

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

ATW-21

Now You See It, Now You Don't - I: Uri Geller Makes the Scene

Eugene, Oregon

October 18, 1973

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The brightest star on the spiritual-psychic circuit these days is Uri Geller, a 26-year-old Israeli who has come to the United States to demonstrate his abilities at telepathy and psychokinesis. Among other things, he claims to be able to cause metal objects to bend or break by simply concentrating on them and even to cause things to dematerialize. Some of his powers are vouched for by physicists at the Stanford Research Institute, a private think-tank in California that conducted "controlled" tests of the "Geller effect" last fall. Uri (pronounced "Oorey," not "Yoorey") is now less interested in demonstrating his talent for scientists than for the general public. He has appeared on many national television shows and recently has performed before large audiences across the country. Most major periodicals have written about him or will be writing about him. In the process, Uri Geller is becoming rich and famous and is confirming the belief of many Americans that a new age of miracles is upon us.

I first heard about Uri in a peculiar way. Last February I called my father in Philadelphia from Newport Beach, California and learned that a telegram for me had reached him by mistake. He read it to me over the phone: it was a message asking me to get in touch with the sender as soon as possible. My father had trouble pronouncing the name. "The first name looks like 'Andrea,'" he said, "and the second is" He made an attempt to read it. "Oh, it's Andrija Puharich," I told him. "I know who it is." Dr. Puharich is a physician and parapsychological researcher. I had spoken to him a number of times about healers he had studied and

had asked him to let me know if he came across any interesting phenomena I should check out.

I made a number of calls to New York and finally reached Dr. Puharich in the offices of his publisher. He said he was glad to hear from me but had not sent me any telegram. How could that be, I asked; I had just gotten the message. Dr. Puharich said, "Things like that happen to me all the time." He went on to say that he was devoting all of his energies to working with "the most impressive psychic" he had ever met -- a young man from Israel who could break forks simply by looking at them. In fact, at that very moment, his protégé was bending keys and spoons for the editors of the publishing company. The name of this phenomenon was Uri Geller. Puharich had discovered him in Israel, working as a night-club entertainer, and had brought him to the U.S. to be studied. "You'll be hearing about him soon," he told me.

Subsequent questioning of my father revealed that the name on the mysterious telegram was not Puharich at all, but by that time Uri Geller had entered my consciousness. And, in fact, it was not long before I saw him in person. About six weeks after the talk with Puharich, I happened to be in Berkeley when Uri made one of his first public appearances -- at a meeting of the California Psychical Research Society. This event took place in a school auditorium, filled to capacity with people who had paid a moderate admission fee to see the Israeli wonder. I was there, about twelve rows back from the stage.

The program began with an introductory speech by Dr. Puharich, who explained that Uri was very tired because that day he had tried to demonstrate his powers before committees of Nobel-prizewinners from Berkeley and Stanford Universities. Puharich assured us that Uri had passed the rigidly controlled tests of the Stanford Research Institute with flying colors and that he was capable of amazing psychic feats. All we had to do was "be with" Uri -- that is, give him our own mental energies.

Uri then came on stage. He was very charming, good-looking, and boyishly enthusiastic. He said that his day had been exhaust-

ing, especially since he had not been able to do much of anything. The mental set of an audience is crucial to his performance, he explained. If people are "with" him, all sorts of things happen; if people are not with him, nothing happens. As an example he described his inability to do much of anything in the hostile editorial offices of TIME Magazine a short time before. But with the staff of an underground newspaper in the Bay Area he was able to make pieces of silverware break and cause objects to dematerialize — vanish instantly without a trace.

He said he requires other people's energies to work with; therefore, the bigger the audience the better. And he likes to work with women because they are "more sensitive" to the powers he uses. He asked us to be patient with him: he would just talk for a while and not try anything until he felt like it.

He told us that he had first noticed his telepathic abilities as a very young child when he was able to guess his mother's hands at card games. When he was about seven, he noticed while sitting in class at school that the hands of his wrist watch would often jump forward or backward several hours. Eventually, he learned that these movements occurred when he willed them. Uri kept these powers to himself and as he grew older, attached less importance to them. But in his early twenties he became interested in them again, practiced at them, and finally decided he should use them to make his living. In mid-1970 he began appearing before small audiences. By the end of 1971 he had become very well known and seen by almost everyone in Israel. It was at this time that he first met Puharich.

