

# Naming is Not Knowing

## A Call for a New Vocabulary for Interactions with Non-Human Intelligences

**By Michael Mannion**

Recently, during a conversation with a young man who believes he has had interactions with non-human intelligences, it became painfully clear how critical it is to shed some of the simplistic terms that are now widely used to describe the interface between human beings and non-human life forms from elsewhere.

The young man described how upset he was by his inability to discuss his enigmatic experiences with an old friend. The friend peremptorily dismissed the young man's claims to have actually had such extraordinary experiences. In a superior, condescending tone of voice, the friend said "What's there to talk about with someone who tells people he has been abducted by aliens?" The young man, in fact, does not use the phrase "abducted by aliens" when speaking of his experiences. Why not? Because it does not accurately convey his thoughts on the subject. Even though he does not use the term "alien abduction," others can easily dismiss him by reframing his remarks and using those words.

These two familiar terms—alien and alien abduction—have been abused and misused by the mass media. They are now saddled with such pejorative connotations as to render them meaningless when characterizing this profound, complex phenomenon. The "tabloidization" of these and other terms used to describe this elusive experience in print, on TV and in the movies has made it imperative that new descriptors be created to elucidate the interaction of some human beings with advanced life forms from elsewhere.

What are the terms that need to be replaced? For starters, can we agree on substitutes for "alien," "abduction," "abductee," and "extraterrestrial"? The term "experiencer" introduced by John Mack, MD is an improvement over "abductee." And the term "encounter," as used by Edith Fiore, PhD and others, is preferable to the word "abduction" when describing the interaction of humans with non-humans. Yet neither "experiencer" nor "encounter" has the specificity or the richness to capture the deep, unique nature of the varied relationships between human beings and the unknown entities.

In addition, can we stop using such judgmental terms as "positive" or "negative"? These words may accurately represent subjective reactions of those who hear the stories told by people who are having extraordinary experiences that do not fit our contemporary model of reality. These words may even accurately convey how those who have had the experiences eventually come to view these anomalous events. But the words "positive" and "negative" do not help us to understand the experiences themselves.

Can we leave "traumatic" and "transcendent" behind as well? These terms may more accurately describe the later impact of the human-nonhuman interface on human beings than they describe the interaction itself. In addition, these words do not advance our comprehension of the phenomenon.

Over the past few decades, a large number of individuals from diverse backgrounds have reported the same basic stories to a wide range of researchers, such as Linda Howe, Raymond Fowler, John Mack, Budd Hopkins, David Jacobs and others. Since all of the researchers work with the same basic material, why do their conclusions as to the nature and meaning of the encounters vary so greatly? Is this due in large part to the character structure of each researcher?

Character structure shapes the details of the worldview, or the definition of reality, embraced by a particular researcher. This worldview then provides the context for the analysis and the interpretation of the material each researcher is presented with. The character structure of a researcher is reflected as well in the language used to assess the extraordinary events that are reported. Aspects of the experience are named, labeled and categorized. The process of naming and categorizing can lead to the mistaken conclusion that the experience is now understood in some way.

Naming is not knowing. Too often, we act as if a word or an expression is the reality that it simply symbolically represents. Over time, we forget that we have only given a name to a phenomenon, not comprehended it. This is true for medicine, science, psychiatry, sociology, religion and many other areas of inquiry. It is true as well of our attempts to reach even a basic level of understanding of the unknown phenomenon that has penetrated our world and consciousness.

The language we use can either help or hinder communication. Some of the terms now used in writings about these interactions do not increase our knowledge of the subject. To move forward in our attempts to understand this enigma, we need a new vocabulary. What terms now in use need to be replaced? What other words can help us to understand the phenomenon better? Any suggestions?