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EDGAR MITCHELL,
IONS' VISIONARY FOUNDER, AT AGE 73

BY DORIS LORA

Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero's Journey*, describes two types of heroic acts—a physical act in which the individual gives his or her life in sacrifice for others, and a spiritual act, in which the hero returns to share an extraordinary experience, and thus deeply benefits the community. The moral objective is the same: “saving or redeeming” others with an act or idea. The result of all heroic acts, notes Campbell, is “transformation of consciousness.”

The Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS)' own hero is former astronaut Dr Edgar Mitchell, the only IONS member who has walked on the moon. Since returning to Earth from a “transformation-of-consciousness” experience on the Apollo 14 space mission in 1971, Mitchell has become an exemplary scientist-mystic by generously sharing his continued journey. With the founding of the institute in 1973, he launched his vision of an interdisciplinary community of scholars and seekers dedicated to exploring the intangible experience of human consciousness. And in the thirty years since, he has embarked on an impassioned journey to bridge the gap between science and religion.

In a series of recent conversations at Mitchell's five-acre “farm,” (as the former farm boy fondly refers to his spread in rural Palm Beach County, Florida), this Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient reflected on his singular scientific and psychic journeys. “The story of my life,” he says, “is an account of being hit on the head with astonishing experiences, which drove me to find an explanation.”

Today, thirty-two years after the moon shot, he speaks of his life-changing experience in space as though it were yesterday. He is still the awe-struck aeronautical

engineer/philosopher who actually walked on the lunar surface, and then hurtled through space back to Earth, being completely transformed during his extraterrestrial journey. In a few life-altering moments, he not only knew intellectually, but experienced deeply, that “the molecules of my body and this spacecraft, of the world I had come from and was now returning to, were all manufactured in the furnace of an ancient generation of stars like those surrounding us. Our presence here was not an accident of nature, but rather an extension of the same universal process that evolved our molecules. And I felt an extraordinary personal connectedness with it. I experienced an ecstasy of unity. I not only saw the connectedness, I *felt* it.”

Mitchell was no stranger to religious mysteries. His upbringing as a very bright boy in a Southern Baptist home exposed him to one particular interpretation of the spiritual life. But long before he became an astronaut, he began to question the dogma of the church. Questioning meant having to address those voices (both inner and outer) that chided him for challenging the central tenets of Christianity. Earnest conversations with a progressive Baptist minister friend, Jim Remington, helped young Mitchell come to the conclusion that doubt and questioning were not irreverent or blasphemous, as he had been taught. He had the freeing realization, he recalls, that “this shared climate of inquiry was sufficiently reverent for any kind-spirited Creator.”

Mitchell never stopped asking the big questions and searching for answers. In the months following his ineffable experience in space, he devoured both Eastern and Western mystical literature in an effort to understand what happened to him. Ancient Sanskrit texts described what he had experienced: “A moment in which an individual still recognizes the physical separateness of all things, yet understands that the separateness is an illusion.” He saw clearly that traditional answers to the questions “Who are we?” and “How did we get here?”—whether postulated by science or codified by religious cosmologies—were incomplete and flawed. Finding that peoples of all cultures throughout recorded history described similar transformative experiences, he reasoned that there must be a natural, scientific explanation for these universal phenomena. Never did he rule



XPLORER

out the supernatural, he says, but he assumed that the supernatural is not scientifically verifiable or falsifiable; consequently, he chose to go with the hypothesis that ineffable mysteries are a part of a natural process open to verification or falsification. His training in engineering and mathematics prepared him well to tackle quantum mechanics where (he reports with great excitement) he began to find the clues he was looking for.

WITNESSING A MIRACLE

Meanwhile, now a space hero, Mitchell traveled and lectured around the globe. He courageously continued to make public his mystical experience, thereby opening doors to meeting other spiritual and psychic explorers. One such person was healer Norbu Chen, an American who had studied Tibetan Buddhism. Mitchell, the scientist, was skeptical but curious about Chen's reported healing abilities. He asked his mother if she would meet with Norbu. Mitchell's mother was having severe difficulties with her eyesight as a result of glaucoma. Reluctant to take on the risks of surgery, she required thicker and thicker lenses until, at that point, she was legally blind. Having found great comfort in her fundamentalist Christian faith, she believed in the "Great Physician," and agreed to the meeting. Norbu placed her in a relaxed state, sang his strange mantra, and floated his hands over her head. When he was finished, he suggested she rest and drink grape juice and broth. The next morning she came rushing into her son's room, praising the Lord, and exclaiming that she could see. She demonstrated by reading the Bible without her glasses, dramatically throwing them on the floor and grinding them to shards under her feet. Later that day, for the first time in years, she drove home without her glasses.

