

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

"It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense." — James Randi

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August 1999

Psychic Junk-Mail Hell

by David Bloomberg

I sometimes don't check REALL's post office box as often as I perhaps should. But when I went to retrieve our mail in the middle of July, after about three weeks of not checking, the box was filled with all sorts of junk mail making fantastic claims (twelve letters or postcards in all). I (or rather, somebody named "Leo Bloomberg") had been put on a mailing list for believers in psychic power.

Where did it come from? Well, it's hard to say. I signed up for more information at one booth at the Holistic Health Fair a few months ago. Maybe they sold my name (while I admit that my signature is not exactly neat, it's a bit of a stretch to get "Leo" from my signed "David"). The other alternative is that somebody did it as a practical joke on REALL (though you'd think they'd at least get the name right). Either way, I suspect I'll be getting this kind of junk mail for quite some time to come.

All but one of the pieces came from Sioux Falls, South Dakota (and that one remaining shares a Fort Lauderdale, Florida, address with several of the pieces that did originate in Sioux Falls). So either Sioux Falls is the psychic capital of the U.S., or we're really dealing with just one company there. The other clues point mostly toward one company, as the name "Joyce Jillson" appears on several different letters and the same website appears on many of them as well.

Ms. Jillson is apparently the "Psychic Director" for the Personal Enrichment Society of America. She is so psychic that she doesn't realize there is no person named "Leo" at this address, and that, in fact, all her mail will be a waste of money because it's going to a skeptics group!

But let's see what she has to say. On one postcard, she has given me "special codes" that I am not supposed to give to anybody else. "Only the candidate can obtain this information with the codes provided on this card," it says. I don't know – I'm thinking that one shouldn't put secret codes that are not to be shown to anybody else on a **postcard**. I don't even think you have to be psychic to figure that one out. At least, that's not what you should do if the codes really meant anything.

This and a second postcard implore me to call right away

if I'm concerned about "love, money or career." At least they have pretty much covered their bases (they forgot health, though). And she says it's "so important" that I will speak directly to a "Master Psychic." She wants me to "be helped, right now." The second postcard says, "Here is what you **MUST** do:" (emphasis in original).

Another letter from good old Joyce contains essentially the same information (with a different code number), offering me some free psychic reading time on the phone.

Several of the letters and postcards (not from Joyce this time), talk about "the intensity of [my] last psychic reading" or how "the connection we enjoyed during [my] last reading was more intense than what we usually experience with most clients." (Emphasis in original.) Also, I was "specially selected due to the nature of [my] last call. Hmmm. Since I've never had a psychic reading in my life, let alone one

over the phone, you don't suppose these folks could be *lying*, do you? It almost makes me suspect that the "opportunity for tremendous wealth of \$1,225,000 or more" might not be completely valid.

But they say they have "years of experience in the specialized skill of Astrology, Numerology, Tarot, and Clairvoyancy" and that they are "the foremost experts in prediction and guidance." Again, I guess that guidance doesn't extend to their mail room.

Jenni Sinclair is so excited about the information she has for me that she is having trouble sleeping. She says, "Last night I was up to 3:30AM literally shaking with anticipation." Gosh, I hate to keep the poor woman awake like that. You'd think she'd have other people to worry about, since she is "a psychic numerologist to the stars." She said that something

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Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land is a non-profit educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe-science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL does not reject paranormal claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

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The views expressed in these articles are the views of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of REALL. ☹

From the Editor

When it came time to start thinking about this issue, we had no articles ready, none on the horizon, and no speaker for our August meeting. Now, not only do we have a speaker, but I had to postpone one article and remove some items from REALLity Check for lack of room! Things can change quite a bit in a couple of weeks.

