

Travel in Spiritual Worlds

A complete guide on [Astral Travels](#).

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Spiritual Travel

A Spiritual Approach to Out-Of-Body Experience

This site introduces the concept of **spiritual travel**. Spiritual travel is a form of out-of-body experience done voluntarily to achieve a spiritual goal. In order to have an out-of-body experience, the soul or consciousness of the individual must temporarily leave the physical body. During out-of-body experience, the physical senses shut down. When this occurs, an entirely new world opens up to the individual. Spiritual travel is a special type of out-of-body experience where the individual's awareness is heightened, and he or she is able to make decisions and direct the experience.

The spectrum of experience afforded by spiritual travel is very broad and can include a wide variety of psychic and spiritual states. In most cases, the spiritual traveler is able to clearly remember the experiences and learn from them.

Spiritual travel is sometimes called transcendent or ecstatic experience because it deals with the "inner" senses rather than the physical senses. It also deals with states of being seemingly independent of the physical world.

The Purpose of Spiritual Travel

The goal of spiritual travel is mystical or transcendent religious experience. The reason for an interest in spiritual travel is that it provides a unique means of approaching these distant and extraordinary states of religious awareness. It does this by exposing the spiritual seeker to a series of lessons about the nature of identity, and the freedom of the soul to travel in various non-physical environments. These lessons gradually introduce the spiritual traveler to a variety of psychic and spiritual states containing increasing degrees of individual freedom, and spiritual awareness. In addition, spiritual travel provides an inner laboratory where the seeker can experiment with techniques and methods of moving through the more limited psychic states of awareness and into these distant spiritual realms.

Near-Death Experience as a Limited Form of Spiritual Travel

One common form of spiritual travel seen in the modern West is near-

death experience. The concept of near-death experience was developed by Dr. Raymond Moody Jr. in his book *Life After Life* in 1975. In near-death experience, a person comes close to death due to sickness or injury, and the person's soul temporarily leaves the physical body. In the early stages of a near-death experience, the spiritual traveler usually views his or her lifeless body and the surrounding physical environment from a short distance away. This is usually followed by a shift of awareness to a non-physical environment in the later stages of the experience where the traveler encounters a spiritual guide or "being of light". Near-death experience is a limited form of spiritual travel in three respects.

First, it occurs spontaneously as a result of a medical crisis rather than voluntarily as part of a spiritual search. Second, though the individual seems to exercise some control over out-of-body movements in the physical environment, the more religious and other-worldly elements of the experience are usually controlled by some outside force such as a guide. This guide directs the near-death experience without any request or permission from the traveler who has little power over what occurs. Third, near-death experience while many times uplifting and life-changing is usually limited to a series of repeating states or stages, and is not as broad or wide-ranging as spiritual travel experience.

Fortunately, it is not necessary for an individual to undergo a near-death experience (medical crisis) to have a spiritual travel experience.

Spiritual travel is a tool for the spiritual seeker. An individual can **engage in a spiritual practice designed to induce spiritual travel experiences**. It is possible for the advanced spiritual traveler to control the contents of a spiritual travel experience.

This site includes:

- Discussion and analysis of spiritual travel experience
- The relationship of spiritual travel to dreams
- Spiritual travel experiences from the bible, and a variety of literary sources
- Spiritual travel experiences from personal sources
- Techniques and methods to induce spiritual travel experience
- The importance of religious symbols in spiritual travel
- The relationship of spiritual travel to death and dying, and near-death experience
- References to books on the subjects of mysticism and spiritual travel

Attempts to describe the value of spiritual travel in abstract terms seem destined to failure. Phrases like "spiritual freedom" and "increased

awareness" sound vague and diffuse. However, I believe when one reads the many firsthand accounts of spiritual travel experience listed at this site, the meaning of these phrases becomes much more clear and concrete. I challenge the reader to read on, and learn more about one of the great mysteries of life - the phenomenon of spiritual travel.

Surfing the Mantric Wave

Mantras are a common method used to reach destinations during spiritual travel. Mantras in my limited experience are a somewhat advanced form of spiritual travel suited to those who are capable of traveling in a disembodied state (without bodily sensations or body image). Practicing mantras during spiritual travel has the effect of moving the soul through different inner spaces much like a surfer rides a wave. They provide a definite sense of continuous forward movement with the mantric vibration or current acting as the basis of propulsion. The author will attempt to describe elements of travel by mantra but as with most deeper experience, the words simply fail to convey the experience.

