LUCID DREAMS AND
OUT-OF-THE-BODY EXPERIENCES

When we think of the world, we usually think of the physical world, where we spend our physical existence. Yet there are have mental worlds of experience, worlds of dreams and inner imaginings, worlds accessible in altered states of consciousness. Conventional wisdom gives full reality only to the physical world, but we have to be careful as to how far we will let a convenient convention become an absolute that limits our minds. In a dream or some altered states experiences we are "out" of this world as far as our immediate reality is concerned: must we always dismiss such experiences as "subjective" and "unreal" when we return to ordinary reality?

The first issue of The Open Mind began a continuing exploration of a fascinating world of experience, lucid dreams. To quote:

Compared to our waking life, our nighttime dreams are a passive sort of existence. Things usually just happen to us, whether we will them to or not. Modern sleep research has shown that we each spend about 20% of our sleep time in the dream state. If you usually sleep 8 hours, that’s over an hour-and-a-half dreaming. Why not take an active approach to dreaming, and have a richer nighttime life? Adding that time to a 16 hour conscious day is like adding 10% more time to your conscious life. That’s not a bad gain!

A very few people already do this: they experience lucid dreaming, a special type of dream in which there is a pronounced shift in the way their consciousness functions, such that they know while dreaming that they are dreaming, feel much more in control of their mental functioning, and are able to exercise much more control over subsequent dream events while they are lucid.

We continued our exploration with articles on techniques for inducing lucid dreaming in the second and fourth issues, and now we return to and expand the topic, stimulated by two exciting and important books which were published in 1985. Stephen LaBerge's Lucid Dreaming: The Power of Being Awake and Aware in Your Dreams (Los Angeles: Tarcher, $15.95 hard cover) and Robert Monroe's Far Journeys (New York: Doubleday, $15.95 hard cover) break new ground in understanding experiences that are "out of" or beyond the ordinary world, namely lucid dreaming and out-of-the-body experiences (OOBEs). This article will deal with dreaming, lucid dreaming, and OOBEs, and their meaning for us. Both books are strongly recommended for follow up reading, and I also suggest that before reading Far Journeys you first read Monroe's classic Journeys Out of the Body, which is still available in paperback (Doubleday).

A Lucid Dream

LaBerge's Lucid Dreaming introduces the subject with the following dramatic example:

As I wandered through a high-vaulted corridor deep within a mighty citadel, I paused to admire the magnificent architecture. Somehow the contemplation of these majestic surroundings stimulated the realization that I was dreaming! In the light of my lucid consciousness, the already impressive splendor of the castle appeared even more of a marvel, and with great excitement I began to explore the imaginary reality of my "castle in the air."
Walking down the hall, I could feel the cold hard-ness of the stones beneath my feet and hear the echo of my steps. Every element of this enchanting spectacle seemed real - in spite of the fact that I remained perfectly aware it was all a dream!

Fantastic as it may sound, I was in full possession of my waking faculties while dreaming and soundly asleep. I could think as clearly as ever, freely remember details of my waking life, and act deliberately upon conscious reflection. Yet none of this diminished the vividness of my dream. Paradox or no, I was awake in my dream!

Finding myself before two diverging passageways in the castle, I exercised my free will, choosing to take the right-hand one, and shortly came upon a stairway. Curious about where it might lead, I descended the flight of steps and found myself near the top of an enormous subterranean vault. From where I stood at the foot of the stairs, the floor of the cavern sloped steeply down, fading into the distance into darkness. Several hundred yards below I could see what appeared to be a fountain sur-rounded by marble statuary. The idea of bathing in these symbolically renewing waters captured my fancy, and I proceeded at once down the hillside. Not on foot, however, for whenever I want to get somewhere in my dreams, I fly. As soon as I landed beside the pool, I was at once startled by the discovery that what from above had seemed merely an inanimate statue now appeared unmistakably and ominously alive. Towering above the fountain stood a huge and intimidating genie, the Guardian of the Spring, as I somehow immediately knew. All my instincts cried out "Flee!" But I remembered that this terrifying sight was only a dream. Emboldened by the thought, I cast aside fear and flew not away, but straight up to the apparition. As is the way of dreams, no sooner was I within reach than we had somehow become of equal size and I was able to look him in the eyes, face to face. Realizing that my fear had created his terrible appearance, I resolved to embrace what I had been eager to reject, and with open arms and heart I took both his hands in mine. As the dream slowly faded, the genie's power seemed to flow into me, and I awoke filled with vibrant energy. I felt like I was ready for anything.

