

THE POWER OF PREMONITIONS

ALSO BY LARRY DOSSEY

The Extraordinary Healing Power of Ordinary Things

Healing Beyond the Body: Medicine and the Infinite Reach of the Mind

Reinventing Medicine: Beyond Mind-Body to a New Era of Healing

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Space, Time & Medicine

THE POWER OF PREMONITIONS

HOW KNOWING THE FUTURE
CAN SHAPE OUR LIVES

LARRY DOSSEY MD

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For Barbara

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FOREWORD

I live at 7,500 feet in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, a majestic tongue of the southern Rockies that extends into northern New Mexico. This is one of those blessed places where nature always seems to be in high-drama mode.

At this moment the world outside my window is transitioning from a harsh, snowy winter to a borderland season that is no longer winter, but not quite spring. The most obvious indicator that something is up is the birds. The finches, juncos, chickadees, nuthatches, doves, and flickers at the feeders are getting flirtatious. Yesterday, taking the cue, I emptied the birdhouses of last year's nesting materials in preparation for another round of nest building and offspring.

It's not just the birds that are getting frisky. Although the piñon and juniper trees are still hunkered down, the daffodils have made a foolhardy advance and are showing green shoots, which usually means they are about to get clobbered by a spring snow. Even the skies are livelier. The clouds are evolving toward showy cumulus formations, a dress rehearsal for their leading role in the violent thunderstorms of summer. Still, these rhythms of nature are protracted. It will be two full months before the earth tilts sufficiently toward the sun to banish frosty nights and permit me to plant my vegetable garden. In the meantime, I try to notice what's happening.

Notice. What a simple word for something so difficult! I've been trying to get the hang of it for most of my adult life, ever since a little book gobsmailed me in the 1970s and revealed to me that I was quite a poor noticer. That grenade, *How to Meditate*, was authored by psychologist Lawrence LeShan, who did landmark research in the connections between the psyche

and cancer at a time when the field hardly existed. LeShan's shorthand definition of meditation was the art of doing one thing well—which, it turns out, is impossible without paying attention, without noticing. This is one of the most difficult tasks we can attempt, as anyone can discover in only a few minutes of trying to notice something intently, without the intrusion of extraneous thoughts and sensations.

The connections between noticing, meditation, and premonitions are profound. Meditation takes us outside the hubbub of flowing, rushing time into temporal stillness. During meditation, we sense our connectedness with all things in the past, present, and future. In this state, premonitions begin to seem not only possible, but likely. They begin to make sense.

Because both premonitions and meditation crash the barriers of time, meditation is a garden in which premonitions often flower. So as you read this book, I hope you will set aside time for stillness, whether you call it meditation, reverie, or solitude. All these activities are versions, literally, of “time out” and “out of time.” Become a good noticer. Pay attention to the feelings, hunches, and intuitions that flood your life each day. If you do, you will see that premonitions are not rare, but a natural part of our lives.

A bumper sticker says, GRAVITY. IT'S NOT JUST A GOOD IDEA. IT'S THE LAW. So it is with premonitions. They are a fact. They are ubiquitous. They follow certain patterns we'll try to discern. Our task is to acknowledge and claim this stunning ability, this great gift, in the task of becoming fully human.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Some of the premonitions and dream narratives that follow have been compressed, paraphrased, or edited for reasons of clarity and coherence.

To protect privacy, some names and identifying characteristics of individuals have been changed.

A word about the terminology I'll be using. Extrasensory perception, or ESP, involves three basic categories of phenomena: telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition. Generally speaking, telepathy is mind-to-mind communication; clairvoyance is a direct non-sensory awareness of objective physical events, not necessarily involving another mind. The non-sensory, non-inferred foreknowledge of a future event is precognition or premonition.

The term *parapsychology* ("alongside psychology") was popularized in the 1930s by J. B. Rhine as a substitute term for what earlier researchers called *psychical research*. Parapsychology, also called *psi*, is an umbrella word that includes telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis, or PK. This latter term involves mentally affecting some physical object and is commonly called *mind over matter*.

In this book I'll use the terms *parapsychology*, *paranormal*, and *psi* interchangeably. I'll stick with these words because they have filtered into common usage. I'm not happy with *parapsychology* or *paranormal*, however, because they convey a false impression. If these events occur, as I believe they do, they are a part of nature and are not *para*, or apart. This means they should be considered an integral part of natural science, not as some ill-bred stepchild that embarrasses the rest of the family. As British biologist Rupert Sheldrake once observed, "Being a biologist, I wouldn't have much use for a field called *parabiology*." As a physician, neither would I have much use for

a field called *paramedicine*. But alas, there is no ideal term to describe these challenging phenomena.

