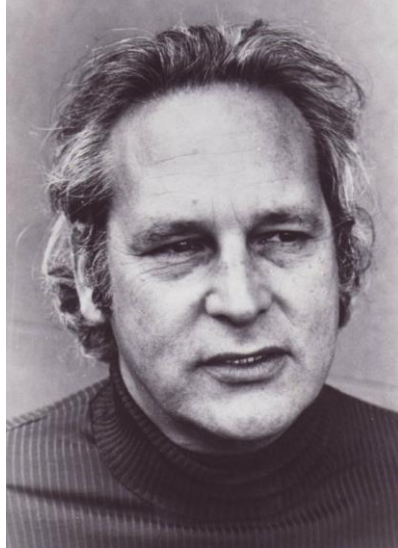


OBITUARY: LAWRENCE LESHAN
1920–2020



Lawrence LeShan (better known as Larry, to friends and colleagues) passed away peacefully on 9th November, 2020, following on-going age related health conditions. He had just achieved his 100th birthday, which received wide congratulations and sparked renewed interest and reflection on his life's work. This includes a special issue of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (volume 52, 2021), which received contributions from such figures as Stanley Krippner and Chris Roe, regarding the life, work and contributions to psychology of Larry LeShan.

Born and raised in New York City, 8th September, 1920. He was educated at the College of William and Mary (B.A., 1942), the University of Nebraska (M.S., 1943), and the University of Chicago where he gained his PhD in human development (1954). Following several years of U.S. military service (1943-46, 1950-52) which interrupted his educational and research pursuits, he became head of the department for psychology at the Institute of Applied Biography in New York (1954-64), alongside being a research associate of the Ayer Foundation, Inc., New York (1954-70). Aside from psychical research and parapsychology, much of his work had focused on cancer research and therapy (e.g. LeShan, 1980); war (e.g. LeShan, 2002a); the state of psychology (e.g. LeShan, 2002b), psychotherapy (e.g. LeShan, 1996) and transpersonal experiences (e.g. LeShan, 1974a, 1976).

In LeShan's own words – when interviewed in 2016 by Lisette Coly for the Parapsychology Foundation's 65th anniversary on their YouTube channel – he described becoming involved in parapsychology as an accident. He approached it from the viewpoint – and perhaps dogmatic view – of all such experiences and research being nonsense and something to diagnose:

I got interested in parapsychology through a fundamental mistake. I'd been working with terminal cancer patients for a very long time and I was completely exhausted, I needed a rest. I

had an idea for a short simple project which would take me a couple of months to do. You see, there was a diagnosis which had never been made. There was a syndrome of people who had very good minds and kept functioning very well, like William James and Gardner Murphy, but had a small hole in their egos. They believed in things like telepathy, but they went on doing very good work showing that their egos were intact. Except for this one small hole, where they believed in obvious nonsense. I was going to name and study that syndrome. That's the way you become famous, to get a disease named after you, Anderson disease, von Recklinghausen's disease... LeShan syndrome I would call it. I was out of foundation money, my grant was up in a year, so I went to a new foundation, I thought I've got to study and expose once and for all these charlatans who go around talking about the paranormal. They thought it was a great idea, they gave me a grant, it was a small grant, but a one-year grant to study LeShan syndrome. So, I did what I do in a case like that, first go back in the literature as far as you can, for me I generally wind up studying with the classical Greeks. And then, find somebody who does it, find a psychic, 'so called'... I asked around and heard about this very famous 'psychic', 'so called', named Eileen J. Garrett. I called up and went to see her, and I liked what I had to see, she was very down to Earth and solid, but had a lot of air of mystery around her. I found out that it was a meeting made in heaven, we needed each other. She needed somebody to watch her while she was in trance, to make sure she did not cheat, fish for information... She wanted someone with credentials... someone like me. And I wanted a quack like her to study. And then she blew my mind. She started pulling information out of the air, and under my conditions. I set up tests, experiments, she passed them with flying colours. Often, apparently, not even working at it. She would use what she called "waking-psychometry". She'd hold something for a thought, free-association, or go into trance. That completely confused me. She was not a quack. I went back to the foundation and said we were wrong... there is such a thing as the paranormal, I've seen it, I've tested it, it's real, and if it is real, it's the most important thing a psychologist could be studying. I wanted another grant to study the opposite, and they went along with it...