Modern Studies

Laberge's pioneering work, reported in highly readable form in Lucid Dreaming, establishes that lucid dreaming usually occurs in a stage 1 rapid eye movement (REM) state, the same physiological state that ordinary dreaming occurs in. This rules out the old idea that it was really impossible to be lucid in a dream, that people who thought they had lucid dreams were just vividly imagining things during brief awakenings in the night. His work also shows that lucid dreaming includes a clear recall and understanding of waking state experimental objectives and a capacity for volitional control of dream action in the laboratory, in accordance with these objectives.

To illustrate: A subject capable of having lucid dreams agrees that during such dreams he will signal to the experimenter (who is monitoring his brainwaves, eye movements, and other physiological measures), that he is now lucid in his dream. This is not an easy task, given the general paralysis of almost all muscles in stage 1 sleep! How can it be done?

With rapid eye movements being measured, as well as electromyogram (tiny electrical signals that control muscular movement) potentials on both wrists, the dreamer, on becoming lucid, sends a prearranged signal. He roles his (dream) eyes vertically three times. Pure vertical rapid eye movements are rare in stage 1 REM sleep, so are not likely to occur by chance.

Not likely is not impossible, though, so to be completely sure the lucidity signal really signifies lucidity, the dreamer then sends his initials in Morse code by selectively tensing the (dream) muscles of his (dream) hands. If the right hand is to signify dots and the left dashes, for example, LaBerge (a proficient lucid dreamer himself) would send his initials, S.L., by tensing his right hand thrice (S = dot, dot, dot in Morse), pausing a couple of seconds, and then tensing his right hand once, his left hand once, and his right hand twice (L = dot, dash, dot, dot, dot in Morse). Electrodes on the dreamer's (physical) wrists pick up the electrical signals produced and record them on the polygraph. These kinds of signals of lucidity have now been sent many times in the laboratory. Keith Hearne, a British psychologist working totally independently of Laberge, conducted similar successful experiments at about the same time.

Controlled lucidity is a major breakthrough for the scientific study of dreams. Understanding the nature of dreams has always been a slow process because of their uncontrollable spontaneous nature. They seldom manifest the particular thing you would like to observe more closely when you are ready to study it. LaBerge describes many experiments about the
nature of dreams that are much more feasible with a dreamer who is an active co-experimenter. What rate does dream time flow at, for example?

Have a lucid dreamer signal lucidity, then count off an agreed upon number of seconds in the dream, then signal again. Now compare the polygraph marks signaling a dream time interval with clock time. It turns out that dream time flows at much the same rate as ordinary time, at least for short intervals.

We seldom experience breathing in dreams, but if we do, does it parallel the breathing of the physical body? Have the dreamer signal lucidity, take a prearranged number of deep breaths, and signal again. Now compare this to your actual physical record of breathing. The results of this and several other fascinating experiments in this vein are described in LaBerge's book, including studies of dream sexuality and right and left brain hemisphere functioning and dream consciousness. Many more are possible, yet this research is still in its infancy.

Growth Aspects of Lucid Dreaming

The most obvious possibility of lucid dreaming that strikes us is gratification of our desires: I can experience anything I want! Sex, power, magic, adventure, you name it. This is natural. Yet, as LaBerge recognizes, . . . after too many wish fulfilling dreams, where the action is motivated by the ego-associated drives, passions, desires, expectations, and goals with which we are so familiar, a point of satiation may be reached. Lucid dreamers . . . grow weary of dreaming the same dream, and equally of being the same self, night after night. It is at this point that the need for self-transcendence may arise. Such lucid dreamers no longer know what they want, only that it is not what they used to want. So they give up deciding what to do, and resign from deliberate dream control.

The lucid dream of LaBerge's quoted at the beginning of this article is not just interesting and gratifying; it is a growth experience. The dreamer recognizes the intimate relation of his dream reality to his self, and instead of fleeing from the Guardian of the Spring, he looked him in the eye and embraced him, restoring the wholeness in his mind.

