

## R.S. 2811 - Close Encounters

In the contemporary UFO movement, UFO sightings, contacts, and abductions continue to be reported, and form the central core of the ongoing fascination with UFOs in popular culture. Each of these aspects of UFO phenomenon have significant religious overtones. Although UFO phenomena can be, and often are, understood outside the context of religious belief, there are strong religious or spiritual components to belief in and experience of contact with extraterrestrials and UFOs. This is true for any kind of close encounter, from the first to fourth kind. It is even more true for those who "channel" extraterrestrial entities, or for those who believe themselves to be the descendants of extraterrestrial visitors to earth. The religious implications of UFO sightings, contacts, and abductions have become increasingly evident over the past fifty years, as the UFO-as-advanced-technology thesis has failed to find incontrovertible support. Nevertheless, there are still a lot of participants in the broader UFO movement who reject any kind of religious interpretation of UFO phenomenon. For this reason, we should keep in mind that our discussion of the religious aspects of belief in UFOs and the experience of UFO abductions represents a generalization not necessarily applicable to the experiences of all members of the UFO movement.

### Close Encounter Experiences

There are religious aspects to all kinds of close encounters with UFOs. The phrase "close encounter" was originated by an astronomer named J. Allen Hynek who worked with the United States Air Force from 1949 to about 1970 on its investigations into UFO phenomenon, investigations that were code named projects Sign, Grudge, and Blue Book. According to the current U.S. Airforces' fact sheet on project Blue Book:

From 1947 to 1969, the Air Force investigated Unidentified Flying Objects under Project Blue Book. The project, headquartered at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, was terminated

Dec. 17, 1969. Of a total of 12,618 sightings reported to Project Blue Book, 701 remained "unidentified." The decision to discontinue UFO investigations was based on an evaluation of a report prepared by the University of Colorado entitled, "Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects;" a review of the University of Colorado's report by the National Academy of Sciences; previous UFO studies and Air Force experience investigating UFO reports during 1940 to 1969. As a result of these investigations, studies and experience gained from investigating UFO reports since 1948, the conclusions of Project Blue Book were:

- \_ No UFO reported, investigated and evaluated by the Air Force was ever an indication of threat to our national security;
- \_ There was no evidence submitted to or discovered by the Air Force that sightings categorized as "unidentified" represented technological developments or principles beyond the range of modern scientific knowledge; and
- \_ There was no evidence indicating that sightings categorized as "unidentified" were extraterrestrial vehicles. <sup>1</sup>

J. Allen Hynek's task with Project Bluebook was to investigate whether any natural celestial phenomenon - planets, stars, moons, comets, meteors, etc. - could account for Ufo sighting reports. After Project Blue Book was discontinued, J. Allen Hynek was sufficiently convinced that enough cases of UFOs remained unexplained to open the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS). CUFOS is dedicated to the scientific study of UFO phenomenon. They frequently publish criticisms of UFO claims, but they also accept evidence of certain cases of UFO sightings as genuine. CUFOS continues to use the system of categorization established by J. Allen Hynek during his time with Project Blue Book for describing UFO sightings. This system has become mainstream in UFO studies today.

Hynek's system of classification distinguished between what he called "distant" sightings, and "close" sightings of UFOs. Distant sightings were divided into three categories: Nocturnal Lights, lights seen in the sky at night; Daylight Discs, daytime sightings of discs and other shapes; and Radar-Visual sightings, those objects picked up by radar and confirmed by visual sightings. "Close" sightings were also divided into three categories:

- 1) Close Encounters of the First Kind: where the reported UFO is seen at close range, but there is no interaction between it and the surrounding environment (including the witness.)
- 2) Close Encounters of the Second Kind: where the reported UFO is seen at close range, and some kind of physical effect caused by the UFO is observed. Physical effects can range from flattened or scorched grass, broken trees, and frightened animals, to the failure of electrical and mechanical systems such as car or airplane engines, radios, and headlights.
- 3) Close Encounters of the Third Kind: where the occupants of the UFO, rather than the craft alone, are seen and reported. This category does not include channeled contact with extraterrestrials, or alien abductions.

