

**YOU'LL NEVER KNOW**

**By**

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I have some questions. How many of you here tonight believe in fairies? How many believe that elves live among us? How many here believe in guardian angels? How many of us believe in God?

I think you will agree that the amount of objective evidence supporting the existence of any of these is about the same. Most humans believe in many things that we may never objectively know exist. And there is nothing wrong with this.

In the United States, a 2007 Pew poll found that 92% of us believe in God and 74% believe in heaven. A 2001 Gallop poll found that 70% believe in angels; 54% in psychic healing; 42% in haunted houses; and, 41% in satanic possession.

Given all these beliefs in the unprovable, what happened to our belief in fairies? I'll wager most of us once believed in the tooth fairy, in that merry old elf, Santa Claus, in Tinkerbell, or in a fairy godmother. Do you remember that thrill of wonder and excitement anticipating Santa's visit? What happened to that feeling? I remember my cheek pressed against the cold windowpane, scanning the night sky, left to right, right to left, hoping to catch a glimpse of Santa's sleigh streaking among the stars. I fought to stay awake at that dormer window under the eaves, watching, and listening for the clatter of tiny hooves on the roof just above me. I always awoke crumpled on the floor between the window and bed, disappointed I had missed seeing him, but trembling with excitement, certain he had come while I slept.

Most of us adults in America have lost our belief in Santa, elves and fairies. By way of contrast, let us look at Iceland. Admittedly it is a small country, but I doubt that anyone would say that raving lunatics populate it. Yet, a majority of Icelanders believe that elves exist on their island in great numbers.

These "alfar" or "hidden people" live much like humans, but unseen. They have their own communities, including churches, and raise tiny livestock. If they are left alone and their property respected, they are harmless. But, elves are fiercely territorial and if you

disturb their homes or churches, Icelanders believe that bad things will happen. Machinery suddenly stops working without explanation; people start having freak accidents; cattle get sick and even die. The Icelandic byword is: “ If you damage their stones, you will pay for it.”

In Iceland, building developments and road projects are stopped or relocated if elf structures might be damaged. According to The Atlantic magazine, the Icelandic Road and Coastal Administration has printed a five-page explanation for responding to frequent press inquiries about elf issues.

The Icelanders are not unique. China, Southeast Asia, India, Pakistan and all of South America have long histories of belief in nonhuman co-residents. Of course, in Europe the Celtic, Germanic and Nordic cultures are replete with stories of encounters with fairies, elves, leprechauns and other beings. In 1999 the Catholic Church revamped its guidelines for exorcisms in a ninety-page document. Pope Francis recognized the International Association of Exorcists in 2014, and in 2017 he expressly recommended that parish priests refer the demonically possessed for exorcism.

So, a great many beings that most of us have never seen do exist, for some people. Are they wrong? No. There certainly is no proof that fairies, et al do not exist. Why is it so hard for some of us to believe in fairies now?

Consider that no human being has ever directly observed an electron. Yet most of us, including the vast majority of scientists, blithely accept that electrons exist. Why electrons and not fairies?

Simply stated, electrons, as we conceive them, are subject to rules. These rules allow us to predict how electrons will behave in different circumstance. Repeated observations of such rule-based behavior supports a conclusion that electrons exist, despite our inability to see them.

Unlike electrons, fairies do as they damn well please. There are no rules governing fairies that allow us to predict fairy behavior, or even if fairies are involved in any particular circumstances. And the same goes for elves, leprechauns, guardian angels and God, for that matter. It is both our inability to physically perceive them and our inability to predict their behavior that undermines our belief in these beings. Logically, our inability to see or to predict has no bearing on whether they exist. It is quite possible that as our ability to perceive and analyze improves through new technology, we will “discover” entire populations of beings that at present only a select few believe exist.