In our earlier discussions of lucid dreaming, we mentioned the possibility of using them for personal and spiritual growth. This is a very individualized subject, but a very real potential. Consider the following lucid dream of LaBerge's:

While ascending a mountain path, I began to find it more and more difficult to climb. My legs took on the familiar leaden feeling they sometimes have in dreams, and a dull heaviness spread through my rapidly weakening body. My feelings of weariness deepened relentlessly until I could only continue by crawling - but finally even this was too much for me and I was overcome with the feeling of certainty that I was about to die of exhaustion. The realization of imminent death focused my attention with remarkable clarity upon what I wanted to express with the one act of my life I had left: perfect acceptance. Thus, gladly embracing death, I let go completely of my last breath, when to my amazement and delight, a rainbow flowed out of my heart and I woke from the dream.

Years after this experience, the profound impact of this dream of death and transcendence continue to influence my beliefs concerning what may happen to us when we die . . .

The dream by LaBerge in the article on Home, later in this issue, is also quite relevant here.

We Westerners are a long way from a fully developed discipline of spiritual growth through lucid dreaming - Tibetan Buddhism has such a discipline - but LaBerge gives us some interesting starting points. His book also has techniques he developed for inducing lucid
dreaming which can supplement the techniques we discussed in the first, second, and fourth issues of The Open Mind.

Labeling Experience

Everything starts with personal experience, but does not stop there. We label our experiences and evaluate them. This labeling and evaluation is done primarily in culturally given categories, habits of thought that operate in a largely automatic way in us. Calling something a "dream" is such a culturally affected labeling.

Labeling is dangerous. Any label is but an approximation of the full reality of that which it refers to, and should never be used to do more than point our attention toward the thing labeled. Yet our minds love labels and use them in automated ways. The semanticist Korzybski said that "The map is not the territory." As a psychologist, I am frequently forced to add the qualifier, "Most of the time people prefer the map to the territory!" We have experiences during the night: as soon as we automatically call them "dreams," we run the danger of this label distorting our perception of what they actually are.

In ordinary and lucid dreams we are temporarily "out" of this physical world and "in" new worlds of experience, then we label these worlds "subjective" on our return. But suppose we had a nighttime experience in which our consciousness seemed not only quite lucid, as in a lucid dream, but was an experience we were convinced was quite real? Suppose it seemed perfectly obvious that we were actually in another world of experience that had an independent existence, like the physical world, rather than existing only in our minds? This would be an OOBE.

The Out-of-the-Body Experience

In Far Journeys, Robert Monroe does not begin by talking about his nighttime experiences as dreams, lucid or non-lucid, but about OOBEs:

What is the out-of-body experience? For those who have not encountered the subject as yet, an out-of-body experience (OOBE) is a condition where you find yourself outside of your physical body, fully conscious and able to perceive and act as if you were functioning physically - with several exceptions. You can move through space (and time?) slowly or apparently somewhere beyond the speed of light. You can observe, participate in events, make willful decisions based upon what you perceive and do. You can move through physical matter such as walls, steel plates, concrete, earth, oceans, air, even atomic radiation without effort or effect.

You can go into an adjoining room without bothering to open the door. You can visit a friend three thousand miles away. You can explore the moon, the solar system, and the galaxy if these interest you. Or - you can enter other reality stems only dimly perceived and theorized by our time/space consciousness.

Bob Monroe's OOBEs began quite unexpectedly in 1958. He was a radio producer and businessman, living in New York's respectable Westchester County, a solid, sane citizen. His interests and background definitely did not include the "occult" or the "psychic!"

Some strange vibration sensations had been happening off and on for a few months; it was as if his body were shaken for a minute by some sort of electrical field that was surging through him. Naturally this worried him, but his physician found nothing wrong with him. A psychologist friend he mentioned it to frankly told him psychology didn't know a thing about it, but it didn't mean he was crazy, and that he ought to take time to explore it. Monroe wasn't at all sure about exploring it, and he had a busy and satisfying life to lead.