In mid-July, I attended the 4-day Internet World conference in Chicago. Lou Dobbs, former anchorman for CNNfn, was a keynote speaker on July 20, the 30th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. Taking advantage of the symbolism of the moment, he announced the official launching of his new web site, www.space.com. With plenty of news about space exploration, it looks like it will be a very nice site to visit. And right there, in with the other main topic areas, you will find a link labeled "Area 51," which leads you to news about UFOs, alien abductions, and similar dubious claims. I leave town for four days and I still can't escape this stuff!

Our feature article is a bit by David discussing a recent eruption of psychic junk-mail in our mail box. Aside from the irony of a psychic not realizing to whom they've sent their pitch, there is the added mysteries of the identity of Leo and the reason why we got all of this at the same time!

A considerably more welcome (and useful) bit of mail came to us from Kevin Vost, commenting on the topic of memes which we discussed at our July meeting.

Lastly, David has provided us with another installment of the always informative REALLity Check. Topics this time include alternative medicine, repressed memories, and Audrey Santos. ☹

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Predictions

- More Weird Web Sites
- Book Reviews
- Skeptic Music



From the Chairman

July's meeting brought us a decent turnout for a videotape, and even a little healthy debate after watching Susan Blackmore's presentation on memes (see the Letter to the Editor in this issue).

Our **August 3 meeting** (7:00, Lincoln Library) will feature David Gehrig speaking on "**The Bible Codes: What Do the Numbers Say?**" Gehrig has degrees in computer science and English and has written his own program to replicate what Michael Drosnin and others have done in their Bible Code claims. He will give an introductory look at the math behind the codes. It should be a very interesting presentation, so don't miss it!

Essay Contest

September is approaching rapidly, and if we want to kick off our essay contest, we need to get moving right away. REALL formed its first ad hoc committee to deal with the contest, and we got a few members at the July meeting. But because

these are the same people who usually do much of the REALL work, we'd love to have a few more volunteers as well. If you're interested, just let me know!

Also, we're looking for the best way to handle prizes. We've had one donation to that end already and another volunteer has pledged to put up at least some of the prize money. We plan to give out U.S. Savings Bonds in varying amounts for first, second, and third prize. If you're interested in contributing to the prize fund, again, let me know (and remember that we are a tax deductible non-profit 501(c)(3) organization). Also, if you happen to know of any business that would be interested in helping to sponsor this contest, please put them in contact with me.

Our current plan is to have a dinner at the end of the school year to honor the winners of the essay contest. This will probably be REALL's biggest endeavor to date, so we want to involve as many people as possible!

Any help at all – even just getting together with us one night to send out the mailings – will be appreciated! ☹

(Continued from page 1)

was going to happen on July 12, 1999 (I guess this one had been sitting in the box a while). She said I should "be prepared to sense a rush of energy soon after" that date. Well, I had two meetings on the 12th, and believe me – there was no rush of energy in either of those. Here it is, a week later as I'm writing this, and still no energy rush. Bummer. With a three-year-old and a 5-month-old, I could use that extra energy.

This particular letter has some very interesting language in it. She says she has been seen on NBC, ABC, CBS, and in magazines. Another part of the letter says "SEEN ON TV DURING:" and lists a few talk shows. I'm thinking she wasn't actually *on* those shows, but maybe a commercial about her aired then. Or maybe she was sitting on top of a television set during those shows and somebody saw her. Whatever the real story is, the tortured language gives her away to anybody looking closely.

Ms. Alycia asks, "Leo, Have you found your lovmate..." Well, gosh Alycia, if you're a psychic, shouldn't you know? For some reason I'm not inclined to use her "psychic abilities."

Another letter has all the official-looking trappings of a government document. "U.S. MAIL" it cries from the return address block, "IMPORTANT & CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENT." There is an eagle stamped on it and above the address window it says, "BUY AND HOLD U.S. SAVINGS BONDS." Frankly, I'd think a psychic would be in the stock market instead... There are some other official-looking statements on the envelope as well, referring to parts of the mail code, but they are pretty meaningless.

