

Early Ghosts or Apparitions Were Known Simply as Spirits of Relatives

History of Ghosts

In ancient Israel, as in many cultures in the ancient Near East, it was believed that a person would continue to exist after “death.” It was thought that their spirit went somewhere below earth most often called “Sheol.” Everyone went there. There was no judgment of good or bad attached to Sheol.

Many believed that the deceased had some of the same basic needs that they had when they were alive. Mostly, food and drink were provided at their tomb when the burial took place. In some places, the dead were buried under the houses of their relatives. It was thought that the dead continued to be a part of the world of the living and that they possessed the power to grant blessings to their relatives and to reveal the future. This art of revealing events by supposed communication with the dead was called necromancy. A witch or a medium aided in this communication. The original Hebrew words for this can be translated as divination, sorcery, prophetic power, magic or fortune-telling.

Ghosts in Greek Philosophy

The earliest Greek philosophers, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Democritus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Hermetimus, did not just wonder about the unseen world of ghosts. They went to this unseen world to acquire firsthand knowledge about it. They practiced, studied or discussed about a half-dozen ways of accessing the world beyond. They discussed their own or other people’s afterlife or underworld experiences.

These phenomenal experiences provided a basis for rational inquiry into life after death. For, as Plato pointed out, some sort of story, narrative or account is necessary, just to get rational thought and debate about the afterlife started. Hence, experiential accounts of apparitions of the deceased, underworld journeys, and Near Death Experiences (NDEs) were the original standard for rational inquiry into life after death.

About 600 B.C. E. Hermetimus, an ancient Greek philosopher, was known for his ability to leave his body at will. During his out-of-body experiences (hereinafter known as OBEs), Hermetimus’ soul would supposedly travel to far away places in search of knowledge. Accordingly, the philosophers realized that whether there is life after death depends upon whether the conscious self can exist independent of the physical body.

This ancient mind-body problem remains among the primary issues in today’s rational debate about the afterlife. There are many theories, but if

consciousness is merely a secondary, unreal manifestation of electrochemical events in the brain, consciousness ceases to exist upon bodily death. Plato, a philosopher and educator of ancient Greece, one of the most important thinkers and writers in the history of Western culture, wrote about this systematic study of the relationship between the soul, body and afterlife in his dialogue, "*The Phaedo*."

Plato also wrote in his dialogue entitled "*The Republic*" "that though the body dies and disintegrates, the soul continues to live forever." "After the death of the body, the soul migrates to what Plato called the *realm of the pure forms*. There, it exists without a body, contemplating the forms. After a time, the soul is reincarnated in another body and returns to the world. But the reincarnated soul retains a dim recollection of the realm of forms and yearns for it. Plato argued that people fall in love because they recognize in the beauty of their beloved the ideal form of beauty that they dimly remember and seek" (Author's Note: This could be an explanation for addictive relationships.) (World Book, Section P, p. 568). The Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung renamed the concept of Plato's forms as archetypes in his psychology.

Ghosts in American Psychology

William James, sometimes known as the Father of American Psychology, in his "*The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy* (1897) stated that the mass phenomena of spiritual consciousness is generally called *mystical*." "Orthodox psychology turns its back upon them...you find things recorded under the name of divinations, inspirations, demoniacal possessions, apparitions, trances, ecstasies, miraculous healings and productions of disease, and occult powers possessed by peculiar individuals over persons and things in their neighborhood" (p. 300). James emphasized that if one wished to understand the human mind, then it was necessary to understand why such phenomena was seen and experienced by so many people (Blum, 2006, pp/ 168-169).

William James also developed the concept of Pragmatism which advises estimating the effect of an idea and to define truth about that idea. He stated that an idea was true if it bore us practical fruit for life and helped us reap gains (Hallman, 2006, p.88). I have found in my psychology practice that many of my clients have seen ghosts or spirits of their dead relatives and friends. These sightings have given them hope, relief and filled them with love. Carl G Jung (1969) commented on ghosts in his *Collected Works*, "The souls or spirits of the dead are identical with the psychic activity of the living; they merely continue it (p. 210).

