

# Straight Talk #19 On Ghosts

by William J. Schnobelen, © 2011

Ghosts are a perennial favorite with people seeking spiritual help or solace. Virtually every culture has a belief in survival beyond the grave and many actually *worship* their departed ancestors. This is especially true in Asia and Africa and in some Native American tribes.

Ghosts and their attendant phenomena are enjoying a revival in the media that began with the film GHOST years ago. This film was a romantic fantasy about a murdered husband who haunts his wife and eventually tries to communicate with a bogus medium to help protect his wife from his own murderer. Since then, we have the immensely popular (and Academy Award winning) film, THE SIXTH SENSE, and the TV series THE X-FILES and MEDIUM and THE OTHERS plus a lot of "trash tabloid" TV and papers. All of these different media feed on human curiosity and fear of ghosts and the supernatural.

A ghost could best be defined as some manifestation (either visual, auditory or psychokinetic - moving or effecting physical objects) of a dead person in the world of the living.

In terms of modern society in Western culture, ghosts have had an uneven history. Belief in ghosts declined in the West with the advent of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and the rise of the scientific method. (1700 - 1800) Belief in ghosts was consigned to "superstition" and folklore.

However, as so often happens, these things move in cycles. *There was a great spiritual hunger* in the US following the fading out of the huge revivals of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Satan is always quick to move in and fill a vacuum.

In the 1820's a pair of American sisters named Fox started up what came to be known as the "spiritualist movement." Briefly, these young women heard tapping on the walls of their home and came to believe it was a spirit or ghost. (See endnote 1) They developed a code by which they could "communicate" with this entity. From these humble beginnings, an entire movement of spiritualism (See endnote 2) and "psychic research" was founded.

Their rise precipitated a cascade of screwball spiritual groups, some of which have strong relations to spiritualism and have become worldwide movements. Among the most prominent would be the LDS church (Mormons), the Theosophical Society, the Association for Research and Enlightenment and scads of spiritualist and New Age-type groups! Since the 1970's the list has grown almost endless!

## A Brief Overview

Originally, spiritualism started as what is technically called a **poltergeist** phenomenon. Poltergeists (German for "noisy ghost") are ghosts that are heard or felt but not seen. They may do as they did with the original Fox sisters and rap or tap on walls. They also do more bizarre things. Sometimes they will lift or move furniture, throw things, play pianos or - oddly enough - turn on modern appliances.

Many years ago, this writer personally observed a home where at the time when the classic show ALL IN THE FAMILY was on, the TV set would turn on by itself to that channel. You could not change the channel for that half hour. The supposed explanation was that the ghost was the revenant of a Vietnam soldier killed over there from the family's home who "haunted" the TV because he like the show.

Other poltergeists are not so cute. We dealt with one poltergeist that threw kitchen knives around the kitchen. It was like standing in the middle of a knife-throwing fight. One of my friends was thrown through a door by a supposed poltergeist hard enough to throw out a shoulder.

Then we have the ghost that is seen or heard but not usually felt. These may appear as shimmering balls of light or as actual vague phantasms of actual people. In the latter case, they often resemble old family portraits and are usually in monochrome (black and white). They often appear translucent. Sometimes these ghosts simply stand there still and silent. They might appear anywhere (indoors or out - day or night), but are often associated with places where people (often the dead they resemble) have died violently, suddenly or by suicide. Rarely, they appear in such a fashion that they appear indistinguishable from a living person. They are in "full color" and appear to have mass and substance. You cannot see through them.

It is taught in spiritualism (and has been picked up by some scientific researchers) that the way ghosts appear is by materializing "ectoplasm." The word is derived from the Greek word ECTO meaning outside-of. Thus, it is some sort of plasmic (organic) substance from outside the realms of biology.

Ectoplasm is usually some sort of etheric, wispy or viscous material that the ghost can supposedly congeal into a physical form or shape. Some old-time spiritualist mediums have been observed with ectoplasm oozing out of their navels or vaginas (right through clothing) in a string like an umbilical cord that then forms into the head or full body apparition of a ghost. Such mediums were rare and may have been fakers. Ectoplasm became nationally known when the film GHOSTBUSTERS came out in the 1980's. The show presented spirits who "slimed" the heroes with supposed ectoplasm that looked rather like a disgusting cross between mucus and petroleum jelly.