Inside the official-looking envelope is (surprise) another psychic come-on. Do I know who my long-forgotten love is and when she will be re-entering my life? Will I win the lot-

tery? How about a sweepstakes? And don't forget that I may make costly mistakes if I don't call and get their advice. "Things are very urgent right now."

Finally, I also got two letters from Michelle Barry containing a sealed envelope with Tarot cards inside. She warns me not to open them until I call her. After all, she says these cards "radiate metaphysical powers that promote self-improvement and ward off the negative energies that may surround you." They were even "protected in a sealed envelope and surrounded by a mysterious aura." Hmm, guess I didn't notice it as I ripped open the seal.

In the first, I got The Lovers, The World, and The King of Cups. The second brought me The Lovers again, as well as Judgement, The Fool, and The Hermit. I'll have to contact REALL's official Tarot Card reader, Derek Rompot, to find out what they mean.

At the very bottom of all of these, in small print, is a note that this is for entertainment purposes only. Of course it is. That's why they include dire warnings and mentions of possible monetary winnings.

What I can't quite figure out is the saturation bombing effect here. If I was prone to believe this stuff, would I really be more likely to call because I got twelve letters and cards instead of, say, three (one per week)? Do they just hit their victims all at once, hope to drain their bank accounts quickly, and then move on? Is this the mail and phone equivalent of a mugging? It must be a pretty profitable enterprise if they can afford to send out this many mass-mailings. But I'd rather they come to REALL's post office box than to somebody who might be conned into calling. Let them waste their money on me. If nothing else, we got a newsletter article out of it. ☹

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

Wow! There are some months when almost nothing happens, and then there are months like the past one – where everything seems to hit the fan at once.

Discover's Failure

Discover magazine, usually dedicated to imparting knowledge of science to the public, plastered Dr. **Andrew Weil's** face on its cover this month (August 1999) and asked the question, "How good is the medicine of America's favorite doctor?" I quickly opened to the article on Dr. Weil to find out what the answer was, hoping for the best while simultaneously feeling it unlikely they'd put somebody's picture on the cover just to say bad things about him. Alas, the answer to that question was nowhere to be found.

Also missing from the article is any semblance of scientific review. In fact, in the 15 or so years I've subscribed to *Discover*, I cannot recall any article so devoid of scientific content. I felt like I was reading a "human interest" story from any random newspaper, where they cover science as a "he-said, she-said" issue. I expect better from *Discover*, and in the past I have almost always gotten it. I hope this is not the beginning of a new trend.

There were so many problems in this article that I can only address a few major ones here.

To start, the author, **Brad Lemley**, knew of Dr. **Arnold Relman's** article about Weil in *The New Republic*, and even mentioned it (see "REALLity Check," Vol. 7, #1, January 1999). But I have to wonder if he actually read it. Rather than picking up on the major scientific problems that Relman brought up, Lemley ignores most of them. That article exposed many of the strange beliefs of Weil and showed that one would not necessarily be wise to rely on him for medical advice. For example, in one on his books, Weil wrote, "I would look elsewhere than conventional medicine if I contracted a severe viral disease like hepatitis or polio, or a metabolic disease like diabetes. I would not seek allopathic [conventional] treatment for cancer, except for a few varieties, or for such chronic ailments as arthritis, asthma, hypertension,..." I have not seen Weil repudiate this statement, and it certainly would have been worth mentioning in an article that purported to discuss how good Weil's medical advice is.

Weil "responded" to Relman's article in a short note on his web site mostly devoted to arguing semantics about the term "anecdotal." He repeats that argument in this article, and Lemley seems to have followed him along without asking for anything further. Whether you call it anecdotal evidence or "uncontrolled clinical observations," the fact of the matter is that he is not referring to proper scientific studies (although with the latter description, Weil seems to want to make it *sound* more scientific). Should a science magazine spend more

time on semantics than science? I don't think so.

This only scratches the surface. On his web site, he has written about his support for "Therapeutic Touch" and other similar forms of unproven nonsense. Yet Lemley says Weil has "claimed the middle ground" and somehow tries to separate him from the "much of alternative medicine" that he terms "a nut farm."

