

CLAIRVOYANCE

C. W. Leadbeater

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Clairvoyance means literally nothing more than “clear-seeing,” and it is a word which has been sorely misused, and even degraded so far as to be employed to describe the trickery of a mountebank in a variety show. Even in its more restricted sense it covers a wide range of phenomena, differing so greatly in character that it is not easy to give a definition of the word which shall be at once succinct and accurate. It has been called “spiritual vision,” but no rendering could well be more misleading than that, for in the vast majority of cases there is no faculty connected with it which has the slightest claim to be honoured by so lofty a name.

For the purposes of this article we may, perhaps, define it as the power to see what is hidden from ordinary physical sight. It will be as well to premise that it is very frequently (though by no means always) accompanied by what is called clairaudience, or the power to hear what would be inaudible to the ordinary physical ear; and we will for the nonce take our title as covering this faculty also, in order to avoid the clumsiness of perpetually using two long words where one will suffice.

The phenomena of clairvoyance differ so widely both in character and in degree that it is not very easy to decide how they can most satisfactorily be classified. We might for example arrange them according to the kind of sight employed—whether it were devachanic, astral, or merely etheric. We might divide them according to the capacity of the clairvoyant, taking into consideration whether he was trained or untrained; whether his vision was regular and under his command, or spasmodic and independent of his volition; whether he could exercise it only when under mesmeric influence, or whether that assistance was unnecessary for him; whether he was able to use his faculty when awake in the physical body, or whether it was available only when he was temporarily away from that body in sleep or trance.

All these distinctions are of importance, and we shall have to take them all into consideration as we go on, but perhaps on the whole the most useful classification will be one something on the lines of that adopted by Mr. Sinnett in his *Rationale of Mesmerism*—a book, by the way, which all students of clairvoyance ought to read. When we come to deal with the phenomena, then, we will arrange them rather according to the direction of the sight employed than to the plane upon which it is exercised, so that we may group instances of clairvoyance under some such headings as these:

1. Simple clairvoyance—that is to say, a mere opening of sight, enabling its possessor to see whatever astral or etheric entities happen to be present around him, but not including the power of observing either distant places or scenes belonging to any other time than the present.
2. Clairvoyance in space—the capacity to see scenes or events removed from the seer in space, and either too far distant for ordinary observation or concealed by intermediate objects.
3. Clairvoyance in time—that is to say, the capacity to see objects or events which are removed from the seer in time, or in other words the power of looking into the past or the future.

Before this more detailed explanation can usefully be attempted, however, it will be necessary for us to devote a little time to some preliminary considerations, in order that we may have clearly in mind a

few broad facts as to the different planes on which clairvoyant vision may be exercised, and the conditions which render its exercise possible.

We are constantly assured in Theosophical literature that all these higher faculties are presently to be the heritage of mankind in general—that the capacity of clairvoyance, for example, lies latent in every one, and that those in whom it already manifests itself are simply in that one particular a little in advance of the rest of us. Now this statement is a true one, and yet it seems quite vague and unreal to the majority of people, simply because they regard such a faculty as something absolutely different from anything they have yet experienced, and feel fairly confident that they themselves, at any rate, are not within measurable distance of its development.

It may help to dispel this sense of unreality if we try to understand that clairvoyance, like so many other things in nature, is mainly a question of vibrations, and is in fact nothing but an extension of powers which we are all using every day of our lives. We are living all the while surrounded by a vast sea of mingled air and ether, the latter interpenetrating the former, as it does all physical matter; and it is chiefly by vibrations in that vast sea of matter that impressions reach us from the outside. This much we all know, but it may perhaps never have occurred to many of us that the number of these vibrations to which we are capable of responding is in reality quite infinitesimal.

Up among the exceedingly rapid vibrations which affect the ether there is a certain small section—a *very* small section—to which the retina of the human eye is capable of responding, and these particular vibrations produce in us the sensation which we call light. That is to say, we are capable of seeing only those objects from which light of that particular kind can either issue or be reflected.

In exactly the same way the tympanum of the human ear is capable of responding to a certain very small range of comparatively slow vibrations—slow enough to affect the air which surrounds us; and so the only sounds which we can hear are those made by objects which are able to vibrate at some rate within that particular range.

In both cases it is a matter perfectly well known to science that there are large numbers of vibrations both above and below these two sections, and that consequently there is much light that we cannot see, and many sounds to which our ears are deaf. In the case of light the action of these higher and lower vibrations is easily perceptible in the effects produced by the actinic rays at one end of the spectrum and the heat rays at the other.

