

A TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY

Magical Blend

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"...extraordinary experiences—intense, overwhelming, indescribable—are recorded at every time in history and in every place on the globe and are widespread in American society today. No one with any familiarity with history or anthropology or psychology can deny they occur. They are a form of 'altered states of consciousness'—to use the current approved phrase—something like intoxication or delirium or a hypnotic trance but different in their intensity, their joyfulness and their 'lifting out' dimension. In some cases, such experiences were triggered by drugs, in others by ritual dances, in still others by disciplined meditation; but most such 'ecstatic interludes' about which we have accounts seem to be purely spontaneous—a man casually walking by a tennis court suddenly is caught up in a wave of peace and joy 'as time stands still.'"

—Sociologist Andrew Greeley writing in the *New York Times Magazine*

Before Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, the Victorian middle-class indulged themselves by collecting biological and zoological specimens. Similarities were noted, but an evolutionary view of their linkage would have to wait for Darwin's book.

According to Michael Murphy we are in a similar predicament when it comes to understanding paranormal experience. Our religious and metaphysical traditions have long recognized supernormal human capacities, but each tradition is isolated in its own belief system with little connection to each other. And considering the fact that paranormal events have been documented since the beginning of history, it is ironic that we in the Western technological societies are still arguing about whether they occur as opposed to what they mean. Perhaps that is because meaning is not a thread but a tapestry—a web of relationships as opposed to a string of coincidences. Michael Murphy appears to view the long history of "numinous" or supernormal phenomenon as geographical points waiting to be turned into a map: the information is there, but it needs to be linked. If this seems like a big undertaking, it is, but Murphy is well-suited to the challenge.

As founder and chairman of the board of Esalen Institute, Murphy has been in a unique position to view nearly three decades of attempts by our best and brightest to fulfill the institute's goal "to devise ways of extending man's human potential." As a student of the great Hindu mystic, Aurobindo, he is familiar with the struggle to unite divine consciousness with historical processes. As a novelist who's consistent theme has been one of physical transformation, his creative imagination is well-tuned. And with his collection of out-of-context experiences in fields as diverse as sports, medicine, mathematics and the arts, Murphy's long effort to write "a natural history of the future" has already attracted intense attention a full year and a half before it is due for publication.

According to Murphy, "The book is an assembly of data and proposals about a frontier that I believe we can now explore." We asked Michael Murphy to explore a bit of that frontier with *Magical Blend*.

Michael Murphy

A Natural History of the Future

You have compared some of the so-called "coincidences" of everyday life like knowing who's on the phone when it rings to Freudian slips, could you explain?

MICHAEL MURPHY: In his celebrated essay, "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life," Freud taught us that many common activities, among them jokes and slips of the tongue, expressed unrecognized thoughts and motives. I believe that activities such as the one you mentioned also express an aspect of our unconscious functioning, namely our latent supernormality.

You have called these latent expressions of supernormality "siddhis of everyday life." Could you explain what siddhis are?

MICHAEL MURPHY: Siddhis are special capacities resulting from the practice of yoga. I believe that such powers are supernormal analogs to everyday abilities that we all have. Thus I call these more common expressions of supernormality "siddhis of everyday life" because they were not produced by yoga or other transformative discipline. They seem, instead, to be part of a general human endowment, though just a few are recognized by contemporary psychology or emphasized by modern education.

If these paranormal experiences, or "everyday siddhis" as you call them, are happening spontaneously, what does that suggest about their nature?

MICHAEL MURPHY: The fact that they arise in all sorts of people, even though they aren't cultivated or

Interviewed by Michael Peter Langevin
and Richard Daab

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expected, indicates that they are deeply rooted in human nature and are not entirely dependent upon social reinforcement. They can't be completely suppressed, it seems, even in cultures that do not celebrate them. That so many of them appear among us without benefit of transformative practice—in people with different backgrounds, temperaments, and cultural conditionings—strongly suggests that there is a continuum between ordinary human functioning and various aspects of supernormality. Numerous resemblances between these "siddhis of everyday life" and capacities such as mystical insight which are truly supernormal seem obvious to me, and suggest that "everyday siddhis" are simply less developed aspects of a greater nature pressing to be realized in us.

"Everyday siddhis" are simply less developed aspects of a greater nature pressing to be realized..."

Comparing the experiences of every-day people to the experiences of religious adepts would seem like comparing apples to oranges. What prompted you to make a connection between the two? And what does this connection represent?

MICHAEL MURPHY: My own inquiries among friends, acquaintances and seminar audiences during the past 20 years have convinced me that many, if not most people have noetic or paranormal episodes without benefit of transformative practice. Furthermore, these spontaneous experiences exhibit more variety than I had once guessed. As I have collected reports about such events, I have discovered certain features they share with activities which are clearly supernormal. Comparing the experiences of these "everyday siddhis" with various kinds of supernormal functioning, we find correspondences which lead us straightforwardly to suppose the former are first expressions of the latter.