Weil claims, "The peer-reviewed research is coming." Great! Then the proper scientific thing to do is to wait and see what it says, not decide ahead of time that this herb or that method of mind-body energy control works when there is no good evidence for it. Lemley then makes an egregious error by using the National Institutes of Health (Office of Alternative Medicine) review of acupuncture as an "example" of such evidence. In fact, if he had done even the most basic research, instead of just using the press release, he would have found that the report was put together by a planning committee and consensus panel that were both heavily weighted with proponents of alternative medicine rather than unbiased, objective observers. The report came from a three-day meeting of presentations, with no balance given in the form of inviting researchers with opposing viewpoints. Finally, the audience often cheered when the presenters attacked the scientific method — the method on which medicine is based, and the method acupuncture proponents should be striving to use to prove their claims. (See a special "REALLity Check," Vol. 5, #11, November 1997 for more details on the OAM report.) Does *Discover* really want to claim that scientific evidence comes out of three-day meetings of biased proponents? Again, I hope not.

As an editorial in a recent medical journal noted, and I have repeated before, there really is no such thing as alternative medicine — there is only medicine that works and medicine that doesn't. Too often, Dr. Weil has been on the side of medicine that just doesn't work.

I expected more of a thorough study from *Discover*. I sincerely hope they return to their usual exemplary job, because right now I am sorely disappointed.

If you'd like to share your opinions with *Discover* (and I encourage you to do so), you can write to them at 114 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10011-5690 or e-mail at editorial@discover.com.

Springfield Saucer Mania

"Two From City See 'Flying Saucers'" was the headline in the Springfield paper. Don't worry, though, you didn't miss something in the *State Journal-Register* — this was a headline back in 1947. And it's news now because **Doug Pokorski** once again hit upon a topic of interest to skeptics in his "A Springfield Century" series (7/5).

Pokorski reports that Springfield was not a "community to miss out on the excitement" of saucer-mania that was sweeping the country at the time. The *Illinois State Register* reported a

number of such sightings in early July, but they soon ended as there were “discoveries of several hoaxes and a general return of clear-headedness to the nation.”

The end of Pokorski’s article refers to the 1897 airship hysteria in Illinois, more about which can be found in the REALL archives (March 1998; Vol. 6, #3), and from which Pokorski got the original idea to mention it as part of this UFO article. Ok, it may not be much, but I’m always happy to hear that information from REALL made it into the media.

Court Tells Claimants to Forget It

As mentioned previously in this newsletter (October 1998; Vol. 6, #8), a number of former altar boys had accused Lincoln’s Monsignor Norman Goodman of abusing them while they were children. The papers filed with the court said they had “recently recovered memories” of these actions.

On July 2, Peoria County Judge Rebecca Steenrod dismissed all the suits except the one filed by one who is still a minor and apparently did not use “recovered memory” within the suit. According to the State Journal-Register (July 3), Judge Steenrod described “their arguments of delayed discovered of the abuse as ‘incredible.’”

This case is somewhat different than most recovered memory cases, because the plaintiffs were trying to walk a fine line. A source close to the case originally had told me that it was not a case of repressed memories (contrary to what the court documents filed by the plaintiffs indicated), but one in which they knew they’d been abused, but hadn’t known of the psychological damage it had done to them. This same argument was apparently used in court before the judge threw it out.

While the Catholic diocese did settle out of court, apart from Monsignor Goodman, and while I received an e-mail from (apparently) one of the plaintiffs who claimed this proved his accusations to be true, I must point out that the church did this against Goodman’s wishes and also must point to the Dow Corning case in which the large company settled a suit by people with breast implants because fighting the suit would have cost more than settling, even though the scientific evidence showed no cause and effect relationship. In other words, contrary to what the e-mail said, it proves nothing unless there is some actual evidence involved (I responded and asked about such evidence, and even though he offered to debate me, he has not replied back at all).