In addition to these three categories of "close encounters," contemporary researchers have added two more. Alien abductions are called Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind, and are defined as:

personal contact between an individual or individuals... initiated by the "occupants" of the spacecraft. Such contact may involve the transportation of the individual from his or her terrestrial surroundings into the spacecraft, where the individual is communicated with and/or subjected to an examination before being returned. Such a close encounter is usually of a one-to-two hour duration.<sup>ii</sup>

Channeled contacts are often not included within the "close encounter" category, for they do not involve the physical presence of extraterrestrials or UFOs. Nonetheless, they share many of the following religious components with the four types of close encounters mentioned above, and are sometimes referred to as Close Encounters of the Fifth Kind.

#### Religious dimensions of Close Encounters

According to one religious studies scholar, there are a number of major religious themes within UFO sighting and contact accounts.<sup>iii</sup> These include the elements of mystery,

transcendence, belief in supernatural beings, perfection, salvation, cosmology, and transformation.

### Mystery

The first of these themes is mystery. UFOs are mysterious. They can help explain earthly mysteries, such as the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle, or the mystery of the astronomical knowledge (of Sirius) of the Dogon of West Africa, or the mysteries of the Bible. The Bermuda Triangle is often understood, within the confines of the UFO movement, as an area associated with UFO abductions and UFO sightings. The Bermuda Triangle is sometimes understood as the location in which Extraterrestrials maintain an underwater base on Earth. Alternately, it is sometimes seen as a location in which the psychic, spiritual energies of extraterrestrials becomes most manifest. This kind of emphasis can be seen in popular Hollywood films such as "Cocoon." The Dogon of West Africa are a tribe said to have ancient knowledge that Sirius, which appears as a single bright star to the naked human eye, is actually a double star system. This knowledge would not have been possible to obtain by simple unaided observation by the human eye. That the Dogon were aware of the double-star nature of Sirius is often seen, in the context of the UFO movement, as evidence for earlier contact between extraterrestrials and mankind's ancestors. The Bible, of course, contains a great many stories that can easily be interpreted as evidence for alien visitation. The most frequently cited are the visionary and "abduction" experiences of Elijah and Ezekial. Other mysteries, such as the stone figures on Easter Island, the monoliths of Stonehenge, and the myths of Atlantis and Lemuria are also often contextualized within a belief in contact with extraterrestrials.

In addition to explaining "old" mysteries, belief in UFOs can also give us new mysteries. Questions about how these unidentified flying objects can fly the way they appear to do,

disappear the way they appear to do, and leave unexplained evidence of their presence such as crop circles the way they appear to do engage our interest and become great subjects for speculation and debate. They also pose questions for us to ponder such as why they are here, why they are seen only by a few, and whether the government is aware of the who, what, and why of UFOs.

The occupants of UFOs also contribute to the mystery of UFO experiences. These occupants do mysterious things: they reportedly communicate via telepathy, levitate their abduction victims, and conduct inexplicable medical tests. Like the aura of mystery that surrounds religious figures and teachings, the aura of mystery that surrounds UFOs is part of their vast appeal.

### Transcendence

The second religious theme in UFO accounts is transcendence. UFOs and extraterrestrials transcend our limited perceptions and our limited experiences. They seem to be free of the limitations of the laws of nature, of the physical world, and of time-space as we know it. They have more in common with the gods and angels of religious literature than they do with engineering, technology or biology as we know it today. They evoke in their witnesses a sense of awe, of humility, and of personal conviction that rivals that of religious faith.

### Belief in Supernatural Beings

The third religious theme is that of a belief in supernatural entities. The extraterrestrials who are visiting earth are understood to have abilities, and powers, that transcend nature. They are often seen as immortal, telepathic, and god-like. Furthermore, their human contacts are also sometimes seen to have, or develop, supernatural powers. Ruth Norman, leader of Unarius, is

believed to have many psychic and occult powers, and several abductees have claimed that they no longer feel fully "human" after their experiences with extraterrestrials.