In my thesis for my PhD, I studied different types of spiritual experiences. My definition was “A spiritual experience (SE) is the transcendent relationship between the person and a Higher Being, a quality that goes beyond a specific religious affiliation.” This small study showed an increase in learning about SEs by the mental health professionals who were researched and in recognizing such experiences in their clients.

Approximately 130 professionals were interviewed and 50% of them felt the presence of dead relatives or friends. One statement was “I am still reluctant to discuss feeling the presence of someone who has passed because people look at you funny, but I pray for a visit.”

Clients Who Communicate/Feel Presence of Ghosts

“I absolutely believe I communicated with my sister. I went to a medium and she brought me messages from my sister. My sister acknowledged there had been twins born in the family since she passed. She told me not to give up on men. She told me who both of her children were and to say hello to them. I just felt so good to know that she’s really “out there” and watching. It validated for me that there really is another side.”

“There are so many of my loved ones that have made their transition to the other side...I communicate with them all the time...it’s like speaking with them over the phone or sending emails – I may not see them but I know they surround me with much love which definitely convinces me of God’s existence.”

“The first time that I saw husband after he died was when I was having a massage and he appeared over the table. He was telling me how to raise our young sons. He would come to my bed at night and kind of float over the bed. He has been in my bed where I can feel his back. I feel him following me around. My mother, father, uncle, grandparents and cousins have come to me in bed at different times. They appear when one of the family members they are particularly close to has a problem.”

The Motivation and Intentions of Ghosts

Annekatriin Puhle in *The Christian Parapsychologist*, March 2005 issue, stated, “spirits and ghosts have been reported since the beginnings of documented history. The most common are dream states...Ghosts appear to have an intention and motivational basis. Puhle lists in Archives of the Mind (Roy, 1996 as cited in Puhle, 2005, p. 144) – collection of cases from 1880-1900 the motive for return was:

- “Life cut short (in 17 cases);
- Unfinished business (in 6 cases);

- To give proof of survival (in 9 cases); and
- Loneliness (in 1 case)” (Puhle, 2005, p. 144).

Most Important Research on Ghosts Happened in Early 1880’s

The colleagues of William James presented a report in 1898 at the International Congress of Experimental Psychology, held in Paris, that was written in 1894, which was “the statistical inquiry into the spontaneous hallucinations of the sane” (Sidgwick, Eleanor, Sidgwick, Henry, Johnson, Alice, Myers, Frederic & Podmore, Frank (1894, p. 25), entitled *Census of Hallucinations*.

They stated: “These, (meaning apparitions or ghost reports), are the most important, because they are the most numerous and because they afford the means of estimating precisely the improbability of explanation by chance. We have shown that after making the most ample allowance for all ascertainable sources of error, the number of these experiences remains far greater than the hypothesis of chance coincidence will account for” (Sidgwick, et al., p. 393).

Approximately 1,700 people in the United States were interviewed. Four other countries also completed this research, in which thousands of people were interviewed: France, Spain, Russia and England. All of the research proved that ghosts or apparitions of loved ones appeared six to twelve hours after their death to say good-bye and let the people still living know that they were fine, happy and “going home.” They appeared in a dream, usually at the time of their death, and wore clothing that was familiar to the person having the dream.

After spending over twenty-five years in the business of being a therapist, I am saddened that my discipline of psychology does not follow William James’s definition of psychology, which is: “The description and explanation of states of consciousness and such” (1890, p. 1). There are many states of consciousness besides our normal waking state and these other states need to be recognized.

What Can We Do Now?

A spiritual experience such as feeling or seeing an apparition of a loved one is very important to the people having them. The fact that they are generally overlooked in the practice of psychology or dismissed as mental illness keeps people from sharing more of these wonderful meetings they are having with loved ones. The latest Gallup poll stated that 32% of our population in the United States believed in the presence of ghosts. I wonder what the statistic would be if people weren’t afraid to speak about

them? If you have had one of these visits with a ghost or an apparition, how about sharing it with someone you can trust. Or send me your story, please! I'd love to hear it. Karen E. Herrick, PhD

Bibliography

The World Book Encyclopedia (2002). (**Plato**. P. 568). World Book, Inc.: Chicago, ILL