

## Mind Games

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I saw the most incredible thing on TV the other day. A man put five small sewing needles in a shot glass, poured in wine and drank the whole concoction in one gulp. Next, he rolled up a ball of thread, stuck that in his mouth, and proceeded to swallow it. Then – *this is really weird!* – he began pulling at a thread protruding from his navel, and one by one out came five sewing needles attached to the thread! How'd he DO that?!

The real question is: DID he do that??

Astrology (horoscopes). Crystals. Ouija boards. Seances. Dowsing (finding underground water with a stick). Ghosts. Crop circles. Channeling (the dead speaking through living beings). Psychokinesis (affecting objects with the mind). Tarot cards. Nostradamus (16<sup>th</sup> century French “prophet”).

What these and other “paranormal” phenomena have in common is the ability to play upon the naivete and weakness of the indiscriminating mind. The stresses of this life can be so great that, without true knowledge, people are susceptible to quacks and charlatans who are all too willing to play with their minds – for a fee. And without certainty of the way things are (i.e., the revelation of God – THE truth), there is nothing by which to measure an astounding claim that has the appearance of legitimacy.

In other words, there are a lot of people in this world getting snookered. But they are getting snookered willingly. People continue to believe in such rubbish in the face of factual debunking. James Randi tells of an astrologer who claimed the ability to categorize people by their zodiacal sign simply by reading their biographies. On live British TV, twelve people were assigned a place on the stage according to their sign, then told to go to their correct sign if an error had been made. The astrologer got *all twelve* wrong. (*James Randi: Psychic Investigator*, p. 140)

This means that people have abandoned astrology because it has been proven a hoax, right? Or they've given up on believing in UFOs because crop circles were actually made by mischievous (and bored) farmers, right? Well, no. Because many people *want* to believe in the supernatural in the first place. So desperate are they that when the hoaxer himself admits his leg-pulling, the “true believers” reject the solid evidence in order to hang on to the illusion.

Where this human tendency becomes most hurtful is when the “supernatural” is attributed to divine origin. The same kinds of claims made by atheistic psychics are made by faith healers. No science. No verification. No objective testing to measure the outcome. Just take the Brother Slick's word for it (backed up by testimony from the poor soul who staggered across the stage to claim their healing), shout hallelujah and give your “love offering.” Oh yes, and wave goodbye to Brother Slick as he boards his private jet. Sorta like pulling sewing needles out of your belly button.

Paul told the Thessalonians that God would send to some “*strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness*” (2 Th 2:11-12). Hucksterism dressed in religious garb is still hucksterism. If fact it is the *best kind* of hucksterism, because it takes advantage of good-hearted but naïve people who are already predisposed to believe in other-worldly forces.

An informed Christian is strongly skeptical of claims that run counter to Biblical principles. He is grounded in the truth, no longer duped by the trickery of men (Eph 4:14). He does not confuse humility and the benefit of the doubt with gullibility. He senses fantasy while still admitting that there is much about this world yet unknown. You may fool him once in a while, but the Christian is not disposed to buying snake oil at the carnival.