

## **Paid Mediumship: A Risky Business**

*Ricardo C. Mastroleo, Ph.D.*  
Allan Kardec Spiritist Educational Center  
[www.aksec.org](http://www.aksec.org)

Spiritism is based on natural, and therefore, universal laws. However, the way it must be introduced and taught to anyone who is new to its core ideas strongly depends on each individual's cultural values, religious background, and personal motivation to learn this new body of knowledge. In fact, this is a general pedagogical truth that is valid not only to the teaching of Spiritism, but also to the teaching of any field of human knowledge. The ability to educate depends heavily on the understanding the educator has about the individuals that will be learning the new knowledge.

As Spiritism is being established in more and more countries, with different cultures, languages and ethical values, it is imperative that the spiritists in different parts of the globe who lead study groups or deliver talks about Spiritism, take into careful consideration the local cultural values so as to put forward the spiritist message in a way that better resonates in people's hearts <sup>[1], [2], [3]</sup>.

Charity is one of the pillars of Spiritism, and the act of giving without expecting anything in return is a bright source of light that illuminates and directs our spiritual path. In this context, Kardec extensively discussed <sup>[4], [5]</sup> the drawbacks of associating the practice of mediumship with financial or any material compensation. On the other hand, in countries like the United States the entrepreneurial attitude is highly valued and encouraged. The ability individuals have to use their talents and ingenuity to create new businesses embodies the basis of the economical system of this country. The value of honest and hard work is taught to children in early ages, where many parents reward their kids with small monetary payments for performing household chores, or encourage them to engage in remunerated activities like mowing a neighbor's lawn, babysitting, or setting up the traditional lemonade booth in their home's front yards to sell cold lemonade in a summer day.

It is clear that in such a business oriented environment, which permeates the lives of many people in the United States, it becomes a little tricky to convey the idea that the practice of paid mediumship should be avoided. The purpose of this article is to highlight the main points in Kardec's arguments discouraging such a practice, and then point out a way in which this concept can be better assimilated in this country.

### **Give for free what has been received gratuitously**

This is the title of Chapter 26 of The Gospel According to Spiritism <sup>[4]</sup>, and is an argument frequently used by spiritists to advocate against the practice of paid mediumship. However, this argument might not be very effective when presented by itself only. Kardec used this passage from the Gospel (Matthew 10:8), and two others, "Paid Prayers" (Mark 12:38-40), and "The Money Changers Expelled from the Temple" (Matthew 21:12-13), to illustrate the importance of charity through our prayers and donation of our time and talents for the benefit of others, and also to emphasize the fact that spiritual progress cannot be purchased, but only attained as a result of our own commitment to self reform in conformity with the Law of Love. But the isolated use of this argument against the commercialization of mediumship

might have little impact in a culture where the financial recompense for professional services is always expected. The argument “give for free what you received for free” has a counterargument that is often invoked: “If a gifted and skilled musician, medical doctor, or scientist can charge for their work, why not a gifted and skilled medium? They all got their gifts for free and acquired their skills with their own effort. Why would it be ethically unacceptable for mediums to make a living off their natural aptitudes and skills?”

One might respond to this counterargument by invoking another statement, also found in the same chapter <sup>[4]</sup>: “*Mediums are not to sell words that do not belong to them, seeing that they are not fruits of their conception, nor their research, nor of their personal work*”. Although undoubtedly true, this argument can be easily refuted with questions like these: “In the exercise of their activities, sign language interpreters or simultaneous translators are also saying nothing that is fruit of their conception. Does it mean that it is ethically wrong for them to charge for their work? If they are charging for their knowledge of different languages and their ability to provide an instantaneous, accurate translation, why cannot a medium charge for his/her ability and skill to serve as the translator between the spiritual and material realms?”

### **Intention and mediumship**

The discussion above illustrates well the fact that the use of purely ethical arguments in countries like the United States to advise against remunerated mediumistic work can be very ineffective because they conflict with the strong and long-standing culture of hard work along with the merit and remuneration compatible with one’s personal skills and efforts. Consequently, the discussion about the exercise of mediumship as a profession must be conducted in a manner where less weight is given to the ethics of it, and more emphasis put on the practical negative outcomes that might result from such a practice.

That said, an important point to consider is that mediumship is a spiritual and mental activity, where the true intention of the medium, manifested through his/her current vibratory states of mind and heart, will determine the nature of the spirit with whom the connection is to be established <sup>[6], [7]</sup>. Besides, in any mediumistic activity the bulk of the work is done by the spirit, with the medium being only the translator, the instrument utilized by the spirit. Therefore, the quality of any assistance work is strongly influenced by the level of spiritual evolution of the communicating spirit. However, benevolent spirits, in their willingness to share their love and wisdom with those in need, will tend to stay away from mediums that don’t have a genuine intention to serve. Not because they don’t have the desire to assist the person that requested the medium’s help, but because the vibratory mismatch between the medium and the spirit becomes an impediment for the spirit to properly perform the needed work, in the same way that an out of tune violin becomes a serious obstacle for a virtuoso violinist to produce good music. As Kardec points out <sup>[5]</sup>, “*Mediumship is a faculty given for good, and good spirits withdraw from everyone who would make it a stepping-stone for aught that does not answer to the views of Providence. Egotism is the sore spot in the social system; the good spirits combat it, and it cannot be supposed that they come to serve it.*”