Like the wide variety of supernatural beings in the world's religions, the UFO movement has developed a whole "pantheon" of extraterrestrials that have been witnessed by UFO experiencers. These beings are understood to have different characteristics, different "powers," and different agendas, depending on their species. According to one scholar, there are six types of UFO entities or extraterrestrials that are commonly witnessed by UFO contactees and experiencers of close encounters.<sup>iv</sup> These types include: 1) Human (clearly human in appearance); 2) Humanoid (usually shorter than human, with large head and eyes); 3) Animal (mammalian, reptilian, or fishlike characteristics such as fur, claws, tail, scales, etc.); 4) Robot (metallic looking, or wearing space suit); 5) Exotic (bizarre characteristics, combination forms, unique forms); 6) Apparition (ghostly in appearance, appear and disappear, pass through walls, etc.) In addition to these general types, however, there are also some specific "species" of extraterrestrials that have entered into the folklore of the UFO spirituality movement. The most common "species" of aliens in the UFO movement are the Greys, the Blues, and the Pleiadians. Other Alien species, such as the Lyrians, the Sirians, the Orion Empire, and the Reptoids, also play a significant role in UFO spirituality.

### The Greys

The Greys are by far the most commonly witnessed extraterrestrial being. The Greys are described as being approximately four feet tall, hairless, sexless, with large dark eyes and limited facial features. They are thought to be from the Zeta Reticulus star system. They have visited earth repeatedly throughout human history, and some suggest that they have been manipulating our evolution for some unknown purpose. Others suggest that the Greys are simply the servants

of another race, and that it is this other race - the Reptoids - that is manipulating our evolution. It was Grey aliens that were reportedly witnessed by Barney Barnett at Corona following the Roswell crash. The Greys are also the aliens commonly associated with abduction experiences, including that of Betty and Barney Hill. The primary "power" of the grey aliens is reportedly their technology, although other powers such as telepathy are also linked to stories of the Greys.

Greys have advanced technology, which they use to study human beings. They are understood to be here on earth conducting secret reconnaissance of the planet, and to be abducting human beings for the purposes of medical experimentation. The medical experimentation conducted by the Greys often involves a sexual element, such as the taking of sperm or ova for purposes of genetic manipulation or hybridization (the mixing of human and alien genes). Some members of the UFO movement suggest this experimentation is purely hostile - an attempt to take over the earth using hybrid beings. Others suggest it has a more benign interpretation - that the earth will soon be facing serious environmental changes, including earthquakes, fires, volcanos, and possibly nuclear fallout, and that we will require alien intervention to survive these earth changes. The experiments of the Greys therefore become the means by which they work to ensure the survival of the human species.

Whether the Greys are hostile or benign, they are thought to be in league with the American government, and with other governments of the world. The governments of the world are thought to be actively working to keep knowledge of the Greys and their agenda from the public. The government conspiracy theory is a central component of the folklore associated with Greys. It is the thread with links isolated elements such as the Roswell crash, the abduction phenomenon, and the channeling phenomenon together. Other alien types are often defined in terms of their relationship to the Greys.

## The Blues

The Blues are reportedly similar in appearance to the Greys, but their skin has a translucent blue colouring, rather than the pale grey of the Greys. The Blues are thought to have arrived shortly after the Greys, around 1947, and to have approached the American government warning them not to deal with the Greys, for the Greys had a hidden agenda and would exploit the people of earth. The Blues urged the government to stay nonaligned, but the government reportedly ignored this warning. As a result, the Blues were forced to flee from the combined forces of Greys and government employed humans, and most left earth entirely. Some, however, went to Arizona and New Mexico, and allied with the Hopi Indians, particularly with a Hopi/Apache man named Robert Morningsky. The Hopi Indians called the Blues Star Warriors, after the figures in their own religious teachings who had battled evil Reptilian entities long ago, entities who had forced the primal Hopi people to flee the caves under the earth where they were born. Some suggest that the Reptilian beings of legend, and the Star Warriors of legend, were really Grey and Blue extraterrestrials in one of their earlier visits to earth, an idea that ties in with Erich von Däniken's theories. The Blues are thought to be benevolent entities, dedicated to helping humans defeat the plans of the Greys and the governments of the world. Their help consists mainly in teaching a spiritual philosophy of spiritual autonomy and growth.