His first OOBE is described in his older Journeys Out of the Body book:
It was late at night, and I was lying in bed before sleep. My wife had fallen asleep beside me. There was a surge that seemed to be in my head, and quickly the condition spread through my body. It all seemed the same. As I lay there trying to decide how to analyze the thing in another way, I just happened to think how nice it would be to take a glider up and fly the next afternoon (my hobby at that time). Without considering any consequences— not knowing there would be any—I thought of the pleasure it would bring.

After a moment, I became aware of something pressing against my shoulder. Half-curious, I reached back and up to feel what it was. My hand encountered a smooth wall. I moved my hand along the wall the length of my arm and it continued smooth and unbroken. My senses fully alert, I tried to see in the dim light. It was a wall, and I was lying against it with my shoulder. I immediately reasoned that I had gone to sleep and fallen out of bed. (I had never done so before, but all sorts of strange things were happening, and falling out of bed was quite possible.)

Then I looked again. Something was wrong. This wall had no windows, no furniture against it, no doors. It was not a wall in my bedroom. Yet somehow it was familiar. Identification came instantly. It wasn't a wall, it was the ceiling. I was floating against the ceiling, bouncing gently with any movement I made. I rolled in the air, startled, and looked down. There, in the dim light below me, was the bed. There were two figures lying in the bed. To the right was my wife. Beside her was someone else. Both seemed asleep.

This was a strange dream, I thought. I was curious. Whom would I dream to be in bed with my wife? I looked more closely, and the shock was intense. I was the someone on the bed!

My reaction was almost instantaneous. Here I was, there was my body. I was dying, this was death, and I wasn't ready to die. Somehow the vibrations were killing me. Desperately, like a diver, I swooped down to my body and dove in. I then felt the bed and the covers, and when I opened my eyes, I was looking at the room from the perspective of my bed.

But, you may well say, how do we know these are the stories of real journeys? Couldn't they just be dreams and fantasies? Fascinating, lucid dreams, to be sure, since Monroe describes clear consciousness as part of the OOB, but still just dreams?

Here we come back to the problem of labeling. I am having an experience right now of sitting in my chair in front of my word processor, typing. How do I know it isn't a dream? That it is real?

My immediate reaction to the question is
that it is obviously real. That is, the overall feel of my consciousness is that of my usual waking state, and I have been taught to believe and been rewarded for believing that what I experience in my waking state is absolutely real. I'm a Westerner and a scientist, after all!

I could, of course, have a dream tonight that I am sitting at my word processor typing. In retrospect, though, after I return to my usual waking state, I will say that there is a lack of clarity, of lucidity, about my dream state, compared to my waking state, so that in retrospect I can dismiss my dream of typing as unreal. It seems quite real at the time in the dream, of course. Perhaps dreams are set in another reality, an independently existing world whose reality is simply different from ordinary physical reality? Not by Western standards! Dreams show too much variation, too much inconsistency, and it is tempting to conclude that anything so inconsistent must be subjective. We have such a longing for stability!

Lucid dreams bring a whole new dimension to the labeling of dreams as unreal. Your consciousness is no longer cloudy, as in a typical dream, and you seem to possess most or all of your mental abilities to reason, recall, and act, just as you do in your waking state. And you label the experience a dream right then and there in the dream world. Your ongoing experience still is perceived as real, but you believe, because you've labeled it a dream, that some unknown part of your mind is arbitrarily creating this dream world, and that it only seems real. The sandwich in your mouth tastes delicious, but somehow you must really be just imagining it!

Further support for this belief comes from the fact that you can sometimes deliberately control the content of your lucid dream by simply willing it to be different. You will to talk to your dead brother and a moment later he walks into the dream and says hello. We can't do this in our waking world: that would be "magic." Since we have been conditioned not to believe in magic, yet magic is now working, we are, therefore, dreaming.

Lucid dreamers may be inclined to believe that people have claim to have OOBES are merely misinterpreting their (lucid) dreams. People who have OOBES are inclined to think that those who talk about their lucid dreams may be too readily dismissing what may be actual OOBES journeys to other realities. I suspect both are right sometimes. LaBerge reports some experiences that are similar to some of Monroe's. Although open to the possibility of OOBES, LaBerge has never experienced one he believes was more than a dream imitating an OOE: his sleep experiences are lucid dreams.