Consequently, a good medium is not only measured by his/her ability to serve as an accurate translator between the spiritual and material realms, but also by his/her ability to connect to more evolved spirits. This connection takes place when the medium is in a vibratory spiritual state that is compatible with the spiritual state of the spirit, and when it comes to assistance work, this compatibility is influenced by the intention of both medium and the spirit to selflessly do good to others. Similarly, a medium that has the intention to do frivolous or self-interested work will attract frivolous and selfish spirits with whom the vibratory state is more compatible. Kardec underscores this point very clearly <sup>[4]</sup>: *“Those who desire serious communications should before all else ask with seriousness, and following this, should inform themselves of the nature of the sympathies the medium may have with the beings from the Spirit world. Therefore the first condition necessary to attract the benevolence of the good Spirits are humility, devotion, abnegation, and total disinterest, both moral and material.”*

Having established the fact that during any mediumistic activity the medium’s underlying intention to perform that activity is a determinant factor of the nature of spirits with whom he/she can be connected, the issue of paid mediumship work can be more soundly examined.

When a medium has a business to provide mediumistic services, profit is expected and it will originate from the revenue generated by the clients. When the medium’s living expenses depend on this revenue, the true intention and motivation to perform the work must be questioned. Is the medium more interested in the client’s consultation fee or in being the instrument of solace for a brother or sister in need? Is the medium more interested in customer satisfaction, feeling compelled to say what the client wants to hear, or in being the channel to the guidance (not always easy to be followed) of benevolent spirits to help a brother or sister to advance in their spiritual journey? Note that these questions are not as relevant to other professionals like, say, a medical doctor or a dentist, because the success of a treatment depends much more on the doctor’s knowledge and experience, and much less on the doctor’s true intention, be it to keep a good reputation and cash flow or to genuinely be an instrument to the patient’s well-being. However, for mediumistic work the true intention of the medium will determine the nature of the spirits who will be doing the work, and any medium engaged in remunerated mediumistic work will be walking a fine line between strictly selling a service to a client and altruistically assisting a brother or sister in need.

Another point to consider is that mediums cannot make promises with respect to specific spirits to channel or spiritual effects to produce, and Kardec states this truth very boldly <sup>[4]</sup>: *“There is not a single medium in the world who can guarantee the obtaining of a spiritual phenomenon at any given moment.”* If a medium charges to channel a client’s departed loved one, what if the communication cannot be established? In this scenario, fraud starts to become an attractive option, either for the medium or for mocking spirits who will take no time to seize the moment to take pleasure in being deceitful.

*“Mediumship only exists through the co-operation of the Spirits.”* <sup>[4]</sup> Making it into a profession exposes the medium to the risk of becoming an agent of less evolved and untrustworthy spirits because the main driving force for the work might be removed from love and genuine intent to help and instead, focused on the medium’s financial and material needs. For this reason, remunerated mediumship is not a recommended practice.

One might argue that discouraging mediums from charging for their services will prevent the good ones from devoting their whole time for the activity, thus depriving many people of the benefits of their work. The flaw of this argument resides in the misunderstanding of what a good medium really is. As it was pointed out earlier, a good medium is not only the one who has a good control of the mechanics that governs the mental and spiritual connections with the communicating spirit, but also the one who can earn the trust of evolved and loving spirits, who accept to utilize the medium as the instrument of their work. When mediumship becomes a source of revenue, selflessness has a greater chance to be partially or totally replaced by self-centeredness, thus discouraging or even impeding the intervention of benefactor spirits, and favoring the intervention of less evolved spirits, more attuned to the lower vibratory state of the medium.

In conclusion, mediumship is a gift intended to bring us solace, knowledge and light to our spiritual path. Meaningful and dignifying mediumship is the one that enlightens, educates, edifies, and unites us, but it can only be achieved with the concurrence of evolved and loving spirits along with the work of mediums committed to their own inner reform and to a humble and selfless practice focused solely on those they were given the opportunity to assist. When financial recompense is present, there is a risk for the focus on the work to move away from the spiritual needs of the assisted and towards the medium's material necessities and appetites. This shift in the focus and intention of the medium has a direct impact on the level of the spirits who will do the work, and therefore, in the quality of its outcome. Hence, paid mediumship should be avoided. The problem is not the payment itself, but the selfish intentions that might result from it. In fact, a medium who does not charge but uses his/her mediumistic faculties in an ostentatious manner, as a tool for self-promotion, will incur in the same problem. Mediumship with pride and egotism invariably produces futile results. In order to fulfill its dignifying mission mediumship must always be fueled by love and a sincere and selfless desire to serve.

## References

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