LeShan continued to study and work with Eileen J. Garrett for many years and documented many instances of her prowess. For example, in his final book on psychical research, LeShan (2009) provides an account of a series of dreams experienced by Garrett between 1960-61. This series has been described by the late Guy Lyon Playfair as "perhaps the strongest case of veridical dream ESP I am aware of ever documented" (Playfair, 2016). In this series of dreams Garrett reports she was visited by a deceased psychical researcher, Hereward Carrington¹ who communicated a range of information, later determined to be veridical. These dreams occurred alongside Garrett's participation in pilot trials of dream ESP at the Parapsychology Foundation with Montague Ullman and Karlis Osis. These trials would later form the methodological basis for the now-famous Maimonides series of dream ESP studies (Ullman, Krippner & Vaughan, 1973).

LeShan reports while in the Parapsychology Foundation's offices one morning with Martin Ebon, and Betha Pontorno, (the foundation's executive director and secretary respectively) Garrett shared a dream from the previous night. In this dream, the deceased Hereward Carrington, had visited her. Within the dream he urged Garrett

¹ LeShan's account has strong parallels to a similar, and more detailed occurrence recorded in correspondences archived at the Parapsychology Foundation and investigated by the British SPR in the unpublished report of Jarman (1962). This account includes four dream visitations to Eileen Garrett of Whately Carrington, where a greater degree of veridical information, unknown to Garrett at the time, was later corroborated. There is strong reason to believe these cases are one and the same and has been considered in detail by Saunders (2019). This will form the basis of a future paper on the topic. However, for the purposes of this obituary, LeShan's account is described.

to take care of his wife, who needed her support and to save a box of unpublished manuscripts, which were currently being ruined by a wallaby sleeping in them. This was followed with a brief discussion about the meaning of dreams before they moved onto other matters.

The following night Garrett had another dream in which Hereward visited. The following morning, she came into the office early and called in LeShan to share her experience. LeShan (2009, p.2) recounts Garrett's words:

We are in trouble. I know myself. Last night I dreamed Carrington came again into my bedroom, very angry. He said he had told me his wife needed me and I had done nothing about it. He then kicked me out of bed, and I woke up on the floor.

This second experience led LeShan and the Parapsychology Foundation staff to attempt to track down Carrington's widow, armed only with the information that she was English. Thus, they contacted a list of seven leading, older psychical researchers in England to ascertain her whereabouts and status. None, however, had any notion as to Mrs Carrington's current whereabouts. They eventually determined her last known address via Garrett drawing on a favour from an old friend who held a high rank in the British revenue and customs department. Garrett called the local police and informed them she talked to someone in the area who had just passed the address and believed something to be very wrong. Mrs Carrington, then in her 80s, was subsequently found by a local police constable to have fallen some three days before and had broken her hip and was in incredibly poor health. LeShan reports a partially rotting box of papers was also found, however, its contents were of little consequence, comprising old letters, receipts, and paid bills.

During his early associations with Garrett, LeShan became actively involved with the American Society for Psychical Research, when research and outputs of the society were thriving (sadly, a stark contrast to the tragic recent downfall of the society in the last 20 years: see Ruffles, 2019; SPR, 2019). His first outputs to the ASPR journal concerned Garrett's psychometry abilities (e.g. LeShan, 1968). He also contributed several papers to the *British Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (LeShan, 1967, 1977; LeShan & Margenau, 1980). He was the author of approximately twenty books and monographs, with several dedicated to parapsychology, most notably *The Medium, the Psychic and the Physicist* (1974b) and *From Newton to ESP* (1985).



*EECS visit LeShan 2015, from left to right:
David T. Saunders, Rachel Evenden, Elizabeth Roxburgh,
Chris A. Roe, Larry LeShan, Callum E. Cooper*

Although less active in research and more in book writing in his later years, LeShan was regularly visited by friends in parapsychology and keen for discussion and debate. Stanley Krippner recounts visiting him every time he was in New York City. And of course, with his long-time association with Eileen Garrett and the Parapsychology Foundation, Lisette Coly was a frequent visitor to LeShan for many years. She would regularly look in on his health, wellbeing, and making sure news and developments in the field would get to him. Indeed, in 2015, the University of Northampton's *Exceptional Experiences and Consciousness Studies* (EECS) research group – while visiting the Parapsychology Foundation's Eileen J. Garrett library – were honoured to spend an afternoon with LeShan at his home. Ideas and stories were shared on all sides, while all gained from LeShan's lifetime of insights. This memory and legacy which will indeed stay with us, has inspired many others, and will certainly continue to do so – especially his contributions to cancer research and psychotherapy, and indeed parapsychology.

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