A few days later she called her son to ask if Norbu Chen was a Christian. Hesitantly, Mitchell explained that he was a very spiritual person but did not call himself a Christian. Instantly, he heard the deep pain of regret in his mother's voice. Her new sight was not of the Lord but of darker forces. Norbu was surely an instrument of Satan, she declared. Within hours, her newly recovered sight deteriorated, and thick new lenses were required.

Mitchell was both distressed and intrigued. His moth-

er was literally co-creating her own reality with her dramatic demonstration of the power of belief and intention. (He now reports that his mother's glaucoma, in fact, was healed. She never had surgery. Gradually over the next ten years, she "allowed" herself to see more and more clearly. At her passing, she no longer was legally blind.)

Mitchell continued to be "hit on the head" with anomalous occurrences, setting him squarely on the path of an even more audacious journey—seeking scientific answers to the age-old questions about miracles and the nature of consciousness itself.

His research seeks to integrate quantum-physics principles with transcultural religious metaphors and consciousness theories. His unique contribution is two-fold: (1) He has formulated a hypothesis about the nature and origins of consciousness itself, and (2) the integration of his theories with recent discoveries in quantum physics provides clues to physical mechanisms involved in the evolution of consciousness. In the best tradition of a noetic scientist, Mitchell's scientific endeavors are fueled by his personal immersion in the intuitive, subjective realm of knowing. The result is what has been called his "dazzling theory of everything"—a dyadic model of reality, set forth in his book, *The Way of the Explorer*.

A PERSONAL NOETIC HEALING

Given Mitchell's dyadic model of universal interconnectedness at all levels of reality through awareness and intention, the idea that "all things are possible" seems less outrageous. However, accessing the possible often requires scientific ingenuity—and, perhaps, a dash of simple, old-fashioned faith.

Even though the quantum realm may be primary, and even though the new science may lead us to believe that the familiar material world is somehow secondary, Mitchell was soon to discover that our macro-level bodies are quite real. If you bump your head, it hurts. If you are a male of the species and over sixty-five, there is the heightened possibility you will confront prostate problems.

In the spring of 1999, he was dismayed to learn that he had an elevated PSA count. Having been blessed with great health and excellent mental and emotional fitness all his life, Mitchell procrastinated for several months before taking

action. When a biopsy showed a malignancy, he was surprised to discover that he was not emotionally prepared for this news. Feeling confused and somewhat disoriented, he listened with disbelief as his urologist recommended surgery the very next week. Fortunately, his rational mind prevailed, and he began to draw on his knowledge and connections to complementary and alternative healing methods. After embarking on a change of diet and a detox program to strengthen his immune system, his PSA level decreased, yet in the following months, his PSA readings fluctuated wildly.

While researching other unconventional treatments early in 2002, Mitchell prepared to make a trip to Northern California for the mid-March board meeting of the Institute of Noetic Sciences. His lifetime colleagues and friends knew about his medical crisis. In an unforgettable moment of sensitivity and caring, Wink Franklin, then IONS' president, asked Mitchell if the assembled board, staff, and guests could hold a healing ceremony for him. Mitchell was delighted and deeply touched. He was, of course, intimately acquainted with unconventional healing methods, and had studied and observed healers, mystics, and psychics performing miraculous feats. However, being the recipient of the proposed healing effort that evening was an entirely new and deeply moving experience for him.

He was placed in a reclining position in the center of the institute's small amphitheater-style auditorium, with approximately fifty devoted friends and colleagues surrounding him. Led by one of the board members, Sandra Hobson, the ad hoc group of healers began intoning an "Om" chant common to Eastern yogic traditions. Observers later remarked that the feeling in the room became ever more electric as successive groups of his friends surrounded him and took their turns providing a healing touch. All the while the chanting continued as minds became coherently focused with loving thoughts and healing intention. As the minutes passed, Mitchell recalls a feeling of energy coursing through his body in a strange but comforting way, like waves rolling up and caressing a beach, then receding.

After the ceremony, he was reminded to be gentle with himself and rest. For four days afterwards, he was aware of a feeling of wave after wave moving through his body, with a warm and satisfying feeling in the pelvic area. Not long after, a sophisticated ultrasound examination yielded the medical verdict: "There are no active cancer cells in your prostate." A biopsy further confirmed that he was cancer-free.

