

Lights On or Lights Off, That is the Question

What do real “Ghost Hunters” do? That would be a “loaded” question, so let’s start with something more basic, namely, “Do you go ‘lights out’ on your investigators and why?” Sounds simple, right? But it is not, in fact it is a very complex subject and when put to a wide variety of seasoned paranormal investigators; the range of answers is somewhat overwhelming.

For those who really want to cut to the chase, the consensus seems to be that turning out the lights during most investigations is a waste of time, intrinsically dangerous and a bit theatrical, harkening back to the days of the trance medium, who always demanded total darkness in order to work (and therefore free to manipulate her stage as she saw fit.) This practice seems to have been adopted by television ghost chasers, who tend to lean toward the dramatic effect of stumbling through basements and attics unassisted by light.

When you actually ask the question, you find that the real investigators see no sense in the practice and for that matter, they see no reason for only investigating at night. But we will revisit that side of the equation later. The greatest response to my recent survey of acknowledged “experts” suggests that normal lighting during an investigation is acceptable; in fact, many point out if anything you might do best to recreate the lighting to the norm when activity has previously occurred. In one recent ASUP case, when asking a client if he had seen a “shadow person,” recently (he had previous encounters this in his home) he said no, but quickly added, “But I no longer leave the light on in the hallway, so I wouldn’t see it!” Good point!

Sticking to the anecdotal information for the moment, most “Spirit” photographs of late have been captured in IR and Full Spectrum in daylight. Photos for instance taken at Gettysburg are mostly daylight shots, and they are usually accompanied by what might otherwise be seen as “the obvious.” If you take an IR photo of a battlefield in daylight, you can attest to what the naked eye is seeing; you can even go the distance and shoot the IR in tandem with normal digital shots. You know exactly what was there under such conditions, so when an unseen “person” shows up on the IR that you did not see at the time on the field and did not capture with your regular camera, you can make some assumptions as to the nature of your subject. If you only shot in the night-time, the best you can say is, “What is that?”

Once again, returning to the results of my questionnaire, one TV personality responded that she has not worked in total darkness since having a mishap on a battleship, where she walked into an overhead I-beam. Another discredited the practice as not being used at all and stated that while on his popular TV show, they “never” went totally “lights out.” And the always present shot of the light switch being turned off was strictly for visual effect.

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Now, not all TV personalities were willing to expand on the theory of why the lights are better off during investigations. Barry Fitzgerald of the GHI series offers another thought on the topic.

“Many groups are not aware why, but I have been developing a manifestation scale which deals with such a question,” Barry writes.

“From what we see in the field the energies are pretty split. But your question deals with the lower end entities which haunt most houses and such. These entities I have found are hindered during manifestation to either effect objects make sounds and effectively materialize due to the UV in the environment. Although it’s found in the night sky because of the shape of the globe, it is much more reduced at night and a greater amount of materialization can occur.

“The atoms used to form can be stimulated by the UV and the photon is excited to a point where it is expelled from the atom and this causes florescence. This is why a lot of castles and houses report white ladies, although at this point no sex can be determined until the romantic mind tells a good story.

“UV will accelerate the florescence, strong UV from flash cameras and daylight will break the bonds needed to hold the materialization in place and will make the entity back away immediately,” Barry concludes.

While Barry suggests that there is a positive to going lights out, others totally disagree. Chad Miller, author of “The Ghost Hunter’s Journal,” said, “At first, we turned off lights and conducted investigations at night. Because we’ve had less of a tendency to see things and more of a tendency to hear things and feel things, it heightens those senses. When they do it on TV though, I think it’s just to get a rise out of the viewer by initiating the ‘creep’ factor.”

“After our recent conversation on the topic, we decided to keep the majority of the lights on during our last investigation and encountered more activity than we ever had anywhere else. 22 possible EVPs, within an hour’s worth of combined recording! I guess it comes down to experience and personal preference. Investigators should try the different variables and see what works best for them. You know...actually do ‘scientific’ problem solving procedures instead of mimicking what you see on television...” Chad concludes.

Chad’s observation brings into question several things; while going lights out may actually heighten your senses, the effect of having the lights on seems to generate more EVPs. Why? Because one might argue, the simple addition of the electrical circuit to that light bulb may be providing the necessary energy for the manifestation, even of sound. This is a consideration rarely suggested in any of the literature, but certainly worth evaluating.

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Another well known paranormal investigator, Eugenia Macer-Story, responded by saying, "I never limit investigation to the night. In fact, some of the most anomalous photos and/or experiences I have documented are in broad daylight as in my most recent book: "Pulse of the Dragon: The Secret Knowledge of the Pirates". On the other hand, certain denizens of the "other worlds" and/or astral continua seem more able to manifest after dark. I have no simple explanation for this. Nor do I advocate any particular type of film to record the visual aspect of these manifestations--which appear on all types of film and digital equipment. One comment I can make is that auditory spirit phenomena do occur quite often after dark--perhaps more frequently than in daylight, or are noticed more easily without the day noises of regular human activity."

From this we can see two non-contradictory truths, while ghosties seem to manifest more often at nighttime, especially in EVPs, there is nothing to prove that they shun a well lighted room, nor that they do not exhibit themselves in daylight. Returning to Barry Fitzgerald's notion of bio-florescence, it might be reasonable to assume that some, but not all spirits will appear more readily in a totally dark environment due to their nature, but that does not preclude their presence in full light, and the issue may well be moot if you are dealing with photographic techniques like IR and Full Spectrum technologies, that are not affected one way or the other by lighting. This is a misunderstood point, I had several responses from folks who assumed you need total darkness to capture something in IR, or that you have to utilize IR lighting, which is simply not true. Some of the best examples were captured in daylight, the majority of photographic investigators agree.