For generations, researchers have floundered in the search for the perfect term for psi phenomena. They still can't agree. It's rather like Louis Armstrong's celebrated response to a reporter who asked him to define jazz: "If you don't know, I can't explain it to you." Why are premonitions and other psi events so slippery where language is concerned? Perhaps it's because our language is geared to the *see/touch/feel* world. Psi, including premonitions, defy the senses. So it's not surprising that language limps in our attempts to grasp these events verbally.

I'll interchange *premonitions* with the terms *precognition*, *future knowing*, and *foreknowledge*. Premonitions are also commonly referred to by a host of colloquialisms such as *gut feelings*, *instinct*, *intuition*, *hunches*, *vibes*, or *sixth sense*. If you wish, pick your own term. Be inventive, like a friend of mine who prefers to call her premonitions *Factor X*.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes things grab hold and just won't let go. That's what it's been like with premonitions for me. I've been wrestling with them for a long time, unable to detach, rather like Jacob's struggle with the angel in the Old Testament. The main difference is that Jacob's brawl lasted only one night. My tussle with premonitions has persisted for more than three decades and shows no sign of ending. Frankly I didn't know what I was getting into when I began my encounter with them. The entire experience is not unlike entering a quiet cave, only to arouse a sleeping grizzly.

It all began innocently enough, with a dream that occurred during my first year in medical practice. In it, Justin, the four-year-old son of one of my physician colleagues, was lying on his back on a table in a sterile exam room. A white-coated technician tried to place some sort of medical apparatus on his head. Justin went berserk—yelling, fighting, and trying to remove the gadget in spite of the technician's persistent efforts. At the head of the table stood one of Justin's parents, trying to calm him and lend support. The technician repeatedly tried to accomplish her task but failed as Justin became increasingly upset. Exasperated, she threw up her hands and walked away.

I awoke in the gray morning light feeling shaken, as if this were the most vivid dream I'd ever experienced—profound, numinous, “realer than real.” But in view of the dream's content, my reaction made no sense. I did not understand why I felt so deeply moved. I thought about waking my wife and telling her about it but decided against it. What sense would it make to her? We hardly knew Justin, having seen him only three or four times.

I dressed and went to the hospital to make early-morning rounds. As the busy day wore on, I forgot about the dream until the noon hour. Then, while lunching in the staff area with Justin's father, Justin's mother entered the

room holding the boy in her arms. He was visibly upset, with wet, unkempt hair and tears streaming down his face. Justin's mom explained to her husband that they had just come from the electroencephalography (EEG) laboratory, where the EEG technician had tried to perform a brain-wave test on the youngster. The tech prided herself in her ability to obtain EEG tracings in children, which can be a demanding task, and her record was virtually flawless—until she met Justin. After relating to her husband how her son had rebelled and foiled the test, Justin's mom left with the disconsolate boy in her arms. Her husband accompanied them out of the dining area and went to his office.

My dream memory returned. I was stunned. I had dreamed the sequence of events in almost exact detail before they happened. I went to see Justin's father in his office and asked him to share with me the events leading up to the aborted EEG.

Justin, he related, had developed a fever the day before, which was followed by a brief seizure. Although he was certain the seizure was due to the fever and not to a serious condition such as epilepsy or a brain tumor, he nonetheless called a neurologist for a consultation. The specialist was reassuring; nothing needed to be done immediately. He would arrange an appointment for the following day for a brain-wave test, just to make sure nothing else was going on. It was a simple procedure and the EEG technician, he said, had a special way with kids.

Could anyone else have known about these events? I asked. I wanted to know if someone could have leaked information to me that I might have forgotten, that could have influenced my dream. Of course not, Justin's dad said; no one knew except the immediate family and the neurologist.

Then I told my colleague about my dream. He realized in an instant that if my report were true, his orderly, predictable world had been suddenly rearranged. If one could know the future before it happened, our understanding of physical reality was seriously threatened. He sensed my disturbance as well. Our conversation turned silent as we contemplated the implications of these strange happenings. I turned, left his office, and closed the door behind me. I did not bring up the event with him again.