Spiritualism really took off in the US with the onset of the Civil War. This was because of the horrible carnage where many families lost one or more men to combat. Spiritualism offered the deceitful hope that grieving mothers could contact their departed sons who had died alone on the battlefield and say their farewells. It enjoyed another resurgence after World War I (in fact, the post WWI period was probably spiritualism's absolute hey-day). It is becoming more popular again today because of all the precious soldiers being killed overseas and their families seeking solace.

## SPECIAL SPOOKS?

Thus far, all of these spirits were pretty much ordinary people, usually relatives of those seeking spiritualist churches or mediums out. A different direction of spiritualism took off in 1875 with the founding of the Theosophical Society (TS) (Greek for "divine wisdom") by Madame Blavatsky.

The TS is the matriarch of the modern New Age movement and an exploration of it is beyond the scope of this booklet. With the TS a new twist was added to spiritualism by the TS. Blavatsky taught that she had been contacted by various "Tibetan Masters" who were dead, but MORE than dead.

These Masters were not just your ordinary dead dudes like dear old Uncle Harry. They were "Ascended Masters" or (to use the Sanskrit term) Boddhisatvas. Implicit in the TS teaching was the Asian doctrine of **reincarnation**; and Theosophy has been described as Anglicized Hinduism. A Boddhisatva is one who has gone through so many lifetimes that they have finally perfected themselves.

Then, as perfected beings, they incarnate again to help us lowly humans perfect ourselves. In TS teaching, beings like Buddha, Krishna or "Jesus" are Masters who came back one last time at various points in human history to guide us. Then, having lived that one final life, become ASCENDED Masters.

Thus, these beings are not just ghosts but "super-ghosts" who have great wisdom and knowledge. They are seen today very prominently in the channeling craze where various channellers (a modern term for medium) bring through "Masters" who give supposedly awesome spiritual teaching. However, they are still technically ghosts; even though you rarely, if ever, hear of them physically manifesting. Usually, they just speak through human mediums. We do not have time to go into any more depth on this "species" of ghost in this paper, but we discuss them further in other publications. (See endnote 3)

Thus, we have the ghosts that can be seen and often heard - either through mediums or by themselves. Ghosts sometimes speak, but mostly they are either moaning or crying. They are usually presented as beings in some sort of torment. Poltergeists, on the other hand, are felt rather than seen.

## **“Who Ya Gonna Call?”**

Most ghosts (either regular or poltergeist) are confined to particular locality or residence. This is called haunting. It can often be disturbing to people who live nearby. This writer and his wife have done our share of “ghost-busting,” cleaning out many, many homes over the years in the name and power of Yah’shua the Messiah (Jesus Christ in Hebrew).

Both in conventional spiritualism and from our Biblical perspective, most hauntings occur in places where there has been some sort of horrible crime or death. Often there has been a murder or suicide. Some hauntings actually survive the home. Even if the home is torn down, the apparitions or poltergeists persist. Spiritualists believe that ghosts are usually emotionally disturbed dead people who are hanging around the residence because they either do not realize that they are dead (?) or that they have some unfinished business they need to do. (See endnote 4)

Here is an illustration of a classic, yet unusual haunting. More than a decade before coming to Christ, I encountered a haunting where a priest had died of old age in an old college building where there was a chapel where the priest celebrated Mass. A few days after the funeral, footsteps were heard walking around the sanctuary of the chapel. Once a ghostly shape in black (the colors of a priest) was seen by the altar.

It was assumed that this chapel was a holy place, and therefore people wondered how it could be haunted (a common misconception). Then one of the priests living there remembered something. The departed priest had been quite old and arthritic and not too dexterous. About a week before he died, he had dropped a ciborium (See endnote 5) full of consecrated hosts before communion.

Recall that Catholics, especially before the 1970's (See endnote 6), earnestly believed that every such communion host was literally the body and blood, soul and divinity of Yah’shua. This priest would have believed that. Acting on a hunch, the priest investigating the haunting ordered some seminarians to search the sanctuary. In doing so, they found one tiny wafer that had rolled out of sight, underneath a lectern. This was taken up by the priest and disposed of.

