were left with no logical way for him to have disappeared. I certainly had not moved the gorilla. But Bonnie replied

that, of course, she had not – she would not have played with Gabrielle’s emotions like that.

In thinking about this, I am reminded of a parapsychological term: apports. These are household objects said to disappear and reappear literally out of thin air in at least some poltergeist cases. Apports have a symbolic or emotional meaning for the people involved. In our case, while no poltergeist was present, perhaps DDHH symbolized Persephone – so that his absence was a synonym for her absence – and only after Gabrielle made clear she needed him back did he reappear. Or maybe the ‘daddy’ in Daddy Hoo Hoo was intended for me, the dad of the house, whose loving responsibility it was to take care of Persephone in her dotage and who felt as sorrowful over her passing as anyone.

In any event, we all breathed easier knowing that DDHH was back. It provided, on the one hand, a kind of closure and, on the other, a hint of an ineffable mystery. But the puzzle may not be as baffling as it seems. What our family members felt for Persephone – and what she felt for us – is at the core of what all mammals (and perhaps other sentient creatures) have in common. The feelings that flow within us, I contend, connect us to one another in ways both tangible and intangible.

#### THE TRANSISTOR RADIO

A few years later, I read a stunning account by the sceptic Michael Shermer in, of all places, Scientific American.com.[3] It was entitled ‘Anomalous Events that Can Shake One’s Skepticism to the Core.’ And for a short while, it did throw his worldview into disarray. What happened to Shermer – and his bride – is so bizarre that it could only be chalked up to one-in-a-million chance were it not for its conjunction with deep emotion. I made this point to him in correspondence afterward, which Shermer referenced in a follow-up article.[4]

In a nutshell, this is what transpired. Shortly after saying their wedding vows, Shermer and his new wife Jennifer walked to the back of their house to be alone for a few minutes. They heard a love song wafting through the air, but had no idea where it could be coming from. The source turned out to be a 1970s transistor radio owned by Jennifer’s deceased grandfather, her closest father figure growing up in Germany. On this, her wedding day, ‘being 9,000

kilometers from family, friends and home, Jennifer was feeling amiss and lonely. She wished her grandfather were there to give her away.’

Unaccountably, this ancient radio that Shermer had not been able to fix sprang to life from the back of a desk drawer.

As Shermer writes, ‘the eerie conjunction of these deeply evocative events gave [Jennifer] the distinct feeling that her grandfather was there and that the music was his gift of approval [...] I have to admit, it rocked me back on my heels [...] I savored the experience more than the explanation.’ Feeling stupefied, I can attest, is the natural reaction one has in a situation like this. It is exactly what my wife and I felt when my daughter’s stuffed animal reappeared on the floor by her bed. That both these experiences took place in the wake of profound feelings and passages is, to me, of great significance. What could be going on?

#### CONVEYANCE OF FEELINGS

One of the few people I shared the Daddy Hoo Hoo story with at the time is veterinarian Michael Fox, author of the American newspaper column ‘The Animal Doctor’. Dr Fox related his concept of the empathosphere, which he proposes to be ‘a universal realm of feeling that can transcend both space and time’. The astounding accounts of pets one sometimes hears – who manage somehow to traverse long distances to reunite with their owners – is attributable to the empathosphere, he suggests.[5]

The same basic idea has different names. Telesomatic was coined by psychiatrist Berthold Swartz (and popularized by author Larry Dossey). It refers to spontaneously feeling the pain of a loved one at a distance, without the conscious knowledge that the other person is suffering.[6] Psychosphere is a parallel concept of Bernard Beitman, a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia. He conceives of the psychosphere as ‘something like our atmosphere – around us and in dynamic flux with us. We breathe in oxygen and nitrogen and water vapors, and we breathe out carbon dioxide, nitrogen, and more water vapors [...] Our thoughts and emotions contribute to the psychosphere and our thoughts and emotions are influenced by it.’[7]