As a matter of fact there exist vibrations of every conceivable degree of rapidity filling the whole vast space intervening between the slow sound waves and the swift light waves; nor is even that all, for there are undoubtedly vibrations slower than those of sound, and a whole infinity of them which are swifter than those known to us as light. So we begin to understand that the rates of vibrations by which we see and hear are only like two tiny groups of a few strings selected from an enormous harp of practically infinite extent, and when we think how much we have been able to learn and infer from the use of those minute fragments, we see vaguely what possibilities might lie before us if we were enabled to utilize the vast wonderful whole.

Another fact which needs to be considered in this connection is that different human beings vary considerably, though within relatively narrow limits, in their capacity of response even to the very few vibrations which are within reach of our physical senses. I am not referring to the keenness of sight or of hearing that enables one man to see a fainter object or hear a slighter sound than another; it is not in the least a question of strength of vision but of extent of susceptibility.

For example, if any one will take a good bisulphide of carbon prism, and by its means throw a clear spectrum on a sheet of white paper, and then get a number of people to mark upon the paper the extreme limits of the spectrum as it appears to them, he is fairly certain to find that their powers of vision differ appreciably. Some will see the violet extending much farther than the majority do; others will perhaps see rather less violet than most, while gaining a corresponding extension of vision at the red end. Some few there will perhaps be who can see farther than ordinary at both ends, and these will almost certainly be what we call sensitive people—susceptible in fact to a greater range of vibrations than are most men of the present day.

In hearing, the same difference can be tested by taking some sound which is just not too high to be audible—on the very verge of audibility as it were—and discovering how many among a given number of people are able to hear it. The squeak of a bat is a familiar instance of such a sound, and experiment will show that on a summer evening when the whole air is full of their shrills, needle-like cries quite a large number of men will be absolutely unconscious of them, and unable to hear anything at all.

Now these examples show certainly that there is no hard-and-fast limit to man's power or response to either etheric or aerial vibrations, but that some among us already have that power to a wider extent than others, and it will even be found that the same man's capacity varies on different occasions. It is therefore not difficult for us to imagine that it might be possible for a man to develop this power, and thus in time to learn to see much that is invisible to his fellow-men, and hear much that is inaudible to them, since we know perfectly well that enormous numbers of these additional vibrations do exist, and are simply as it were, awaiting recognition.

The experiment with the Röntgen rays give us an example of the startling results which are produced when even a very few of these additional vibrations are brought within human ken, and the transparency to these rays of many substances hitherto considered opaque at once show us one way at least in which we may explain such elementary clairvoyance as is involved in reading a letter inside a closed box, or describing those present in an adjoining apartment. To learn to see by means of the Röntgen rays in addition to those ordinarily employed would be quite sufficient to enable anyone to perform a feat of magic of this order.

So far we have thought only of an extension of the purely physical senses of man; and when we remember that a man's etheric body is in reality merely the finer part of his physical frame, and that therefore all his sense organs contain a large amount of etheric matter of various degrees of density, the capacities of which are still practically latent in most of us, we shall see that even if we confine ourselves to this line of development alone there are enormous possibilities of all kinds already opening out before us

But besides and beyond all this we know that man possesses an astral and a mental body, each of which can in process of time be aroused into activity, and will respond in turn to the vibrations of the matter of its own plane, thus opening up before the ego, and he learns to function through them, two entirely new and far wider worlds of knowledge and power. Now these new worlds, though they are all around us and freely interpenetrate one another, are not to be thought of as distinct and entirely unconnected in substance, but rather as melting the one into the other, the lowest astral forming a direct series with the highest physical, just as the lowest mental in its turn forms a direct series with the highest astral. We are not called upon in thinking of them to imagine some new and strange kind of matter, but simply to think of the ordinary physical kind as subdivided so very much more finely

and vibrating so very much more rapidly as to introduce us to what are practically entirely new conditions and qualities.

It is not then difficult for us to grasp the possibility of a steady and progressive extension of our senses, so that both by sight and by hearing we may be able to appreciate vibrations far higher and far lower than those which are ordinarily recognized. A large section of these additional vibrations will still belong to the physical plane, and will merely enable us to obtain impressions from the etheric part of that plane, which is at present as a closed book to us. Such impressions will still be received through the retina of the eye; of course they will affect its etheric rather than its solid matter, but we may nevertheless regard them as still appealing only to an organ specialized to receive them, and not the whole surface of the etheric body.