One curious thing about travel by mantra is that though the mantra is being silently chanted by a single voice (the practitioner's inner voice), the mantric sounds often seem "larger" and more all pervading than sounds a single voice could normally produce. Instead, they sound as if they are being intoned by a chorus of voices. This creates the sense that the traveler is not riding the mantric wave or current alone. The wave therefore seems more like a bus than a single passenger car with many beings riding together through a common environment experiencing the same scenery.

In my experience, mantric spaces usually have no horizon and as such are more like moving through an underwater environment than moving through a normal atmosphere. The spaces have different textures, densities, and emotional qualities which create varying background sensations that permeate the space. These qualities naturally also determine the sensations of those traveling through the space.

The visual component may also vary but a complex visual field of changing patterns and colored lines (sometimes in 3-D) is one class of imagery that is familiar to me.

The author has experimented with different mantras but the one that seemed to work best was the one that had been practiced for many hours in normal meditation. Much positive emotional and spiritual energy had been poured into this sound during meditation, and the mantra seemed to function like a battery storing the spiritual energy. As a [charged religious symbol](#), it therefore had the power to move me into and through radically altered states of consciousness when other less familiar mantras had much less effect when practiced while out of the body.

My intuitive sense is that those who are more familiar with disembodied states of light and energy use mantras the way we in the physical world use vehicles to take them to many destinations in the inner worlds. However, mantras are used to traverse dimensions in the psychic and spiritual worlds rather than streets and highways in the physical world. Many of these mantric roads are ancient pathways created by spiritual explorers eons ago.

Another function of mantras somewhat unrelated to spiritual travel is that mantras can link individuals with gurus, entities, and gods. The empowered mantra given to a disciple during a

spiritual initiation when repeated can act much like dialing the number of a being in the inner worlds. The being may not always answer but the line is there, and communication can occur over the line once the link is established.

The question also arises as to what mantra to use in spiritual travel. In general, the mantra or prayer chosen needs to come from the spiritual tradition the practitioner follows. For those with a yogic orientation, using simple Sanskrit mantras (sometimes one syllable) is effective since they are sounds that are understood to originate in high spiritual planes, and will therefore draw the practitioner towards those points of origination. Names of deities or buddhas, or names of respected living or inner spiritual guides can also be used as mantras. This is especially true if the practitioners has an inner or outer relationship with one of these beings. Simple prayers such as the "prayer of the heart" from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, or phrases from Psalms or the Lord's Prayer can also be repeated, and they can function as mantras. Again these names or phrases will act as powerful symbols since they usually have very positive spiritual associations for a person practicing the religious tradition connected with these deities, guides, or prayers.

Once the person has even a little experience with riding these mantric waves, he or she is presented with a new way of being that is not easily forgotten. The method of using mantras to travel is an advanced form of spiritual travel since it requires considerable concentration. It is good to be able to experience this method of travel but the real challenge is to catch the wave, and then ride it long enough and with enough determination and skill to reach spiritual states of cosmic light and sound. This is the goal of the true spiritual traveler who by wisdom or by grace hopes to touch the infinite.

Travel by mantra is perhaps the best way to direct the soul toward specific destinations in the psychic and spiritual universes. The experience of travel by mantra also justifies using the term *spiritual travel* rather than more generic terms like meditation or contemplation. This is because the phrase spiritual travel is much more phenomenologically descriptive of the actual experience than these other two less specific terms.

As with all spiritual travel practices, it is important to emphasize that mantras should be used only for ethical purposes that further the practitioner's knowledge, or for helping and healing others.

Tibetan Dream Yoga

The tradition of Tibetan Dream Yoga described by Evans-Wentz in *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935) is a good example of a practice that uses conscious visualization of sacred images or symbols to bring about mystical states in dreams. Dream yoga is one of six subtypes of yoga elaborated by the Tibetan guru Marpa and passed down by his well-known disciple Milarepa.

The practice has a number of steps, which permit the individual to gradually gain increasing amounts of control in the dream state.

First, the individual must become lucid or wake up in the dream state.