The dismissal of these cases apparently moves the accusations out of the realm of recovered memories, since I do not believe the one remaining altar boy claimed to have repressed anything. However, I will continue to follow the case and report as it develops (remember that the various claims of horrible child abuse rings at daycare centers did not involve repressed memory either, but many were still found to have pseudoscientific bases and were caused by adults unwittingly influencing the memories of children).

Desperate Times...

CBS’ 48 Hours had an hour-long episode on “Desperate Measures” (6/24). The promotional clips for it looked like it would be completely believer-oriented. So I was pleasantly surprised to see a bit of skeptical reporting included as well. Not as much as I’d have liked to see, but they slipped it into the show in interesting ways.

Much of the hour was taken up talking about **Audrey Santo**, a 15-year-old semi-comatose girl in Massachusetts. It is reputed that miraculous healings can work through her, and there is a steady stream of believers who file into the garage-turned-chapel and past a window cut in her bedroom specifically for such viewing purposes. (See “REALLity Check,” May 1999; Vol. 7, #5 for more on Santo.)

Her bedroom is filled with pictures and statues that cry or seep an oily substance – a miracle, to be sure (tests show the substance is a mixture consisting mostly of olive oil). Interestingly, a volunteer caretaker noted that the miracles seem to know when to appear, as there is more oil on the days people are expected. Hmmmmm...

As mentioned in the previous “REALLity Check” piece, the church undertook an “investigation,” but they didn’t include the right types of (objective) people.

The family made sure to note that they give away the miraculous oil for free. *48 Hours* additionally noted that the family also accepts donations and sells books and videotapes.

The family also maintains a “miracle committee” who examines letters to Audrey thanking her for the supposedly miraculous healings that took place after the person visited Santo. Audrey’s mother claimed there was “no other explanation” for some

of these healings. But *48 Hours* took a look at one anyway.

Andrea Pearson had breast cancer that had spread to her liver and bones. When she found out about the spreading, her doctor started her on a new treatment, but Pearson also went to see Audrey. Two weeks later, a CAT scan showed no liver cancer, although there was still some in her bones. The doctor was unsurprised, saying that her Taxol treatment is aggressive and he had seen the response begin before she visited Audrey. But Pearson told *48 Hours*, “I know that there are some medical explanations, but I know in my heart that I had a miracle.” The Santos put Pearson’s letter in their miracle file.

But wait, there’s more. In April, Pearson found that the cancer had spread to her brain. She does not know how much more time she has left, but continues to credit Audrey with giving her a miracle.

We see this type of belief time and time again. “X healed me,” a believer claims. “So you say,” the skeptic replies, “but weren’t you also undergoing standard medical treatment at the time?” The believer replies, “Yes, but I know it was X that healed me.” How does one argue against that kind of illogic?

Speaking of illogic, the show later addressed the issue of a

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I truly enjoyed seeing seasoned skeptics deftly dealing erudite critical comments about Dr. Susan Blackmore's theory of memes during my first REALL meeting this month [July]. It was all I could do to sit back and try to absorb the rapid-fire points and counterpoints. Now that I've had time to reflect, I'd like to make a few comments from the tranquil sanctuary of my study. Because the fiery Dr. Blackmore managed to touch on (or hammer at) so many fundamental issues and beliefs, it is hard to decide where to start and where to finish, but I'll begin by seconding one of the post-video comments and then focus on just two issues.

Someone posited that Dr. Blackmore's memes may constitute a useful idea that she has overgeneralized to explain just about everything. Ditto. Her approach reminds me of the radical behaviorist B.F. Skinner, whose operant conditioning principles would explain all aspects of humanity and show how concepts like mind, self, free will and personal responsibility are pre-scientific fictions. He, too, could succinctly explain religion – superstitious behavior reinforced by chance (with some interesting pigeon demonstrations as evidence). In fact, he did this with scarcely a passing reference to genetics and evolution. Interestingly, one of the factors leading to the decline of Skinner's paradigm was the work of Albert Bandura, a psychologist whose social learning theory focused on imitation or "modeling."

