



The North Texas

Skeptic

Volume 17

February 2003

Number 2

<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

Victor Baines and the Nostradamus Society

by John Blanton

Being as clueless as ever, we never picked up on Victor Baines until we received a note from him by e-mail:¹

Hello North Texas Skeptics,

This is Victor Baines of Ft. Worth (a Nostradamus author) and “advocate” of such topics as ESP, Telepathy, precognition, and astrology. I like “everything you hate” and do not believe in. ESP guided me to your web-site tonight. But I’m sure you would never accept that as truth.

[Bunch of other stuff deleted]

Sincerely,

Victor Baines, Esq.

We thought this was all very spontaneous and refreshing, so I decided to contact Victor and see if he would be interested in the NTS Paranormal Challenge.

Alas, the e-mail return address he gave us was bogus, quickly putting an end to that line of inquiry. However, a quick Google search on the Internet turned up a Victor Baines, head of the Nostradamus Society of America.

A chiding e-mail to *that* Victor Baines, including some mean-spirited comment about children using his name to write hoax e-mails, brought no immediate response. So we figured the original letter had been a childish hoax meant to embarrass the *real* Victor Baines.

Suddenly, three months later, Victor Baines responded. He had written the original, he said, and was frankly offended by my reference to childish pranks. OK, so I was busted.

EVENTS CALENDAR

February Program

Saturday, February 8, 2003 at 2:00pm

Center for Community Cooperation
2900 Live Oak, just east of downtown Dallas

Daniel Barnett – *From Roswell to the Raelians: UFOs as Religion*

Never mind Whitley Streiber and *Communion*; some people claim they’ve been contacted by extraterrestrials – and *loved* it! In fact, religious movements have sprung up around these alleged aliens, as the recent Rael/Clonaid debacle has demonstrated. We’ll be examining this phenomenon in greater detail at the February meeting.

For more info: (214) 335-9248 or
check our Web site at
<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

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Our newsletter, *The North Texas Skeptic*, is
 published monthly by The North Texas Skeptics, P.O.
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Anyhow, the real Victor Baines is not interested in our \$10,000 challenge. He figures it's all set up for the claimant to lose. Of course, he's correct. As I explained in a final note, the proponents claim they can do the impossible, so we require they do the impossible in order to get the money. Which is why we still have the money.

In responding to Victor, I mentioned the correspondence with Bette Epstein from about 11 years ago. Epstein could find lost or hidden objects by dowsing a map. So she said. *She* was not interested in the award either. You have to realize it was only \$6000 back then. Had she been interested I suspect we would have asked her to locate my car, parked somewhere on a city street in Dallas. Not impossible, but our money would have been safe, since we would have only allowed about two hours for the search.²

Last I looked, the money was still in the bank.

Back to Victor Baines

Victor Baines has written a book, *Remember the Future: The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, Holographic Books, 1993. You can get it by linking to Amazon through the NTS Web site. Go to the site and click on the book title. We get a commission.³

The Nostradamus Society of America, as evidenced by its Web site, seems to concentrate mainly on Baines' writings and speeches. However, in a quick check of Nostradamus topics on the Internet, the Society's name pops up regularly.

If you are a Nostradamus fan you will regularly come across Victor Baines. For example, following the idiots' attack on the U.S. in September 2001 there were two hoax e-mails floated about the Internet claiming Nostradamus had predicted the attacks. Here is the first.⁴

"In the year of the new century and nine months, From the sky will come a great King of Terror... The sky will burn at forty-five degrees. Fire approaches the great new city..."

"In the city of york there will be a great collapse, 2 twin brothers torn apart by chaos while the fortress falls the great leader will succumb third big war will begin when the big city is burning"

Victor Baines pointed out the obvious hoax:⁵

However, the lines are a "collage" of two different Nostradamus quatrains, Victor Baines, director of the Nostradamus Society of America, said on the society's website. A quatrain is a four-line section of verse.

Not only that, but the original quatrains said the "Great King of Terror" would come in July 1999, rather than September 2001, and in any case the latitude of New York (at Central Park) is 40 degrees, 47 minutes, not 45 degrees.