For a priest to allow a host to lie on the floor like that where a mouse or other vermin might eat it would have been a serious sacrilege; even though it was an accident. Interestingly enough, once the host was disposed of, the haunting stopped. That is because the dead priest's "unfinished business" was taken care of.

More horrible examples of hauntings would include homes where murders, suicides or adultery or child abuse have taken place being haunted. When still pagans, we had a house in Milwaukee that repeatedly tried to kill us. When we were moving in, we actually heard a voice say, "I will kill you." Though we lived there for several years, we never did learn why. But the next tenant of the home moved in perfectly well, and died of cancer horribly within six months. That would be a poltergeist type haunting, and we never did learn why it was going on there. Thankfully, YHWH kept us alive.

The first haunting we dealt with was a prominent home on the bluffs of Dubuque, Iowa. There, it turned out that supposedly a specter of a woman was trying to warn the family who now lived there. She had been a nurse in her life, and was trying to protect the family's children from the specter of a man who had (during his life) molested children and was now threatening these children.

## What does the Bible Say?

Having given you an over-view of what types ghosts there are and why they usually appear; let us see if we can cast some light from the Creator's truth on ghosts. First of all, let me say that the Bible does teach, in no uncertain terms that human beings are made up of a body, soul and spirit (**1Thess. 5:23**); and that the two latter components of our humanity (soul and spirit) survive death. The body is, of course, our physical fleshly component. We need little help identifying that.

The spirit (RUACH in Hebrew) is usually identified with the divine spark that God gives everyone when they are created (**John 1:4**). It is what is eternal within us and, in saved people, it is the temple where the Holy Spirit dwells.

The soul (called NEFESH in Hebrew) is normally thought of as a life principle, what keeps us alive. It is us, who we are. That is why it is our soul that needs to be saved. In a sense, we could say that each person is a soul that is quickened by their spirit - both of which dwell in a body.

Actually, the soul would actually be what would be thought of as being seen in ghostly apparitions. According to the Bible, our souls do seem to resemble us physically. They have eyes (**Luke 16:23**), tongues (**Luke 16:24**) and can even be dressed in white robes (**Rev. 6:12**). Some Bible teachers believe that this is where the idea of the classic ghost (an insubstantial phantom dressed in a white sheet) got its beginning.

Luke 16 and elsewhere make it pretty clear that it is our soul (ghost) that will reside in heaven or hell (depending on our choice about receiving Yah'shua the Messiah as our Lord and Savior). However, from here on the Bible parts company with the conventional view of ghosts.

## The King and the Medium

People seeking Biblical substantiation for ghosts haunting houses, graveyards, etc. will find precious little evidence to support that idea. There is really only ONE such instance in the entire Bible, and it is a bit questionable. Actually, it is not a haunting but a kind of séance, and it occurs in **1 Samuel 28**. It is commonly called the “witch of Endor” passage even though the woman is never precisely identified as a witch. She is a medium and we are told she “hath a familiar spirit.” (vs. 7). We will deal with what a familiar spirit is in a moment, but first let us look at the passage. It involves the first king of Israel, Saul, toward the very end of his reign, when he was deep in sin and apostasy. He was not able to hear from the Almighty and wanted advice. Like many, he could not wait for YHWH to answer...

Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.

And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee... Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel.

And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul.

And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth.

And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, **An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel**, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.

**And Samuel said to Saul**, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do. Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? - 1Sam. 28:7-8, 11-16

There is more, but space does not permit the entire text being reproduced here. What we see here is a classic séance. The mark (client) comes to the medium seeking an audience with a departed loved one (Samuel the prophet, Saul's old mentor). The only difference here is that previously (in accord with God's Word) Saul had ordered all the mediums in Israel put out of business or killed. So, naturally this woman was astonished to learn that her new customer was her profession's feared persecutor, the king of Israel.

She did not know what Samuel looked like in all probability. But she does what many mediums do and gives out vague information that is likely to be right and then wait for more information from the mark: "An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle." This is like the typical fortune-teller saying, "You will meet a tall, dark stranger." Most Hebrew men in those days wore mantles, so that was a no-brainer.