Nonetheless, I would like to focus on two issues that Dr. Blackmore indicated follow from meme theory. 1), the denial of free will, and 2), the self or "I" as a meme-induced illusion. I'll mention at the get-go that my arguments are grounded in ideas propounded by three philosophers: Mortimer Adler's *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, David Kelley's taped lectures *Foundations of Knowledge: An Objectivist Perspective*, and Tibor Machan's *The Pseudo-Science of B.F. Skinner*.

It appears to me that many scientists erroneously conclude that determinism must be true, thinking that everything has a cause, and thus, our actions must be the results of massive causal networks dating back to the big bang. Free will is assumed to imply actions without causes, suspending the laws of the universe, just for man, as if by magic. I will make two points here, one about Dr. Blackmore's statements regarding the denial of free will, and another about an alternative view of causation which is compatible with human evolution.

Dr. B. noted that she had given up belief in free will 20 years ago. She thus denies that we really have a choice in our beliefs (or the memes we allow to run our shows). We cannot rebel against the memes, but may tune out in a Zen-like state of mindlessness. Yet she endorsed compulsory religious education, noting that when children are exposed to multiple systems, they may find absurdities and contradictions which will lead them away from religion. Is she is not endorsing the com-

mon sense idea that when exposed to a variety of alternatives, we possess the capacity to exercise our reason and choose among them? Is this not what we mean by free will? Also, did she not choose to believe that determinism and not free will is true? If her current belief of determinism was not rationally chosen, then why should we trust the memes that have thrust the deterministic view upon her, rather than free will endorsing memes, or indeed, rather than the causal memetic chains which enable some to "know" there are spacecraft full of sexy, swinging aliens out there looking for human pickups (for experimental purposes only, of course).

I think that a determinism that rules out free will leads to inevitable contradictions. An interesting approach to this issue lies in comparing and contrasting the views of causality put forth by David Hume (events causing events in billiard-ball-like fashion in infinite regress) and by Aristotle (agents causing events in accord with the nature or identity of the agents).

2) I believe Dr. Blackmore's statement that the sense of a "self" or an "I" are meme-produced illusions begs the question of who or what the memes are deluding. I worked for a year and a half in a neuropsychology laboratory, and it is true that though I saw a few brains, I saw far fewer minds. Still, I believe the idea that the self is an illusion is grounded in the reductionistic fallacy that the emergent properties of wholes are somehow less real than their constituent parts. Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky once compared behaviorists who would understand all the workings of human consciousness by the examination of discrete stimulus-response pairings to those who would understand the relationship of water to fire only by separately studying hydrogen, which burns, and oxygen, which sustains fire.

All in all, I still think other aspects of the meme theory, which would not logically necessitate the denial of free will or the self, could prove of value. And in all fairness, I have yet to read Dr. Blackmore's book. Nevertheless, there is, so far, much more evidence of "me's" than memes. Dare I say it is "self"-evident?

Kevin Vost, Psy.D. ♡

I believe Dr. Blackmore's statement that the sense of a "self" or an "I" are meme-produced illusions begs the question of who or what the memes are deluding.

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miraculous healing for Audrey herself. But her parents are not just leaving this in the hands of God – they have turned to a coma expert, who is trying to enable her to communicate basic concepts. The family believes Audrey is aware of what's going on around her, but there is little progress to be seen. If all of these healing miracles happen through Audrey, why doesn't one happen to Audrey herself?

The next topic on the agenda was “energy healing,” which looked rather like Therapeutic Touch. **Gene Egidio** is the healer in question, and said he has had strange powers throughout his life – to the point that his parents put him through an exorcism and electric shock therapy when he was a child. So he kept his mouth shut about his powers until he was in his 50s, when he moved to California (where else?) to ply his energy healing.

