

BOOK REVIEW

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Future Memory: How Those Who “See the Future” Shed New Light on the Workings of the Human Mind, by P. M. H. Atwater. New York, NY: Birch Lane Press, 1995, 224 pp., \$17.95.

The human adventure is indeed much broader and deeper than Western culture might once have believed. In P. M. H. Atwater's book *Future Memory*, she convincingly presents and documents a type of experience that few people ever encounter. The evidence for this phenomenon, which she calls “future memory,” is offered in a most persuasive manner. After interviewing many individuals who have encountered this experience, and combining those data with her own personal experiences, Atwater outlines a pattern associated with future memory.

The sequence for this pattern usually begins with a physical sensation such as a rush of heat and a feeling of exhilaration, followed by a freezing of time-space relationships, and a sense of expansion of space. In this frozen time, one encounters the future event, or future memory: “It is detailed and fully involved, replete with thoughts, conversations, moving, touching, accomplishments, and relating to people, places, activities, and events” (p. 24). Afterwards there is a return to the normal space-time relationships, with after-effects of being startled or chilled by the event. Eventually one experiences the actual living of the pre-experienced event. These incidents, we are told, are generally infrequent, and usually, but not always, occur when one is alert and busy, rather than in a relaxed, passive, or sleeping state.

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But what can one make of such a phenomenon if one has never had such an experience? In present Western cultural thinking, such events are, needless to say, difficult if not impossible to explain. Our culture, being primarily concerned with exploring events that most individuals can experience, is not well equipped to explain events that very few individuals experience. And "future memory" certainly confronts our present conventional understanding of time, space, and matter. It has always been a major problem to explain and to justify experiences that take us beyond our everyday reality, into a realm unknown to our culture's "normal" world. We tend to dismiss them as aberrant, fanciful, or unimportant, if not worse. For those who have had such experiences, it seems natural to attempt to use the most recent scientific understandings to give credence and respectability to such experiences, even though Western science has not yet reached that ability to discuss them intelligently. Still, one feels obligated to move our thinking forward in view of this greater experiential, intuitive, and seemingly contradictory reality.

Atwater uses a spectrum of concepts from various disciplines in an effort to find a suitable justification or category for "future memory." The reader will find mentioned scientists such as Albert Einstein, David Bohm, and Stephen Hawking, and physical concepts such as relativity, quantum mechanics, black holes, tachyons, and chaos theory. Atwater also uses Lawrence LeShan's notion of "alternative realities," Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow states," Carl Jung's "synchronicity," and Itzhak Bentov's classification of objective, subjective, and convergent time-space relationships. With some of these connections the reader may feel in agreement, while with others the reader may be uncomfortable. One will have to decide for oneself which of these connections are appropriate, as one weaves through Atwater's conceptual labyrinth.

In the end, one does leave this book with a feeling that our sense of time-space-matter is very limited. We know little of who we are and why we are here. We have an idea of these concepts based on a cultural consensus from our most common state of mind. We are presently dominated by the objective scientific understandings of time-space-matter and have little understanding of their subjective realities. We may not be ready to ground "future memory" in our science or our culture, but we can begin to categorize and explore such phenomena until we can in some sense establish a framework out of which to operate. Atwater makes numerous suggestions, exploring numerous perspectives, and includes various disciplines so

that doors might open for individuals with different expertise. But at the same time, it will require a collegial consensus to establish the big picture for this phenomenon.

Atwater writes, "my goal here, the real purpose of this book, is to construct a framework, hopefully a meaningful context, with which we might better understand what happens during a brain shift and what may be at the very core of existence itself" (p. xiv). But she also, by documenting the phenomenon, opens the doors for others. As we allow people to discuss more openly their very private experiences, we also allow them and ourselves to accept these profound experiences as normal human events. We find that in other cultures, where human existence is viewed differently, human existence is also experienced differently.

I found this book well worth investigating, and call upon its readers to learn from it not necessarily a justification for the experience of "future memory," but an appreciation of how much we don't know, of how this phenomenon confronts our presently limited cultural, scientific, and experiential knowledge, and of how far we still have to go to understand truly the mystery of our very existence. The point is not how our present scientific knowledge can explain or rationalize this experience, but rather how this phenomenon can challenge our science to grow.