Uri began his demonstrations by picking several female volunteers from the audience. He kept asking us not to be disappointed if nothing happened. "Just want something to happen, and maybe it will." He asked the first woman to write on a blackboard the name of a color. He did not look as she wrote "blue" and then erased it. Then he asked the whole audience to "think" the name of that color at him on the count of three. "And, please, no one whisper it," he cautioned. He counted to three. I thought "blue." We re-

peated this three times. Uri shook his head. "I'm having some trouble," he said. "Once more. One, two, three. . . ." There was a long pause. "O.K.," he said, "I'm going to take a chance. The color I get is blue." The audience applauded wildly. He held up his hands. "Wait. I must ask: who over here [he pointed to the right front section of seats] was sending yellow?" A young man in that section gasped and raised his hand. "Please don't do that," Uri told him, "it really confuses me." The man apologized: "I couldn't help myself," he said.

Uri was also successful at the next test: a foreign capital written on the board, erased, and then sent to him mentally by the whole audience. The capital was Prague; he got it with little difficulty. He also reproduced several figures drawn on the board.

"I'll tell you how I do this," he said. "I have in my mind a kind of screen, like a television screen, and when I receive something, whatever it is draws itself on that screen."

Uri then wanted to try some demonstrations of psychokinesis. He would first attempt to fix broken watches. "If anyone has a watch that is not running, as long as no parts are missing from inside, bring it up front, and I'll try to make it go." Apparently, his talent at this operation was already well-known because many persons had brought their stopped watches with them. Uri fixed a watch by having a woman hold it in her hands and putting his hand over hers. Without touching the woman's hand, he passed his palm back and forth as if trying to direct some sort of energy. He asked his volunteer to let him know if she felt any sudden sensation of heat or tingling. She did. He opened her hands, took out the watch, and it was running. He repeated this demonstration with a number of other watches and got almost all of them to run; one was an antique pocket watch that had been stopped for years.

Elated by this success, he said he would try to bend some metal objects. Volunteers rushed forward with an assortment of rings, keys, pins. Uri explained that objects to which people were emotionally attached were most suitable. And he would not guarantee that he could do anything at all because he was so tired

from his day of failures with the Nobel laureates. He tried bending several rings by putting them in the hands of volunteers and again passing his hands over theirs but got no results. After a number of attempts, he gave up. "No, it just doesn't want to work tonight." The audience was only slightly disappointed; they had already seen so much.

Uri concluded his presentation by offering to take a group of volunteers on a blindfolded drive through Berkeley. That is, he would be securely blindfolded and would drive a car, using telepathic reception of the vision of the other passengers to navigate. There was no shortage of volunteers, and I heard the next day that the ride had been successful and exciting.

Uri Geller was now a real person to me. And a very likable one at that. As for whether he really had the power of mind over matter, I could not say. I had not seen him fix the watches with my own eyes (I was sitting too far away), although I believed the testimony of those who had. I did not see him bend any metal. The telepathic experiments were nice, but somehow they did not move me: I had seen stage magicians give similar or better performances using trickery. Blindfolded driving also does not really impress me; one can get very good at peeking through even the best-fastened blindfold.

What I really wanted to see was a key bend or a ring break: that would decide the case. I should say at once that my prejudice is all on the side of believing such things possible. I have no doubt that telepathy exists; in fact, I think it is so common that we do it all the time without being aware of it or without attaching significance to it. Psychokinesis I have never seen but I am willing to believe it happens. Nor do I have to go through any mental gymnastics to rationalize its existence. The proposition that matter and energy are synonymous on some level is consistent with all of modern conceptions in physics. The proposition that human consciousness is a form of real energy seems to me self-evident. So why should consciousness not be able to affect the physical properties of things?

