



CAROL BROWN GOLDBERG

# Why the Bleep?

TRISH RILEY

**T**HE FILM CONCEIVED BY THREE STUDENTS of a channeled ancient warrior named Ramtha got off to an inauspicious beginning. When traditional movie producers turned their noses up at *What the Bleep Do We Know!?*, the production was financed by one of its three filmmakers; when mainstream movie houses rejected the final product, it became a blockbuster hit through independent film venues, winning five independent film awards along the way. It's been the subject of much derision from mainstream press and scientists, yet an estimated five million people have seen the film, which had a long run as one of Amazon.com's top sellers.

The movie strings together scientific discoveries with religious and mystical traditions to create a synthesis of information suggesting that we can change our lives and our realities by simply adjusting our perspective. Is that why this funky little film caught the attention of so many viewers and why it has generated so much controversy? Is it scientifically valid, science fiction, fable, or an alchemy of all three?

"I think it's because we're asking questions in this film that people wanted answers to or wanted to ask themselves," says director Betsy Chasse, who shares filmmaker credit with Mark Vicente and William Arntz.

*Bleep* interviewee John Hagelin, a quantum physicist and director of the Institute of Science, Technology, and Public Policy at Maharishi University of Management,

contends, "People are ready for knowledge of unity, and the film is a powerful medium to present that knowledge, which has world-transforming significance."

## IT'S NOT THE SCIENCE, IT'S THE SPIRIT

A *Newsweek*-Beliefnet poll taken in August 2005 reveals that of 1,004 Americans, 55 percent consider themselves "religious *and* spiritual," while another 24 percent describe themselves as "spiritual." Two thirds say they pray daily and a third meditate.

Prayer, meditation, chanting, visualization—it's all about focusing attention to achieve a higher level of consciousness. It's not new and there are many avenues to what some call enlightenment, but the underlying practices yield the same or similar results.

"Wherever one looks, spirituality is on the billboard," says Nathan Katz, PhD, director of the Center for the Study of Spirituality at Florida International University. Katz believes the popularity of the film is based in our shared fundamental need to understand the mysteries of life. "It strikes a very deep issue, that of spirituality," he says. "The *Bleep* movie is about what I call 'secular spirituality,' the contemporary phenomenon—mostly but not entirely American—of applying spiritual insights to issues such as health care, the environment, physics, art, education, and so on." <

We know there's more out there. Yet many have become disillusioned with traditional explanations. Religious stories about God creating heaven and earth are challenged by science, while religion is too often used as a tool by various authorities to keep the collective in line. "I think the word 'God' has been co-opted by mainstream religions," says Chasse.

And science has been co-opted by corporations, according to the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, published by the Society for Scientific Exploration, a group of 800 members from 45 countries representing universities as esteemed as Stanford, Princeton, Cornell, UCLA, and the University of Virginia. "Increasingly, corporate organization of science has led to knowledge monopolies, which, with the unwitting help of uncritical mass media, effect a kind of censorship," writes Henry H. Bauer, professor emeritus of Chemistry and Science Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. "Since corporate scientific organizations also control the funding of research, by denying funds for unorthodox work, they function as research cartels as well as knowledge monopolies . . . Most sorely needed is vigorously investigative science journalism."

Perhaps people are losing faith in organized answers. "In my own life, what works for *me* is what matters," says Chasse. "When a scientist says to me there's no such thing as telepathy or ESP, I don't believe him because I've actually physically experienced it."

While some scientists are more than willing to discredit *Bleep*, there are respectable institutions that continue to explore the realms of consciousness and intention presented in the film. The Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Program has been studying the effect of human operators over machinery for more than twenty years and has found evidence of a mind-over-machinery connection. A study on meditation conducted at the University of Wisconsin concluded, "A short program in mindfulness meditation produces demonstrable effects on brain and immune function . . . and underscore[s] the need for additional research." The list of such efforts is long and growing. Research on intentional healing, remote viewing, parapsychology, and other "frontier science" phenomena strongly suggest that the world is not what it seems, that the real action

happens beyond the scope of the known. Just ask Candace Pert and Bruce Lipton, two of a growing number of scientists and researchers who are proposing a radical shift in our view of reality.