The emotional and psychological aftermath of this fas-


cinating healing experience was considerable, he reports. There was relief, as though the weight of years had suddenly been lifted from his shoulders; there was the deep satisfaction of having the efforts of thirty years of research concerning nonlocal phenomena so dramatically confirmed in his own body. And he was finally able to quit smoking.

CELEBRATING THIRTY YEARS

These days, Mitchell's passion for exploration is as insatiable as ever. He continues to fine-tune his dyadic model of reality that has proved flexible enough to incorporate exploding new developments in quantum physics.

"Have you remained in touch with your experience of universal connectedness?" I asked. Yes, he said, by continuing a regular meditation practice that he believes is a fundamental way to access information at the quantum level. He can drop into a *nirvikalpa samadhi* state almost at will—"a total ecstatic feeling of bliss, an experience of pure awareness." He reminds us that meditation (as well as holotropic breathing, biofeedback, and other modern technologies for quieting the noisy brain) is a time-honored way of accessing nonlocal information.

Surprisingly, these days space pilot Mitchell is no more enthusiastic about getting on planes than many of us. And as for flying, he can borrow a friend's plane and take off at a whim, if he so chooses. However, in his spare time, he is quite content to walk around his wooded acres and commune with nature, play with his dog, and visit his children and grandchildren.

The founder of IONS now knows more deeply what he doesn't know. He is both more earnest in his journey and more playful. "We still have very few answers to the big questions," he muses. "The paradox," he chuckles, "is that the more knowledge we accumulate, the less we know. Gaining knowledge is like chopping down a forest from the inside out. The more we know, the bigger the circle of the unknown becomes. If we keep going at this rate, in another thirty years we'll be totally clueless." But he is not discouraged from dedicating his mature years to following the most challenging of noetic paths: forging a quantum cosmology that takes us further along the way toward understanding the mystery of consciousness. 

A 'DYADIC' MO

MITCHELL'S MODEL ADDRESSES THE QUESTIONS, "How do we come to know what we know?" and "How do we know that we know?" He also tackles the question, "What is the mechanism that leads to consciousness?" Within this model, Mitchell defines consciousness (as discussed below), and then ventures to formulate a hypothesis about how consciousness evolved and continues to evolve.

Built on the central tenets of quantum science—most recently, quantum holography—the model expands on the key notion that energy is the basis of everything. But basic energy is always linked to information, which Mitchell defines as particular "patterns of energy." Energy and information are a dyad, like two sides of the same coin. For Mitchell, "information" is not mere-

ly measurement of objective signals or "bits," as the term typically is used in engineering research, but is the basis of matter's capacity to know.

All matter—whether human bodies or brains, cells or molecules, atoms or quanta—possesses some kind of awareness or the capacity to "know." Less-developed forms, such as molecules, exhibit a rudimentary knowing: They "know" to combine into cells, which, in turn, "know" to fight off harmful intruders; plants "know" to turn toward the sun; birds "know" to fly south in winter. At some level of complexity, for example, in the human brain/body, matter evolves to the point where "it knows that it knows (self-reflection)." In Mitchell's definition, this is anthropic consciousness—self-reflective knowing—the highest form of knowing of which we are aware.

Mitchell postulates that awareness and intention, another dyad in his model, are aspects of the evolutionary process leading to consciousness. Awareness and intention (postulated components of informa-

tional energy patterns) are the roots or seeds of self-reflective consciousness, so right from the start—when matter came into being around fourteen billion years ago during the Big Bang (or perhaps otherwise)—these rudimentary precursors of consciousness were already part of the package.

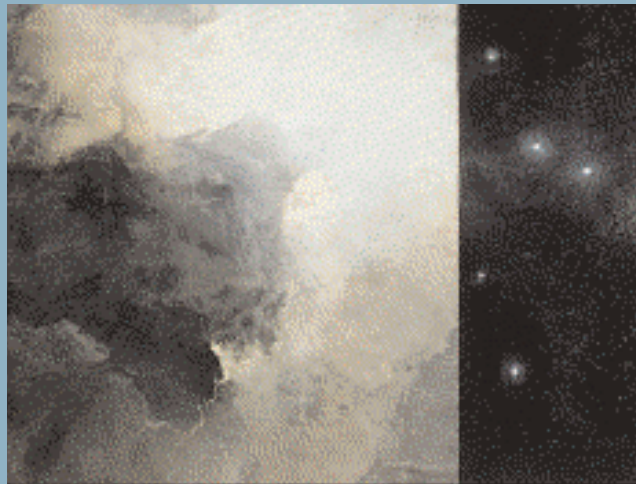
But where is the evidence that matter "knows" in the first place? The quick answer, suggests Mitchell, begins

