

Dr John Mack - A TRIBUTE

EDITOR'S NOTE: *As described in Aftab Omer's "The Spacious Center," the job of a cultural leader is to creatively build a bridge between a culture's entrenched core and its churning, marginalized periphery, especially during times of transition. John Mack was such a leader, though he wouldn't necessarily have admitted it. With diligence and courage, through his research at Harvard and his books *Abduction and Passport to the Cosmos*, he helped to shift our collective perspective about the world we live in and our place in the universe. His life and work are beautifully honored here by Michael Cohen.*



[1929-2004]

WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE suddenly passes, a series of shocks ripple through the system: waves of grief, tenderness, memories, combined with a sense of your own finitude; and at the same time, a paradoxical analytical process of combing through the associations and trying to understand the significance of what this person meant in your life.

When I learned from a friend that John Mack had suddenly died, I found

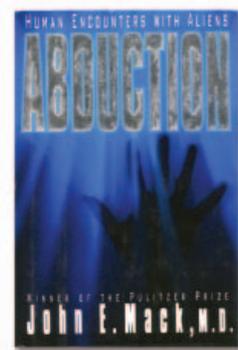
these waves of emotions rising and subsiding. I felt deeply connected to John, though I knew him professionally only in passing, and personally hardly at all. I realized that we had connected beyond time and space, through a shared bond, a passion for truth. I admired John, and felt that I was able to travel further simply knowing he was there.

The details of John Mack's legacy are now coming to light in tributes from around the world, both from academics and institutions of great learning—including his own, which once put him through what must have seemed an inquisition—and the many individuals whose lives he touched. John was a pioneer, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author (in 1977 for *A Prince of Our Disorder: The Life of T.E. Lawrence*), a dedicated psychiatrist, and a humanitarian. John was deeply committed to his local community in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the community of mental healthcare, and the larger community of all beings every-

JUDY DATER

“As I come to the end of this story, I cannot help wondering what it might take to bring about the shift in consciousness, the change of paradigm that is implicit in what the abductees have undergone. It would appear that what is required is a kind of cultural ego death, more profoundly shattering than the Copernican revolution which demonstrated that the earth, and therefore humankind, did not reside at the center of the cosmos.”

—excerpted from John Mack’s *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* (Scribner, 1994)



where. He seemed to embody the ideal of aspiring to help uplift the entire creation. John held the space for many to open up to their felt experiences, not judging them but allowing; and in our time together I experienced his wisdom, his compassion, and his humanness. Both in his intellectual triumphs and in the stillness we shared—the contact between the words—I felt his essence as a marvel.

John was a freedom fighter, working toward the liberation of human consciousness. That meant a lot to many people—particularly those who had experienced extraordinary planes of consciousness, tried to express their inner (and sometimes tormenting) adventures, and found only scorn and further abuse on most other doorsteps within the scientific and mental health “care” communities. Many of these individuals finally found a measure of acceptance—and self-acceptance—through John’s work, as well as a way to reflect on and integrate their intense experiences.

John’s spacious mind allowed a broader conceptualization of our place in the omniverse, a place in which we humans might coexist with other species and, indeed, intelligently converse with them. But to do so, if one followed the line of John’s work, required more than radio signals and scientific intelligence. It demanded emotional and spiritual intelligence, including a capacity—if not the courage—to deepen our opening to inner experience.

John had been working on a new manuscript about “interdimensional” communication. He was exploring

how a field of love can literally create a bridge between worlds, reiterating the perennial wisdom in the psychologically rich, biographical vein that had won him the Pulitzer. This exploration, while controversial to some, has resonances in epistemology and other branches of philosophy, and may inspire colleagues in other fields, including a new scientific discipline known as astrobiology. I believe this work will stand the test of time and be recognized as a great contribution to human knowledge. It was in such ways that John moved us past the marriage to our own intellectual constructs and into an awareness of our soul bond with something more unrestricted, and therefore less known.

A few months ago, I ran into John on a train ride to New York. It was wonderful to be in contact with his keen mind, wry humor, and generous heart. John could be intellectually critical and skeptical—as he was when the notion of “karma” was raised—yet as a person he was simultaneously embracing, tolerant, and full of wisdom.

John Mack offered a gift to all those with extraordinary experiences who might otherwise have felt shamed by the judgment of many segments within contemporary society. John’s gift was unconditional acceptance of the possibility for transcendence; and thus, his legacy to us is a world without end. 

MICHAEL H. COHEN is an attorney and faculty member at Harvard Medical School. For more on John Mack’s work, or to make a contribution to the institute he founded, go to www.johnmackinstitute.org/gift.