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The Psychic Life of Dr Alex Tanous

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Last year marked the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the Alex Tanous Foundation for Scientific Research (Portland, Maine, USA). Had Dr Alex Tanous himself lived into 2016 this year would have marked his 90th birthday. Given two such milestones of such importance to the Alex Tanous Foundation have been reached, I'd like to reach out to readers in this article and share a brief glimpse of the life and work of Dr Tanous – especially for those who are not familiar with the man, the scholar or the psychic.

Alexander Tanous was born in Van Buren, Maine, to Lebanese parents and was the eldest of eight brothers. Before Alex was born, his father was friends with the Lebanese writer, Kahil Gibran – author of *The Prophet*¹ – who presented Alex's father with a prediction:

“You will have a son, a man of exceptional gifts, of great abilities – but also a man of great sorrows.”

When Alex Tanous was born this prediction appeared to show itself in various forms. He was born with the afterbirth ‘the veil’ draped over his head and shoulders, and is seen in Middle Eastern tradition as a sign of a gifted child with ‘psychic abilities’. The palm of his left hand formed a perfect hexagram or six pointed star (the Star of David or the Jewish Star) in the creases. This too, has been seen as a sign of psychic gifts – a trait shared by the Dutch psychic Peter Hurkos.

Many of Alex's childhood psychic demonstrations are outlined in his autobiography *Beyond Coincidence*.² The first demonstration of psychic abilities in young Alex came when he was eighteen months. His parents had nursery songs on a record, and kept it among a variety of fifty or so other records. His particular favourite was *Mary Had a Little Lamb*. According to those who watched him, he would run his finger down the stack of records feeling the edges, stopping and pulling out the correct record each time. And yet, no one else could apparently see or feel a difference in the record covers.

As a young boy, through touching a person, he would have spontaneous precognitive visions. In one instance, shaking the hand of his father's friend, he asked ‘Sir, are you ready to die?’ and explained he would be dead within 24 hours – the man laughed it off. Alex was given a stern talking to from his father regarding the incident, but at the same time sympathised as Alex's mother and father had both displayed similar gifts and had given psychic readings to people in their lifetime. It appears Alex had inherited this gift – though somewhat amplified. Following the incident, the gentleman died the next day of a sudden heart attack.

One of the feats Alex became most recognised for was his ability to go ‘out-of-body’ and report back on what he saw. He first discovered he could enter an out-of-body state as a child, when one day jumping down the steps of the home staircase, each time getting a little higher. On one jump, after he landed, he looked back up the stairs and saw an image of himself at the top staring back, and smiling.

He named this 'Alex 2' and was his realisation of his out-of-body state (also referred to as Out-of-Body Experiences or OBEs), through which he could see and travel. Similarly, he saw images of children and adults most people considered 'imaginary friends' who turned out to be deceased familiar members he'd never met, when described to his parents and family friends. This phenomenon is discussed throughout chapter 3 of his book *Is Your Child Psychic?*³ regarding 'Imaginary Playmates'.

The most notable incident occurred in July 1937, when Alex was out with his brother Nolan, selling newspapers, when suddenly he had the most disturbing premonition of his life:

"Let's go home now," I told my brother. "Something terrible has happened to Dad."

They ran home and found that their father had suffered an accident. A pole he was sticking in the ground to grow runner (climbing) beans had broken in half and the point went through his eye. Six weeks later, he died of a cerebral haemorrhage, a complication of the accident.

School was very difficult for Alex. His family had originally intended that he became a priest. A lot of his early teachings were surrounding religious studies and he was taught by priests. Throughout this time, he would still have psychic thoughts and messages come to him, which he relayed to classmates. They were fascinated by this, but word quickly spread to his teachers of what he was doing. Many of them – being priests – told Alex that his 'psychic' thoughts were evil and demonic. He was told to keep such thoughts to himself, while a select few teachers told Alex that his psychic impressions were simply the results of an adolescent phase. Nevertheless, attempting to suppress his thoughts and impressions was no easy task. To give another example:

"When he was 13, a woman whose son was serving in the armed forces approached young Tanous and asked if her boy would return from the war. Tanous predicted that he would but advised the woman she should warn her son to avoid crossing railroad tracks. The soldier returned home safe and sound but a few days later was struck and killed by a train as he crossed a set of tracks"⁴

Following his schooling and a period in the US army, and while writing and publishing several successful musical pieces, Alex returned to higher education and excelled. In 1957, he completed a Bachelor's degree (BA) in history and government through Boston College, a Master's degree (MA) in philosophy in 1961 from Boston College's graduate school, a Master's degree (MA) in theology (sacred sciences) in 1964 from Fordham University, a Doctorate of Divinity in 1965 from the College of Divine Metaphysics in Indianapolis, Indiana (now based in Glendora, California), and a further Master's degree (MS.Ed) in counselling and guidance in 1973 from the University of Southern Maine. He was also a certified school psychologist for the State of Massachusetts.