Within a week I dreamed two more times about events that occurred the next day, and that I could not possibly have known about ahead of time. Why had a cluster of precognitive dreams erupted when I'd never experienced

them before? It was as if the world had decided to reveal a new side of itself, for reasons I could not fathom.

In all three instances time seemed to be reversed, with effects appearing before their causes. Rationally I knew this could not happen. Time simply could not reverse itself and flow backward, carrying information into the present from a future that had not yet occurred. I wondered whether my mind could somehow have strayed from my body into the future, retrieving information about events that would later unfold. Both possibilities violated common sense and every ounce of my medical training. My consciousness was localized to my brain and to the present; *all* doctors knew that.

I did not experience another precognitive dream until around ten years later when I purchased my first computer. It was a clunky, cumbersome contraption that seemed to have a mind of its own. It had a distinctly stubborn personality, often refusing to carry out my commands. It came with an instruction manual that made little sense, and which was written by someone whose mother tongue obviously was not English. One day I found myself struggling with how to enter footnotes into the text I was working on. I followed the instructions scrupulously, step-by-step, for a couple of hours, trying all combinations. Nothing worked. I decided to abandon my efforts and try again the next day. That night I dreamed I was sitting before the computer writing as usual, when it came time to enter a footnote. I saw clearly how to do it, and where the instruction book had gone wrong. I awoke, went to the computer, and performed the keystrokes I'd seen in the dream. The procedure worked perfectly. I decided not to throw the machine out the window.

I haven't had a precognitive dream since. It was as if the universe, having delivered a message, hung up the phone. It became my job to make sense of it—which I try to do in this book.

My training in medicine has sensitized me to premonitions. Health and illness, clinics and hospitals, are prime stalking grounds for these phenomena. Yet we physicians have a tortured relationship with them. We are trained to honor evidence-based medicine, with its rigid algorithms and decision trees. This approach deliberately excludes hunches, intuition, premonitions, and other varieties of knowing that don't conform to reason and analysis.

I have spent my professional life in the field of internal medicine, from which I am now retired. Integral to my life as a physician has been a fascination with the role of consciousness and spirituality in health and illness.

Although I've published books exploring this issue in various ways, I've never focused explicitly on premonitions. But since my "Justin dream" clobbered me, I've been unable to suppress my curiosity about them. I've combed the neurological, psychiatric, and parapsychological literature in search of answers: how and why premonitions happen; what purpose they serve; what they imply for our understanding of consciousness, space, and time; and how to cultivate them.

Over the course of the last three decades, I've seen the landscape of this field change considerably. Solid breakthroughs have occurred in premonition research that were totally unanticipated. Ingenious computer-based experiments by consciousness researcher Dean Radin and others now show that perhaps everyone has an innate ability to sense the future. Scientists around the world replicated and, indeed, have confirmed the studies, so that we can now responsibly use *science* and *premonitions* in the same sentence.

As the new information has become available, my attitude toward premonitions has changed. I no longer believe my premonitions have dried up. I think they have merely taken other forms, becoming more subtle and less visible but always active. I believe that to be alive is to have premonitions. Premonitions are not something we can avoid. They are our birthright. They come factory-installed, part of our original equipment.

A premonition—from the Latin *prae*, "before," and *monere*, "warn"—is literally a forewarning. It is a glimpse of the future, a feeling or sense that something is about to happen. Premonitions are not explainable by inference from prior information or past experience. They come in many flavors. They may warn us of something unpleasant, such as imminent danger or a health crisis, or announce something agreeable, such as what the winning lottery numbers are or where to find a parking spot. Premonitions may be vague, or vivid and dramatic, as in a dream that contains complex characters and plotlines. They may occur while we are awake or asleep. We may be fully conscious of them, or they may be buried in our unconscious mind so deeply they prompt us to act without knowing why.

The sheer heterogeneity of premonitions is dizzying, confusing, maddening. Why should premonitory dreams warn us one night of a national disaster, and the next night reveal where we lost our glasses? Why do they range from the trivial to matters of life and death? Why do some premonitions ar-

rive in vibrant detail, while others are an imageless hunch or a vague intuition? And why do they turn up not just in humans but in animals as well? Premonitions are fickle; sometimes they are valid, but often are misleading. Why aren't they consistent? Why won't they respond when bidden? These are some of the questions we'll try to unravel.