I have another question for you. Who was the English language literary prototype for a private detective, for an individual uniquely talented in the observation of minute details from which he would make inferences and then reason out the solution to crimes that had baffled the police? Yes, Sherlock Holmes. And Holmes was created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a practicing physician before he became a world famous author. Would it surprise you to know that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle believed that fairies live among us? He did. Sir Arthur wrote two articles in the Strand magazine about his conclusions and followed with a book titled “The Coming Of The Fairies”, first published in 1922.

Sir Arthur was a Spiritualist his entire adult life. He was interested in and wrote extensively about mystical subjects. He was a Free Mason for many years and studied Theosophy. Theosophy dates back to at least the Gnostics of Biblical times. The word loosely translates from the Greek as “Divine Wisdom”. Theosophists seek knowledge of the mysteries of life, of nature, and of divinity through the close observation and analysis of the world around them. Does the tireless search for knowledge through detailed observation, informed inferences and, perhaps, a dash of inspiration remind you of a certain private detective? Sherlock Holmes applied to crime the same investigative principles that Theosophists apply to the mysteries of life.

Sir Arthur’s belief in fairies was long standing. His family history was steeped in stories of fairies and elves going back generations. Perhaps Sir Arthur’s belief in fairies illustrates Kierkegaard’s quip that the best proof that God exists is the circular one we

were offered as children: “It is absolutely true, because my father told me so.”

In his book about fairies Sir Arthur has a chapter titled “Independent Evidence For Fairies”. In it he discusses a line demarking material visibility and how certain creatures, such as fairies, could move back and forth across the line. They could be visible in some circumstances or to some people, but not in other circumstances or to other people. He characterizes science as “but a little light in the darkness, and outside that little circle of definite knowledge we see the loom and shadow of gigantic and fantastic possibilities around us.” In that same chapter he discusses the large number of reported cases supporting the existence of fairies. He states that “one feels that this world is very much more complex than we had imagined, and that there may be upon its surface some very strange neighbors who will open up inconceivable lines of science for our posterity.”

Why do some thoughtful and well-educated people, such as Sir Arthur, believe in unprovable beings despite the lack of objective evidence? All of us, to some degree, are aware of the fragility and impermanence of our existence, of our individual insignificance in the vastness of the universe, of how limited are our perceptions and knowledge. We long for a connection with others and with a power greater than ourselves. Our individual, self-absorbed egos are a small and lonely place.

At the same time, we are compelled to seek to understand our world, to look for rules that both explain our world and allow us to think that we know what to expect. We seek light in the dark unknown.

These tendencies are the basis for many belief systems, and for science. They are two ways of approaching the mysteries of the universe and our place in it. Each has their use; neither should be dismissed. The case for objective proof and science is well known; but we must acknowledge that in many areas of life the nonobjective, the soul stirring, and our elemental feelings and emotions, are more important than facts. For instance, in most of our relationships feelings and emotions are much more important than facts. We intuitively know that respecting other people’s feelings is more important than

bludgeoning them with facts, if we wish to maintain loving - or even friendly - relationships. The nonobjective, the emotional, the spiritual aspects of our humanity are essential to our individual happiness, in our relationships and in our lives. I believe that if the ultimate value in life is our individual happiness, and a belief in fairies or other spiritual beings contributes to our happiness, then let us have more faith in fairies and other unprovables.

Belief is a choice. We can choose to believe because believing fosters a happier life. As a former courtroom lawyer I understand the importance of objective evidence and the value of proofs - in a court of law and in a science lab. But the rigid demand for objective proof in all aspects of our lives is a form of self-strangulation. You may survive, but it is a most unpleasant way to live. Not knowing something for sure need not be a barrier. Not knowing can be a portal, a window through which our imaginations, our hopes, and our dreams may fly. Don't we all need from time to time to breathe deeply the fresh air of imagination? To spread our spiritual wings and fly?

So, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you again; do you believe in fairies? Surely, if Sir Arthur Conan Doyle could publicly state his belief in fairies, none of us need feel shame in raising our hand tonight. Personally, I'm pretty sure fairies do exist; because somebody is always moving my stuff so that I can't find it. But, objectively, we'll never know. And that's OK.