You have put a great deal of effort into listing and categorizing these every-day paranormal occurrences. What purpose do you see these lists serving?

MICHAEL MURPHY: A cross-matrix between "siddhis of everyday life" and supernormal capacities gives us a way to search for non-ordinary abilities we have not yet recognized. Like a Table of Elements, a matrix of this kind might suggest undiscovered aspects of our human potential. Indeed, with such a map in mind I've been prompted to look for particular kinds of nascent "siddhi", thus discovering some of the powers described in my list of spontaneous supernormalities. [See following list]. I wouldn't have guessed, for example, that so many acquaintances had realized "self-existent delight" if I hadn't been led to ask them about it by recognizing its centrality for religious contemplatives; nor would I have thought that many people had superordinary kinesthetic perceptions if I hadn't heard stories that yogis can perceive their own cells and atomic patterns. On the other hand, I hadn't considered shamanic ability to be an aspect of supernormal embodiment until I heard several athletes innocent about mysticism describe some of their self-transcendent feats. We can uncover latent powers in two ways, then: by extrapolating from nascent non-ordinary abilities to capacities that are truly supernormal, and vice versa.

You have said that not only do you believe that the "everyday siddhis" may be forerunners to the siddhis encountered in transformative practice, but that both may be products of an evolutionary trend. Could you explain?

MICHAEL MURPHY: Several correspondences between these two orders of experience and various aspects of animal functioning suggest certain lines of development through the separate domains of animal, human, and supernormal evolution. As I have suggested, the continuing

development of particular abilities—perception of external events, for example, or kinesthesia, or cognition—through different evolutionary arenas indicates that something besides domain-specific mechanisms are at work in our universe. The more clearly we see that analogous outcomes of the animal, human and supernormal domains are produced in different ways, by different kinds of mediation (natural selection, education, and “grace”, for example), the more reason to suppose nature has a “domain-transcending” *telos*, or aim to realize numinous capacities.

So, how many of these abilities do I have even though I may be unaware of them?

MICHAEL MURPHY: It is difficult to estimate how many supernormalities lie dormant in us, given our general ignorance today about the further reaches of human nature. We don't know how many positive capacities are neglected or suppressed in this (and every) culture. I currently have 35 particular supernormal attributes broken into twelve or thirteen sets, but it wouldn't be difficult to enlarge my inventory through interviews, questionnaire surveys, and informal conversations in which unusual capacities were deemed worthwhile. For example, in polls conducted by the University of Chicago's National Opinions Research Council in 1973 and 1984, sociologist Andrew Greeley and his colleagues found that word of their research gave many people permission to reveal their own quasi-mystical, extrasensory episodes. Furthermore, a great variety of spontaneous superordinary abilities are recorded in the proceedings, journals, and archives of the British and American Societies for Psychical Research, in Frederick Myers' *Human Personality*, Edmund Gurney's *Phantasms of the Living*, William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Marghanita Laski's *Ecstasy*, and other collections of extranormal experience. A systematic listing derived from such literature would reveal a considerable range of metanormal abilities beyond those mentioned here, providing a basis for further research and guidance for transformative practice.

These polls, you mentioned, showed an increase between 1973 and 1984 in the number of people who said they had had a paranormal experience. To what do you attribute that?

MICHAEL MURPHY: Greeley attributed the apparent increase in such experience to a growing willingness among Americans to talk about paranormal events.

Have their been similar polls?

MICHAEL MURPHY: Greeley's data is supported by the Gallup Organization, which found that 45% of the subjects in a 1985 survey reported “an unusual or inexplicable spiritual experience.” Ten years from now, I suspect, even more people will acknowledge they've had such an experience.

The “Siddhis” of Everyday Life: Spontaneous Supernormalities

Extraordinary perceptions of external events

- synesthesias, or crossing of the senses (“seeing” sounds, for example or “hearing” flowers sing), in which a numinous beauty is revealed or an extrasensory perception is mediated
- “feeling” someone in a house though you cannot see or hear them
- sensing someone watching you, after which you turn to meet their gaze
- feeling a basic compatibility (or incompatibility) with someone before you meet them face to face
- correctly guessing the location of water, oil or other materials by dowsing or other extrasensory processes
- clairvoyant discovery of books, memorabilia, or other special objects
- spontaneous perceptions of distant events
- sharing with others auditions of music for which there is no discoverable

MICHAEL MURPHY CONTINUED ON PAGE 110

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- physical source, perhaps as a loved one is dying
- correctly sensing colors, script or music on a phonograph record through your fingertips
- sensing the location of lost objects
- opening books to exact passages or sentences for which you are searching

Extraordinary kinesthesia.