There are some abnormal cases, however, in which other parts of the etheric body respond to these additional vibrations as readily as, or even more readily than, those of the eye. Such vagaries are explicable in various ways, but principally as effects of some partial astral development, for it will be found that the sensitive parts of the body almost invariably correspond with one or other of the *chakras*, or centres of vitality in the astral body. And though if astral consciousness be not yet developed these centres may not be available on their own plane, they are still strong enough to stimulate into keener activity the etheric matter which they interpenetrate.

When we come to deal with the astral senses themselves the methods of working are very different. The astral body has no specialized sense-organs, but if a vibration which is within the limits of its power of cognition strikes any part of it, it responds to that vibration, and sight or hearing, as the case may be, is produced as the result. So that a person using astral vision does not need to turn and look at any object, but can see it equally well behind him or on one side; whereas one using etheric sight would be as far as this is concerned almost in the position of a man seeing physically in the ordinary way.

The vision of the devachanic or mental plane is again totally different, for in this case we can no longer speak of separate senses such as sight and hearing, but rather of one general sense which responds so fully to the vibrations reaching it that when any object comes within its cognition it at once comprehends it fully, and as it were sees it, hears it, feels it, and knows all there is to know about it by the one instantaneous operation. Yet even this wonderful faculty differs in degree only and not in kind from those which are at our command at the present time; on the mental plane, just as on the physical, impressions are still conveyed by means of vibrations travelling from the object seen to the seer.

On the buddhic plane we meet for the first time with a quite new faculty having nothing in common with those of which we have spoken, for there a man cognizes any object by an entirely different method in which external vibrations play no part. The object becomes part of himself, and he studies it from the inside instead of from the outside. But with *this* power ordinary clairvoyance has nothing to do.

The development, either entire or partial, of any one of these faculties would come under our definition of clairvoyance—the power to see what is hidden from ordinary physical sight. But these faculties may be developed in various ways, and it will be well to say a few words as to these different lines.

We may presume that if it were possible for a man to be isolated during his evolution from all but the gentlest outside influences, and to unfold from the beginning in perfectly regular and normal fashion,

he would probably develop his senses in regular order also. He would find his physical senses gradually extending their scope until they responded to all the physical vibrations, of etheric as well as of denser matter; then in orderly sequence would come sensibility to the coarser part of the astral plane, and presently the finer part also would be included, until in due course the devachanic faculty dawned in its turn.

In real life, however, development so regular as this is hardly ever known, and many a man has occasional flashes of astral consciousness without any awakening of etheric vision at all. And this irregularity of development is one of the principal causes of man's extraordinary liability to error in matters of clairvoyance—a liability from which there is no escape except by a long course of careful training under a qualified teacher.

Students of Theosophical literature are well aware that there are such teachers to be found—that even in this materialistic nineteenth century the old saying is still true, that “when the pupil is ready, the Master is ready also,” and that “in the hall of learning, when he is capable of entering there, the disciple will always find his Master.” They are well aware also that only under such guidance can a man develop his latent powers in safety and with certainty, since they know how fatally easy it is for the untrained clairvoyant to deceive himself as to the meaning and value of what he sees, or even absolutely to distort his vision completely in bringing it down into his physical consciousness.

It does not follow that even the pupil who is receiving regular instruction in the use of occult powers will find them unfolding themselves exactly in the regular order which was suggested above as probably ideal. His previous progress may not have been such as to make this for him the easiest or most desirable road; but at any rate he is in the hands of one who is perfectly competent to be his guide in spiritual development, and he rests in perfect contentment that the way along which he is taken will be that which is the best way for him.

Another great advantage which he gains is that whatever faculties he may acquire are definitely under his command and can be used fully and constantly when he needs them for his Theosophical work; whereas in the case of the untrained man such powers often manifest themselves only very partially and spasmodically, and appear to come and go, as it were, at their own sweet will.

It may reasonably be objected that if clairvoyant faculty is, as stated, a part of the occult development of man and so a sign of a certain amount of progress along that line, it seems strange that it should often be possessed by primitive peoples, or by the ignorant and uncultured among ourselves—persons who are obviously quite undeveloped, from whatever point of view one regards them. No doubt this does appear remarkable at first sight; but the fact is that the sensitiveness of the savage or of the coarse and vulgar European ignoramus is not really the same thing as the faculty of his properly trained brother, nor is it arrived at in the same way.

