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An Interview with Elmer Green

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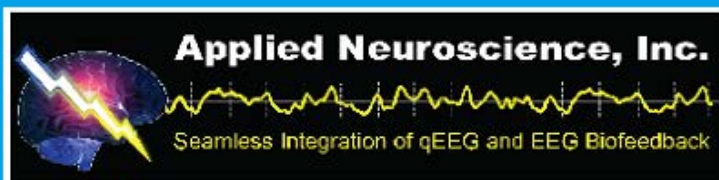
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HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

AN INTERVIEW WITH ELMER GREEN

Deborah Stokes

The Better Brain Center, Alexandria, Virginia, USA

Elmer Green was born on October 10, 1917, in La Grande, Oregon. From an early age, he possessed a natural inner awareness and curiosity about the true nature of consciousness and claims to have experienced dramatic synchronicities throughout his entire life. As a teen he studied music, although his “first love” was science. He met his wife, Alyce, in 1939 and they were together until her death from Alzheimer’s in 1994. He obtained a B.S. in physics from the University of Minnesota in 1942 and did graduate study in physics at UCLA. He worked as a physicist from 1947 to 1957, then earned his PhD in biopsychology from the University of Chicago in 1962. He was able to merge his diverse interests in yogic concepts and science by establishing a psychophysiological laboratory at the Menninger Foundation in 1964. For 20 years, he and Alyce conducted biofeedback and self-regulation workshops, lectured in the United States and abroad, and visited India to study yogis and their remarkable abilities for self-regulation.

It was in 1966 that, along with Gardner Murphy at the Menninger Foundation, biofeedback was “created,” according to Elmer. Gardner Murphy was the Director of Research at the Menninger Foundation who developed the concept of muscle feedback. Elmer Green then developed an EMG feedback system along with Dale Walters who worked along with the Greens for many years. Elmer designed a thermal biofeedback device for autogenic training, and one day while training a woman having a

migraine to use this device, he noticed that her hand temperature rose dramatically, which coincided with her headache vanishing.

In 1969, Elmer cofounded the Biofeedback Research Society (now known as the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback, or AAPB). He and Alyce authored many papers and a classic book on biofeedback, *Beyond Biofeedback* published in 1977, that chronicled their work in the field of biofeedback and self-regulation training for healing the body and expanding consciousness. In 2001 Elmer published a three-volume set titled *The Ozawkie Book of the Dead: Alzheimer’s Isn’t What You Think It Is!* which described Alyce’s experience of Alzheimer’s disease from the 1980s until her death in 1994.

Deborah Stokes has enjoyed phone contact with Elmer since September 2011, and in November 2011 she attended a 12-hr “dialog” with him and 30 of his followers in Topeka, Kansas. The following interview is verbatim except for additional information added for clarification, which appears italicized in brackets.

ELMER GREEN INTERVIEW

Sunday January 8, 2012, 7 pm EST

DS: Hi Elmer, it’s me.

EG: And here I am.

DS: Looks like we’re good to go. First question: we have a lot of young people in our organization and I certainly don’t know if they



FIGURE 1. Deborah Stokes with Elmer Green at his Topeka, KS dialog. (Color figure available online.)

have a sense of the history of biofeedback or people who might not be aware of your contribution to the field of biofeedback. Would you mind, please, giving us a brief overview of how and when biofeedback came to be discovered?

EG: It wasn't discovered.

DS: Ah. How would you put it, then? How did it come to be?

EG: It came to be because Gardner Murphy said that if I could get some information from my muscles, then I could get rid of my headaches. And so, I wired him up and he got some information from his muscles and he got rid of his headaches.

DS: So that was the beginning of biofeedback as we know it and the first application of biofeedback was for headaches?

EG: Yeah, with Gardner Murphy. He had the idea that somehow he knew what the muscles were doing and that he could correct it. And so then a lady showed up with a migraine, and after I asked her how she raised her hand temperature she said, "How did you know how I got rid of my migraines?" I told her I did not know this but then I put it all together and then began teaching handwarming.

DS: Approximately what year was that?

EG: That was in '66.

DS: How did you get involved in brain-wave biofeedback?

EG: People were always curious about how their brains worked so I would hook myself up,

and when I would go into deep states of consciousness, then theta would come up.

DS: Your seminal book, *Beyond Biofeedback*, was instrumental for many of us for our work in this field. For those who aren't familiar with this work, can you tell our members why you chose the title *Beyond Biofeedback*?

EG: I didn't choose it, it was chosen by Elda Hartley. Elda is the one who went to India with us to take pictures. And when she didn't have enough pictures, she said, "I'll have to get some more pictures and then I'll come to Kansas and we can talk about whatever you want to beyond biofeedback," and I said, "That's a good title for our book!"

DS: And what would you mean by *Beyond Biofeedback*? What does that title mean to you?