- picturing arteries, capillaries, lymph nodes, or other bodily structures that immediately seem to be your own, sometimes sensing they may be injured or (conversely) in a process of recovery from injury or stress
- experiencing exceptional muscular freedom during strenuous exercise, as for example during a long run or swim
- determining by spontaneous tastes or smells your level of stress during extreme exertion
- picturing what appear to be “chakras” depicted in esoteric teachings, or other organs corresponding to the subtle bodies of yogic lore
- hearing strange sounds which seem to rise from the body, and sensing their origin and meaning

Extraordinary communication.

- correctly intuiting someone’s negative feelings or thoughts about you or a third party
- saying something unexpected in unison with someone else
- writing to a friend you haven’t communicated with for a long time at approximately the same time they write you
- sensing correctly who is calling on the telephone, even though the caller hasn’t communicated for a long time—or thinking about someone who then calls you
- sensing a powerful communication with a plant or animal
- feeling no separation from your lover during sexual intercourse
- feeling sympathetic pains with a distant friend or relative
- “feeling” what someone else is thinking
- picking up another person’s thoughts telepathically
- sensing the mood and intention of a pet or other animal
- sharing the same nocturnal dream with a friend
- sharing sensations of well-being or distress with friends or relatives though there is no ordinary communication between you
- accurately sensing someone’s prayers in your behalf

Extraordinary heat, energy and vitality

- feeling great warmth on cold days, without benefit of extra clothing or other protection
- experiencing immense energy, sometimes

- frightening in its intensity, for which there is no apparent cause
- sensing a rush of electricity up the spine, or radiating out from the abdomen, accompanied by strange perceptions, altered states of mind, or extraordinary strength
- remaining free of infection in the midst of general sickness among people around you
- going without normal amounts of sleep for extended periods without loss of mental clarity, vitality and physical strength

Extraordinary movement.

- executing moves in sport that exceed one’s normal ability and which seem to be mediated by a power or “self” beyond one’s ordinary functioning
- sensing physical levitation during strenuous physical exercise, a religious service, or some other event
- moving into “other worlds” during sleep
- out-of-body experience (during which you see your own body perhaps) after which you report details of locations or events which could not be known to you through the ordinary senses

Extraordinary affections.

- experiencing a complete loss of boundaries between you and a loved one, as if you and they were one person, consciousness, or body
- looking at someone (or something) familiar and seeing them as if for the first time, with a great sense of spontaneity and delight

Extraordinary delight

- experiencing profound joy for no apparent reason, during a routine task perhaps, or even in the midst of pain or discomfort, and being struck that such joy doesn’t depend upon the satisfaction of a particular need or desire. This state may be attributed, simply, to the “joy of living”
- and, with the above, a contagious effect upon others by which they too experience a self-existent delight

Extraordinary cognition

- correctly sensing unexpected danger
- anticipating a melody before it comes on the radio; anticipating a dramatic event before it happens; or imagining a sentence before a companion says it
- apprehending a situation or place as if you had experienced it before (“deja vu”)
- apprehending an exceptionally complex and original thought or other mental production all-at-once
- cognizing something truly original in conjunction with sensations of inspiration and joy
- experiencing a sense of mystical union with God, in a common situation perhaps, during a festive event, or while engaged in intimate

- conversation
- remembering extremely complex material with perfect detail (eidetic imagery)
- correctly determining historical events connected with a particular location or object (psychometry)
- spontaneously apprehending the presence, voice or other aspect of someone who is physically distant or dead, by direct and vivid contact
- tasting a particular food before it is unexpectedly served to you

Extraordinary volition

- waking up from sleep at a designated moment, without assistance from an alarm
- shedding great pain, simply by resolution
- accomplishing some deed requiring strength or endurance beyond one’s usual capacity, in a crisis perhaps, or during a sports competition
- spontaneously adapting to great heat, cold, or other adverse conditions
- spontaneously exerting subliminal influence upon others, harmonizing conflicting parties, for example, or reversing potentially violent situations
- finding odd details in photographs you’ve taken which don’t correspond to the objects you photographed
- overcoming the effects of poisons, spoiled food, and other toxins
- spontaneously throwing off the effects of injury or disease
- deliberately rising above thirst or hunger, with no apparent loss of energy or strength

Extraordinary alteration of the inorganic or living environment

- appearing to alter the flight of a ball during golf, baseball, or other games by an act of will (telekinesis)
- altering ambient room temperature as if by some sort of psychokinesis
- leaving a strong mood in an empty room by religious ritual, powerful emotion, or sustained prayer and meditation
- promoting the growth of plants in extraordinary fashion by some sort of “green thumb”
- conveying a sense of well-being to others
- repairing broken devices which others could not fix with the same procedure
- appearing to influence the weather

Extraordinary beauty

- suddenly assuming a beautiful appearance to others, without benefit of make-up, costume or other adornments

Extraordinary bodily changes

- spontaneously assuming a more youthful appearance, or retaining a youthful appearance into later life