## SEEKERS, SEERS, AND SOOTHS

A certain amount of skepticism is not without foundation. I've covered many New Age and spiritual conferences, and they're all attended by people eager for answers. Many are looking for someone, some deity, to relieve them from their depression, their fears, their paralysis in the face of relentless uncertainty and frustration about their lives and the world around them. They line up for guidance or words of encouragement, hoping to touch the speakers' hands, as if they're faith healers. But the message is inevitably the same: "It's your life. Solve your problems using the brain you know you have. Stop seeking answers outside yourself. Look within."

Perhaps it can't hurt to hop along the path and into the rabbit hole with the *Bleep* folks (although the filmmakers are all students at Ramtha's School of Enlightenment, they insist theirs is not a recruitment effort). No one's asking movie viewers to sign their lives away or join a religion or mystical sect. "We want to continue the dialogue. Nowhere do we say this is the end all-be all," says Chasse. "The whole point of the movie is to think for yourself."

At the *Bleep* conference held this past year in Miami, Chasse took the stage to welcome attendees—myself included—by saying she wanted to take her baby to the beach, but the day was grim and gray. She asked the two hundred or so gathered to focus their thoughts on bringing in sunshine and clearing away the rain. "It really is that simple," Chasse said.

Marlee Matlin, the *Bleep* actress who portrays the young woman learning how to apply the power of intention in her own life, told the group, "I've learned to eliminate things that don't give me good energy. Some of us want to overcome our addictions, and some like them. It all depends on who you are and who you want to be."

It was interesting, though not surprising, to note that in an audience composed of people of all ages and walks of life, the best-attended presentations at the

conference were those led by spiritual leaders, not the scientific lectures.

“The *Bleep* movie is popular for the same reason *The Passion of The Christ* is popular,” asserts Nathan Katz, also a presenter at the Miami conference. “Both films are about spirituality, and both films are a tad anti-institutional. *Bleep* appeals to those on the cultural left, *Passion* to those on the right. And I think the most pressing issue confronting our society, indeed our world, today is to get these two worldviews to engage each other respectfully.

“Both camps are responding to the breakdown of community,” he adds, “to the superficial culture, to a rejection of mainstream Hollywood entertainment in favor of something deeper—issues of family, decency, concern for one another.”

And so in an odd twist of secular providence, the ultimate power of the *Bleep* phenomenon may be the universality of its message: You don’t need to join a cult, ascribe to a set of beliefs or blind faith, and you don’t need to understand the science—most people really don’t anyway. But you could use the power of your thoughts to see whether focusing on potentially positive outcomes instead of potentially negative ones changes your life. It doesn’t take a quantum leap of faith to understand this principle and put it to work in your life. Replace love with fear. Zip your lips instead of criticizing another (including yourself). Turn your attention toward something you’d really like to make happen. Point your energy in the right direction and then go, like a skier launching down a mountainside.

## THE RETURN OF THE RAINBOW?

At the end of the conference’s last day, Chasse thanked everyone for their good thoughts and let us know that she’d been able to take her little one to the sea under a brief but beautiful, sparkling sunny sky. A musical performance by the Miami band Inner Voice had participants swaying together, humming a vibrational chant, lending an air of peace and happiness to the room.

Walking away from the hotel, I looked back to see a beautiful rainbow curving over the top of the Marriott. It illuminated the possibility that we can indeed bring positive change to our society and to our world by a

# Further Down the Rabbit Hole

A new *Bleep*-based book has just been released, from HCI Books, *What the Bleep Do We Know!?: Discovering the Endless Possibilities for Altering Your Everyday Reality*, and a sequel to the movie is due in spring 2006. Both feature interviews with a new cast of scientists, including IONS own Dean Radin on psi research and Duane Elgin on our evolving perception of the universe and our connection to it.

We’re trying to hit the science harder, says Chasse, who shares credit for the new book and movie with original *Bleep* collaborators William Arntz and Mark Vicente. But her take-away message is still a practical one: Would you rather know about a quark or about something that can help you now? Mainstream science is running after that quark, but I’m more interested in learning if praying will actually heal my body. —TR

redirection of focus. By looking for the love and beauty, we will find them, and maybe quench our thirst for peace and happiness. Perhaps the key to the *Bleep* phenomenon really is as simple as that: Our thoughts create our reality. If so, then we all have a clear place to start. 🌍

**TRISH RILEY** is an investigative journalist, environmental reporter, travel author, and explorer, who’s been tracking the mysteries of the universe since writing her college thesis, “Will We Be Able to Harness This Phenomenal Energy?”