Second, the dreamer must overcome all fear of the contents of the dream so there is the realization that nothing in the dream can cause harm. For instance, the lucid dreamer should put out fire with his hands and realize fire cannot burn him in the dream.

Next the dreamer should contemplate how all phenomena both in the dream and in waking life are similar because they change, and that life is illusory in both states because of this constant change. Both the objects in the dream and objects in the world in the Buddhist's worldview are therefore empty and have no substantial nature. This is the stage of contemplating the dream as *maya*, and equating this sense of *maya* with everyday experience in the external world. **

Fourth, the dreamer should realize he has control of the dream by changing big objects into small ones, heavy objects into light ones, and many objects into one object. He should also experiment with changing things into their opposites (i.e. fire into water).

After gaining control over objects and their transformations, the dreamer should realize that the dreamer's dream body is as insubstantial as the other objects in the dream. The dreamer should realize that he or she is not the dream body. While this realization is very difficult in normal waking existence, presumably it is quite obtainable in the dream since the dreamer who has control over dream objects could, for instance, alter the body's shape or make the dream body disappear all together.

Finally, the images of deities (Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or Dakinis) should be visualized in the lucid dream state. These figures are frequently seen in Tibetan religious art (*thangkas*) and used in meditation. They are said to be linked to or resonate with the clear light of the Void. They can therefore serve as symbolic doorways to this mystical state of being (the Void or clear light). The dreamer is instructed to concentrate on these symbolic images without distraction or thinking about other things so that the revelatory side of these symbols will become manifest.

We will note here that some of the early practices of dream yoga where the yogi tests and alters the dream reality were done spontaneously by the author before being introduced to the formal practices of dream yoga. Some examples of the practices done are listed on the [Spiritual Navigation page](#).

**** Note:** *The notion that dreams and everyday experience are similar in nature is best understood by Westerners by examining the concept of "idealism". The philosophy of idealism says that all experience is delivered to the individual via the brain and nervous system, and is therefore a product of the mind. Idealism (better termed "ideaism") characterizes all sensation as indirect mental representations or "ideas" rather than direct experience of an external or objective world. Without the brain and nervous system, such experience would not exist. All experience, both ideas and sensations are therefore mental phenomena. In this way, everyday material experience is very much like dream experience..*

Charged Symbols

Paul Tillich, the 20th century Protestant theologian, defined a symbol as *something that points beyond itself*. Symbols are unique mental objects which have no fixed referents. They can be contrasted with signs which have fixed meanings. Symbols are described as layered, multi-valent, multi-dimensional, or multivocal (Victor Turner's term). Their personal meanings and interpretations evolve to reflect the evolution of the individual, and the meanings of cultural symbols that are shared evolve as the culture changes.

Symbols are complex because they have different meanings that change as they are explored. The figure of Christ has meant different things to different people at different times. For instance, Christ was characterized as a warrior during the crusades going into battle to defeat the unbelievers. In the early 20th century, he was characterized as a businessman and the perfect salesman and marketer, a union organizer and a friend of the working man during the rise of unions, and a strong athlete who could fast and control his desires through physical and mental discipline as preachers focused on the masculine virtues of Christ. Jesus is both the ideal capitalist and socialist depending on differing interpretations.

In the early medieval period, Christian Neoplatonists saw Christ as the *logos* or "divine mind". Here, God the Father was infinite being or awareness which supplied the light and power of creation. Jesus as *logos* was the set of archetypal patterns or templates that took this power and created the "world soul" or *Anima Mundi* realm where living things such as plants, animals, and humans came into being. The Holy Spirit was God's presence that infused matter and living things. These three abstract entities were "personalized" by later Christians, and became the basis for the three persons of the trinity. For many early Christians, Christ symbolized the divine intellect and salvation was attained through wisdom rather than faith. This abstract and universally creative function of Christ differed greatly from the incarnate Christ who served as the ethical model for the path to salvation popular in more modern interpretations.

These examples all illustrate how broadly the symbol of Christ has been interpreted over time.

Symbolic statements such as "Christ is the Light of the World", "In the beginning was the Word", and the necessity of having faith the size of a mustard seed also have different possible meanings and interpretations. Literal interpretation of such statements renders them absurd, and metaphor is a dangerous slippery slope that threatens those who believe the Bible or other holy book must be literally true.

Symbols are dynamic as they grow and reinvent themselves.

