

The Combination Lock Test for Survival

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INTRODUCTION

Much evidence which points toward survival of personality after death, especially that from mediumistic communications, falls under the criticism that the information communicated was known to some living person or available in a documented form. In either case the medium, so this criticism suggests, might have obtained the information either through telepathy with the living or by clairvoyant reading of documents. Since most communications only provide evidence if they can be verified—that is, if they correspond with facts corroborated by living persons or documents, this objection has acquired a good deal of force and perhaps contributed somewhat to the diminution in efforts by parapsychologists to study further the evidence for survival. The problem of survival has even been declared insoluble until we know the “limits” of extrasensory perception. Fortunately, there exist other approaches to the question of survival, but so far as verbal communications from mediums are concerned, any methods which do not depend for verification on the testimony of any living person or existing document would have much greater value than those which did.

To meet the criticism mentioned above, R. H. Thouless developed an ingenious test which consists of enciphered messages the keys to which are to be communicated by him (if he survives after death) in the form of two words and a phrase (4, 5). Since Thouless himself enciphered his message and has told no one the key words and phrase nor written them down anywhere, they will remain unknown to anyone living other than himself through normal means. Thouless has invited mediums and sensitives to endeavor to extract his key words and phrase during his lifetime and has furnished psychometric objects to assist them in this effort. He hopes that if enough tests of this kind are carried out while he is alive and all are unsuccessful, this will serve to show that the keys cannot be obtained from him while living when he does not wish to divulge them. And such unsuccessful tests while he is living

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would render less probable (although not impossible) the interpretation that a successful communication of the keys after his death resulted from a medium having learned the information while he was living and retained it, perhaps subconsciously, until after his death. Successful communication of the keys after Thouless' death would provide evidence of survival since it would be known that the keys had not been obtained from any written record and it would be very improbable that they came from any living mind. The usual explanation in terms of telepathy or clairvoyance would seem not to apply.

A further advantage of Thouless' test is the possibility of having many unsuccessful trials to communicate the keys without stopping the test. Only a successful decipherment of the message would bring the experiment to a close. This feature makes the test a notable improvement over those previous tests which consisted of leaving messages in sealed envelopes. Apart from the possibility that such messages might be read clairvoyantly, attempts at communicating the messages can never be checked without opening the envelopes and reading the messages, which would then be known to at least one or more living persons.

A disadvantage of Thouless' test seems to be the large amount of work involved in carrying it out. The subject of the experiment has to take considerable pains in enciphering his message. And later the investigators will have a great deal of work to do in trying various communicated phrases to see whether they will decipher the message. It seems very likely that these tasks, while not heavy for enthusiasts of survival research perhaps, may nevertheless prove too tedious for most persons who might otherwise wish to try such an experiment. Success with Thouless' own test would undoubtedly encourage others to repeat the technique, but unless this were done on a fairly large scale, the evidence would remain scanty.² It would be possible for skeptics to explain away a few isolated successes.

It therefore appears highly desirable to devise a test which would have all the advantages of the Thouless cipher test, but which would require less work for the subjects³ in preparing for it and for the investigators in concluding it. Such a test might appeal to a larger

² Dr. Thouless tells me in a personal communication that so far as he knows only one other person has used his technique of enciphering a message for a test of survival after death. He attributes the failure of others to try the test not to the time taken for encipherment (two hours at most), but to the unfamiliarity of most persons with the process of encipherment.

³ I find it convenient to refer to persons participating in this test as “subjects,” although this term is also commonly used to refer to mediums, sensitives, and other persons with paranormal capacities who are studied by investigators as “subjects.”

number of subjects who would be willing to try it. The test here proposed seems to have these advantages.