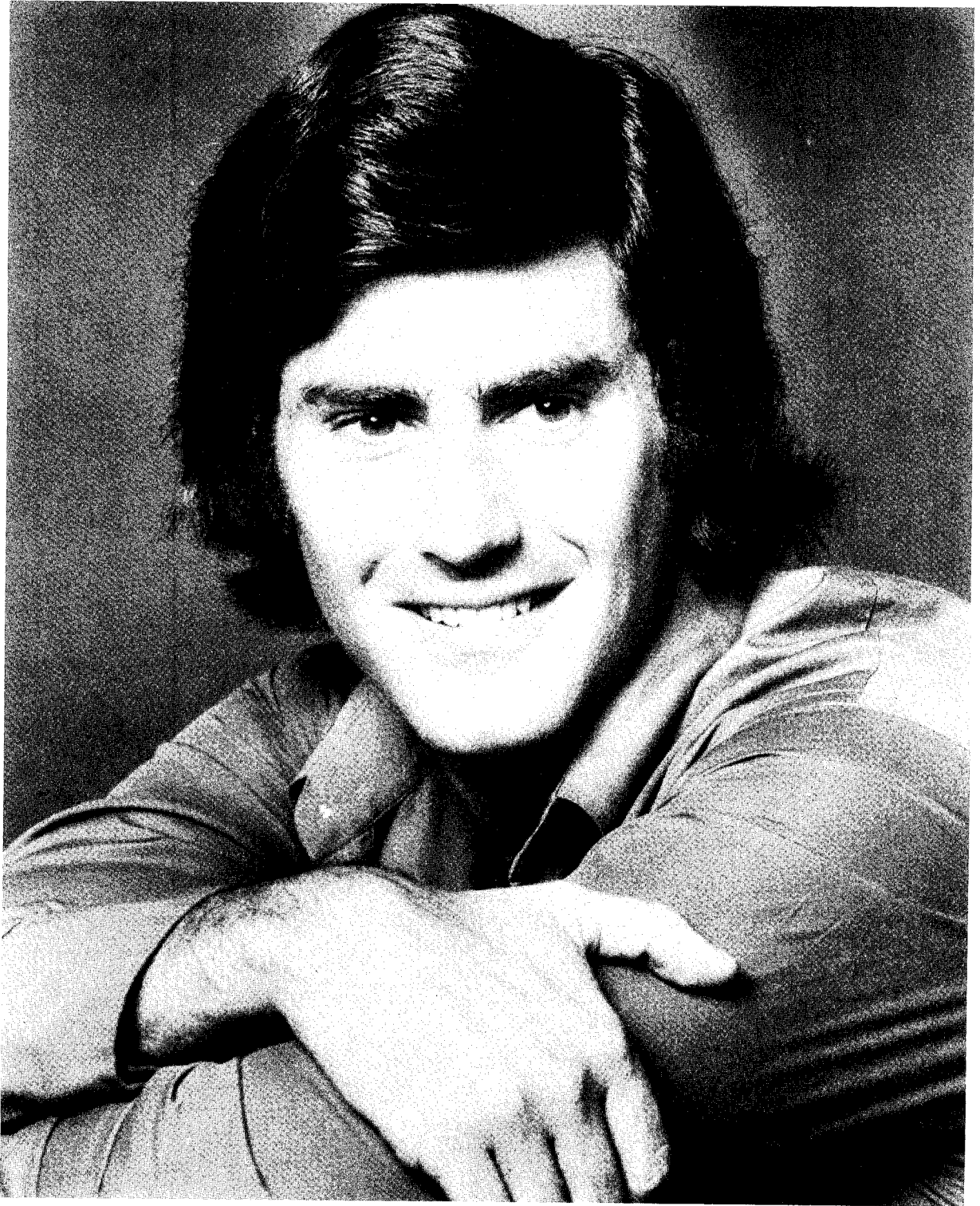
I was perfectly willing to believe that Uri Geller could demonstrate that power. I also knew that seeing such a demonstration would not cause me to change my views of the world or of mind. But it would sure be fun to see it.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew T. Weil". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'A'.

Andrew T. Weil

Received in New York on October 24, 1973.



URI GELLER