Symbols can be looked at as having a spatial dimension. As one layer of meaning is peeled away or shed, another comes into view from behind the first one. Symbols also have a volume dimension. They are receptacles that "hold" meaning and power for the individual. The more power they hold, the more they become holy and a focus for prayer and contemplation. As they gain power, they also provide motivation and inspiration for religious individuals and groups.

A symbol is multivocal because it communicates different things depending on where the individual is on his or her spiritual journey. Symbols may be said to *speak to people* in much the same way that sacred scripture becomes like a living thing when religious people are able to enter into a kind of contemplative dialogue with the text.

Symbols also have a vitality dimension. Symbols are in a sense alive. When a symbol fails to hold power, it becomes dead or meaningless.

Religions can be looked as systems of symbols. Whole cultures evolve as newer symbol systems replace older ones. No one believes in the Greek or Babylonian gods any more. They are part of dead symbol systems (and therefore dead religions). Many of the symbols from mainstream religions such as Christianity and Buddhism derive from religious narratives describing the activities of founders of these religions and their disciples. For instance, the life of Christ is turned into a set of symbols in the Catholic Church's stations of the cross, which distill the major events in the life of Christ into a set of fourteen images. The Buddha's life is also captured in a set of images documenting his adventures in some Tibetan Thangkas, and the incarnations of the god Vishnu appear in depictions of the "ten avatars" in Hinduism.

A **charged symbol** has power and is alive with meaning. Symbols may be charged spontaneously, and have power when first encountered. This often happens in religious conversion where an individual finds him or herself irresistibly attracted to a religious figure or symbol system, and converts to a new religion. Symbols may also become charged as an individual uses them in prayer and meditation, and directs attention and positive emotion towards them as part of a spiritual discipline or search. Such charged symbols can be very valuable when the individual directs attention towards them during spiritual travel.

One extraordinary thing about spiritual travel is that religious people who adopt a spiritual practice involving contemplative prayer and meditation do not have to wait until death to perceive the power of the symbols that they employ in their practice. They can get glimpses of the value and power of these symbols here and now which can be very motivating and inspiring. Contemplating a *charged symbol* while in an out-of-body state can be much like stepping into a whirlwind of powerful forces. The individual is picked up and carried to mysterious and extraordinary states of consciousness with the symbol acting as the method of transport. The symbol can function as the key that opens the door to a sacred reality.

The Downside of Losing Symbolism

One trend seen in modern religion is the idea that there is one literal interpretation of scripture on which all reasonable people will agree. Passages from sacred texts are many times highly symbolic and multidimensional containing many possible interpretations. However, scriptures are being flattened and frozen into a single interpretation by authorities that know, for instance, what the Bible literally means. The other common levels of interpretation including the allegorical, ethical, and mystical interpretations are denied and suppressed.

The first result of such an approach is that the authority of preachers who claim to know the correct interpretation is vastly increased. The twin doctrines of literal interpretation and inerrancy (the Bible is one hundred percent true, perfect, and without error) give vast authority and credibility to those professionals who preach the true word. The individual believer's power is in equal measure lessened.

The second result of this concept of literal interpretation is that it leads to an over simplification of religion where only a short list of "fundamentals" are deemed important. This occurs because the same confidence that leads people to claim to know exactly what the Bible means also makes them certain that they know which parts are most important, which parts can be ignored, and what needs to be done to gain salvation. In this environment, simplified stripped down religion tends to become a formula. Here a personal relationship with the divine is reduced to uttering a prescribed set of phrases, which when spoken sincerely and correctly become a ticket to heaven. Salvation is achieved by employing a simple ritual formula.

When such formulas are treated like life preservers thrown to the drowning, they are grasped so tightly by the individual that they become an excuse for some to stop growing spiritually. The formula for salvation is repeated over and over again as if it were some sort of magic charm for luck and protection. Once the formula is accepted, the practice of religion becomes primarily the task of getting others to subscribe to and repeat this same formula. Thus we see the emphasis on evangelism.

Being certain about one's salvation because there is faith that sins are forgiven lays the foundation for a happy life and a joyous self-confidence. It is difficult to fault anyone who seeks such assurance in their spiritual life. The people who seek this kind of security and the church leaders who try to provide it are sincere and honest in their efforts to create a viable religious tradition that can stand against the many challenges to religion posed by the modern world.