EG: All I mean is that biofeedback has to do with is self-regulation. Yoga, for instance, has been around a long time before biofeedback.

DS: It seems to me that your work has spanned the exploration of the body, the brain, and then it has progressed on to the mind and then to consciousness.

EG: Yes, yes.

DS: And now you are mostly involved in the exploration of spirit. Is this a fair assessment?

EG: No, no, now wait a minute—it isn't *on* to spirit—it's been spirit all the time, from the beginning. My awareness of spirit has been there from the very beginning. There's been no difference between spirit and mind. That has always just stuck in people's heads.

DS: Were you aware of this the whole time?

EG: Sure!

DS: From an early age?

EG: Oh yeah!

DS: Can you recap your interest in this for us? When did it start for you?

EG: It started at age 3.

DS: What got you interested at age 3? I know why, but our readers may not know the story.

EG: Well, you will have to explain it to them.

DS: (Laughing) Can I have it in *your* words?

EG: Well, the Teacher appeared to me at age 3 and told me, "We are here and you are

there and you've been successfully planted," and I then was aware of the fact that these guys existed. The only question in my mind when I began to study physics was "How are we going to study these guys?"

[Elmer was always drawn to yogic philosophy, New Thought and Spiritualist movements in the United States and, in his sophomore year of college, he began yoga training under the direction of ex-Spiritualist minister William J. Erwood, who was able to channel "The Teacher" whom Elmer had known from a young age and credits him with being "the spiritual instructor of my life."]

DS: Are you saying that your knowledge of biofeedback was somehow channeled from these guys?

EG: I never thought of it that way, because it was like I always just knew it. I always knew I could do [biofeedback] myself so I figured that everybody else could, too.

DS: When you say you could always do it, how long have you been able to do it?

EG: Since about age 12.

DS: And can you tell us what type of biofeedback you were able to do?

EG: Nothing, just everything.

DS: How did you use it?

EG: If I had a pain in my foot, I would say "All right—Leave now." And I found out I could always do that.

DS: Do you know how you did it?

EG: Sure! You just tell it and the body obeys.

DS: So the body has its own wisdom?

EG: Yep, and it obeys. It's as smart as a dog.

DS: So you just have to tell it.

EG: Yep.

DS: Very interesting. So, if you could tell us about your other book, *The Ozawkie Book of the Dead: Alzheimer's Isn't What You Think It Is*.

EG: I don't tell about it—you will have to ask questions.

DS: OK, I know it is your documentation which chronicles your wife, Alyce's descent into Alzheimer's . . .

EG: Yes.

DS: And how she would . . . go away, really, and be absent for long periods of time and

then she would come back into her own again and be completely cogent.

EG: That's right.

DS: And she would come back and tell you the most amazing stories about where she had been.

EG: Yes, about what was going on over on the other side and at the same time she was telling me that I was getting it visually and in dreams.

DS: Yes, so you knew that this was an inter-dimensional phenomenon?

EG: Well, I knew that she was stuck, half-way between planes. She was halfway between here and the other side and she could not go forward or backwards, which is what she told me one day.

DS: I loved reading the part about when she would do what we think many Alzheimer's patients will do—and that is, hallucinate—she would awake and tell you, "There are three men at the door with guns trying to break in!" and you would say, "Oh, go back to bed" and then you would go and enter into your dream state and then you would see them there at your front door with guns trying to break in. Is that correct?

EG: That's right. And people with Alzheimer's can tell you all sorts of things like this if we would only ask them questions.

DS: I often believe this can be the case with schizophrenics as well.

EG: That's absolutely correct. They can tell you all kinds of things, providing you ask them questions.

DS: That's right. I have seen this in my practice and it has really turned my former thinking on its head in terms of what I studied in school versus what I have observed. For example, I have had clients with auditory hallucinations who seem otherwise quite normal except they hear others talking to them that I do not hear. A couple of times, I've hooked them up and find excessive fast wave activity at the right temporal lobe and if they are able to normalize it, the voices can disappear.

EG: Yes. In any event, psychiatry generally has it all upside down. They think the brain comes first but actually, the brain comes last.

DS: So then what would you say comes first, the spirit or the energy field?

EG: I always think of it as the energy field. Or in terms of Castaneda's work it is the double mind or other mind. Everybody has double consciousness, you know. You have the dream side and then you have what they call the wake side. The dream side is the real side and the wake side is a reflection of it.

DS: That's very interesting. And Castaneda said that?

EG: Oh, it was explained in detail to Castaneda and then he tested it out. Well, I tested it out, too, and it turns out to be true.

DS: I think that it is really interesting when we see the EEG and how it often reflects what we think of as psychopathology and how we now have identified some biomarkers associated with certain conditions. One of the most interesting conversations I have witnessed was between scientists Candace Pert and Karl Pribram where Candace asked Karl what he thinks brainwaves actually are. They bantered back and forth and they could not put their finger on it but said that basically they think they are some form of energy field.

