



Book Reviews

Personal Spirituality: Science, Spirit and the Eternal Soul

by Daniel J Benor MD

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Reviewed by David Lorimer

This massive book is the third volume of Daniel Benor's Healing Research series. Each of the first two volumes – *Spiritual Healing: Scientific Validation of the Healing Revolution*, and *Consciousness, Bioenergy and Healing* – have been published in professional research editions and in a more popular format. This volume, containing 1,369 notes and over 50 two-column pages of references, is not for the dilettante, although it also contains an enormous number of apposite quotations.

Thirteen chapters cover, in detail, out of body experiences, near death experiences, reincarnation, apparitions, nature spirits and angels, mediumistic experiences, possession, psychic surgery, religions and healing, mystical experiences, quantum physics in relation to the mystical, spiritual healing and spirituality, physical and emotional correlates of religion and spirituality, and participatory spirituality. Typically, Benor's treatment introduces the evidence – both anecdotal and research or laboratory – for the phenomena in question. He explains different ways of approaching or explaining the evidence, before a more extended discussion and comment from personal experience, and a useful summary at the end of the chapter. On occasion, he puts forward a range of explanations from conventional materialistic science, but generally shows these to be deficient in some key respect. At the same time, he highlights shortcomings of some types of anecdotal evidence.

I am familiar with much of the research cited, and found the Benor's analysis well-balanced and his conclusions soundly drawn from the evidence. He is very open about the effects of his professional training, which one sees gradually modified by experience, reading and reflection. Scientific and medical

training predisposes people towards materialistic and reductionist explanations, and indeed leads them to dismiss much of the kind of evidence put forward in this book. Benor, however, maintains a rigorous and open-minded approach, which is in my view the most constructive one. Will it convince the sceptic? Probably not, as few will have the patience to read about such topics at length, or be capable of extending their philosophical assumptions to the necessary extent.

A good example of his approach is Benor's treatment of psychic surgery, a topic about which I know relatively little. I imagine, however, that most readers of this review and of the book itself will have some *prima facie* reservations on the basis of what they have read. He reviews a number of reports in detail, on the basis that they seem to demonstrate remarkable cures that are activated by faith and spiritual healing. This enables the reader to explore the evidence and come to a personal conclusion. The accounts of the phenomena vary considerably, but there are some extraordinary case histories that speak for themselves. Doubts nevertheless arise, since many psychic surgeons do use sleight of hand; however, this does not mean that they are cheating all the time. In addition, Benor observes that Healers seem to be more concerned with the reaction of Healees than with the Researchers.

The theme of personal spirituality is paramount. Benor is surely correct in his analysis that Western civilisation has broken its connection with nature and closeted itself from spiritual awareness, constructing reductionist barriers that immobilize our intuitive and spiritual senses. Research in both the scientific and the spiritual realms supports Benor's contention that "we are all part of a vast, magnificent web of spiritual consciousness

that extends through infinite space and time". Spirituality is defined as our basic quest for cognitive understanding of ultimate meanings and values in life, while spiritual awareness is said to arise out of gnosis or deeper insight into the nature of things. Hence the logic of his book as "an urgent call to awakening our awareness of our intimate interconnection with the world around us".

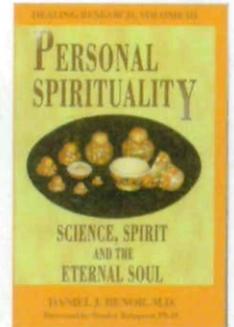
The final chapter contains an extensive discussion of the nature of participatory spirituality. In the course of evolution, the Divine comes to know itself through its manifestations and an ever increasing awareness of the interconnectedness of life and consciousness. Benor proposes the notion of *Participatory Intelligent Design*, the principles of which he spells out in some detail (not to be confused with the Creationists' usage of Intelligent Design). Participatory spirituality "opens us to our awareness of our interconnectedness with our higher selves, with each other and with Gaia, our planetary ecobiological system", acknowledging that we each have a place in and a responsibility for the creation of reality. This profound and scholarly work provides the reader with the necessary cognitive map to come to a realization of the metaphysical and ethical implications of the deeper nature of human experience.

About the Reviewer

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