

The confessions of a leading psychic

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THE CONFESSIONS OF A LEADING PSYCHIC

If one of the "world's leading psychics" confessed to being a hoax what would he or she say? Seldom does the world find out because leading psychics seldom ever reveal to the public the tricks of their trade. In 1981, however, one of this country's leading psychics did confess to being a hoax. That confession, unfortunately, took place during a television special which was aired only once and never repeated (a transcript was never published). SCS is pleased to publish here for the first time excerpts from that rare and fascinating television interview with confessed psychic James Hydrick.

First some background information on James Hydrick. Hydrick rose to national fame after appearing on a December 1980 taped broadcast of ABC's popular program "That Incredible." Hydrick appeared to demonstrate for the viewing audience very strong psychokinetic powers. These powers enabled Hydrick to flip the pages of a telephone book (without touching the book) and cause a pencil to turn on a table merely by the power of his will. The tabloid newspaper The Star quickly ran an article on Hydrick labeling him "The World's Top Psychic." The glowing account labeled Hydrick's powers as "incredible and staggering." Other newspapers revealed that Hydrick could cure headaches and colds with a touch and answer questions before they were asked.

A scientist and electrical engineer from the University of Utah after much testing also concluded that Hydrick's psychic powers were indeed authentic.

Hydrick claimed that he had learned these powers from special training in the martial arts and that he could teach these powers to anyone. Hydrick opened a popular and successful school where he professed to be able to teach psychokinetic powers.

While Hydrick was fooling the gullible he was not fooling magician and psychic investigator James Randi. As Randi recounted the incident in the The Skeptical Inquirer (Summer 1981), "What of the pencil and page tricks? Well, my jaundiced eye recognized these as rather tired old tricks...Hydrick was simply blowing the page over, and he spun the pencil around by the same means. Not immediately evident are these facts, however: First, the blast of air from a half-open mouth takes time to get to the props, and Hydrick made sure he turned his head away from the pencil and the page after giving a sharp puff of air, so that he was facing away

when the action occurred. Second, one blows not directly at the prop but at the table surface."

Randi immediately offered Hydrick his prize of \$10,000 for proof of one paranormal demonstration under proper conditions of observations. Hydrick accepted Randi's offer and agreed to be tested on the TV show "That's My Line." During a rehearsal practice session with Hydrick the day before the actual taping Randi had the session, unknown to Hydrick, videotaped, with a highly sensitive microphone aimed and focused at Hydrick's mouth, and with the amplifier turned up far beyond normal voice level. Randi's microphone recorded monumental blasts of air every time the page moved or the pencil turned.

For the actual taped show Hydrick was allowed to perform each trick once without any controls; then he was required to submit to a controlled test designed by Randi. John Palmer, a member of the Parapsychological Association and two UCLA scientists were called in as judges of Hydrick's abilities. The prize check was held by "That's My Line" host Bob Barker, and was to be surrendered to the proper person at the close of the test.

Randi's simple but controlled test involved emptying a small can of styrofoam particles around the open book. In this way, any blowing would show up as a massive movement of the particles. In case Hydrick claimed that his power could not differentiate between the pages of the book and the styrofoam particles, Randi was prepared to place a simple germ-mask on his face, which would in no way interfere with his breathing or his psychic functions but would prevent one thing-blowing. Not only did Hydrick fail to perform with the styrofoam particles in place, but he refused altogether to use the face mask. Hydrick spent ninety minutes trying to move the page of the telephone book without success. The judges were polled, and all agreed absolutely that Hydrick had failed to show them anything paranormal. What was Hydrick's reply? "This isn't a magician's trick. I just can't come up - bang bang - and its over. I have to be where I can work with something small than big to build up my own self. It isn't a trick. It has to be done..It's mental power."

A few months later Hydrick again agreed to undergo testing of his psychic abilities. This time proper controls were used and he failed to exhibit any psychic powers. Hydrick giving in to a lost cause confessed to magician Danny Korem. Korem was part of the team testing Hydrick. Also present was Hugh Ainsworth, a former bureau chief for Newsweek. Hydrick began his confession by talking of his fascination with magicians at the age of nine.

HYDRICK: He [the magician] would show how easy it was to trick people. Slight-of-hand, etc. Things like that impressed me. How

close-minded a lot of people really were. It was so fascinating to see how people would miss things just like that. The obvious things they would miss. I was impressed by Houdini's trick of vanishing an elephant off a stage. I could figure out how it was done. I began to think, if people go crazy over that, maybe I should do something people go crazy over.

KOREM: Why did you feel that you had to tell people that you had powers that you didn't have?

HYDRICK: Because I wanted attention. My parents would never give it to me. I would always be ignored or kicked around. I had to do this to make me feel good. It gave me confidence. Everytime someone thought what I did was very good but I'd never tell them what it was. I'd tell them it was something else. Because if I told them what it was they would say "Fine, it's just a trick." But I would always tell them it was something else so I would continue to get recognition.