## The Pleadians

The Pleadians are extraterrestrial entities currently channeled by a number of New Age and UFO spirituality channelers. The best known of these channelers is probably Barbara Marciniak, whom we discussed in our survey of Channeling. Billy Meier, whom we discussed last week, also claimed contact with the Pleadians. The Pleadians are thought to be a highly spiritually evolved species, very benevolent, who have participated throughout history in guiding

human evolution. When they communicate to humans through channelers, they speak as a collective rather than as individual entities. In cases like that of Billy Meier, they often speak through intermediaries, known as Nordics, who are human servants with blond hair and fair skin. Other alien species also use Nordics as intermediaries, including the Greys. Semjase, the beautiful blonde woman whom Meier met, was a Pleiadian, but also fits the Nordic pattern.

The Pleadians teach that earth is approaching a point of spiritual transformation, when we shall evolve from the third to the fourth dimension of reality, and thereby enter an era of peace, love, and light. The Pleadians themselves made this transition a long time ago. They now live in another dimension, not just another star system. Pleadians warn of the negative intentions of various other alien species, including the Greys and the Reptoids, discussed below.

#### Other Alien Types

There are several other alien species within the "pantheon" of extraterrestrials within the UFO spirituality movement. The Lyrians are thought to be a benevolent race, the progenitors of all humanoid species in the galaxy, including humans, the Blues and Greys, and the Pleadians. One channeler, named Lyssa Royale, suggests that the Lyrians can be categorized into several sub-groups, including a) Lyran Giants, who are six to nine feet tall, and who were the "gods" of human history; b) Lyran Redheads, who are red haired, green eyed, hot-tempered humanoids with a cosmic "chip" on their shoulders; c) Caucasian and Darker-Skinned Lyrians, the ancestors of all human beings; d) Birdlike Lyrians, who are "ectomorph, very thin, almost frail, and birdlike," and e) Catlike Lyrians, who have catlike eyes, are agile and strong, and a peach-fuzz like covering on their skin.<sup>v</sup> These latter two types had little contact with human beings in the past. The Lyrians have now evolved spiritually to a point that their physical natures are being left behind. This spiritual transformation is the same one that humans are evolving towards.

Like the Lyrians, the Sirians are believed to be a highly spiritually evolved species. They are not humanoid like the Pleiadians, however. Instead, they are believed to be a water-based lifeform, similar to dolphins and whales. Sirians are thought to work for the spiritual enlightenment of human beings, but also for the spiritual welfare of the dolphins and whales of earth's oceans.

The Orion Empire also figures significantly in the "pantheon" of alien beings within the UFO spirituality movement. The Orion Empire is believed to be made up of two opposing forces, known as the Council of Light and the Evil Orions. These two forces struggled for thousands of years, and in the process many planets were destroyed. The evil Orions were overcome hundreds of thousands of years ago, however, and the Council of Light has helped them get ready for a spiritual transformation to the fourth dimension, just as they are helping us. Many of these evil Orions were reincarnated to earth, where they have been atoning for their evil actions.

The Reptoids are a reptilian race, similar in appearance to the "Gorn" in *Star Trek* or the aliens in the television show "V". They are thought to be the "masters" of the Grey aliens, and to be blending their reptilian DNA with that of human beings. The Reptoids used to live here on earth, and plan to return at some point in the near future. They are an evil race planning the conquest of earth. They are also actively working to prevent human spiritual evolution. They wish to keep humans from perfecting themselves spiritually, so that we do not become equals or competitors to other galactic races. The Pleiadians channeled through Barbara Marciniak warn of the evil intentions of the Reptoid extraterrestrials.

