

Is there good evidence supporting the claims that people make to be able to contact the dead, or tell your fortune or see the future? Any careful, sustained observation of any of the myriad approaches out there, regardless of culture or modality, indicates that there is not any such evidence.

There are occasional "hits" where chance, statistics, psychology, common experiences and sheer luck combine to make what sounds like a very compelling case. However, when you start to look at the factors involved, it usually becomes very clear, very quickly, that there is no more to it than those to-be-expected random factors.

The general adage is that the onus of burden of proof rests on those making extraordinary claims. You have to ask - is what this person is doing so extraordinarily compelling that we have to overturn all we think we know about how the universe works in order to explain it?

There are general practices used by all psychics/mediums whatever their flavour (clairvoyants, astrologers, mediums, Western, Chinese, Indian, Amerindian etc). Magicians call it "cold reading" and know the techniques well, without claiming special powers.

Add to this an awareness of basic stereotypes and common experiences ("you had a special toy as a child", "you have money concerns", "you'd like to travel in the future", "you still think about a failed relationship"), and you can provide a very

compelling, apparently personalised, reading of even a total stranger.

For contacting the dead you can guarantee that the person coming to the medium wants to contact someone, so you start off with "you have lost someone important to you - a relative or close friend". They will then respond eagerly with some information "yes, my mother" and you can take it from there. This works whether the medium is a scam artist out to take some poor widow's nest egg or someone who genuinely believes they are talking to spirits.

A genuine psychic/fortune-teller/medium should be able to provide information that is:

- (1) detailed
- (2) surprising
- (3) definitive

Most make very general statements that can be readily "retranslated" because they fit a whole host of possible outcomes, and they pick things that happen all the time to improve their chances of being right.

Here's some examples from a US-based psychic:

I sense that our planet is on the verge of releasing this tension in various forms of natural disasters.

No time, no place, no what - and when there is a flood in Bangladesh, an earthquake in Turkey or a

hurricane in the Pacific, then he can claim 100% accuracy!

Typically they'll dress up a lot of very generalized statements with a lot of nice sounding but pretty meaningless phrases. Anything that could be taken as a vaguely definitive statement is hedged with "may" and "possibly" so it's possible to back off, hedge or reinterpret.

Everyone will see unusual weather. Some places may undergo some rough changes. The Colorado River may do a lot of flood damage. Prepare yourself for the unexpected - it's hard to say where.

Hardly useful predictions, hardly predictions at all in fact!

You also often find psychics like to make soothing instructions that give people the sense they have some special control over their lives, and this usually comes in the form of quasi-religious or mystical intervention.

It will be helpful to go with the energy and not fight it. Attention should be paid to prayer and meditation.

Who's going to argue with that?! Mix Christian ideas, throw in some vaguely Indian/Eastern mysticism and a dash of New Age psychobabble, and you can have a very successful time making your client feel they are tapping into the wisdom of the ages.

And they make a lot of statements that you will agree with so that you are lulled into agreeing with everything.

There is presently a great deal of international resentment toward the United States. Much of the world sees us as self-indulgent and naïve with little consideration for the quality of life off our shores."

No predictions there - you can get this info just by reading the papers!

It always helps to throw in at least one outside guess so that if it does come right, you can point to it as amazing, while quietly ignoring all the mistakes. And take advantage of the "Jeanne Dixon effect", where the media or the psychic exaggerates a few correct predictions, guaranteeing that they will be remembered, while forgetting or ignoring the far more numerous incorrect predictions.

People wonder why psychics get into this game - easy money, low overheads, no responsibility and lots and lots of desperately vulnerable people out there....

"If psychic power existed, to use it would be 'a gross and unethical violation of privacy' and 'professions that involve deception would be worthless" (Radford). There wouldn't be any need for undercover work or spies. Every child molester would be identified immediately. No double agent could ever get away with it. Psychics would be on demand for high paying jobs in banks, businesses

and government," notes Bob Carroll, author of the Skeptics' Dictionary. "' Most psychics would be very, very rich....' (Radford) and since psychics are such altruistic persons, giving up their time to help others talk to the deceased or figure out what to do with their lives, they would be winning lotteries right and left and giving part of their winnings to help the needy. We wouldn't need trials of accused persons: psychics could tell us who is guilty and who is not. The polygraph would be a thing of the past. Of course, the operative word here is IF. IF psychic power existed, the world would be very different."

References

<http://www.skeptdic.com/coldread.html>

<http://www.skeptdic.com/psychic.html>

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New Zealand Committee for Scientific Investigation
of Claims of the Paranormal (Inc.)

the new zealand Skeptics guide to

Psychics, Mediums and Fortune tellers

If there was something to psychics tapping into some form of spiritual after-life, or even a mass consciousness that extruded back from the future, then anyone with a pinch of psychic power should have warned Diana, Princess of Wales, not to get into that Mercedes.

After all, that death had HUGE emotional ramifications that should have promulgated through the ether like nothing else. Every psychic should have been falling out of bed with the clairvoyant blast. Instead we had three of the "top" psychics in England the week before predicting she would marry again and find happiness...

Vicki Hyde, Chair-entity NZCSICOP Inc. and awarded 9 out of 10 for her accuracy as a psychic during a television demonstration of simple cold reading practices.