## Getting a Bit Familiar?

Whatever happened here, and it is by no means clear; it is evident that the entity's appearance *scares the living daylight out of the medium*. Like the fake Whoopi Goldberg medium character in *GHOST*, she is not used to having REAL spirits materialize. She may have been a fraud. Historically, many mediums in the ancient world were actually just skilled ventriloquists, and made voices appear to come from statues or other odd places. This is not to say that there weren't (and aren't) genuine mediums who bring forth familiar spirits; but a lot of them are crooks who are just skilled con artists.

Some Bible scholars believe that this wasn't Samuel's ghost, but a **familiar spirit**. A familiar spirit is actually a demon or evil spirit that masquerades as someone familiar to you (hence the name) in a séance. Thus, it is not a ghost at all, but a demon. A demon is an evil spirit who serves the devil and seeks to deceive and destroy.

Remember that a familiar spirit (being a demon and immortal) would have access to *all sorts* of intimate information about the departed and about YOU. The spirit could tell the medium things that would amaze you because "only you and the departed" would know these things. Thus, you are drawn in to believe OTHER things the spirit says. After all, dear old "mom" wouldn't lie to you, would she?

However, the problem with the familiar spirit theory in this case is that the Bible actually says *it is Samuel* (vs. 15). This means, in my opinion, that it really is the deceased prophet. Saul is really talking with a dead person. However, note the context. Saul is in deep sin. Samuel's shade is obviously pretty angry with Saul for disturbing him. This makes it seem as though this sort of appearance was not very common, if it happened at all. If YHWH was continually allowing this kind of communication between the living and the dead, it is doubtful that Samuel

would have been so peeved.

The second point here is that Samuel does not give words of comfort the way the typical "ghost" does in a modern spiritualist séance. Most séances are filled with all sorts of spiritual pabulum about how wonderful the afterlife is and no, there isn't any hell, etc. The medium usually conveys that the departed loved everyone and wants them to be at peace about their fate. This is not what happens in the Bible.

Samuel basically curses Saul and tells him that he and his sons will be dead very soon because of his (Saul's) continual sin — culminating with his necromancy. (See endnote 7) It is evident from the context that this séance was the last and greatest of Saul's serious sins. It may well have been that the Holy Spirit permitted the veil between the living and the dead to be rent asunder just to let Saul know he was toast.

It is never sound Bible hermeneutics (interpretation) to base your theology on *one, isolated instance*. That is what we have here. It appears as though if you want to commune with a ghost, you might be cursed to death for it.

Elsewhere in the Bible, communing with the dead is forbidden. This is sorcery and witchcraft (**1Sam. 15:23, 2Chr. 33:6, Isa. 8:19, Isa. 47:9, Rev. 21:8, Rev. 22:15, Gal. 5:19-21**). Even Yah'shua in Luke 16 in the story of the rich man and Lazarus seems to teach *against* the idea that the dead coming back to warn the living is not permitted. Surely, if there was all this chatter and communications going on between the realms of the departed and the earth plane, this story of Luke 16 would have been the perfect place for the Lord Yah'shua to mention it. Yet He says nothing. Nor does any other New Testament writer indicate that there communication between the living and the dead.

The exception of the Saul and the medium is the exception that proves the rule.

## A Biblical Explanation

So what are these ghosts that seem to appear, whether in hauntings or séances? Most likely, they are familiar spirits or demons. They come appearing to be departed loved ones, or else they pretend to be unknown dead people associated with the home. But why?

To deceive people who do not know their Bibles.

In séances or elsewhere, **when these spirits communicate they present a non-Biblical view of the after-life**. They never talk about hell, judgment or repentance. They rarely, if ever, mention Yah'shua. They deceive lost people into thinking that the afterlife is this nice, ecumenical place where everything is wonderful and there is no consequence for sin. These spirits lull millions into a false sense of security about their own eternal destiny and when they die,



unrepentant, they go straight to hell.

There is another element here though which needs to be understood; and this is the poltergeist or other spirit that appears to hang around places where **great sin** has been done. This is a different sort of situation that can be explained Biblically.

The Bible is clear that there are certain serious sins that can defile a home or even the land itself. Murder (shedding of innocent blood) would be the most obvious (see **Deut. 21:4-9**). Others would include blasphemy (taking the name of the Lord in vain or mocking God), adultery, sorcery and homosexuality. All of these were **capital crimes** in the nation of Israel under the Torah. This shows how seriously God views these sins.