According to Egidio, he moves his hands over people (again, like TT) and gives them energy so they can heal themselves. For more information, *48 Hours* “went to the experts,” but I question just what kind of experts these were. The two they referred to were a couple of clinical psychologists (not doctors or scientists, mind you) who they say have done extensive research on energy healers. Their words of wisdom? Nobody really knows how it works. Gosh, thanks. But they claim an energy healer's brain can generate 200 volts of electricity! Well, there is a testable claim, and I, for one, would love to see where it was published in a peer-review journal and replicated. Alas, no mention of that. But they did mention several other things that Egidio says he can do, including healing over the phone, healing by just having a photo of the person, and even pet healing.

While *48 Hours* filled most of the time with positive comments from patients, they ended this part by saying they tracked down 56 people who'd been at one of Egidio's healings. Only 13% reported any relief of physical pain. And, as we all know, pain is a very subjective thing anyway, and can often be “cured” by the placebo effect alone. But even without worrying about that, I wouldn't call 13% a stellar review.

The last of the pieces dealt with a 12-year-old girl, **Katie Huntley**, who had a cancerous tumor the size of a baseball in her left sinus four years ago. She went through the standard regimen of chemotherapy and radiation, but the tumor was still there. It didn't look good for her.

The family heard about a teenage boy, **Billy Best**, who had run away from home to avoid chemotherapy, and only came home when his parents agreed he wouldn't have to go through it any more. Instead, they turned to an illegal drug called 714X, whose manufacturer claims it can cure cancer. Since it had supposedly worked for Best, Katie's parents decided to try it as well (in both cases, they had to go to Quebec, where a French scientist mixes it in his basement).

Katie is now cancer-free, and her family attributes it to 714X. With such a wonder drug, what about testing? Well, the French scientist has refused all offers to test it and has even neglected to provide any information on survival rates (though, again, he claims it works). Personally, if I had found a cure for cancer, I'd be doing my best to get it tested and approved so I could give it to the world. That is, after all, one of the criticisms so often leveled by alternative medicine proponents – that standard medicine doesn't want to find cures to some diseases because it would cut into their cash flow. But here we have an alternative medicine practitioner who is keeping his “cure” out of the hands of those who could benefit – if, of course, it was actually a cure...

A Canadian doctor interviewed by *48 Hours* talked about how he has seen patients take 714X instead of standard cancer treatment, and they have died. As for Billy and Katie, the doctors say their cancer would have gone away anyway, due to the previous treatments they'd had. As with the woman who attributed her cancer's retreat to Santo, the people here underwent standard treatment but then attributed success to the alternative.

The show ended with **Dan Rather** noting that scientific proof is hard to come by for alternative medicine. He also talked about “integrative medicine” becoming more common, though, and more or less did the standard newsie thing of leaving it somewhat up in the air.

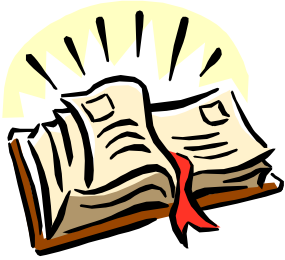
As I said, I was pleasantly surprised that the show wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. It could have been better, with more skeptical content, but we need to take our minor victories where we can get them. ♡

A Nod to Our Patrons

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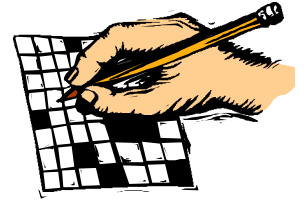
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Our Next Meeting The Bible Codes: What Do the Numbers Say?

Presented By David Gehrig



Einstein said, "God doesn't play dice with the universe." But what about Scrabble? Recent books have proclaimed that the Bible contains crossword-like encoded messages which can only be read using computer analysis. Is this true, or is it just wishful thinking? Gehrig will give the layman an introductory look at the math behind the "Bible Codes."

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Lincoln Library (7th & Capitol)
Tuesday, August 3, 7:00 PM

Free and Open
to the Public

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