This approach offers a tentative way to understand how something as startling, as uncanny, and as moving as what Shermer and I experienced can possibly come to pass. It points to

deep-seated or volatile feelings that somehow make themselves known across space—time

We feel  
more  
than we  
can  
think.  
We live  
more  
than we  
can feel.

the fundamental importance of feelings – and not just surface feelings or feelings that quickly pass, but more profound feelings that relate to the bonds between people, or the bonds between people and their pets. As Dossey has noted, telesomatic events ‘almost always take place between people who share empathic, loving bonds—parents and children, spouses, siblings, lovers’.[8]

Interestingly, in all my perambulations I have come across only one instance where emotion has been squarely examined as a potential ‘psychic trigger.’ Bernard Carr, a leading member of the Society for Psychical Research, presented a lecture on this topic back in 1985.[9] If we accept the hypothesis, another major question immediately raises its head: why strong emotion, and why in such particular circumstances? Why is psi not entirely commonplace, since feelings themselves are intrinsic to human life?

#### WHAT MAKES IT MEANINGFUL?

The shorthand definition of synchronicity is meaningful coincidence. Let us consider just what makes something meaningful. Typically, meaning is felt – it has an emotional truth or resonance within us. This truth, this felt import, is the meaning.

Consider that it is the brain’s job to sort through what our senses are gathering at any particular moment. Determinations are constantly being made as to whether something needs to be acted upon, whether it should be duly noted and filed away, or if it can be ignored altogether. Our brain’s emotional circuitry is the lead player in this evaluation, assigning shades of feeling as appropriate. The type and degree of feeling equates to the current or remembered meaning for the individual.

Psychical anomalies, I posit, reflect occasions when the inherent meaning of one’s life – that is, the drive toward emotional truth and self-actualization – is thwarted or in danger of being overturned. The clearest and most present such danger is where/when the very continuation of self is in peril. A close second is where/when significant emotional bonds are in jeopardy of being broken, or actually have been broken. A third instance is where/when the person is in some degree of emotional tumult, but prevented or dissuaded from expressing his or her feelings. The fact that the agitation is not being expressed equates to an obstruction of

emotional truth – the disruption or detachment from a reckoning with felt meaning. A fourth kind of occasion is, in some sense, an inverse of the others. This is where/when essential meaning in one’s life is not yet realized but coming to light, dawning in one’s consciousness.

In the above paragraph, I have used the phrase ‘where/when’ because the place and the time in such circumstances are indistinguishable. As the philosopher Samuel Alexander described a hundred years ago (and which we understand to be true today), space and time overlap. ‘Space is in its very nature temporal and time spacial,’ he wrote. Any moment occupies a given place and any spot exists in time. Space–time is a fusion.[10]

In psi events, felt meaning that is either being thwarted or realized is made manifest, in a wholly uncanny way, to ourselves and/or others. These others are typically the people with whom we are closest – yet they can also be individuals unacquainted with us who are especially sensitive. In all cases, psi is occasioned by either the severing or realization of inherent meaning, reflected in the loss of life, the breaking of bonds, the short-circuiting of emotional truth, or the dawning of crucial emotional insight. Through some instantaneous conveyance (the empathosphere?), communication of these circumstances is accomplished. Let us look at several widely known examples through the lens that I am proposing:

**Apparitions** seem to relate quite often to acts of violence, whether perpetrated in a private residence, a hotel room, or on a battlefield. Violence itself is the carrying out of volatile and angry feeling. Hospitals, prisons and military barracks, where emotions no doubt ran high, are also frequent sites of spectres.[11]

**Poltergeist phenomena** are evidently triggered by unhappy family dynamics or tense interpersonal situations, as illustrated by numerous intrepid investigators.[12] Indeed, the sheer energy and volatility of many poltergeists – not to mention their quirky unpredictability – suggests a parallel with feelings, which themselves arise and subside and are sometimes vehement, but, nevertheless, transient.

**Telepathic or precognitive dreams.** While these typically relate to personal or familial matters, they sometimes reflect natural disasters or acts of violence where the emotional upheaval of many people seems to

exert an influence.