Perfection

The fourth religious theme, that of perfection, is also readily apparent in UFO contact and sighting stories. Psychologist Carl Jung once suggested that the circular shape of UFOs is symbolic of perfection. According to contactees, the self-professed goal of many extraterrestrials is to help the human race perfect itself. They are often understood to have come from planets and societies without war, violence, poverty, prejudice, etc. Their technology is vastly superior to ours, their spirituality is vastly superior to ours, and their societies are vastly superior to ours. The pursuit of perfection is of course a religious goal. And as in the religious context, human beings are understood to need supernatural aid to attain this goal. The extraterrestrials fill that role.

### Salvation

The fifth religious theme apparent in UFO stories is that of salvation. The mission of extraterrestrial visitors to earth is often understood as one of salvation or redemption for human beings. Aliens are here because we are on the verge of destroying ourselves - either with nuclear weapons, or environmental disasters, or by failing to learn needed spiritual lessons. Extraterrestrials can save us by spreading the word of peace and harmony, or by intervening in natural disasters, or by manipulating our genetic code so that we can survive the coming "earth changes." As within many religious contexts, salvation is seen to come from outside, rather than from within ourselves.

### Cosmologies

The sixth religious theme, that of cosmology (or religious worldview), is one of the more fascinating parallels between UFO beliefs and experiences, and traditional religious ones. Recently, traditional Christian answers to questions such as the origin and meaning of life and the origin of the universe itself have come into question. Scientific answers to these questions,

however, are devoid of spiritual significance. People searching for alternate answers to such questions, therefore, that neither participate in the supernatural mysticism of Christian theology (God did it, and we can never know why...) nor the meaningless rationalism of science (it was an accident, there is no purpose...) can find them in a belief in UFOs. The cosmology of the UFO movement explores the question of our relationship to the rest of the universe, a question ignored within Christian cosmology. The cosmology of the UFO movement often posits the importance of earth and humans within the wider galactic or universal context (after all, we must be important if aliens are going to so much trouble to study us), but does not have the same human-centredness as traditional Christian cosmology. At the same time, in exploring our relationship to the rest of the universe, it suggests some deeper significance to our existence than that of a cosmic genetic accident, as suggested by contemporary science. The cosmology of the UFO movement can therefore unite, to some extent, the worldviews of religion and science.

### Transformation

The seventh element that UFO experiences and religion have in common is that they are transformative. Close encounters of the third and fourth kinds are intense experiences, often resulting in the transformation of the effected individual, and the details of their experiences are often articulated in ways similar to those of mystics and saints. It has been suggested that a close encounter is like a rite of passage - perhaps, given our society's lack of such rituals, the close encounter is a way to mark a major transformation in identity or consciousness. The contactee or abductee is put into a circumstance where they must reevaluate their entire worldview, their belief systems, and their religious faith. They become set apart from their fellow human beings - indeed, are often ostracized and ridiculed, and must take a stance to defend their experiences, "witnessing" to the truth of their convictions in ways reminiscent of Christian evangelism.

## "Mystical" Encounters

The parallels between these experiences and those of Christian mystics have been noted by folklorist Hilary Evans.<sup>vi</sup> He suggests that there are six basic elements in a close encounter of the third or fourth kind, which are:

- 1) it is usually a solitary experience.
- 2) it occurs in an isolated place.
- 3) wise superior beings take the initiative, and guide the contactee.
- 4) light is a dominant symbol in the experience.
- 5) there is a sexual element.
- 6) there is an absence of natural sounds, such as bird song.

According to Hilary Evans, these are all classic elements of religious mystical and initiatory experiences. In other words, the very structure of a UFO contact or abduction experience mirrors that of classically religious experiences known throughout the world. There are three basic explanations for the parallels between classic mystical experiences, and UFO contact experiences. The first, drawing upon the impact of von Däniken's theory, is that when mystics thought they were in communication with supernatural or divine beings, they were in fact in contact with extraterrestrials. This argument is frequently made within the UFO movement. The second explanation, made within the context of the extraterrestrial channeling movement, is that extraterrestrials really are wise spiritual beings, and hence the human response to their presence is logically going to be similar to other religious or spiritual experiences that humans have recorded. The third explanation, a sceptical one, suggests that the human mind is simply capable of producing certain purely internal, mental stimuli, and that the fact that humans have such experiences, and variously interpret them as contact with gods or aliens, does not mean that

either entity necessarily exists. This third explanation, of course, does not often feature prominently in the UFO movement.