Throughout his higher education, the now 'Dr Alex Tanous' was more comfortable in expressing his psychic gifts and supporting them through research and findings of parapsychology. In wanting to know more about death and a possible conscious existence beyond this, he began working at a local hospital for the terminally ill. However, he felt that this did not teach him a great deal about survival of death beyond the experiences of the dying. It was around this time that Dr Karlis Osis of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) had been conducting research on 'deathbed visions of physician and nurses'.⁵ Both of them met and became well acquainted with each other's interests in parapsychology. This led to Dr Tanous' twenty year association with the ASPR.

There were two things that Drs Osis and Tanous were interested in researching through the ASPR which they believed could demonstrate conscious survival beyond death. Firstly, through testing Dr

Tanous' ability to go outside of his body at will, could they detect 'the essence' that leaves the body in the room Dr Tanous was asked to travel to? Secondly, through the investigation of haunting phenomena, could Dr Tanous provide accurate information on who allegedly haunted a particular place which could be verified against records of that person? In the case of the haunting investigations, very little in the past has been published on these cases, however, recently some of Dr Tanous' notes and news articles were brought together to produce a book entitled *Conversations with Ghosts* ⁶ – a book he intended to publish in the 1980s with Dr Osis but never saw its completion. When Dr Tanous purported to receive information psychically during haunting investigation, on many occasions he claimed to be in direct mental contact with the dead.

The research conducted at the ASPR regarding Dr Tanous' out-of-body abilities, has become highly recognised in parapsychology within general discussions of OBE research and experimental studies of survival. Between the 1960s-1980s, Dr Tanous was a regular research participant for the ASPR. Dr Osis and Donna McMormick led the experiments which involved attempts to detect Dr Tanous' disembodied mind or astral body (Alex 2) when he claimed to be out of his body. Dr Tanous was placed in a perception lab where he would lay down in a darkened room and begin to relax. Four rooms away was an optical illusion device, this box contained a spinning disc of four quadrants, four possible colours and five symbols. The device would randomly select a quadrant, colour and symbol to stop at. An observer could only see what symbol was displayed if they were stood by the device looking through a spy hole. Tanous' task was to travel in the astral body (4 rooms away from his physical body), look through the spy hole of the illusion device, and state what was being displayed. All of his answers were communicated via an intercom to Dr Osis. Hits and misses were determined at the end of the trial by decoding the device as to what it had actually selected throughout the trial (analysing the scores on the basis of 1, 2 or all 3 items correctly guessed – quadrant, colour and symbol). A strain-gauge was also placed in the room with the device. At periods where Tanous produced a sequence of correct hits, there was strain-gauge activation, suggesting *something* was in the room.

In one of the main papers on this experiment published in 1980 in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, ⁷ the findings demonstrated that Dr Tanous scored beyond what anyone should be able to guess through chance alone, especially when scores were correlated with periods of strain gauge activation. In pilot tests, participants were selected from the streets of New York to attempt the same task. Findings demonstrated that test participants could not score the same amount of hits as Dr Tanous on the quadrant, colour or symbol (or all three correctly), and no one appeared to create strain gauge activation during the trials. With the amount of accurate reporting of the images in the device and the strain-gauge becoming active, the evidence suggested that some form of anomalous process was taking place. Debates have been produced on this as to whether this was evidence for the consciousness detected outside of a living body (and therefore, mind not being dependant on body) or a matter of extrasensory perception regarding the targets and psychokinesis with regards the strain-gauge.^{8 9} Either conclusion leaves remarkable findings and supportive evidence for psi processes in life – and possibly in death.

Another remarkable feat of Dr Tanous was his ability to absorb light through his eyes and then project images on to walls. In one instance – cited in his first publication *Three Days of Darkness* – when visiting Mr and Mrs Pawlowski of Portland Maine, during a gathering of friends, Mrs Pawlowski reported the following experience:

“On Saturday night, October 25, 1969, shortly after midnight, while Dr Alex Tanous and five other people and my husband were all talking in our living room, I turned my head

over to say something to Mrs Sylvia Allen and her husband and Mrs Mary McKenzie, my eyes went to the wall in the corner. I saw the outline of the ship in light, a reproduction of the picture. I quickly took my eyes off it, as I was very frightened at what I saw. My hands were shaking. I could not believe what I was seeing, but I looked again and it was still there. I wasn't going to say anything, but I just had to ask everyone if they had seen it.