EG: Well, it *is* an energy field. The brainwaves are merely a reflection.

DS: So for those of us who work with the brainwaves, we are able to help people change their energy fields?

EG: That's right. And if they start to think in terms of the energy field, everything works 10 times faster.

DS: So then in other words, they can help it along with their thoughts?

EG: The brainwaves are a reflection of thinking, aren't they?

DS: I think they're a reflection of many things, not just the thoughts.

EG: The brainwaves themselves are not you.

DS: Perhaps they are something or someone else, too, because these schizophrenics can hear three people talking and the brainwaves can reflect that, no?

EG: Well of course. The brainwaves can show the other side, which is the real side. The trouble with schizophrenics is that they

get mixed up and can't tell how to separate the two sides.

DS: Yeah. They are caught between two worlds, like Alyce was.

EG: They are caught. They are caught and they don't know how to separate them. The big problem in everything is how to decide which is which and how to focus attention and move back and forth. If you can't move back and forth at will, then you are caught.

DS: Not just with psychoses and Alzheimer's but with . . .

EG: Everybody should read Castaneda's works from A to Z. His five books tell it exactly as it is.

DS: And what other sources do you have that verify that?

EG: Everybody verifies it—HPB, Helen Blavatsky verifies it, the Tibetan verifies it, all of the Puranas [*Hindu teachings of the Vedas or ancient sacred texts of India*] verifies it, all of the ancient books verify it. I mean, this stuff is old hat. There's nothing new about it.

DS: Can you tell me what ancient books?

EG: People have to read the ancient Vedic scriptures. The best thing people can do if they can tolerate it is to read the Tibetan book called *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, if they can stand it, and if they can't stand it, they can start with a book called *A Treatise on White Magic*. When I say, "They can't stand it," I mean if they try to focus their attention too much on it and this is a waste of time. What you have to do is read these things as if they are some sort of newspaper story. Just read real fast and then eventually, you'll understand what they are saying.

DS: And then it will sink in?

EG: Yeah.

DS: Interesting. Who wrote these books, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* and *A Treatise on White Magic*?

EG: These books were written by Alice N. Bailey but they were dictated to her by that Teacher called the Tibetan.

DS: So, how would we be able to develop further after reading these works?

EG: The Tibetan has advice. [*The Tibetan is the teacher channeled by Alice Bailey.*]

DS: Can you tell our readers what that might be?

EG: Sure, it is simple. Two words: meditation and fasting.

DS: Really?

EG: That's what he said. Point blank. If you meditate and then also don't eat, you can find out. The reason for not eating is that the stomach has so many signals that go up to the brain and if you don't eat for a while, then you can cancel those signals and then become more aware of the other side.

DS: You know, that is really interesting that you bring this up because when I attended your dialog in Topeka in November, I made an observation that, throughout the 12-hour event, most of us took lunch, snack, and bathroom breaks but I never once saw you take a sip of water, leave to use the bathroom, or eat. How do you do that?

EG: I just find that as long as I don't do anything that involves the GI tract, then I can stay focused.

DS: Amazing. That was a long day for all of us and you were doing most of the talking. Did you even eat at all?

EG: Well... I think I went and got something down at Denny's, I'm not sure.

DS: I think Laura made you eat! (Laughing) Do you often fast for long periods?

EG: I fast all the time. I never pay any attention to eating.

DS: Do you still need to meditate?

EG: Uh, well, I stay in the state. I never bother to go into it anymore. I just stay in it all the time.

DS: That's amazing. So practice makes perfect, sort of like the biofeedback?

EG: Well, yeah, sure, I don't even think about it anymore. I just stay in it.

DS: That is amazing. So, meditation and fasting. What would you say to us for those of us who are doing the work of biofeedback? Do you have any advice for those of us doing the biofeedback and neurofeedback?

EG: Well, that is simple-minded: Do theta training! Read the chapter in the Ozawkie book on Theta training.

DS: I copied a page out of the book that tells what it is and give it to some of my Alpha Theta clients and they find it fascinating.

EG: All you have to do is do what it says.

DS: Which is? I don't remember it being directive. What did it say to do?

EG: You'll have to read it again.

DS: OK, well, I'll look it up and if it's OK, I will quote it in this article?

EG: Of course!

[The book likened theta training to being shown a door but we must do the work of learning to walk through it. The EEG machine is the doorknob. We must take advantage of these tools and do the training on ourselves.]

DS: What do you say, I believe, you say that theta training is communion with the divine?

EG: No, no no no. It is transcendence of the gods training. In other words, the gods are all man-made, aren't they?

DS: Yes.

EG: And so there's nothing better you can do than to get rid of the gods, right?

DS: Yes.