So as we begin, let's acknowledge that premonitions are utterly paradoxical; this will help us keep our balance as we explore this perplexing territory. A paradox is something that's considered to be senseless, logically unacceptable, or self-contradictory, but there are other views. My favorite comes from English essayist and novelist G. K. Chesterton, who said that a paradox is "truth standing on its head to attract attention." Maybe that's one reason why premonitions are so bizarre. If they weren't, we might not pay attention to them.

Our journey through *The Power of Premonitions* consists of five stages.

One—"The Cases"—describes actual instances of premonitions. I've selected examples that reveal the main characteristics of foreknowledge—how it often saves lives from impending disasters, and also how it often fails to do so because of its incomplete fragmentary nature. We'll see how premonitions often herald illness or death. The role of premonitions in premodern cultures will be examined, as well as people's use of premonitions to make money and acquire wealth.

Two—"Evidence"—examines the recent contributions of modern science to premonitions. We'll see how the various presentiment experiments indicate that perhaps everyone has an innate ability to see what will unfold in the near future. These little-known computer-based experiments reveal that premonitions are not fantasy or wishful thinking, but are a natural in-born ability that usually operates outside our conscious awareness.

Three—"Premonitions: Why, What, How?"—explores why premonitions exist and what purpose they serve, why they are not more accurate and widespread, and how to interpret them.

Four—"Why Should We Want to Cultivate Premonitions, and How Do We Do It?"—further unpacks the importance of premonitions, the penalties we often pay for ignoring them, the role of personality and temperament in premonitions, and some of the cautions and dangers of these experiences.

Five—"Premonitions and Our Worldview"—examines the impact of premonitions on how we see the world and our place in it. We explore not

only our ability to see and change the future, but the past as well. We'll explore the influence of premonitions on perhaps the biggest questions of all—the nature of the mind, our origin, and our destiny.

In the Appendix, we'll review what some of the greatest minds in the history of science have had to say about the nature of consciousness. We'll see that these timeless views of the mind are cordial to the existence of foreknowledge.

The allure of future knowing is ancient and powerful. As author and remote-viewing researcher Stephan A. Schwartz says, "There is no siren whose call is quite so exquisite as the music of the future. For as long as writing has existed there are records showing we have sought to know its form. Last year alone, literally billions were spent by widows, lovers, spies, and presidents—all seeking, like an arrow through time, some way to answer: 'In the future, what will . . . ?'"

For most of human history, foreknowledge has not been regarded as hypothetical, but as a natural part of the human endowment. People saw evidence for this everywhere. Premodern cultures routinely used, and still use, premonitions pragmatically—knowing where danger lay; where to find game and shelter; when to plant and harvest; where to locate strayed animals; or which part of which plant, harvested in which season, prepared in which way, would cure a specific illness. In addition to the utilitarian side of precognition, there were more subtle benefits that were equally important.

The ability to know the future is a stepping-stone outside the here and now. The intensity of the trials of life—the daily dose of hunger, suffering, and death—was lessened for our predecessors because foreknowledge made it clear they were part of something outside the here and now, something transcendent. Our forebears could better endure the nastiness, horrors, and pain of the present because they were not time-bound.

They kept their links to the past alive through oral history, ritual, myth, and story, which often included honoring their ancestors. Their link to the future was fashioned through foreknowledge, which for them was an obvious, demonstrable fact.

Our forebears knew something we don't: the links between the past, present, and future are real. But how can we know this for ourselves? There are two main ways I'll pursue this in this book. One approach is to examine

the actual precognitive experiences of ordinary people. Second, actual experiments demonstrate that we can know the future before it happens.

Systematic research in premonitions has a long and storied history, beginning most emphatically in 1882 with the founding of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in the United Kingdom. The SPR was later imitated in other countries, including the United States, where William James, widely regarded as the father of American psychology, helped found the American version in 1885. The founders of the SPR were among the most eminent, respected scholars of their day. Their dedication to the principles of science was profound. Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung were members of the organization. Past presidents have included several Nobelists.

Another major event in precognition research was the founding of the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory in 1935 by the legendary J. B. Rhine. Rhine is rightly considered the founder of modern parapsychology research, and he did more than anyone in the twentieth century to anchor it in rigorous science. Rhine and his colleagues brought a statistical and laboratory approach to studying extrasensory perception (ESP), which continues to this day. Rhine's initial laboratory has morphed into the Rhine Research Center, with headquarters in Durham, North Carolina.

In 1957, following an initiative by Rhine, the Parapsychological Association (PA) was formed with the intention of providing a nucleus for an international society. In 1969 the PA became formally affiliated with the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The archives of the PA are a rewarding entry point for anyone wishing to pursue the history of research in precognition.