About the quatrains, Nostradamus was fond of writing in this style. The quatrains are four-line verses, which seem to make no sense at all

until something has already happened. Then you read them again and you say “*Idiot*. That’s what he was trying to tell us.” That’s how predictions work. They are more like *postdictions*. You don’t get to read them until after the fact.

You can get samples of Nostradamus’ musings from the Nostradamus Repository. Each click of their repository link brings up a new quatrain. Here is an example. Of course, Nostradamus wrote in French, so the site provides an English translation. Unfortunately, not the secret meaning:⁶

Sus la munict conducteur de l’armee
Se saulvera, subit esvanouy,
Sept ans apres la fame non blasmee,
A son retour ne dira oncqu’ouy.

At midnight the leader of the army
Will save himself, suddenly vanished:
Seven years later his reputation unblemished,
To his return they will never say yes.

Except, I know what this means already. I predicted this in last month’s newsletter. Saddam Hussein will give up his day job for a show business career. Later the Iraqis, having tasted McDonalds and Monday Night Football, will refuse to take him back. That was an easy one.

Victor Baines is not the only famous author on the topic of Nostradamus. Skeptical magician James (the Amazing) Randi has written *The Mask of Nostradamus : The Prophecies of the World’s Most Famous Seer*, Prometheus Books, 1993. You can also buy that book through our Web site.⁷

In *The Mask of Nostradamus*, Randi provides a history of the Nostradamus legend. He also deconstructs the popular ten quatrains offered up by Nostradamians (fans of Nostradamus) as proof of his power.

The problem Randi and other skeptics have with Nostradamians’ interpretation of the quatrains is their willingness to bend the meanings of words, after the fact, to fit the *postdiction*. An example in number eight of the ten is the translation of the word “Hister,” an old name for the Lower Danube River, to “Hitler,” a well-known tyrant of the 20th century. After all, if we don’t allow Nostradamus some latitude, how would he ever be able to describe modern events in the lexicon of his own time?

Some people call me skeptical, but I think Nostradamus was writing obscurely with purpose. If people can’t understand you, how can they call you wrong? If he had really been able to predict the future, he would have written more to the point. What’s wrong with a quatrain like this:

On an open field the masses stand in awe.
Close by them all fortunes rise and fall
A shout then tears in Benson’s house rejoicing
Crystal Bell will win the Preakness.

I would even place a little money on that one. □

References

- 1 <http://www.ntskeptics.org/challenge/baines/baines.htm>
- 2 <http://www.ntskeptics.org/1992/1992august/august1992.htm#dowser>
- 3 <http://www.ntskeptics.org/books/nostradamus.htm>
- 4 <http://www.rense.com/general13/emailhoaxers.htm>
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 <http://www.nostradamus-repository.org/>
- 7 <http://www.ntskeptics.org/books/randi.htm>

Applied foolishness

by John Blanton

The procedure appears deceptively innocent. Until you realize what’s going on.

A patient in the treatment center holds a small vial in one hand. The arm is down at his side. The other arm is outstretched, and the practitioner tugs down slightly on it. The arm gives way under the force.

At this point the practitioner might remark, “That feels firmer, doesn’t it.”

The patient agrees.

This means the medicine in the other hand, in the sealed vial down at the patient’s side—*this* is the correct medicine for this patient. What has happened is that the practitioner has concluded some perceived extra strength in the patient’s arm—the arm that’s not even holding the bottle. This tells the practitioner the patient’s body is reacting to the substance in the sealed container and signaling its need through the free arm’s resistance to force.

This is not a scene out of the latest Harry Potter movie. This ritual takes place regularly in upscale clinics and treatment centers in the U.S. It's called *applied kinesiology* (AK).

First, AK needs to be differentiated from *kinesiology*, which is the legitimate study of muscles and their movement. Dr. Stephen Barrett explains this distinction and provides an excellent review of AK on the *Quackwatch* Web site.¹

The concept of applied kinesiology was developed by George J. Goodheart in 1964, which I guess puts it in great danger of being labeled *New Age*. A deeper description is provided by a quote on *Quackwatch* from a book by two AK practitioners:

The practicing AK is a graduate chiropractor who can explain to you how your glands and organs appear to be functioning with specific muscle tests. He can suggest nutrition to help improve various conditions, and he can demonstrate with your muscles that you probably need particular nutrients. He can correct problems in your spine and in joints, and can stretch or compress muscles to improve your structural condition. He may massage certain junctures of nerve, lymph, blood, and acupuncture meridians to stimulate glandular or systemic activity. He can advise you on how to stay healthy and he will pay particular attention to your posture and your feet. He can offer an excellent second opinion if you are under a physician's care, are seeing a chiropractor who is not an applied kinesiologist, or if you have been in an accident.²

The practice of AK is not confined to medical professionals. Promoters of quack appliances of all kinds enlist the public's naiveté in pushing their wares, and belief in AK is just one more tool in their bag. A woman I have known for many years decided some time back that a rewarding career could be had selling *medical magnets*. These are the magnets you strap to your body or wear in your shoes to alleviate so many health woes. Forgetting for the moment who I was, she carefully explained the increased resistance to arm movement of a person wearing the magical magnetic shoe inserts.

Forgetting for the moment who *she* was, I carefully explained this principle, if it really worked, could be used to test whether something was magnetized.

Public faith in AK seems easy to come by, and a number of diverse entrepreneurs have joined in the feeding. Stephen Barrett has outlined an alphabet soup of related fields. The following information about them was obtained from the referenced Web sites:

Neural Organization Technique (N.O.T.)³

The Neural Organization Technique International of Brooklyn, N.Y., provides information about N.O.T. on its Web site. N.O.T. "protocols" were developed in 1979/1980, and they have been in constant development since. As explained on the Web site:

N.O.T. is a total body program which can address almost any deficit which can befall the human condition. The body is a totally integrated biological entity where everything effects everything and as the song goes, the "head bone" is ultimately connected to the "foot bone". It is impossible to treat one part of the body only without effecting or causing stress or change somewhere else.

According to Dr. Carl Ferreri, patients come from 15 countries and most states in the U.S., attending either to a clinic close to home or even making the trip to Brooklyn.

Contact Reflex Analysis (CRA)⁴

CRA is claimed to be a "natural method of analyzing the body's structural, physical, and nutritional needs." Any of these can contribute to health problems according to the CRA Web site. They note that nerves carry electrical energy, which I note is contrary to what is taught in biology. Furthermore, they point out there are approximately 75 reflex areas on the skin that represent specific body parts. Illness causes an interruption of the nerve energy, similar to the action of an overloaded circuit breaker.

To test a reflex, the tester will use the patient's arm muscle (or any other muscle) as a "circuit" indicator. When the tester's fingertip comes near or touches a healthy reflex, the arm muscle will remain very strong. Nerve energy is flowing freely. The tester will not be able to push the patient's arm down without exerting a lot of force.

However if the arm muscle is suddenly weak, and the tester can easily push the patient's arm down, a "hot circuit breaker" has been located. The nerve energy has been interrupted. Using this reflex information, the Health Care Professional will know if the problem is structural, physical, or nutritional.

Health Kinesiology (HK)⁵

The Health Kinesiology™ Web site describes how kinesiology "finds disturbed energy flow in the body/mind and corrects it helping many people heal." It is claimed to be a new way to use muscle testing and monitoring to "gather genuine energy information from the body..." It also helps in eliminat-

ing allergies, “physical toxicity,” emotional traumas, and learning blocks. It also helps patients to perform at their best.

In a nutshell, the HK Practitioner uses muscle testing / monitoring to identify the priority order of the energy balancing that needs to be done with his/her client, exactly what stresses are interfering with well being, and which energy balancing methods to use for that individual.

The basic principles of kinesiology come from Traditional Chinese Medicine / Acupuncture and Applied Kinesiology / Touch For Health. Dr. [Jimmy] Scott expanded on those disciplines, basing his work on a solid, scientific understanding of the human electromagnetic energy system, psychology, and psychophysiology. HK’s broad applications range from electromagnetic issues to psychological and spiritual ones, from allergy and detoxification to geobiology. It offers a unique session structure that is clearly defined enough to guide the newcomer and open-ended enough to include other therapeutic modalities.

HK compares itself to acupuncture in that both use the “meridian model of the human energy system.” HK practitioners, however, forego the needles and use only a light touch to correct “energy imbalances.”

Neuro Emotional Technique (NET)⁶

The Dr. Z Web site (“When Western Medicine Has Not Helped”) explains that NET is a “Holistic Alternative Method” for accessing physiology of emotions through applied kinesiology and chiropractic.