The idea for the combination lock test for survival came to my attention through reading an autobiographical account of psychical experiences by an English sensitive, Mrs. Helen Greaves (2). Mrs. Greaves' husband, Roger, had a small box in which he kept documents and which was secured by a combination lock. Only Mr. Greaves knew the combination and he frequently made a teasing joke of the fact that he alone and not his wife knew it. He would very ostentatiously open the box in her presence, but in such a way that she could not know the combination. After Mr. Greaves' sudden accidental death, Mrs. Greaves thought that her husband almost certainly had left important documents in the box which she needed to have. She and her son spent a great deal of time trying at random all sorts of combinations on the lock without success. Finally, one day Mrs. Greaves had the experience of seeming to be in contact with her deceased husband who was trying to give her the correct combination. When she tried the sequence of numbers which came to her in this fashion the lock opened and the lid of the box sprang up.

THE METHOD PROPOSED

Various combination locks are manufactured which have mechanisms whereby the owner can change the combination after purchase. A padlock of this type is manufactured by Sargent and Greenleaf, Inc., Rochester, New York 14621, and identified as Model 8088 (see Figures 1 and 2).⁴ The padlock is opened by dialing a three-number combination on a dial with fifty units. The padlock is sturdily built and I am assured that it will not open accidentally if jarred, for example. By means of a key inserted at the back, the mechanism can be reset to a new combination according to simple instructions which come with the padlock. After a resetting of the combination, no one living would know the new combination unless the owner communicated this to other persons. Since three numbers each selected out of fifty possibilities (six digits) are included in the combination, the chances of finding the correct combination through random trials are 1 in 125,000, odds sufficiently high to justify the use of the padlock for the purpose intended.

⁴ This padlock is available at a retail price of \$16.95 at Brown's Lock and Safe, University Shopping Center, Charlottesville, Virginia 22901.

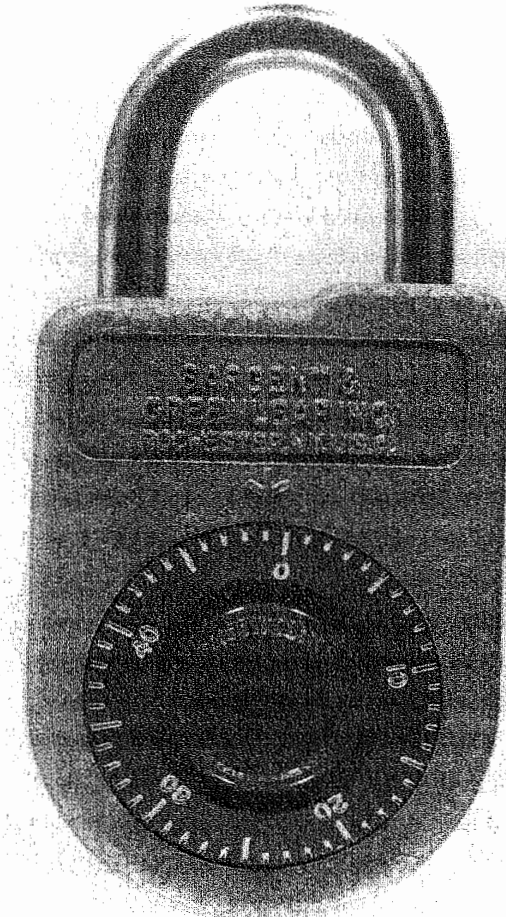


Fig. 1. Front view of padlock described in text. (About one third larger than actual size of lock.)

Use of a Mnemonic Phrase

It may prove difficult to remember six digits after death unless they consist of some unusual combination (e.g., all 6's) or a number already familiar to the owner through long usage (e.g., his social security number). The selection of combinations like these, however, would increase the possibility of successful guesses having no paranormal provenance. They should therefore be avoided in favor of genuinely random numbers. At the same time, the escape of these random numbers from memories after death may be reduced by matching them to a key phrase or word, or deriving them from a key phrase or word. The communicator would probably be more likely to remember his key phrase or word and communicate this. Or he could translate his phrase back into the numbers and communicate the numbers. This would require him to remember also how he had translated the letters into numbers when he was living. I emphasize that the word or phrase is simply an aid to memory and not in the nature of a decoding key as are the words and phrase of Thouless' cipher tests.