EG: You know what I'm talking about, right?

DS: Oh yes, religion.

EG: Yeah! You have to get rid of that idea. The gods are all man-made and theta training allows you to go right past them. It is connected with the next level up, which is called the lotus.

DS: Is this the causal body?

EG: No, no, the causal body is a mental state. The causal body is level 21 in the diagram. *[In the Ozawkie Book, there is a diagram of the different levels or planes of consciousness.]*

DS: But the lotus is a higher level of consciousness.

EG: The lotus is level 22 in the diagram.

DS: Because Lisa and I *[Lisa Merrifield, a neurotherapist from Nebraska]* were also there at your dialog and she and I were musing that certain types of bio- or neurofeedback may help us to penetrate through to these higher states.

EG: Well, if you do the theta training, then it makes it possible for the higher self to talk to you, because in order to do the Theta, you

have to still the mind and tell it to shut up for a while. And as soon as the mind gets quiet, then the other level will want to chat. It's the dream level that begins talking and you have to be able to listen to it without falling asleep.

DS: So, the higher self that we are not always in touch with in our workaday lives

EG: Well, you have to be careful because the higher self is a mental state—level 21.

DS: So what is the difference between meditation and theta training, because I think that over time, meditation can help you reach your higher self as well.

EG: Well that's true since meditation goes into theta training.

DS: But with the assist of the machine, do you think theta training is more accelerated? What are your thoughts?

EG: No, no no, it merely tells you where you were. It tells you what not to do. It doesn't tell you what to do, it tells you what not to do.

DS: I see. So it is possible to make a mistake during meditation?

EG: Well, yeah, if you start thinking about your foot during meditation, then obviously you're not meditating very well.

DS: Then you won't go very deep.

EG: No.

DS: I've certainly seen that.

EG: Well, in any event, it's pretty straightforward and simple.

DS: Is there anything you would like those new to our field to know, any truths if any, or lessons learned, for example?

EG: Well, the main thing is to learn how to tell the mind to shut up so that you can hear what the inner mind has to say. If you can't get the outer mind to shut up, then you can never hear the inner mind. That's what theta training is for. Theta training isn't anything miraculous, it is merely a way to tell the mind to be quiet for a while.

DS: So do you think there is any value in doing the regular neuro- or biofeedback, for migraines, for example, first before moving into theta training and then do the theta training after you've gotten rid of the migraines?

EG: Well, most people don't have migraines.

DS: Or pain, or anxiety or depression or whatever?

EG: Well, we always started with hand-warming, merely to demonstrate to people that it is possible.

DS: Yes, this is what we do with our migraineurs . . .

EG: First we start with handwarming, then we'd teach them how to do foot-warming.

DS: Is that a little more challenging for them than the handwarming?

EG: Well, the hands respond quickly whereas the feet are slow. After they can do the feet, then it is easier for them to come back up to the head and say, all right, now we are going to be quiet all over and listen to what the imagery says that comes along when we do theta training. Listen to the imagery or you look at the imagery or you pay attention to the imagery. But you don't do it by thinking—if you think, it goes away.

DS: So, it's not a conscious process.

EG: No.

DS: So, really what you are saying is to quiet the mind and still the mind, by telling it to shut up, you gain more mastery over the body?

EG: Oh yeah, that's right.

DS: Candace Pert has always said that the brain is not always in charge, that we can often get as powerful a response by doing peripheral biofeedback as by doing neuro-biofeedback and I have seen this with migraines.

EG: Well, learning to warm the hands is elementary, whereas learning to tell the brain to shut up for a while so it can produce theta is more advanced.

DS: You think theta training is more advanced?

EG: Well, without it, you cannot get the imagery from the higher self.

DS: Yeah. That makes sense.

EG: Well, anyway, you are on the right track.

DS: Well, thank you. You are very generous and we all want to thank you so much for your contributions over the years.

EG: It was merely fun.

DS: Was it fun?

EG: Yes.

DS: Well, you are on to other things, it sounds like.

EG: Well, it's all a lot of fun.

DS: We look forward to reading more about you, especially once your website is out there—is it coming out soon?

EG: I don't know because that all depends on how rapidly these guys get going. But everybody can turn *llog* on to YouTube and look at what it has to say.

DS: So there is an 8-minute movie about you on YouTube.

EG: Yep. That's it.

DS: Well, I'll certainly tell our readers to look at that.

EG: And when they do, they'll get a pretty good picture of how it started.

DS: Well, thank you so much, Elmer, for your time.

EG: Well, nice talking with you.

DS: Nice talking with you. Maybe I'll call you again, soon?

EG: Well, do it!

DS: I'll call you again just to chat as things come up, but if I have any more questions, is it OK if I call you back?

EG: Sure, sure.

DS: Well, Elmer, you take good care of yourself and thank you again so much.

EG: And all the best to you.