

CHAPTER 1

What Is a Psychic Experience?

On a sunny winter afternoon some years ago I was sitting in my office working on a paper when the receptionist called up on the intercom to announce a phone call. It was a woman who wanted to discuss an experience she had had, and it was my afternoon to be on duty for that sort of call. (The Institute gets a couple dozen phone inquiries each day. The majority are for information about parapsychology in general or for our research in particular, but a few are from people wishing to discuss personal experiences, often troubling ones. The five-member research staff deals with these latter calls.*) After years of taking such calls, my colleagues at the Institute for Parapsychology and I have found that there is little that can shock or surprise us in what folks want to discuss,

*As you might suspect, a certain percentage of the personal-experience calls are from emotionally disturbed individuals. The best we can do in such cases is sympathetically to suggest that the person seek professional care in his or her own locale. Many calls, however, are from persons who seem perfectly sane but have simply had a puzzling experience that they believe to have been psychic. For these we can offer information, suggest reading material, or otherwise help the person better understand the experience. We log all such calls, but we do not record them in detail or attempt further investigation.