Monroe, in personal conversation, has told me that his OOBES are easily distinguished from lucid dreams because he can't work "magic" in them. He finds himself in places that have their own reality, and he cannot change them by mere acts of will. Further, the other worlds he visits in OOBES show the stability of ordinary reality. Just as the walls of my study keep their same dimensions and spatial relationships to each other each time I walk in, barring lawful changes such as rebuilding, the out of this world places Monroe visits in OOBES maintain their principal characteristics from visit to visit.

Local Validation

Some OOBES are local, i.e., you are out of your body but still located somewhere in what seems to be the ordinary physical world. This can give an opportunity to apply a very stringent test of whether you were really there, or just dreaming. Can you describe specific, improbable details of the location you believe you visited? Can you be sure there was no normal way you could have known about these details? Finally, can you now verify that these details are correct?

Feeling you were in a large, empty room somewhere won't do: the world is full of large, empty rooms. Certainly you could have just dreamed such a thing, and mislabeled a lucid dream as an OOB. But if it's a room in a neighbor's house you've never been in before, and you saw a stuffed badger in the corner sitting on top of a pink 55 gallon drum, and this is verified, what then? This is hardly the sort of thing most people have in their house!

The question of whether his OOBES were real in this sense or just unusual dreams was a very pressing one for Monroe for the first few years of his experiences. He gives the question much attention in Journeys Out of the Body. Many of his local OOBES couldn't be checked: if you find yourself on a dark street in a strange city for a few seconds, looking at nondescript buildings, how can you check it? There were enough instances where he could check and did
confirm that his OOBE perceptions matched physical reality, though, that he did accept his OOBEs as having a reality of their own. I deliberately use the phrase "a reality of their own" because there are enough alterations in OOBE perception from physical eyes perception to suggest that a simple model of the OOB traveler just being there is too simple.

Far Journeys will be difficult for many readers because the journeys are not local, they are interstate. Monroe and his students experience other worlds and communicate with beings in them, and there is no way we can evaluate their reality by ordinary criteria. Of course, we might be interested enough to try to learn how to go there ourselves ... but that is another story. Again I strongly recommend reading (or rereading) Journeys Out of the Body first before tackling Far Journeys. These books, and LaBerge's book, will stretch your mind in some very useful ways!

GOING HOME

The great spiritual systems all speak of "Home," We feel there is something essential in our being which is of a different and higher nature than the physical world we live in, and one of the main goals of the spiritual path is to find the way Home, to recontact our essential nature.

This is how A Course in Miracles expresses it on page 331 of its Workbook for Students:

This world you seem to live in is not home to you. And somewhere in your mind you know that this is true. A memory of home keeps haunting you, as if there were a place that called you to return, although you do not recognize the voice, nor what it is the voice reminds you of. Yet still you feel an alien here, from somewhere all unknown. Nothing so definite that you could say with certainty you are an exile here. Just a persistent feeling, sometimes not more than a tiny throb, at other times hardly remembered, actively dismissed, but surely to return to mind again.

No one but knows whereof we speak. Yet some try to put by their suffering in games they play to occupy their time, and keep their sadness from them. Others will deny that they are sad, and do not recognize their tears at all. Still others will maintain that what we speak of is illusion, not to be considered more than but a dream. Yet who, in simple honesty, without defensiveness and self-deception, would deny he understands the words we speak?

We speak today for everyone who walks this world, for he is not at home. He goes uncertainly about in endless search, seeking in darkness what he cannot find; not recognizing what it is he seeks. A thousand homes he makes, yet none contents his restless mind. He does not understand he builds in vain. The home he seeks can not be made by him. There is no substitute for Heaven. All he ever made was hell.

Perhaps you think it is your childhood home that you would find again. The childhood of your body, and its place of shelter, are a memory now so distorted that you merely hold a picture of a past that never happened. Yet there is a Child in you Who seeks His Father's house, and knows that He is alien here. This childhood is eternal, with an innocence that will endure forever. Where this Child shall go is holy ground. It is His holiness that lights up Heaven, and that brings to earth the pure reflection of the light above, wherein are earth and Heaven joined as one....
The idea of home is more than just an intuition in us, or a statement from a source outside of us, though. It can be a deep human experience. Both Stephen LaBerge and Robert Monroe have had such experiences.