The disaster that befell the Welsh town of Aberfan in October 1966 is a prime example. A massive coal tip slid down a mountainside and engulfed Pantglas Junior School, burying 116 children and 28 adults. Psychologist John Barker subsequently obtained some 200 accounts of individuals in the UK who believed they had experienced a premonition of the tragedy. In 24 cases, Barker verified that the account had been shared with at least one other person at the time. One stunning for-instance: a man dreamt of large, illuminated letters spelling out ABERFAN; he had no idea what it meant. In another case, a woman had a nightmare of a child screaming in a telephone booth, with another child walking toward her helplessly followed by a 'black, billowing mass.' A secretary had an early morning vision of 'a black mountain moving and children buried under it.' Most heartrending was the dream of a little girl, Eryl Mai Jones, who told her mother that 'I went to school but there was no school there; something black has come down all over it!' Two weeks before the disaster, she had surprised her mother by saying 'I'm not afraid to die [...] I'll be with Peter and June' (two of her friends who, along with Eyril Mai, lost their lives). Most of the premonitions took place within a day before the tragedy; beyond the understandable distress and anxiety, a few of the percipients developed actual choking sensations or feelings of suffocation.[13]

More recently, scores of precognitive dreams related to the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center have been documented.[14] What is even more striking (and less well known) is that several of Osama bin Laden's henchmen – individuals who had not been involved in planning the

attacks – themselves reported dreams of airplanes crashing into buildings prior to 9-11. As these particular underlings were not aware of precisely what attacks were planned, bin Laden worried that, if other people had access to the same dream information, his plans might be uncovered in advance.[15]

Anomalies in general, I suspect, are saying nothing more – and nothing less – than 'Here I am at this important juncture' or 'There I was there at an especially critical moment of my life'. Most poignantly, they are saying (in the words of Marlon Brando's frustrated boxer in *On the Waterfront*), 'I coulda been somebody'. Or, put in the context of our current discussion, 'This is what I felt deeply but couldn't express.'

#### IMAGERY AND DISCONTINUITY

As Jung explained, synchronicities often (as in dreams) present a symbol or image reflective of the emotional truth that is coming to light. As both psychologists and artists know well, feeling lends itself to imagery. The images evoked can be highly personal, highly communal, or both at the same time. The stronger the feeling, the more affecting and widely understood that image is likely to be.

The images 'caught' by the British sensitives in October 1966 encompassed mostly literal glimpses of a disaster, but also a few symbols of it. Among the literal: children screaming, black dust, a mountain, a valley, a school, a Welsh miner, Wales, a grief-stricken boy, hurtling coal, horror, buried houses, crying people, rescue operations, the letters ABERFAN. Among the figurative: hundreds of black horses thundering down a hillside dragging hearses.[16]

Returning to my original pair of instances, Shermer's transistor radio was a potent reminder of his bride's

much-missed grandfather and the time and distance since her upbringing in Germany. In my family's case, Daddy Hoo Hoo was almost a literal stand-in for Persephone – approximately the same size, colour and even texture. Certainly our kitty-cat's departure from this life was a poignant passage, especially sorrowful for Gabrielle who had grown up with her and who equally treasured DDHH.

Such passages – Jennifer's as a bride embracing a husband and new life in America, Persephone's literally leaving us – evoke the inevitable discontinuities of life. Death is the most fearsome discontinuity, the ultimate dissolution of identity (at least as far as we can materially gather).[17] Since personal meaning is necessarily bound up with identity, this must be why death is the foremost trigger of anomalies. It is even more so with collective tragedies, where the dissolution of dozens, hundreds or thousands of lives must, in a manner of speaking, reverberate through the empathosphere.