For purposes of uniformity and simplification I propose that the mnemonic phrases and words be restricted to two types, as follows.

(1) The initial letters of a six-letter phrase. The initial letters would be translated into numbers according to the following formula:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Supposing now that a communicator-to-be selects the phrase, "We all certainly live after death," this phrase would give the following initial letters and numbers:

W A C L A D
3 1 3 2 1 4

The combination of the lock would then be reset to 313214.

(2) The first six letters of a single word. Suppose the owner selects the word "communicate." This would give the following new combination :

C O M M U N
3 5 3 3 1 4

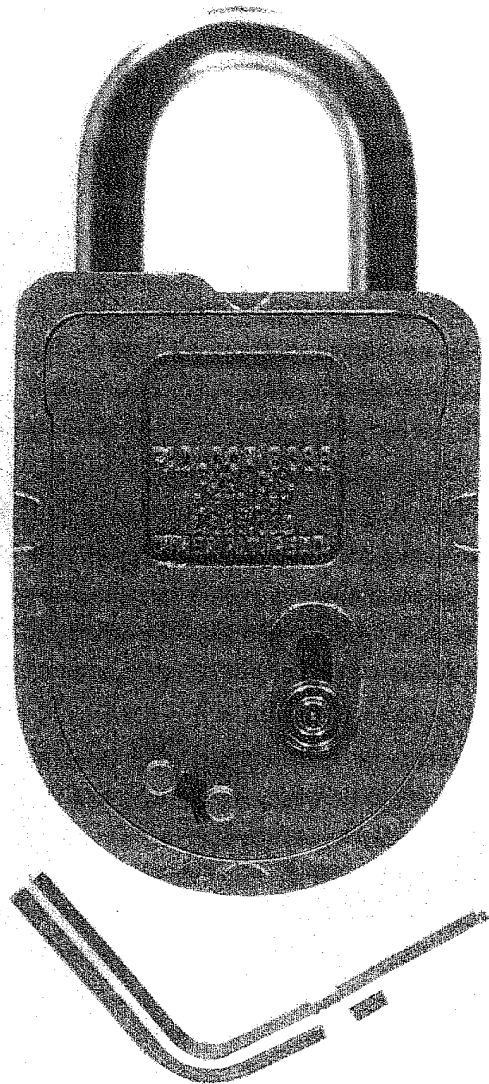


Fig. 2. Back view of padlock described in text. (About one third larger than actual size of lock.) The key shown at the bottom is inserted in the hole at the lower left of the padlock during the operations for changing the combination.

The combination of the lock would then be reset to 353314.

Since the numbers on the dial (of the padlock mentioned) go only from one to 50, no pair of numbers larger than 50 can be selected, although the numbers 6, 7, 8, 9 and 0 can be included in other pairs. Thus the numbers 87, 95, and 72 are not on the dial, but the numbers 37, 45, and 22 are. Numbers above 50, such as the first three given in the preceding sentence, may be used by deducting 50 from the higher number. (But a subject registering for the test should indicate that he has done this in deriving his numbers and mnemonic word or phrase.)

On psychological grounds, I recommend selecting the phrase or word *first* and deriving the new combination from this rather than selecting the new numbers first and then finding a phrase or word to match these. The selected phrase would have special meaning for the subject and therefore be likely to remain longer in his memory. A phrase that was devised to match a combination of numbers would probably lack this emotional charge and might also be somewhat clumsy or artificial due to the need for the fitting of each initial letter of a word to a particular number.⁵

It may be thought that if words are used instead of a phrase, the number of possibilities are reduced to even fewer than the 20,000 principal words of the English language, since only six-letter words can be used. A determined person might work through the dictionary and try every possible word until he succeeded in finding the right combination. (In this connection, it is worth remembering that Thouless' first cipher (5) was "broken" by a cipher expert using his spare time in only two weeks!) The possibilities, however, become enlarged if we remember that the key word or phrase could be drawn from any language and not only from English, even by English-speaking subjects. Proper names could also be used. There would then easily be as many possible words as there are possible numbers to the combinations of the locks. We would hope, however, that if a subject selects foreign words or proper names for his mnemonic he will, after his death, communicate the fact that such words are offered as the key to the lock test. They might otherwise be quite unintelligible to mediums and sitters.