Though my focus in this book is on the most recent research in precognition, I mean no disrespect to the early trailblazers. Those wanting a more comprehensive approach might consult the recent scholarly books *Irreducible Mind* by Edward F. Kelly and colleagues, and *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence*, edited by Etzel Cardeña, Stanley C. Krippner, and Steven Jay Lynn.

One of the most striking features of psi-related experiences (PREs) is their high prevalence in nearly every culture studied. A 1987 survey by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center found that 67

percent of adult Americans say they have had PREs. In most other countries where similar surveys have been done, more than half the population reports PREs. This includes all of North America, the United Kingdom, and other countries in Europe, the Middle East, Brazil, Asia, and Australia.

The most common PRE involves telepathy, reported by one-third to half of the population. About one-fifth report clairvoyance. Psychokinesis is reported by only 5 to 10 percent of the population.

Where do premonitions fit in? Around 60 percent of PREs are *contemporaneous*, meaning that they link two concurrent events. Nearly all the remainder are *precognitive*, relating to the future. Precognitive ESP, or PREs, are what we call premonitions.

Most contemporaneous PREs are intuitive imageless impressions—a hunch or “just a feeling.” By contrast, precognitive experiences or premonitions usually occur as realistic visual images, most commonly in dreams.

There is a dark side to premonitions. Because they provide foreknowledge, people throughout history have coveted this ability as a way of exercising influence over others. In their quest for power, people throughout history have won—and lost—kingdoms and fortunes by trusting premonitions. Adolf Hitler’s premonitions of Aryan supremacy and a Third Reich that would reign supreme for a thousand years destroyed Germany, ravaged Europe, and led to 50 million deaths in World War II. The Allies’ premonitions that the D-Day invasion at Normandy would be successful, in spite of horrid weather and ferocious German resistance, won the day.

Today it is difficult for us to appreciate the extent to which premonitions, visions, prescient dreams, prophecy, and divination have influenced civilizations. “The concept of divination is basic to not only shamanic but also Judeo-Christian traditions,” say psi researchers Elisabeth Targ, Marilyn Schlitz, and Harvey J. Irwin in *Varieties of Anomalous Experience*. “As in other places, leaders in ancient Greece relied heavily on the prophetic efforts of sibyls at the Oracle of Delphi to make strategic decisions. In modern Asia, the time of escape for His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, after the Chinese invasion was determined through directions from the Nechung oracle, who helped guide the spiritual and political leader of Tibet into safety in India.”

The Nechung Oracle remains the official state oracle of the exiled govern-

ment of Tibet. The Kuten, the medium of the oracle, occupies the rank of a deputy minister in the Tibetan government. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has dealings with him several times a year. The reason is pragmatic. As His Holiness says in his autobiography, “This may sound far-fetched to twentieth-century western readers. . . . But I do so for the simple reason that as I look back over the many occasions when I have asked questions of the oracle, on each one of them time has proved that his answer was correct.” But he cautiously adds, “That is not to say that I rely solely on the oracle’s advice.”

At least the Tibetans are open about their reliance on future knowing. Our government tends toward secrecy in these matters. First Lady Nancy Reagan consulted an astrologer in managing President Ronald Reagan’s schedule. The Carter administration successfully used remote viewers to locate a downed spy plane that satellites could not see. The CIA for decades employed remote viewers to gather intelligence in the highly classified Star Gate program.

Premonitory abilities can be extremely seductive. This is why many spiritual traditions have regarded them as detriments to one’s spiritual development, and why some religions condemn them as satanic. This reaction is perhaps overwrought, at least in some instances. Fire can be used to cook our food or burn heretics, but no one suggests that we ban it because it can be used in nefarious ways. So it is with premonitions. Surely wisdom and discernment, not censorship or condemnation, is the better approach toward a gift that humankind has possessed for probably its entire history, and whose impact on us is, on the whole, benevolent.

I’m not asking you to take anything in this book on blind faith, but to open yourself up to the *possibility* of premonitions and the evidence supporting them. Listen to the stories people tell. Explore the research that demonstrates our capacity to sense the future. Ponder the implications of mind outside of time. Invite premonitions into your life and see what happens. If you do so humbly and reverently, your life will likely become more premonition-prone, and you may touch that exquisite infinite realm to which premonitions, now as always, are a door.

—Larry Dossey, M.D.
Santa Fe, New Mexico