

In Memoriam Lawrence LeShan, 1920-2020

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Many of us recall being uniquely influenced and touched by someone who inspired us by their words, actions, writings, and sheer force of their being. For me, Lawrence LeShan was such a person.

In my home library I have a “LeShan shelf” where most of his authored books rest dog-eared, underlined, and generally defaced through multiple readings. They date to the period in my life following medical school, when many Big Questions were unsettled — the nature of consciousness, its impact in healing, human connectivity, and our fate following physical death.

Lawrence LeShan was born September 8, 1920. He died on November 9, 2020, at the age of 100. His contributions to our intellectual landscape were monumental. Here are a few notable facts.

LeShan held a Ph.D. in human development from the University of Chicago. His teaching appointments included Pace University, Roosevelt University, and the New School for Social Research. He worked as a clinical and research psychologist for 50 years, including six as a psychologist in the U.S. Army. In workshops, he taught rudiments of psychic healing to hundreds. He was a staunch defender of parapsychology; probably no one in modern times has had a clearer understanding of how and why these events occur. His writing was distinguished not just by his original, penetrating insights but also by remarkable clarity of communication. In the actual technique of writing, he was masterful.

He was prolific, author of twenty books and scores of scientific papers exploring the above-mentioned topics. He was also a captivating public speaker, blessed with an engaging, larger-than-life personality. Generous with his friendship, he was eager to assist fellow seekers, as I can attest.

I came across LeShan’s work early in my career as an internal medicine physician in Dallas, Texas, in the early 1970s. At that time, I was fascinated by the role of consciousness in healing. This led to an intense interest in parapsychology research, which continues today. Mind-body medicine was controversial then but gaining traction in the culture. Interest in meditation was erupting everywhere. As a member of the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, headed by psychologist James Hillman, I was instrumental in inviting LeShan to participate in an event dealing with the integration of consciousness and healing. We collaborated in a stimulating dialogue that began a long friendship.

It is not easy to characterize the breadth and depth of LeShan's scholarship, but here are a few highlights. Beginning in the 1960s he wrote authoritatively in the field of parapsychology, most eloquently in his landmark book *The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist: Toward a General Theory of the Paranormal*, but also in *A New Science of the Paranormal: The Promise of Psychological Research*, and in *From Newton to ESP*. He clearly saw the relevance of parapsychology to medicine, in terms of diagnosis and therapy. Deeply informed about quantum mechanics, he collaborated with famed physicist-philosopher Henry Margenau of Yale. His *How to Meditate* is a classic in the field of spiritual scholarship. As someone who served as a field battalion surgeon in Vietnam, I found *The Psychology of War* a revelation.

LeShan's profound humanism is key to his entire oeuvre. As a psychologist, he was intensely concerned about people's mental health — but also wrote at length about neoplasia in *Cancer as a Turning Point; You Can Fight for Your Life: Emotional Factors in the Development of Cancer*; and *The Psychosomatic Aspects of Neoplastic Disease*. His *Counseling the Dying* has helped those involved in end-of-life care. He became concerned with broader themes later in his career: *The Pattern of Evil: Myth, Social Perception and the Holocaust*; *Patriotism for Grownups: How to be a Citizen in the 21st Century*; and more. His concerns reached cosmic dimensions with *An Ethic for the Age of Space: A Touchstone for Conduct Among the Stars*.

To say that LeShan inspired me is an understatement. As I worked through his books, I was amazed at his understanding of the role of consciousness in our interface with “the world out there.” This was a pivotal influence in my personal journey. His integration of psychology, healing, quantum physics, and the overlap of western and eastern knowledge systems were dazzling. His influence was lasting. The theme of my most recent book, *One Mind: How Our Individual Mind Is Part of a Greater Consciousness and Why It Matters*, clearly overlaps with one of LeShan's recurring themes — the intrinsic connectedness of all humans.

LeShan did not believe in the materialism that dominated twentieth-century science and medicine or in the extermination of consciousness with physical death, and neither do I. So, although I have lost a great friend, his presence resonates still — evidence that he was correct.

Let us pause and honor his passing. He was a great man.

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