LaBerge describes lucid dreaming as a way of having all sorts of pleasant experiences, but pleasant personal experiences are not enough for our full development. Lucid dreaming can be used in a more growthful way. He describes, in Lucid Dreaming, a lucid dream experience which reflects the experience of being Home:

Late one summer morning several years ago, I was lying quietly in bed, reviewing the dream I had just awakened from. A vivid image of a road appeared, and by focusing my attention on it, I was able to enter the scene. At this point, I was no longer able to feel my body, from which I concluded I was, in fact, asleep. I found myself driving in my sportscar down the dream road, perfectly aware that I was dreaming. I was delighted by the vibrantly beautiful scenery my lucid dream was presenting. After driving a short distance farther, I was confronted with a very attractive, I might say a 'dream' of a hitchhiker beside me on the road just ahead. I need hardly say that I felt strongly inclined to stop and pick her up. But I said to myself, "I've had that dream before. How about something new?" So I passed her by, resolving to seek "The Highest" instead. As soon as I opened myself to guidance, my car took off into the air, flying rapidly upward, until it fell behind me like the stage of a rocket. I continued to fly higher into the clouds, where I passed a cross on a steeple, a star of David, and other religious symbols. As I rose still higher, beyond the clouds, I entered a space that seemed a vast mystical realm: a vast emptiness that was yet full of love; an unbounded space that somehow felt like home. My mood had lifted to corresponding heights, and I began to sing with ecstatic inspiration. The quality of my voice was truly amazing — it spanned the entire range from deepest bass to highest soprano — and I felt as if I were embracing the entire cosmos in the resonance of my voice. As I improvised a melody that seemed more sublime than any I had heard before, the meaning of my song revealed itself and I sang the words, "I praise Thee, O Lord!"

Upon awakening from this remarkable lucid dream, I reflected that it had been one of the most satisfying experiences of my life. It felt as if it were of profound significance. However, I was unable to say in exactly what way it was profound, nor was I able to evaluate its significance. When I tried to understand the words that had somehow contained the full significance of the experience — "I praise Thee, O Lord!" — I realized that, in contrast to my understanding while in the dream, I only now understood the phrase in the sense it would have in our realm. It seemed the esoteric sense that I comprehended while I dreamed was beyond my cloudy understanding while awake. About what the praise did not mean, I can say this: in that transcendent state of unity, there was no "I" and "Thee." It was a place that had no room for "I" and "Thee," but for one only. So which of us, then, was there? My personal "I," my dream-ego sense of individuality, was absent. Thus, what was present was "Thee." But in that realm, "I" was "Thee." So I might just as well have sung "I praise Me . . . " except that there was really no "me" either! In any case, it should be clear why I have called this lucid dream a transpersonal experience.

Monroe similarly describes his OOBEs as usually pleasant and adventurous, but also going well beyond the personal level to the transpersonal. Here is his description of Home, from his earlier Journeys Out of the Body book:

Three times I have "gone" to a place that I cannot find words to describe accurately. Again, it is this vision, this interpretation, the temporary visitation to this "place" or state of being that brings the message we have heard so often throughout the history of man. I am sure that this may be part of the ultimate heaven as our religions conceive it. It must also be the nirvana, the Samadhi, the supreme experience related to us by the mystics of the ages.
It is truly a state of being, very likely interpreted by the individual in many different ways.

To me, it was a place or condition of pure peace, yet exquisite emotion. It was as if you were floating in warm soft clouds where there is no up or down, where nothing exists as a separate piece of matter. The warmth is not merely around you, it is of you and through you. Your perception is dazzled and overwhelmed by the Perfect Environment.

The cloud in which you float is swept by rays of light in shapes and hues that are constantly changing, and each is good as you bathe in them as they pass over you. Ruby-red rays of light, or something beyond what we know as light, because no light ever felt this meaningful. All the colors of the spectrum come and go constantly, never harshly, and each brings a different soothing or restful happiness. It is as if you are within and a part of the clouds surrounding an eternally glowing sunset, and with every changing pattern of living color, you also change. You respond and drink into you the eternity of the blues, yellows, greens, and reds, and the complexities of the intermediates. All are familiar to you. This is where you belong. This is Home.

