

In Memoriam: Michael Persinger

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It is with great sadness that I read of Professor Michael Persinger's (1945-2018) passing. The Laurentian University obituary noted that "Dr. Persinger... was a very engaged member of the Laurentian community. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1967. He received his M. A. in Physiological Psychology from the University of Tennessee in 1969, and his Ph.D. from the University of Manitoba in 1971. Dr. Persinger began his academic career at Laurentian in 1971 as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology. In 1975, he was promoted to Associate Professor, and became Full Professor in 1980. In 1983, Dr. Persinger founded the Behavioural Neuroscience program at Laurentian, bringing together psychology, chemistry, and biology. He remained Coordinator of the Behavioural Neuroscience program until his passing. Dr. Persinger was globally renowned for his scholarly contributions, having published hundreds of peer-reviewed academic journal articles across several different fields of study... He was a regular contributor to national and international television and radio programs, speaking on topics such as unusual experiences, climate change, religious experiences and many more."



This official obituary does not go into depth regarding Michael's contributions to parapsychology. I first discovered this interest when I was lecturing at a university in South Dakota and my host told me that a friend of his was engaged in parapsychological research. I had never heard of him but asked for contact information so that we could communicate. Michael wrote me a long response and told me about his analysis of spontaneous cases. He found a link between low geomagnetic activity and putative ESP, and a link between high geomagnetic activity and PK.

Michael asked for my data and I sent him the "hits" and "misses" for the first night for every participant in our Maimonides dream/ESP studies. The analysis demonstrated a significant connection, especially for what we called "high hits" (high ratings on correspondences between dream reports and pictorial targets) and low geomagnetic activity (Persinger & Krippner, 1989; Krippner & Persinger, 1996).

When our team observed the psychic claimant Amyr Amiden in Brazil, I devised a 5-point scale that a group used to evaluate each of the spontaneous PK phenomena that occurred in our week with

him. These data were correlated with geomagnetic readings obtained with the only geomagnetometer in Brasilia, transported to an isolated field to ensure accuracy. This time there was a significant relation between high scores on the scale and high geomagnetic activity.

Michael did not attend very many conventions because of family obligations as well as his incredible output of published research. The *American Psychologist* identified him as one of the most widely published of its members. Michael had an inquisitive mind, an original approach to research, and a lively sense of humor. He once told me, "You refused to call yourself a neuroscientist, but that is your basic identity." The compliment was undeserved but, I assume, was made in jest. Michael enjoyed hearing accounts of UFO sightings, mediumistic readings, and phone calls from the dead, although he typically sought naturalistic explanations such as electric storms, cortical anomalies, and the environmental ambiance. His work was not without criticism and controversy, even among parapsychologists. But there was nobody quite like him. Who else could have evoked quasi-mystical experiences with an apparatus he jokingly referred to as "The God Helmet"?

References

- Persinger, M. A., & Krippner, S. (1989). Dream ESP experiments and geomagnetic activity. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 83, 101-116.
- Krippner, S., & Persinger, M. (1996). Evidence for enhanced congruence between dreams and distant target material during periods of decreased geomagnetic activity. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 10, 487-493.