

The Shirley MacLaine Phenomenon

A look at the influence, alleged beliefs, and outrageous statements of one of the leading gurus of the New Age movement.

Henry Gordon

MY RECENT book, *Channeling into the New Age: The "Teachings" of Shirley MacLaine and Other Such Gurus*, includes, among other things, a pretty harsh criticism of MacLaine. So I will not at this time be too uncomplimentary.

MacLaine obviously seems to believe what she is preaching (or "sharing," as she prefers to call it). Her influence on the public can be measured by the attendance at her seminars, the ratings of her television movie, and the phenomenal sale of her books.

Perhaps even more noteworthy is the fact that MacLaine almost single-handedly created the craze that has enabled countless "channelers" to separate the public from millions of dollars.

These so-called conduits to the "other side" are proliferating. They are promoted in newspapers and magazines and on radio and television talk-shows; millions listen to them spout their banalities and thousands take them seriously.

In her early books, MacLaine described her adventures in far-off places. But with *Out on a Limb*, her first book to outline her beliefs and experiences with the occult, she hit the jackpot. *Out on a Limb* was soon followed by *Dancing in the Light* and *It's All in the Playing*. The paperback editions of these three books have sold in the millions. *It's All in the Playing* is a recounting of the film she made that was a recounting of the first book. I assume we may look forward to a new film portraying the last book, which described the film that portrayed the first book. And so on.

One constant theme runs through all of these books: a stream of seemingly paranormal anecdotes that will strain your credulity. A good example, in *Dancing in the Light*, is MacLaine's visit to her acupuncturist, Chris Griscom, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Griscom is not your everyday acupuncturist. When she punctures you, it's not simply to remove pain or cure your hiccups. It's to put you into fast reverse and spin you back a few lives. According

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to MacLaine, the needles “stimulate memory patterns locked in the cellular memory of the physical body.” She doesn’t explain how the cells are preserved for another lifetime after the original body has decayed. For MacLaine, Griscom’s method is much more efficient than the archaic one of hypnotic regression. This may start a whole new trend in needle-noodling.

But that isn’t all. MacLaine tells us of Griscom’s remarkable powers of psychokinesis. She recalls how dozens of flies were buzzing around the room while she was being punctured. Chris merely stretched out her arms and concentrated. The insects immediately vacated the room through an open door.

This is only one of many such anecdotes, but it will prepare you for what to expect should you decide to plow through one of MacLaine’s books.

Here is a small sampling of her “teachings”:

Doctors . . . are so confused with this disease [AIDS] they don’t know what to do. Maybe this is the purposeful good of the disease. By the way . . . there’s a purposeful good to everything. . . . (From “City Lights Show,” City TV, Toronto, September 21, 1987)

This was MacLaine’s response to a question about AIDS. Is she trying to say the AIDS epidemic can be beneficial in that it confuses the medical profession? I’d like to see her try to convince an AIDS sufferer that there’s a “purposeful good” in the affliction.

I really think we are creating our own reality. I think I’m creating you right here. Therefore I created the medium, therefore I created the entity, because I’m creating everything. (From a recorded interview with Henry Gordon, September 16, 1985)

When I questioned MacLaine about the authenticity of her medium (channeler) Kevin Ryerson, she suddenly became defensive and launched into the “creating our own reality” maneuver, which gets her off the hook.

When I countered with a weak “But Ryerson is a reality to me and to others,” she answered: “In my dream he is. But I don’t know if he’s a reality to you.”

I’m more interested in getting the truth, rather than condemning the people who are lying [the so-called psychics]. (From the “Andy Barrie Show,” CFRB Radio, Toronto, September 15, 1987)

MacLaine maintains that we should seek truths by overlooking untruths. The problem is that scoundrels often obscure the truth, and many people accept their lies.

Following are a few “scientific” quotations that should give us pause for thought:

Nothing ever dies—science tells us that—nothing ever dies, it just changes form. (From the Phil Donahue show, September 9, 1985)

One of the principles of physics tells us that the matter and energy in the universe remain constant, although they can change in form. But science does not tell us that nothing ever dies.

If one says audibly, "I am God," the sound vibrations literally align the energies of the body to a higher attunement. (From *Dancing in the Light*, p. 119)

It does sound scientific, doesn't it?

The following "teachings" defy comment:

In déjà vu you are getting an overlap of a past-life experience, or you could be getting an overlap of a future-life experience. . . . That's what Einstein said." (From the Sally Jessy Raphael show, September 28, 1987)

When we had déjà vu experiences, perhaps, we were not actually seeing something in the past/future-life sense, but inadvertently shifting to a different aspect of the whole. . . . (From *All in the Playing*, p. 189)

When three or more people are gathered with the same intentionality in a room, the energy units are squared. (From the "Andy Barrie Show," September 15, 1987)

The vibrational oscillation of nature is quickening. (From a quotation of MacLaine's in the *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1987)

I am often asked what harm there is in the Shirley MacLaine phenomenon. Can her flaky philosophies really influence people? MacLaine's constant repetition of the "I am God" slogan helps sell the idea that the individual can do no wrong. To some people it can condone any sort of self-centered or self-fulfilling action. And her endorsement of various types of alternative medical treatments can prove dangerous. MacLaine exerts a greater influence on the gullible than does the average New Age promoter because of her public prominence.

When MacLaine was a guest on the "Larry King Live" television show on CNN on September 17, 1987, one listener called in to say that his family had been completely "blown apart" by the kind of thinking she espouses. "My wife," he said, "in a time of depression went to a psychic healer and was told that in a past life I had murdered her and run off with her teenage daughter. I've not seen her in two years. I think she was looking for a crutch to avoid dealing with the realities of life—thinking things would be better the next time around. I think there's a certain group of people that can be damaged irreparably by this type of thought."

In my opinion, the people who follow Shirley MacLaine, collect her books, and attend her seminars are "looking for a crutch to avoid dealing with the realities of life." ●