As you move slowly and effortlessly through the cloud, there is music around you. It is not something of which you become aware. It is there all the time, and you vibrate in harmony with the Music. Again, this is more than the music you knew back there. It is only those harmonies, the delicate and dynamic melodic passages, the multivoiced counterpart, the poignant overtones - it is only those that have evoked in you the deep, incoherent emotion back there. The mundane is missing. Choirs of human-sounding voices echo in wordless song. Infinite patterns of strings in all shades of subtle harmony interweave in cyclical yet developing themes, and you resonate with them. There is no source from which the Music comes. It is there, all around you, in you, you are a part of it, and it is you.

It is the purity of a truth of which you have had only a glimpse. This is the feast, and the tiny tidbits you tasted before, back there, had made you hope for the existence of the Whole. The nameless emotion, longing, nostalgia, sense of destiny that you felt back there when you stared at the cloud-layered sunset in Hawaii, when you stood quietly among the tall, waving trees in the silent forest, when a musical selection, passage, or song recalled memories of the past or brought forth a longing for which there was no associated memory, when you longed for the place where you belonged, whether city, town, country, nation, or family - these are now fulfilled. You are Home. You are where you belong. Where you always should have been.

Most important, you are not alone. With you, beside you, interlocked in you are others. They do not have names, nor are you aware of them as shapes, but you know them and you are bonded to them with a great single knowledge. They are exactly like you, they are you, and like you, they are Home. You feel with them, like gently waves of electricity passing between you, a completeness of love, of which all the facets you have experienced are but segments and incomplete portions. Only here, the emotion is without need of intense display or demonstration. You give and receive as an automatic action, with no deliberate effort. It is not something you need or that needs you. The "reaching out" is gone. The interchange flows naturally. You are unaware of differences in sex, you yourself as a part of the whole are both male and female, positive and negative, electron and proton. Man-woman love moves to you and from you, parent-child-sibling-idol and idyll and ideal - all interplay in soft waves about you, in you, and through you. You are in perfect balance because you are where you belong. You are Home.

Within all of this, yet not a part of it, you are aware of the source of the entire span of your experience, of you, of the vastness beyond your ability to perceive and/or imagine. Here, you know and easily accept the existence of the Father. Your true Father. The Father, the Creator of all that is or was. You are one of His countless creations. How or why, you do not know. This is not important. You are happy simply because you are in your Right Place, where you truly belong.

Each of the three times I went There, I did not return voluntarily. I came back sadly, reluctantly. Someone helped me return. Each time after I returned, I suffered intense nostalgia and loneliness for days. I felt as an alien might among strangers in a land where things were not "right," where everything and everyone was so different and so "wrong" when compared with where you belonged. Acute loneliness, nostalgia, and something akin to homesickness. So great was it that I have not tried to go There again.

Many of the experiences that people have of Home are what I have termed "state-specific knowledge" (see my States of Consciousness, 1983) They are perfectly clear in the altered state of consciousness they occur in, but in ordinary consciousness only part of the understanding is clear, vital aspects remain just thin hints. Attenuated as the ordinary state memory is, though, it can function as a vital reminder of a greater reality, beckoning us on.

Since his first book, Monroe has touched
Home again. Once touched, something vital remains. In Far Journeys he writes:

On a clear night before going to bed, I might go our and stand on the sun deck and look up. When I do, sometimes the stars disappear and there is nothing but blackness overhead. From beyond the blackness comes and unseen and eternal song that is hauntingly familiar, a reminder, if needed, cutting sharply through the noise of local traffic....

I think A Course in Miracles is correct: we all have some kind of recollection of Home, however faint. May this be a reminder.....

[Quotations from A Course in Miracles are by permission of The Foundation for Inner Peace, Box 635, Tiburon, CA 94920.]

RESCUING THE ESSENCE OF WESTERN SPIRITUALITY

One of the great difficulties of our times is the bankruptcy of Western religion for so many people. We often actively reject it because of the way Christianity was used on so many of us to invalidate our basic selves, manipulate us, and fill us with guilt and a sense of sin.

Yet we are Westerners. Christianity and its basis in Judaism is a formal or at least an implicit part of our heritage, and many of our essential spiritual impulses were interwoven into Western spiritual ideas at a very early age. The crazy things it has done to us ultimately need to be straightened out so we can learn from them, not just avoided.