### Abduction Experiences

In addition to these seven thematic parallels between close encounter experiences and religious ones, psychologist John E. Mack has also suggested eight ways in which close encounters of the fourth kind - alien abductions - trigger a religious transformation of consciousness.<sup>vii</sup> Dr. Mack has become a fairly controversial figure. He is a Harvard University psychologist and practising psychiatrist at Cambridge Hospital, and is the recipient of the Pulitzer Prize. He has also come (somewhat reluctantly, at least initially), to believe in extraterrestrials and alien abductions. According to Dr. Mack's clinical work with more than seventy alien abductees, between 1989 and 1994, the abduction experience itself seems to hold religious implications. According to Mack, the eight types of experience within abductions that hold these implications are enough to support the argument that extraterrestrial visitors have a spiritual agenda as well as any other agenda they might be fulfilling.

The eight elements of abduction experiences that Dr. Mack identifies as spiritual are as follows:

- 1) Pushing Through: when undergoing psychiatric treatment for the stress of an abduction experience, abductees fully experience and reexperience the fear and rage caused by the abduction, and come to term with the reality of the event. This is important within our sceptical cultural context, for it lends legitimation to the experience, and hence to whatever meaning or message the experience holds for the abductee. This in turn allows the abductee to develop, in their own perceptions, a more reciprocal relationship with the extraterrestrials, rather than the purely one-sided relationship of abductor and victim. This relationship then leads to an

environment in which learning and growth can take place, overcoming the "victim/victimizer" emphasis which is usually the abductee's initial framework for understanding their experience.

2) Aliens as Intermediaries: abductees come to see the aliens as intermediaries between the fully physical state of human beings, and the fully spiritual/consciousness state of God. Extraterrestrials come to be viewed as "light beings" or "angels" - not divine, but not fully mortal either. This perception emerges as a result of the "powers" that the alien abductors display - telepathy, teleportation, etc., and also as a result of the messages of the aliens themselves.

3) Homecoming: many abductees experiences a sense of homecoming during their hypnotically induced recall of abduction experiences. They feel joy and completeness at the idea of being united with the cosmos. Sometimes, they weep with sadness when they leave that state and awaken from their trance. This sense of homecoming is often linked to a conviction that the human abductee is genetically related to the extraterrestrial visitors - either genetically related as a result of extraterrestrial "seeding" of earth with genetic material hundreds of thousands of years ago, or sometimes as a result of more recent alien intervention in their own or their families' genetic codes.

4) Past life Experiences: abductees often experience recall of past lives while under hypnotic regression. Many abductees recall abduction experiences tracing back to infancy, and when these experiences are explored, they also recall feelings of complaint about being "back again" in another human incarnation. The past lives they recall seem linked to their spiritual development in this life. This emphasis on past life experiences firmly links the abduction experience with other aspects of the New Age/alternate spirituality movements. 5) Altered view of Human Identity: abductees with past-life recollections develop a different view of what it means to be human. Death and birth are understood in a new context, and consciousness is understood as

separate from bodily incarnations. Abductees come to see "humanness" as reflected in consciousness, rather than in biology. This in turn leads to a more universal sense of community with all human beings, and subsequently to a sense of community with other species as well.

6) Transpersonal Experiences: in separating their sense of self from the particular bodily incarnation they are currently experiencing, abductees learn to then identify with many other non-human beings - animals, aliens, etc. They no longer feel isolated in their own minds, or within their own species. Dolphins and Whales, in particular, come to be seen as sentient beings in their own right, and the human claim to be the sole intelligent species on the planet is rejected. Again, this also leads to the perception of our place in a cosmic fellowship of beings.