with subatomic matter and its attributes of nonlocality, quantum entanglement, and coherence. Nonlocality (which Einstein called "spooky action at a distance") is the phenomenon in nature illustrated by the famous demonstrated connection, or "entanglement," between partner photons sent off in different directions, yet remaining capable of instantaneously "commu-

nicating" across vast spaces—that is, nonlocally. Mitchell suggests that this "spooky action" is due to a particle's "knowing" that is, its postulated properties akin to awareness and intention. We humans also are made of these "knowing" entangled particles that, Mitchell believes, are the basis of our evolving consciousness.

But exactly how does this subatomic entanglement work, and how does it connect with the macro-level where we live? What are the mechanisms? Mitchell, in a collaborative effort with a group of European scientists, is finding clues to these mysteries from recent dramatic discoveries in quantum holography. These discoveries take quantum information theory from the subatomic level to macro-scale functioning—an entirely new direction within physics research. While initial steps have already been experimentally validated, the interpretations and implications are being vigorously debated.

More widely recognized examples of nonlocality at



DOZIER BELL

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the macro level are the data from remote-viewing experiments in the 1970s and 1980s in which Mitchell participated early on with his colleague Russell Targ and others. These experiments verified the human ability to perceive objects and events across vast distances despite no known physical connection. More recent and more controversial research on the quantum hologram indicates that nature has been utilizing quantum information processes, at both the micro- and macro-levels, throughout its evolution. Data from quantum-holography research not only support micro-to-macro communication, but provide clues to the mechanisms of exchange of information across levels. These clues lie in the special conditions of resonance or coherence generated by “groups” of particles—a resonance that contains historical information about all matter in the universe. Furthermore, this research shows that the human brain/body itself is a complex biocomputer that handles innumerable parallel quantum-holographic processes simultaneously. In other words, the brain/body can access information holographically in the form of “virtual signals” or “wave fronts” at both the micro- and macro-levels. Couched in Mitchell’s dyadic framework, this evidence suggests that particles “know” because of their innate properties of awareness and intention, and that “groups” of particles interact within the quantum hologram generating information about the universe. Because our brain/body also functions holographically, we can access this information.

Mitchell emphasizes that the importance of the discovery of nonlocal, holographic-information exchanges, or “signals,” cannot be overestimated. Apparently, nature does not lose the record of its evolution. The quantum hologram appears to be an information mechanism for recording the historical experience of matter. He believes that our focused intention, or attention, to an image is what connects us holographically to nonlocal “signals” or “wave forms.” These signals, he says, apparently contain the unlimited knowledge and potential we seem to “know” is available when we access our creativity, engage in

prayer, or deeply intend to influence events at a distance. Based on these recent data, Mitchell’s current hypothesis states, “Self-reflective consciousness can now be postulated to be a highly evolved process of knowing about the event histories of objects and systems in the universe—including the knowing being itself. One of the mechanisms for this knowing appears to be our brain/body’s ability to interact with the resonating quantum energy field, the source of all information, through shared holographic processes.”

Broader implications follow both logically and intuitively, Mitchell notes. Deep knowing (“noetic” experience) “requires an exchange of information with this universal archive of information—and that is precisely what prayer, meditation, and the rituals of mystics are designed to accomplish.” Furthermore, he notes, deep communication with the universe, such as *samadhi* states of ecstasy and peace, feel really good. This is nature’s way of enticing us to come back for more, thereby furthering the evolution of consciousness. The greater the experience of bliss, Mitchell believes, the more “the awareness of every cell of the body coherently resonates with the holographically embedded information in the quantum zero-point [primordial] energy field.”

In other words, to be connected with this quantum field of resonance holographically is to perceive information from all times and all places—including the Akashic records, channeled material, Carl Jung’s archetypes of the collective unconscious, Joseph Campbell’s transcultural myths, or Rupert Sheldrake’s morphic fields.

What could be more celebratory during IONS’ thirtieth anniversary year than an emerging new theory of consciousness from its inspired founder?



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