Elaine Pagel's The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Vintage Books, 1981, $2.95, paper, 214 pp., index) is an excellent tool for helping us distinguish Christianity as we know it, a political system, from the ideas that may have been taught by Jesus or inspired by his teachings. The gnostic gospels are a diverse group of early Christian writings that were excluded from the orthodox New Testament by the decisions of men. I use "men" with deliberate sexist connotations here to accurately reflect political history. These rejected ideas may be just as or more useful for our spiritual growth as those included in the orthodox New Testament.

Elaine Pagel makes clear that the overt reasons for exclusion were trying to discriminate genuine writings from spurious ones, but these decisions were strongly influenced by political ones. Most gnostic versions of early Christianity, e.g., treated women as equal to men. They could be priests and prophets, baptize, and preach. God was as much feminine as masculine. The sect of Christianity that later became the orthodox one, branding all others as heresies and burning their books (and bodies), the Catholic church was set up by men who proclaimed that women were spiritually and morally inferior.

The gnostics stressed the primacy of direct spiritual experience over doctrines and priests, a clear threat to the evolving authoritarian structure of the church. They also taught that knowing oneself was the primary way to knowledge of all that was valuable, including God, because we were ultimately one with God, rather than separate. "Salvation" is an enlightenment that can be attained in the present. Consider the following from the gnostic "Gospel of Thomas:"

"If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

Pagel's book is short and quite readable. It has helped me see how the ideas generated by early Christianity are unlike the ones later used to commit so many personal and social atrocities in the name of Christ, and how they are like many of the best ideas of modern growth psychology.
The Spiritual Emergency Network

Judy Tart

Many travellers on the spiritual path have found the going rough, or have suddenly found themselves at a level of awareness and/or energy transformation they were not prepared to handle. Perhaps others around them have also had difficulty in dealing with the enormous new levels of knowledge, insight, and energy their friends are experiencing. Even worse, many many persons who do not consider themselves seekers or spiritual wake up one morning to find their world suddenly changed - hearing voices, seeing visions, knowing the thoughts and secret feelings of others around them.

We know what usually happens to anyone in our society who not only has these experiences but is foolish enough to talk about them to others - a 72-hour hold in the nearest "spiritual correction" center and some massive doses of Thorazine to bring them back to "normal."

In order to avoid this situation, and to help those who are trying to figure out if they're becoming enlightened or going crazy, Stan and Christina Grof and Rita Rohan several years ago established the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN). It was first based at Esalen Institute; now it's located at the California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (CITP) in Menlo Park. The address is:

SEN/CITP
250 Oak Grove Avenue
Menlo Park, CA 94025
(415) 327-2776

What does SEN do? Anyone experiencing altered states of awareness, energy, insights, who needs some nurturing, reassurance, and help while going through this transformation, can call SEN and hopefully find someone nearby who has had similar experiences, or someone who is a therapist sensitive to and aware of spiritual dimensions of reality, whom they can contact for assistance.

The network of individuals and organizations in SEN numbers more than 10,000 at present. By writing or phoning SEN you can receive information and referral for yourself or others. There is also an educational program, including articles, bibliographies, tapes, lectures, workshops and conferences on aspects of spiritual opening and crisis. SEN's membership is open to anyone who is interested in in the goals of spiritual awakening and what might be called spiritual midwifery.

Having recently reread Bert Kaplan's The Inner World of Mental Illness, I am very struck by the almost universal themes of spiritual awakening running through diverse firsthand accounts of people's experience with madness, along with the equally striking lack of recognition of the same by the so-called authorities. It is also frightening to realize that today, with our anti-psychotic medications, people aren't even allowed to experience their mystical states in the privacy of their own minds. I see SEN as filling a pretty urgent need.

If you want more information, please write or call SEN at the above address. They need support, volunteer networkers, and others to spread the word that they exist and are available to help out when needed.

Reference:

LECTURES AND WORKSHOPS

by Charles T. Tart


August 16-17, 1986: Workshop on "Parapsychology: Discoveries at the Leading Edge." Joy Lake Community, Box 1328, Reno, NV 89504.


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