7) Double Alien/Human Identity: many abductees experience a sense of double identity: that is, that they are both fully human, but also alien. Many experience "flashbacks" in which they find themselves doing to others the things that aliens did to them during an abduction experience. Coming to terms with the double identity leads many abductees to a sense of spiritual completion. They come to see that the fear they experienced as an abductee was a temporary and necessary experience, and that the abduction was genuinely a positive experience done for necessary spiritual reasons.

8) The Collapse of Space/Time Dichotomies: abductees who successfully work through the trauma caused by the experience subsequently learn to see beyond the categories of time and space within which we tend to operate. They have a very difficult time articulating this perception, since the experience is outside of our conceptual categories. Past, present, and future come to have little meaning. Near and Far, in universal terms, also lose their meaning. A monistic perception of time, space, and consciousness emerges.

Responses to the religious aspects of UFO phenomenon

It is clear that there really are clear parallels between religious experiences, and the experiences of close encounters. These parallels are not necessarily interpreted in the same way, however, by all participants in the broader UFO movement. There are many different responses by UFO believers to these parallels, ranging from outright dismissal to full, enthusiastic exploration. Generally speaking, however, responses tend to fall into one of two areas. First, many UFO enthusiasts simply reject the spiritual parallels evident in UFO sighting and abduction stories, and insist that anyone who finds religious significance in, or who receives a religious message during a UFO encounter, is simply deluded. This position is the strongest position among those who adopt the UFO-as-alien-technology/government conspiracy model of UFO phenomenon.

Second, some participants in the UFO movement actively explore the parallels between UFO contact and abduction accounts, and become convinced that extraterrestrials are spiritually advanced entities here to contribute to our own spiritual evolution. For most within this second perspective, the world's religious traditions become source-texts to show a long-standing pattern of contact and intervention by alien beings, who are understood to have been guiding our religious evolution for many thousands of years. This guidance is understood to be ongoing, and no matter what these alien beings are reputedly seen to do in the contemporary context, it is interpreted within this perception of a benign spiritual agenda.

For the vast majority of those who adopt this perspective, interest in the parallels between close encounter experiences and religious experiences is of minor spiritual concern, and does not result in any kind of shift in spiritual practice. This seems to be the case for Dr. Mack, and many others. For a small minority, this perspective does become a major focus of practice as well as interest. Channelers of extraterrestrial intelligences, or those who adopt the philosophies of

extraterrestrial beings as channeled through others, fall into this category. Barbara Marciniak is an example of this type. For a very small minority of others, this interest becomes the central focus of their spiritual faith and practice in another way, and they join with others to form new "UFO religions" focused around this perspective. The Aetherius Society, Unarius and The Raelian Movement represent three examples of this latter category that we will be exploring in the final section of our course.

### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> "Unidentified Flying Objects And Air Force Project Blue Book." USAF (US Air Force) website, [http://www.af.mil/factsheets/fs\\_188.shtml](http://www.af.mil/factsheets/fs_188.shtml). Accessed June 30, 2003.

<sup>ii</sup> Bryan 1995, p. 9.

<sup>iii</sup> Saliba, John A. "Religious Dimensions of UFO Phenomena," in The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds. James R. Lewis, ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 15-64, p. 41. Saliba lists seven characteristics: mystery, transcendence, belief in supernatural entities, perfection, salvation, religious worldview, and spirituality.

<sup>iv</sup> Alvin Lawson "Archetypes and Abductions." Frontiers of Science 2 6:32-36. Cited in John A. Saliba, "Religious Dimensions of UFO Phenomena," in The Gods have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds. Ed. James R. Lewis. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 15-64, p. 24.

<sup>v</sup> Lyssa Royale. "Galactic Family, An Overview of Genotypes." <http://www.spiritweb.org/Spirit/galactic-family.html#Pleiadians> Accessed January 6, 1998, pp.1-5.

<sup>vi</sup> Saliba 1995, p. 51. Citing Hilary Evans, Gods, Spirits, and Cosmic Masters: A Comparative Study of the Encounter Experience. Wellingborough, UK: Aquarian press, 1987, pp. 239-240.

<sup>vii</sup> Mack, John E. Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994, pp. 48-49.