

# Not Alone

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by Pamela Sargent

Emrah Elmasli

I'd been waking in the middle of the night, paralysed with terror, wondering if anybody could be sure of anything at all, thinking that maybe there was nothing else except us and the world and the rest of space, that there was no meaning to any of it.

"I don't know about Jerome Sivan," Agnes Mead said, after I'd told her I'd already agreed to be one of his subjects. "Saw him on a C-SPAN debate this weekend, and he just tore this minister apart. The way Sivan attacked religion, he looked like a missionary in reverse." Agnes sounded worried, almost frightened. "It's all superstition to him, just an adaptation we picked up in order to survive. He says faith's totally outlived its usefulness."

The man she described didn't sound like the kindly professor type I had met. Jerome Sivan had turned out to be a slightly plump bearded man in a rumpled jacket and baggy slacks. He'd smiled warmly at me, ushered me to an armchair, then sat down behind his desk.

"You've read the material the receptionist handed you?" he asked.

I nodded, although the brochure hadn't told me much more than the newspaper ad, just that the medical school needed subjects for a new study. Dr. Sivan had been doing his experiments for a couple of years by then, as I found out later, but hadn't yet published any results.

"We're working on ways to lower tension and stress," he told me. That was supposedly the purpose of the study, but I wouldn't have known the difference if he'd admitted he was doing something that involved the brain and temporal lobes and magnetic induction and what-have-you. "Of course we'll need your informed consent, but I don't expect there'll be any physical or mental problems later on."

I was a bit taken aback. "Oh, I didn't think..."

"Well, I don't expect problems, but there are no absolute guarantees. That's why you should take your time to think things over." He sounded awfully reassuring, and there was also the fact that all his subjects would get a small fee, which I could use since I was still looking for a new job, and free medical follow-ups for at least a year after that. There weren't going to be any shots or experimental drugs, either, so it was hard to see what could go wrong.

He didn't say anything about his personal beliefs, because that would have affected his results. I found that out later. I found that out too late.

"I'll think it over," I said, even though I'd already made up my mind to go ahead.

"You do that," he replied.

I'd always thought of myself as religious. I went to Mass and said my Our Fathers and Hail Marys and never doubted that God was around looking out for me, but I didn't really think about God that much. Once in a while, it would occur to me that there had to be something more, something overwhelming that could take me out of myself, make me actually see the face of God, but then the next day would come, and I would forget about all of that. Maybe I'd have some kind of overpowering mystical experience someday, but if I didn't, in the meantime I would just do the best I could.

Better not to think about all of that, anyway, I decided, because I'd been waking up in the middle of the night more often and lying there, paralysed with terror, wondering if anybody could be sure of anything at all, thinking that maybe there was nothing else except us and the world and the rest of space, that there was no meaning to any of it. That was just what Jerome Sivan believed, according