⁵ Dr. Thouless and Dr. J. G. Pratt disagree with me on this point. They think it important for random numbers to be selected first and a mnemonic phrase or word fitted to the numbers afterwards. They think that with some effort a suitable mnemonic word or phrase could be fitted to the randomly selected numbers. The need to find a phrase to fit previously unknown numbers would greatly reduce the possibility of selecting as a mnemonic some favorite phrase which might be known to the subject's friends and perhaps even to mediums who would participate in the test after the subject's death. I am more concerned, however, that the phrase selected be memorable since if the phrase and numbers are forgotten by a subject who did in fact survive after death, the test would be useless for him.

DISCUSSION

The Possibility of Clairvoyant and Telepathic Cognition of the Combination

Since the padlock continues to exist after the death of its owner, it may be thought that a gifted clairvoyant could simply read the positions of the pins and levers in the lock and therefrom derive the combination and open the lock without any communication from a discarnate personality. This is certainly a theoretical possibility, but is it one to be taken seriously? We must remember that the clairvoyant's task would consist not only in seeing into the lock and noting the positions of the pins and levers; she would also have to *translate* these positions into numbers which would then be dialed to open the lock. Since most sensitives presumably know little or nothing about locks, this task would seem to be exceedingly difficult. The difficulty can perhaps be compared to that of a person unfamiliar with music who would endeavor to translate the holes in the roll of a player piano into written musical notation.

The question whether these combination locks can be opened through clairvoyant capacities is one which can be approached empirically. The test here proposed has the advantage that the padlock once owned and reset can be used as a token object and sent around to various mediums while the owner is still living. These mediums could then attempt to derive the correct combination for opening the lock.

Supposing one or more sensitives proved successful in opening the lock while the owner was still living, how would we interpret the results? If the sensitives obtained the combinations from the living owners of the padlocks through telepathy, we might expect them to be equally successful in obtaining the related mnemonic phrases. (There is no reason to think that six digits could be communicated more readily through telepathy than six words or a single word.) If, on the other hand, the sensitives succeeded in opening the locks by means of clairvoyance, one would not expect them to derive the related mnemonic phrases also. It would, I think, remain possible that the digits alone without the mnemonics were derived telepathically, but a sufficiently large series might show definite probabilities toward one or the other explanation for the provenance of the successful combinations during the lifetimes of the owners.

It is extremely important for attempts to be made by mediums and sensitives to derive the combinations of these locks while participating persons are still living. Apart from the advantages of such tests already mentioned, we could learn (from the living subject) whether a medium had correctly derived his mnemonic

or had opened the lock without deriving the mnemonic. After the death of the subject, the opening of the lock would indicate that the correct combination of numbers had been obtained, but there would be no way of knowing directly if the correct mnemonic had also been communicated. A medium could conceivably make up her own phrase to match numbers derived paranormally. Thus successful tests with living subjects might tell us much about the processes involved.⁶

The possibilities for communication of the combination through telepathy from the living may be tested also in a linkage experiment (3). Here, the combination would be known to one person who would pass the lock on to another person who would in turn pass it on to another, and so on. Each participant would know only the name of the person he had received the lock from and the name of the person he gave it to. At the end of the line one person would give the lock to a sensitive who would try to derive the combination. Linkage through telepathy with the owner and knower of the combination would be difficult, according to our present understanding of telepathy, if not absolutely impossible. Success in opening a lock passed along in this manner while the owner was living would point rather strongly toward clairvoyance.