An exact and detailed explanation of the difference would lead us into rather recondite technicalities, but perhaps the general idea of the distinction between the two may be caught from an example taken from the very lowest plane of clairvoyance, in close contact with the denser physical. The etheric double in man is in exceedingly close relation to his nervous system, and any kind of action upon one of them speedily reacts on the other. Now in the sporadic appearance of etheric sight in the savage, whether of Central Africa or of Western Europe, it has been observed that the corresponding nervous disturbance is almost entirely in the sympathetic system, and that the whole affair is practically beyond the man's control—is in fact a sort of massive sensation vaguely belonging to the whole etheric body, rather than an exact and definite sense-perception communicated through a specialized organ

As in later races and amid higher development the strength of the man is more and more thrown into the evolution of the mental faculties, this vague sensitiveness usually disappears; but still later, when the spiritual man begins to unfold, he regains his clairvoyant power. This time, however, the faculty is a precise and exact one, under the control of the man's will, and exercised through a definite sense-organ; and it is noteworthy that any nervous action set up in sympathy with it is now almost exclusively in the cerebro-spinal system.

Occasional flashes of clairvoyance do, however, sometimes come to the highly cultured and spiritual-minded man, even though he may never have heard of the possibility of training such a faculty. In his case such glimpses usually signify that he is approaching that stage in his evolution when these powers will naturally begin to manifest themselves, and their appearance should serve as an additional stimulus to him to strive to maintain that high standard of moral purity and mental balance without which clairvoyance is a curse and not a blessing to its possessor.

Between those who are entirely unimpressible and those who are in full possession of clairvoyant power there are many intermediate stages. One to which it will be worth while to give a passing glance is the stage in which a man, though he has no clairvoyant faculty in ordinary life, yet exhibits it more or less fully under the influence of mesmerism. This is a case in which the psychic nature is already sensitive, but the consciousness is not yet capable of functioning in it amidst the manifold distractions of physical life. It needs to be set free by the temporary suspension of the outer senses in the mesmeric trance before it can use the diviner faculties which are but just beginning to dawn within it. But of course even in the mesmeric trance there are innumerable degrees of lucidity, from the ordinary patient who is blankly unintelligent to the man whose power of sight is fully under the control of the operator, and can be directed whithersoever he wills, or to the more advanced stage in which, when the consciousness is once set free, it escapes altogether from the grasp of the magnetizer, and soars into fields of exalted vision where it is entirely beyond his reach.

Another step along the same path is that upon which such perfect suppression of the physical as that which occurs in the hypnotic trance is not necessary, but the power of supernormal sight, though still out of reach during waking life, becomes available when the body is held in the bonds of ordinary sleep. At this stage of development stood many of the prophets and seers of whom we read, who were 'warned of God in a dream,' or communed with beings far higher than themselves in the silent watches of the night.

Most cultured people of the higher races of the world have this development to some extent; that is to say, the senses of their astral bodies are in full working order, and perfectly capable of receiving impressions from objects and entities of their own plane. But to make that fact of any use to them down here in the physical body two changes are usually necessary; first, that the ego shall be awakened to the realities of that plane, and induced to emerge from the chrysalis formed by his own waking thoughts, and look round him to observe and to learn; and secondly, that the consciousness shall be so far retained during the return of the ego into his physical body as to enable him to impress upon his physical brain the recollection of what he has seen or learnt.

If the first of these changes has taken place, the second is of little importance, since the ego, the true man, will be able to profit by the information to be obtained upon that plane, even though he may not have the satisfaction of bringing through any remembrance of it into his waking life down here.

Students often ask how this clairvoyant faculty will first be manifested in themselves—how they may know when they have reached the stage at which its first faint foreshadowings are beginning to be

visible. Cases differ so widely that it is impossible to give to this question any answer that will be universally applicable.

Some people begin by a plunge, as it were, and under some unusual stimulus become able just for once to see some striking vision; and very often in such a case, because the experience does not repeat itself, the seer comes in time to believe that on that occasion he must have been the victim of hallucination. Others begin by becoming intermittently conscious of the brilliant colours and vibrations of the human aura; yet others find themselves with increasing frequency seeing and hearing something to which those around them are blind and deaf; others again see faces, landscapes, or coloured clouds floating before their eyes in the dark before they sink to rest; while perhaps the commonest experience of all is that of those who begin to recollect with greater and greater clearness what they have seen and heard on the other planes during sleep.

Having now to some extent cleared our ground, we may proceed to consider the various phenomena of clairvoyance under the three heads already mentioned.