

NEIL McNEILL

Paranormal Research & Education

Frequently Asked Questions about the Paranormal

© Neil McNeill

Q: What is "paranormal"?

A: For better or worse, "paranormal" has become associated with anything beyond normal experience. Paranormal also means *beside* or *next to* normal, which is an elegant description for some of the phenomena ascribed to it.

Q: So, do real scientists study this stuff?

A: Parapsychology is the scientific study of paranormal or psychic phenomena, also called *psi* (a Greek term for the mind/soul). Parapsychologists study human consciousness, not stuff like UFO's, demons, or astrology.

Q: What kinds of paranormal phenomena do parapsychologists study?

A: Psi phenomena tend to fall into three main groups: ESP (extrasensory perception, such as clairvoyance, telepathy, and precognition), Psychokinesis (mind over matter), and the Survival of Death. Evidence suggests that ESP may be linked with cases of hauntings, Psychokinesis with poltergeists, and Survival with apparitions.

Q: What is a ghost?

A: Simply put, a ghost is whatever – a soul, personality, consciousness, etc. – survives death and remains to interact with the living. Parapsychologists call this type of phenomenon an *apparition*, which can be seen, heard, felt, and smelled. Contrary to popular literature, most apparitions appear in broad daylight and are mistaken for real people. Several types of apparitions exist (both dead and living), and all appear interactive and aware.

Q: So, what is a haunting?

A: A haunting is tied to a specific location, which somehow "records" the sights and sounds of life events on the environment, and then plays them back regularly over time under the right conditions – just like watching a movie.

Q: Okay, then what is a poltergeist?

A: Research suggests that the brief but violent nature of poltergeist activity centers around – and is caused by – a living person. Typically, this "poltergeist agent" is not venting stress and anxiety normally, so their subconscious throws a "tantrum" of psychokinetic energy, causing loud noises, objects to fly around, electrical disruption, etc. Once the agent becomes aware of their involvement, the activity tends to stop.

Q: Aren't ghosts and psychic phenomena supposed to be harmful and evil?

A: We fear what we don't understand. As a matter of record, no one has ever been hurt or killed by a ghost (although you might injure yourself running away from one). Psi phenomena have gotten a bad rap from horror novels and movies – let's face it, evil sells! In most reports, apparitions behave as they did in life. In fact, most apparitions seem willing and able to communicate, so why not introduce yourself the next time you see one?

Q: I've seen those TV shows – don't they "bust" ghosts with all those fancy gadgets and detectors?

A: Parapsychologists always want hard evidence. Unfortunately, since we don't know exactly what a ghost is, we can't build devices to detect one. Technology is useful for documenting cases of psi, but overly-enthusiastic ghost hunters can confuse science with gadgets, promoting "evidence" that is questionable at best.

Q: This all sounds cool, but are there any paranormal resources that I can trust and use?

A: Absolutely. The Parapsychological Association (www.parapsych.org) and the Rhine Research Center (www.rhine.org) have recommended reading lists, comprehensive glossaries, and ways to test your own psi ability. Read about real investigators like Loyd Auerbach, Dean Radin, William Roll, and D. Scott Rogo. Finally, if you're in the Seattle area, you can take Neil McNeill's college-level courses!