The Possibility of Opening the Lock by Retrocognition

Dr. J. G. Pratt thinks I have perhaps taken insufficient account of the possibility that the combination may be derived after the death of the subject through retrocognition, perhaps of the numbers on the piece of paper he used in working out his matching

⁶ I very much hope that a considerable number of persons will be interested in purchasing these padlocks and participating in the test. Those who wish to undertake the combination lock test for survival are invited to correspond with me and to register their intentions. I hope to make provision for trials to obtain the combinations of the locks by sensitives while the registrants are still living and also after their deaths. Registration of all participants in this experiment will be helpful in developing a sufficient body of information about the features of success and failure in the test. Registrants will be asked to state whether they selected the numbers or mnemonic first; whether they selected a word or phrase for the mnemonic; whether they used (and subsequently reduced) numbers above fifty; and whether they used writing materials in working out the selected mnemonic.

Participants are warned against the use of certain cheap combination locks whose combinations can be reset by the owner. Such locks sometimes have defects and may be opened by jarring or otherwise than by using the exact combination. The manufacturers of the lock I have myself adopted (Sargent and Greenleaf, Inc.) assert that this lock cannot be opened by jarring, shaking, or vibration; it also cannot be opened by listening to changes in the movement as the dial is turned.

I would like to hear from mediums or sensitives who are willing to attempt to derive the combinations of the locks during the lives of the owners and after their deaths.

I would also welcome suggestions for the improvement of the design of the test itself.

mnemonic. This seems to be a possibility which, in the present state of our knowledge of retrocognition, we cannot exclude. It should encourage participants not to use writing in the preparation of their mnemonics if they can avoid doing so.

The Possibility of Opening the Lock by Means of Motor Automatism

Some sensitives and communicators seem best able to work together by means of automatic writing. It is possible that habitual postures and patterns of movement are carried over with other aspects of personality which survive after physical death. (Some cases of the reincarnation type suggest this.) It is therefore possible that some communicators might prefer attempting to dial the correct combination through using a medium's hand just as, it is supposed, communicators sometimes use a medium's hand for automatic writing. It seems that the deceased Mr. Greaves, mentioned above, may have employed such a procedure. Mrs. Greaves, in describing her own experience in opening her husband's combination lock, stated: "Without any purposeful volition, I swung the knob to certain numbers and stopped. . . I did not realize then, though I did immediately afterwards, that *knowledge was in my hand and not in my conscious brain!*" At the same time Mrs. Greaves also had some verbal awareness of the numbers, for she continued: ". . . all the time, in rhythm with the movements, I was murmuring aloud the numbers at which the wheel stopped. It was the strangest sensation" (2, p. 60).

Opening the lock by an apparent motor automatism would not necessarily mean that the movements for opening the lock derived from a discarnate communicator. One can envisage a living communicator also as capable of influencing such motor activity. This possibility is suggested by a case of xenoglossy in which a living communicator was found to be the agent for a communication through a ouija board, which is certainly one type of motor automatism (1).

If anyone proposes to use this motor communication of the lock combination, I suggest that he practice extensively with the padlock while living, perhaps developing sufficient skill in opening the lock so that he can do so when blindfolded. This would probably make it easier both to remember the combination and to accomplish "direct dialing" after death.

Multiple Tests by One Person

One person could set combinations on several locks, equip himself, if he felt the need, with appropriate mnemonic phrases, and then, after death, try to communicate the combinations of the several locks through different mediums. Provision for this should

be made premortem so that the locks of one person could be properly identified. It might be advisable, for example, to have a colored plaque or label on each lock. The communicator would then be expected to communicate which lock he was referring to in stating a particular key phrase or word, or combination of numbers. Success in such an endeavor would provide particularly strong evidence for survival and would certainly weigh heavily against the interpretation that a single medium had been able to read and open one lock either by chance or clairvoyantly.

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