Taking a quick look at the ASUP handbook of course, there is an entire chapter on the field rules for cemeteries that is usually true for all outside investigations, and routinely those are after dark because the location history usually relates action at night. Are we saying that you can't do an investigation in a cemetery during the day? Certainly not, in fact my personal experience has found us in the bone -yards more in daylight hours, simply because we are attempting to gather names and information for a related case in most instances, which would not be easy in the dead of night.

Here we come into the rules of engagement for night encounters. First and foremost, be prepared to adjust your vision to the night. There is no such thing as a totally dark night. There are stars, the moon, even reflected light on the cloudiest of evenings. That is not a generalization, it is a fact. Nocturnal animals "see" in low light, but are equally as blind when in an artificially created area of absolutely no light. If you allow yourself to adjust to the night's natural light, you will see just how well you will be able to get around. In order to enhance the effort and for safety purposes, you can utilize a small penlight with a red lens, which will not alter your night vision appreciably, but be sparing.

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The trick is simple, go to where you wish to observe and turn off even the smallest of light sources, then wait for several minutes. Your eyes will dilate and soon you will be able to see remarkably well, unless of course, you have a problem with your eyesight in the first place. In a cemetery, your team goes to the prearranged spot and makes themselves comfortable, without any light.

The problem with outdoor phenomenon is largely one of perception. For example, in normal darkness and night, a sprite seems extremely luminous, but in fact there is no reason to believe they do not exist in nature in the daytime, you just don't see them because they really are rather dim. We found this to be true when doing the "Spook Light" research as well. The ball of light, usually yellow, swings over the railroad tracks and can be seen for some distance. To that end, we always did our testing on tracks that were straight for several miles and when possible, pretty much deserted and devoid of things like nearby street lights. Why? Because in the darkness, the ball of light seems to be extremely bright, but in all honesty, when shot with a light meter, it is rather dull. Again, the theory is that the lights will be there under the correct conditions at any time of day, but only visible in darkness.

So, when working outdoors, you will probably want to limit light and allow your eyes to adjust to the low light conditions. You will not want to be using a flood light, not because it might scare a ghost, but rather because it eradicates the images created by low light emitting entities. Inside a house however, make every attempt to replicate the conditions under which the original witness claims to have seen or heard something. If they claim they were in total darkness, then set up the scene to those specifications, but have a light source at hand and don't go walking around a strange environment without illumination, especially in older structures.

I once worked "Plain Clothes," in Manhattan, specifically in what was known as the East Village. Part of the job was to familiarize yourself with the old derelict buildings in the precinct, just in case you might have to enter one in a hurry on a call. I really enjoyed introducing the newer officers on their first "tour". I would take them into an old brownstone and show them around. Now older brownstone conversions and most old apartment houses are pretty much the same; iron railings and stone steps, landings with old mosaics, etc. Most apartments had wooden flooring and all of them were without any electricity. If you got into a foot pursuit, chances were that the bad guy would head into one of these old houses, in an attempt to lose you.

So the tour went something like this, I'd tell the younger cop that he was never to enter an abandoned building alone and never go in if you have not been in that particular one previously. They would enter the hallway; usually I was looking for a handy brick or two for demonstration purposes. First you show the new kids on the block the stairs, which appeared to be all there, but if you pitched

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the brick onto one of them, it would collapse, falling into the sub-basement below. I'd give them a quick lesson in "rail walking" where you use the rail stringer as a kind of horizontal ladder, being careful to show them the booby trap on the landing, which covered in a piece of cardboard, had another gaping hole to nowhere. Then up into one of the apartments, opening a door, walk in a foot or so, and find out that the wall that was once there is now gone, and you are looking over a vacant lot below.

The lesson was simple; "Fools rush in...." The running perp has selected that building because it has been turned into a trap. Young drug dealers can mount those runners at high speed, without breaking stride, they know what is under that cardboard box and they know which door leads to the "Lady" and which one to the "tiger." How do they escape? Usually a second floor bailout, as it was called, a door to nowhere, but with a giant pile of old mattresses under the opening. Up the stairs, through the halls, out the door and back on the street, even as the unaware officer in pursuit is breaking his leg or worse for his effort to detain him. The lesson, call for backup and wait outside.

Now ghosties don't set traps, at least not intentionally, but there are enough hazards to be found in some places to make you wonder. Our message here is simple. Don't be stupid. It may look cool to walk into a house without lights and stumble around, but in fact, it is almost never that way in real life. It does not heighten your experience or make your chances any better of seeing a spirit, it is, and everyone agrees a throwback to the old days when lights out was tantamount to an invitation for slight of hand.

We are not in the business of scare tactics; we do not go to haunted locations for the thrill of being scared, in fact it has been a long time since I was scared and on that last occasion drugs and guns were involved, not ghosties. The world is by nature a scary place sometimes, but studying the activities of human spirits should not be one of them. The rules are simple, don't go anywhere that has not already been thoroughly researched, go in prepared for the worst, in the ASUP we always have an EMT with us and a full medical jump bag at hand. Don't do anything stupid and recognize there has never been a documented case of a spirit willingly harming a human, under any circumstances. We tend to do that to ourselves.

When the case history calls for it, go in, sit down and kill the lights; the danger is when you start walking about in unfamiliar spaces. And by all means have a light source close at hand, otherwise in a year or two from now, folks will be telling me the tale of an intrepid ghost hunter who one day walked into a pit and broke his neck, only to return on the day of his demise to warn others not to be that foolish.

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