The N.E.T. doctor uses muscle testing, body reflex points, and semantic reactions (physiological reactions to memories or words) to assist and guide you to recall a specific negative emotion and when it first occurred. This engages a specific neuro-emotional pattern, much as a computer operator engages a specific program on a computer screen. While you mentally hold the emotional memory, the doctor adjusts the spinal subluxations associated with it.

Jaffe-Mellor Technique (JMT)⁷

The JMT™ Web site explains that it “is a revolutionary bioenergetic system created by Carolyn Jaffe, D.Ac., Ph.D.(c) naturopathy, and Judy Mellor, RN, Ph.D.(c) nutrition, Certified Oriental medicine herbalist.”

They have developed this, they say, through years of study and research. They have found “adaptive pathogens” associated with osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia, psoriatic and rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, multiple sclerosis, Crohn’s and colitis, myasthenia

gravis, scleroderma, and other health disorders. The researchers created their practice to secure safe and effective ways to counter these pathogens without drugs, invasive methods, or other major inconveniences. They describe their method for diagnosis and treatment:

...She or he will have you hold a small glass vial in your hand while applying light pressure against your raised arm. If the arm weakens, which is only temporary, it may be that your brain perceives the substance in the vial, which creates a weakness in you energy system and this could be a very big part of why you have unhealthy bones and joints. Once the doctor has completed evaluating your condition, she or he will gently tap along your spine while you hold the vial. Following this part of the JMT™ treatment, the doctor will apply acupuncture or acupressure to balance the energy throughout your body...

The Dawson Program⁸

Cameron Dawson developed his program through 26 years of study into the functioning of the body, the nature of illness and disease, how the body heals itself. His program is based on the body’s “controlling and organizing energy matrix around which the human form develops...”

All this was known by the ancients according to the Dawson Program Web site. The Egyptians, Chinese, and even the shamans of Africa, Asia, and South America had the jump on Western medicine with this technology. And it was all written down in sacred texts.

Dr. Harold Saxton Burr, Professor of Anatomy at Yale University proposed in 1935 that living organisms have electric fields governing growth and decay. Further research demonstrated these fields are can be externally influenced. These fields can be photographed using Kirlian photography, as explained on the Web site. Also, the cause of disease is explained:

The body’s emotional, structural, physical and chemical/nutritional processes are interrelated. Any aspect may cause an alteration in the energy matrix.

Any alteration in the matrix that controls the body’s shape will result in a distortion of the physical body.

If left unattended, these distortions will result in physical illness. For example, a twist in the body may misalign a vertebra in the spine, which presses on a nerve to an organ, stopping it functioning normally.

The body contains an extraordinary innate intelligence, incorporating the subconscious mind, which organises a constant self-healing system. Pain and illness are its way of alerting us that external attention is required.

We are cautioned that treating these maladies using Western medicine only treats the symptoms—much like removing a flashing warning light from an instrument panel. Organ removal by surgery indicates standard medical practice has failed.

The Dawson Program uses the Kinesiological technique of muscle testing to trace and identify the root cause of each imbalance affecting the body's energy system and impeding the body from self-healing. This results in conditions such as Dyslexia, learning difficulties, chronic fatigue, depression, stress, Eczema, Asthma, Psoriasis and behavioural problems.

It is also pointed out that dyslexia can be corrected in less than four minutes using the Dawson Program.

AK at your door

Closer to home, we were able to observe AK in action when three fearless Skeptics attended a health fair at Texas Women's University in Denton two years ago. We set up a table in the midst of the chiropractors and the therapeutic touchers in order to provide some skeptical balance. Close by our table the Chiropractic Center of Denton was demonstrating AK on various walk-up patients.



Woo-woo at TWU. The chiropractor assesses muscular resistance in the patient's leg at Texas Women's University in 2001.

Photo by John Blanton

The photo shows how AK is done in Denton. The patient is lying on a gurney with her hand on a potential point of trouble. The chiropractor tests the vitality of this point by noting any resistance to leg motion. Hopefully this candidate did not have any issues requiring real medical diagnosis.