Psi is far more ubiquitous than commonly believed. Talk to virtually anyone and you will soon hear of a startling or moving coincidence. Indeed, such experiences may not be anomalous at all, but universally 'baked in', indicative of how meaning and life and death actually work. Shakespeare's Hamlet famously observed, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy'. Speaking of philosophers, in our own time the late Eugene Gendlin stated, 'Experience is a myriad richness. We think more than we can say. We feel more than we can think. We live more than we can feel. And there is much more still.'[18] Ψ

#### NOTES

- [1] These two anecdotes were originally addressed in Michael Jawer's blog 'Feeling Too Much: Living Closer to the Bone, Part 4', *Psychology Today* (8 August 2015), and 'Living Closer to the Bone, Part 5' (11 August 2015).
- [2] Paul Halpern, 'The Synchronicity of Wolfgang Pauli and Carl Jung', *Nautilus*, 53 (18 November 2020).
- [3] Michael Shermer, 'Anomalous Events that Can Shake One's Skepticism to the Core', *Scientific American* (16 September 2014).
- [4] Michael Shermer, 'Do Anomalies Prove the Existence of God?' (12 May 2018), <https://michaelshermer.com/articles/do-anomalies-prove-gods-existence/>.
- [5] Michael W. Fox, 'The Nature of Compassion', in *The Smile of a Dolphin*, ed. by Marc Bekoff. (New York: Discovery Books, 2000), p. 178.
- [6] Larry Dossey, *Healing Beyond the Body* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), pp. 253-254; Larry Dossey, *Reinventing Medicine* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), pp. 93-94.
- [7] Tara MacIsaac, 'Feeling Another's Distress at a Distance: A Seemingly Psychic Connection', *Epoch Times* (22 July 2014).
- [8] Dossey, *Healing Beyond*, p. 254.
- [9] Bernard Carr, 'Is Emotion the Psychic Trigger?' Lecture given to the Society for Psychical Research, London, 12 February 1985.
- [10] 'Samuel Alexander', Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel\\_Alexander](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Alexander); A. Cornelius Benjamin, 'Ideas of Time in the History of Philosophy', in *The Voices of Time*, ed. by J.T. Fraser (New York: George Brazillier Inc., 1966), p. 25.
- [11] Dennis William Hauck, *Haunted Places: The National Directory* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).
- [12] Rogo, D. Scott, *The Poltergeist Experience* (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press, 1979); Brian Williams and Annalisa Ventola, 'Poltergeist Phenomena: A Primer on Psychological Research and Perspectives', (2 June 2011), <http://publicparapsychology.org/Public%20Parapsych/Poltergeist%20Phenomena%20Primer%20Final.pdf>.
- [13] Robert L. van de Castle, *Our Dreaming Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), pp. 408-409; Leo Ruickbie, 'The Ghost in the Time Machine', paper submitted for the Prize Essay Contest, Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies, November 2021, [https://www.bigelowinstitute.org/contest\\_winners3.php](https://www.bigelowinstitute.org/contest_winners3.php), 46-7; Herbert B. Greenhouse, *Premonitions: A Leap into the Future* (New York: Warner, 1973); Tricia J. Robertson, *It's Life and Death, But Not as You Know It!* (Epsom: White Crow Books, 2020); 'Premonitions of Aberfan' excerpt at [http://whitecrowbooks.com/features/page/premonitions\\_of\\_aberfan](http://whitecrowbooks.com/features/page/premonitions_of_aberfan).
- [14] Two examples: Sy Safransky, 'Sy Safransky's Notebook', *The Sun* (November 2001), p. 47; and Annie Reiner, 'Psyche Phenomena and Early Emotional States', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 49.3 (June 2004), p. 313-36.
- [15] Philip Kennicott, 'The Home Movies of Hate: The Men Whose Dreams Create a World of Nightmares', *Washington Post* (14 December 2001), C-1.
- [16] Robertson, *It's Life and Death*; 'Premonitions of Aberfan' excerpt.
- [17] Guy Murchie, *Music of the Spheres*, Vol. II: *The Microcosm* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), p. 589.
- [18] Eugene T. Gendlin, Quotation highlighted on EugeneGendlin.com, 'In Memoriam', <https://www.eugenegendlin.com/quotations>.