Dr Tanous then immediately asked me what I saw, and I told him. He said 'Yes, I just projected that picture onto the wall.'

After that, starting across the top of another picture and going all around it was a wide band of light framing the picture. In the corner of the room, a wide band of light starting from the ceiling extended down to the floor, flashes of light making like frames were everywhere in that area. The left wall was quite dark and the opposite wall was very light. This went on from after midnight till almost 2 am. The band of light in the corner would not go away.

Dr Tanous said 'I cannot turn it off'. Until he got up from his chair, put his hands over his eyes and turned away from it, the light remained. After that, my fear had left me, and I was very amazed at all that had happened."

There are scattered mentions in parapsychology literature and unpublished letters between researchers describing Dr Tanous being tested for this ability at the ASPR by Dr Osis, and by Charles Honorton and Dr Alan Vaughan at the Maimonides Medical Center. In the latter case, the two researchers asked Dr Tanous to look at particular images they gave him, and then to project those images on to the wall of the dimly lit laboratory. Both researchers and a Mr Stubbs, saw the images projected, but concluded that they were not sure whether what they had seen was a telepathic hallucination from their minds or Tanous', rather than objective light from Tanous' eyes.¹⁰ If suggestion and group conformity could not have explained these events, such a conclusion from the researchers leaves the suggestion of psi processes taking place, regardless of whether actual light was emitted from Tanous' eyes or not. It appears that no conventional explanation was found at the time of the experiments.

Dr Tanous held teaching posts at various colleges delivering classes on theology and philosophy, among them was St. Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire. Wherever he could, he would bring examples of parapsychology into his teachings, from discussions and demonstrations of psychometry to miraculous healing, to lectures on world views on life after death. He began teaching at the University of Southern Maine in the late 1970s developing a class on parapsychology which received a 3 year waiting list of students wanting to take the course. The most notable topics taught included issues of psychic healing and dreams – the latter being the topic of Dr Tanous' third book published shortly after he died, entitled *Dreams, Symbols and Psychic Power*.¹¹ It was claimed to be the first university based course on parapsychology to be offered 'with credit', where other universities had previously not granted course credits for such a topic.

Just before his death in 1990 through sudden heart attack following treatment for cancer, Dr Tanous founded the Alex Tanous Foundation for Scientific Research in March of that year. Its aim is in preserving his work and encouraging the continuation of his teachings. This is encouraged through grants and scholarships which the Foundation offers. Not only did the Foundation recently see the publication of *Conversations with Ghosts*, but several other previously unpublished manuscripts by Dr Tanous are being edited and prepared for publication, to further spread his knowledge and teachings into current day thoughts and research in parapsychology. The next book planned for publication is entitled *Paranormal Psychotherapy*, which saw Dr Tanous involved in the psychiatric setting in the

1980s, offering patients a psychic diagnosis of the roots of their problems, while working alongside a psychiatrist and a psychologist. This and so much more of Dr Tanous' life's work and teachings are in the pipeline for editing and eventual publication.

I first became involved with the Alex Tanous Foundation in 2011, and in reading through their material and archives I quickly noticed how little awareness there was for Dr Tanous in the United Kingdom. Toward the end of his life he'd become such a huge figure for his psychic abilities and public lectures, especially in the USA and Japan. Although, many researchers of parapsychology and those with general interests in the field have expressed some awareness for Dr Tanous, their awareness of him is often due to the widely discussed testing of his out-of-body abilities at the ASPR.

I visited the ASPR with Bill Tanous (nephew of Alex and vice president of the Foundation) in May of 2015 to examine some of the material on Tanous, from research notes through to articles which require digitising and duplicating for preservation in the Alex Tanous Foundation archives. This is a task which the Foundation has ahead of them with the 'co-operation' of the ASPR – hopefully Alice Kelley (niece of Alex and research office of the Foundation) and I will be able to report at a later date on this next venture of archiving. Above all, I hope this article and the others included within this special issue of the *Paranormal Review* will inspire those of you previously unfamiliar with Dr Alex Tanous to now read further into his life, teachings, and research, which has been preserved for this generation and those to come.

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For further information about the Alex Tanous Foundation, visit: www.alextanous.org

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