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Survival Research Institute of Canada, PO Box 8697, Victoria, BC V8W 3S3 Canada
Email: info@survivalresearch.ca Website: www.survivalresearch.ca

First prepared in October 2006 by the Survival Research Institute of Canada (Debra Barr and Walter Meyer zu Erpen). Capitalization of any name or subject in the text below indicates that you will find an entry on that topic in the forthcoming third edition of Rosemary Ellen Guiley's *Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits* (October 2007).

Table-Tilting

Since 1848, table-tilting phenomena, including the lifting, tilting, turning, rocking, and pivoting of tables, and the related knocking and rapping sounds produced, have been witnessed by thousands of families in home circles across North America and Europe. For example, in her journals, Canadian author LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY described her periodic experiences of table-tilting with family and friends over almost thirty years (1890-1919). Earlier accounts of table phenomena include M. Tscherepanoff's observation in 1831 of the flight of a table with a Tibetan lama. Descriptions of Tibetan knowledge of thought forms (tulpa) able to cause independent movements were also addressed from 1920s onwards by writer and explorer Alexandre David-Neel (1868-1969).

Historically, a number of individuals have manifested enough psychic force on their own to move tables in a powerful way, including Francesco Carancini (1853-?), EUSAPIA PALLADINO (1854-1918), Elizabeth Poole (1870-1935) (See THOMAS GLENDENNING HAMILTON), Kathleen (Kate) Goligher (1898-?) (See GOLIGHER CIRCLE), DOROTHY STELLA CRANSHAW (known as Stella C.) (1900-?), Jack Webber (1907-1940), and Phil Jordan (1950-).

In recent decades, fewer SITTER GROUPS appear to have sustained an interest in table-tilting phenomena, though examples do exist: British experiments by Kenneth J. Batchelor (1964-67), D.W. Hunt (1968-69) and Colin Brookes-Smith (1971-73); séances by the SORRAT group in Columbia, Missouri (1961-1981), that may be ongoing; experiences of full levitation of a large dinner table by the Douglas and Betty Thurmond Transcendental Meditation (TM) group in Binghamton, New York (1973-75), including one session that was filmed with a home movie camera; observations by the late Carl F. Pihl, Beacon Home Circle, in Florida (1991-93); table phenomena observed by the Sydney, Australia, table-tilting group (2001-ca. 2004), some of which has been filmed; and study sessions by a Spiritualist home circle in Victoria, British Columbia (1998-ongoing).

In another interesting experiment, members of the Toronto Society for Psychical Research working in the 1970s under the leadership of IRIS M. OWEN and A.R.G. OWEN claimed to have deliberately created PHILIP, an imaginary ghost who was able to generate classic table-tilting phenomena. Communication with SPIRIT was not the purpose of the group and was not attempted. Rather, the group sought to prove that the table-tilting phenomena observed in Spiritualist SÉANCES could be produced in a séance-like setting, through group

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PSYCHOKINESIS (PK) and the creation of a collective thought form. The Philip group did report similar phenomena, including tables lifted on two legs, moving across the floor, pivoting on one leg, and rapping sounds or knocks in response to questions asked of Philip that were designed to elicit a Yes or No answer. Some Spiritualists claimed that an actual surviving spirit had assumed the role of the imaginary Philip, but the group was adamant that none of the information communicated went beyond the story they had created for their imaginary ghost.

In sitter groups, the production of table phenomena seems to be based on the strength of shared beliefs, whether those beliefs are in real or imagined GHOSTS. For example, the above-mentioned Spiritualist study group in Victoria, BC, after sitting for almost a decade with a dedicated core membership and a wide variety of guests, has ascertained that the majority of its members need to have faith that some phenomena will indeed occur. It has found that the presence of one or more skeptical guests does not inhibit activity. The sitters in the group share a belief in SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH and the hope of communicating with departed family members, friends and other spirit beings.

The group's members also regard trust in each other's integrity as a key part of the process. They have gathered evidence that meaningful table movements occur no matter which members are present or absent, and that the action of the table is so unpredictable that no single individual could have caused it. They are convinced that an external energy source is involved; otherwise, collusion between at least two sitters would have been needed to create certain results. For instance, application of a coordinated physical force among members would have been required to make a table rise and pivot about on one leg, or suddenly move across the floor while rocking, but repeated observation in good light reveals no evidence of physical manipulation of the table. The Victoria group is featured in a television documentary, *Conjuring Philip* (2007), produced by Reel Time Images.

As a form of MEDIUMSHIP, group members have expressed frustration with the limitations of the table-tilting process. As with a game of charades, they must formulate an appropriate series of questions answerable with either Yes or No. The method also requires the pre-establishment of a particular table movement for each answer. In general, table-tilting can provide only weak evidence of SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH because both table rocking and spirit contact must be sustained during a long set of questions to identify the communicator. Impressive evidence can still be received, however, especially when the information obtained through the rocking table is beyond the knowledge of the sitters and can be independently confirmed.

The Victoria group has concluded that spirit CONTROLS do not directly move tables. Instead, psychic energy or force flowing through their hands into the table

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causes movement, though the energy itself may be from or augmented by an external source, similar to the theory of Therapeutic Touch and related hands-on healing modalities.

In attempting to understand accounts of psychokinesis in connection with table-tilting, John L. Randall's definition in *Psychokinesis: A Study of Paranormal Forces through the Ages* (1982) seems to be sufficiently broad to allow a group mind or consciousness, as well as a discarnate mind, either of which may be capable of influencing the table's movement.

For further progress to be made with respect to table-tilting as a form of collective PK, a scientific hypothesis is required to explain "mind over matter" rather than just label the result. Also, in experiments that involve purported communications either with spirits, imaginary beings, or the subconscious self, it is important to separate the two aspects of the phenomena, that is the physical movement of the table from the communication aspects. In this way, study of the causes can be addressed as distinct from the source of the communication, which is the subject of more heated debate.

Many parapsychologists, on the basis of experiments in micro-PK, accept that there is a still-unknown and unmeasured force that is able to cause objects to move without the application of normal physical force. It is probable that table-tilting is a manifestation of the same PK force, but on a larger scale (macro-PK) and probably results from the combined psychic force of the sitter group's members (collective or group PK). However, the jury is still out on the nature of the communications that are reported through table-tilting. It is probable that, as in other forms of mediumship, the communication process combines elements of information from both the spirit world and the human subconscious.

Further Reading:

Brown, Michael H. *PK: A Report on the Power of PsychoKinesis, Mental Energy that Moves Matter*. Blauvelt, New York: Steinerbooks, 1976.

Randall, John L. *Psychokinesis: A Study of Paranormal Forces through the Ages*. London: Souvenir Press, 1982.

Richards, John Thomas. *SORRAT: A History of the Neihardt Psychokinesis Experiments, 1961-1981*. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1982.

Rogo, D. Scott. *Mind Over Matter: How the Human Mind Can Manipulate the Physical World*. Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press, 1986.

Zuckerbrot, Donna. *Conjuring Philip* [television documentary]. Toronto, Ontario: Reel Time Images, 2007.