AK falls in line with a number of other brainless "medical" practices that have come down the pike in recent years. Not

counting homeopathy, which is now about 200 years old, there are also therapeutic touch (TT) and facilitated communication (FC). A common theme runs through all three: They rely on something weakly perceived by the practitioner, and they can all be easily tested and refuted.

TT is the bogus practice of feeling patients' energy fields and correcting them with hand manipulations. The patient is not actually touched by the practitioner. Child scientist Emily Rosa put the torch to TT five years ago by demonstrating its practitioners can't even tell when a supposed energy field (from a patient's hands) is present or absent.

FC involves trained "facilitators," who interpret supposedly weak motions of their client's hands and perform typing or other communications tasks *for* them. FC was shot down decisively by not allowing the facilitator to see what the client was seeing, and thereby not being able to correctly spell for the client.

AK can be refuted by an equally simple test. Much of the faith in this and similar techniques, is the vagueness of the measurement of its effectiveness. You think there is more resistance to movement. More than before? Or less? Is the power of suggestion coming into play?

To test it, turn the experiment around. Identify a potion in a sealed vial that produces a positive result. Now use AK in a double blind test to pick out this same potion from a collection of bottles containing inert ingredients.

We contend it can't be done using AK, and we are willing for any AK professional to challenge us on this. There's \$10,000 for anybody who can do it.



References

- 1 <http://www.quackwatch.org/>
- 2 Valentine T, Valentine C. *Applied Kinesiology: Muscle response in diagnosis, therapy and preventive medicine.* Rochester, VT: Thorsons Publishers, 1987. Written with help from Douglas P. Hetrick, D.C., and Davis S. Walther, D.C.
- 3 <http://www.notint.com/>
- 4 <http://www.crahealth.org/>
- 5 <http://www.subtleenergy.com/>
- 6 <http://www.drz.org/asp/cp/net.asp>
- 7 <http://www.jmt-jafmeltechnique.com/>
- 8 <http://www.dawsonprogram.com/>
There is more on Harold Saxton Burr and Kirlian photography on the World Research Foundation Web site at <http://www.wrf.org/news/news0003.htm>.

Skeptic Ink

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John Blanton.
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What's new

by Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

Stop cloning around: Clonaid has started backpedaling.

Last week we reported that the company, founded by Raelians, picked gullible physicist Michael Guillen to oversee verification of the cloning of baby Eve (WN 27 Dec 02). He says he's not being paid to do this, but it is generally believed that he is working on a book or film deal. But it now seems that the parents (parent?) of Eve are resisting such a test. We are, of course, *shocked*, but apparently a Florida lawyer has filed a suit claiming that Eve is being abused or exploited and asking the court to take custody. Meanwhile, the vice president of Clonaid will explain the new cloning technology and discuss investment opportunities at the Broward County Convention Center on 11 Jan 03 www.money-expo.com. The workshop is free, but you're gonna need \$99 to reserve a seat. Clonaid is a commercial company, and it's not embarrassed about its goals: it expects to make a lot of money. Immortality, after all, should be an easy sell.

Scientific hoax? No, no, not the cloning, Michael Guillen.

We now learn that the scientist/journalist, who grandly announced that he was accepting the responsibility of testing the Clonaid claim "on behalf of the scientific community," tried to market an exclusive to the media before Eve was born, which raises serious questions about his independence. Even Fox Entertainment, which gave us such classics as *Alien Autopsy*, declined on ethical grounds. Wednesday, Guillen was interviewed by

Charles Gibson on ABC *Good Morning America*. "You are a Professor of Physics at Harvard?" Gibson began, by way of establishing Guillen's credentials. "Yes," Guillen mouthed. Whoa! Guillen is not a Professor of Physics at Harvard. I went to American Men and Women of Science; the edition I had was 1995-96. His autobiographical sketch says he's a member of the National Academy of Sciences. He's not. □

Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org

The North Texas Skeptic comments on the Columbia tragedy

February 1, 2003

— Two steps forward, one step back —

We continue to challenge the future. We make strides forward, and we take our licks. Today we lost seven more pioneers. They will not be the last.

While some question the scientific worth of manned space flight, there is little doubt manned exploration will go on. It is our nature. We must see, hear, and touch. We are relentlessly inquisitive on a personal level, and we will not be armchair adventurers. People will continue go into space. Not because they need to but because they can.

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