KOREM: You were on "That's Incredible" a few months ago and you really tricked them.

HYDRICK: I tricked the whole world.

KOREM: Yes. What did it make you feel like?

HYDRICK: I did that to reach. It's like a hand reaching out for recognition. I don't know...I just wanted to be known. I needed to be recognized. All my life, I've been...I hate to keep going back to the past, but I don't know. I wanted to do that because it was different. I just wanted to see how open minded people were. I wanted to see if these people who were so-called intelligent and I was so-called dumb; I mean, surely I'm here for a reason. My whole idea behind this in the first place was to see how dumb America was. How dumb the world is.

KOREM: How do you cause the objects to move?

HYDRICK: People are looking [at the object] and waiting and so it moves, ok? Actually it didn't move from psychic powers it moved from something else - physical. It moves from air currents.

KOREM: From where?

HYDRICK: From my mouth. But you can't tell it because it took so many years of practicing to get this down pat to where you can't

see it.

KOREM: What you did, if I'm not mistaken, was to take somebody, hold their hand and get them to point at the leaf and then you would make the leaf move?

HYDRICK: Right. It's called the power of suggestion. Once you can get a person to believe that he can actually do something - then perhaps he can do it.

KOREM: What did you do? Can you show me?

HYDRICK: First of all I'm not just puffing out the air because that can be seen. I am taking the air from my inside and making it come out in a way in which it doesn't show. I can direct the air in a way that it hits head on every time. I spent one year and six months in solitary confinement. All this time I had been thinking and thinking...then that's it!

KOREM: You had all the time you needed to learn how to breath and make it move.

HYDRICK: I had spent hours and hours. I'd hold by breath. Different breathing controls. So many ways. I could make deputies think someone touched them on their neck because I could breath in a certain way on their neck. They would feel something and say "That's a ghost!" They would piss on the floor and go running out of there! It was something that was fascinating to me and it got me recognition. I mean every deputy in that jail was so frightened of me. "That guy is possessed!" I remember when I was in the Chaplin's office. He taught me how to read and write. And I would convert people from bad to good. He told me that you had to turn them onto Jesus, the Lord. And he gave me a Bible and I'd read it. Then I got an idea! Now, I've never told Brother Joe this, and I've never told anyone this, but I would convert twenty inmates a day. That was my limit. I would have to convert twenty inmates a day. I'd get up there and start telling them about Jesus and stuff. And when I'd see that they were beginning to get turned off - I'd stop and say "You don't believe that it exists?" - I'd take a Bible and open it up and say "If the Lord is here with me make these pages move!" or I'd open the Bible and say "Hold the Bible. Father in the name of Jesus Christ make these pages move." And the pages would move! And the guys are going "Oh my God!!!" Everytime it worked. Then I would say "It's in you." Or I take a pencil and put it there and say I've got to call the Lord; but you are going to have the power to do this if you

accept the Lord. The next thing you know you would see them with this big cross and handing Bibles out to people!

When in Egypt performing for family members of the late Anwar Sadat, Hydrick relates how he healed a woman stricken by a heart attack.

HYDRICK: She strongly believed that I could actually heal her.

KOREM: What did you do that made her believe that?

HYDRICK: I'd move things. I'd show her so many things. I would touch her and she would feel weird things. But its only in her mind. She wanted to feel those things.

KOREM: Do you feel bad because you...

HYDRICK: No! No! I don't feel bad at all. It would be different if you tricked them and done wrong, but I tricked them for their good.

KOREM: Were adults fooled by what you did as well as children?

HYDRICK: Absolutely. As a matter of fact, there was more adults fooled then children.

KOREM: Why?

HYDRICK: Because a lot of the adults are looking for something like this. They want to see something like this.

KOREM: Do you think that parents watching this particular program might think that what you are trying to start was a cult?

HYDRICK: Yes.

KOREM: You did not want to start a cult?

HYDRICK: No.

KOREM: You know that you can't read and write and that you lack education. Do you think the possibilities existed that somebody could have used you to start a cult?

HYDRICK: Absolutely! Kurbegovic. King Moharem Kurbegovic, the Applebit bomber, who blew up the airport in LA. He wanted to use

me for a cult. Sirhan Sirhan who was part of the cult Aliens of America (AOA). These people wanted to use me as a leader of their cult.

KOREM: How did they want to use you?

HYDRICK: To brainwash people. By showing that this power came from something that it didn't. As with the Jim Jones incident. That would never have taken place if peoples' minds would have been open. It would have been stopped.

Editor's note. Hydrick's connection with Sirhan Sirhan has never been verified. Hydrick is now serving time in jail