Thus, when you have a home or land where such sins were committed (for instance a murder or child abuse), it opens the door in the home for evil spirits to come in and infest the home. This is all the more true if the sin was done repeatedly. Remember, it could be sins *on the land itself*, before a home was even built. This is why hauntings almost always are centered on one location, usually one with an evil history.

Every "haunting" we have ever seen involved a place or person where some sort of violence or evil had been done. This attracted demon spirits the way a light bulb does insects in your yard at night. If you call a "ghost-buster" who is some sort of spiritualist medium (as we once were) and they get the spirits to leave, then this impresses you to believe the faulty doctrine the medium will try and sell you. Of course, the demons will leave when ordered to by the medium, because Satan (their master) wants YOU to believe in spiritualism, not in the Biblical view of salvation. It is a powerful trick to draw many thousands into a lie.

## A Communion of Saints?

One final question: Do real human spirits ever come back to appear to the living? The Bible does leave this possibility open with the story of Saul and the medium, although it is evidently quite rare. There are many stories, even among serious Christians, of them seeing the apparition of a loved one just seconds or minutes after the loved one had departed this life (perhaps even in another city). This happens spontaneously and is not sought by the Christian.

Some of these may be genuine. The image of the loved one just lingers for a moment and then fades away. The ancient creeds of Christianity mention a "communion of Saints." (See endnote 8) Remember that all Christians, whether living or dead, are all part of one Body. Yah'shua taught the Sadducees:

But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of

[the living. - Matt. 22:31-32.](#)

Those who have died in Christ are not dead, but *alive in Him*. They are the church triumphant in glory. We are still the church militant down here on earth, fighting the fight. But we are all still one body. This makes it a bit more likely that such brief, unbidden apparitions of departed Christian parents, etc. might happen upon occasion. They are not sinful and, if any doctrine is affirmed, it is that Yah'shua is Lord!

One woman we counseled with said that her mother (a devout Christian) had died unexpectedly miles away. The daughter had been getting dressed in the morning and did not know of the death yet. Suddenly, she saw her mom standing behind her in the mirror. Her mom just smiled at her and said, "Don't worry, hon. I'm with Yah'shua and it's wonderful." Then she vanished. Her daughter nearly fell over - trembling with shock and goose flesh. Just about ten minutes later she got the call that her mom had dropped dead of a heart attack.

But there is a world of difference between being surprised like this by seeing your dead mother for a second without expecting it and going to a séance or medium deliberately seeking such things out.

The important thing about any such weird events **is the doctrine they promote**. If what they teach or imply does not measure up to the Bible, get rid of it - even if it does appear to be your sainted mother. Remember, just because a dead person was a believer, doesn't prevent the devil from sending some familiar spirit to impersonate that person. Let us end with the important counsel of Isaiah:

[And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. - Isaiah 8:19- 20](#)

### **Endnotes**

1) These terms are, for all practical terms, synonymous. Ghost is more commonly used, it being derived from the German word for "spirit," GIEST. Spirit comes from the Latin "spiritum." The closest term in the Bible would be RUACH in Hebrew or PNEUMA in Greek. In all cases, the Bible terms refer to the essential divine spark of life which is created by God and which endures after death.

2) Spiritualists call their faith spiritualism. Orthodox Christians for more than a century have preferred to call it "spiritism." For the sake of clarity, in this booklet we will call it by its common name, spiritualism.

3) See SOMEWHERE UNDER THE RAINBOW, by this author from With One

Accord Publications.

4) This concept is richly demonstrated in both films GHOST, where the dead husband hangs around to protect his wife and THE SIXTH SENSE where a child sees ghosts who are confused and wander around their pre-death environs.

5) A ciborium is usually a wide, covered gold chalice used for keeping dozens of little consecrated communion wafers for communion. It is kept locked in a tabernacle except during communion.

6) Though still officially taught, this doctrine is not taken nearly as seriously in the past twenty years. Today, any US Catholic may receive communion in their hand; and the almost superstitious reverence they used to show for the host has greatly diminished.

7) Necromancy is the technical term in the occult for trying to get information from the dead.

8) The Apostles Creed is the best-known example of this.

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