However, there is a hidden or dark side to such an approach. When one has the ultimate answer which is distilled in this simple formula, why continue to seek and ask questions? For some, spiritual growth or the process of sanctification becomes irrelevant and unnecessary. For others, when salvation is certain, religious practices can be put aside. Still for others, when forgiveness of sin is assured, ethics can be put aside, and this can be very dangerous. If all sin is forgiven, committing another sin is not such a bad thing.

This is especially true if the ultimate goal of the sin has a higher purpose. This "end justifies the means" type of morality has been responsible for much of the evil and suffering in the world because it sugar coats evil making it appear virtuous, and having some religious or idealistic goal. The more grandiose the goal, the greater the dishonesty and cruelty. Thus we have religious "stealth candidates" who lie about their true views running for political office and judges seeking court appointments that avoid answering questions that will give a true picture of who they are and what they think. We also have religious leaders making claims that Christianity is a religion of war and vengeance, who advocate torture of enemies while they claim to follow Christ who told them to "love their enemies". On a more subtle level, we have clearly biased religious authorities with limited educational backgrounds making dubious pronouncements on matters of history and science.

Certainly not everyone takes these approaches but many seem to be attracted to these fundamentalist traditions because of them. Modern religions that take the twin approaches of the certainty of salvation and of all sin being forgiven are seeing increased membership.

The richness and beauty of religious texts become sterile and dry as monolithic interpretations are accepted by whole church councils, denominations, and congregations. Agreements arise on what and how people must believe in the name of group unity, or faith,

or security, or salvation. Some protestant denominations that protested the authority of the Catholic hierarchy in the reformation so that each individual could become his own priest have now taken on different authorities in the form of church conventions or charismatic preachers who tell them the true and only interpretation of the Bible.

Formerly congregational churches where the local church members decided doctrine are being pressured by interchurch hierarchies to adopt the true interpretation or be expelled. Authoritarianism is ascendent, and the individual is expected to adapt and conform to the group. Fortunately, Bible study groups, where people are sometimes encouraged to discuss differing interpretations, run counter to this trend.

These group interpretations have the virtue of clarity and simplicity, and can be very helpful, but they are only a point of departure on an individual spiritual journey, and not a final destination. Those who tell people who are at the beginning of a journey that they have already reached their final destination do them a great disservice.

These group interpretations also have the distinct down side of creating tendencies towards a "fortress religion" where everyone who does not believe the proper interpretation becomes a threat or an enemy or of the devil. Religious communities, which should be cohesive based on bonds of love, can shift the basis of this community to bonds of fear and hatred of the outsider. Having the correct religion combined with its correct interpretation has been the basis for many religious wars in the past, and could easily become the basis for another wave of cultural and religious wars in the future.

It is the deeply symbolic nature of religious texts and imagery, and the inability of some religious people to accept the pervasive ambiguity of a religious life based on shifting meanings and interpretations, that is the source of these fundamentalist revivals. In this situation, scripture becomes history and its symbolic doorways can become closed and locked. The revelatory nature of symbols requires that their meanings change in order for the symbols to function as doorways to the sacred.

The literalist is continually caught in confusion trying to make clearly symbolic statements sound literal and fighting to give them only one interpretation. Ironically, the Book of Revelation which is among the most highly symbolic books in the Bible is one of the most important texts for most Christian literalists. Similarly, those who treat the Bible as a kind of divinatory text which predicts what has happened in the recent past, and what will happen from now until the rapture are on very shaky ground. The dense forest of symbolism which must be crossed to understand, for instance, who is the Antichrist, what country will produce him, and the states that will be at war during the end times is anything but literal. People who claim a literal interpretation as they wade through a sea of symbolism seem to simply have forgotten what the term literal means.

The literalist is also largely cut off from the power of sacred symbols and therefore from religious experience. This being the case, the individual turns to external authorities for guidance. Faith-based religions which rely mostly on external authorities are excellent places for the autocrats and the power hungry to gain followers because it is easy to gain the trust of those that consider faith a saving virtue. Religious language is easily learned and easily manipulated, and con artists have been using religion for centuries to swindle the unsuspecting.

Perhaps even more dangerous is the sincere but confused religious person who as a political leader uses religious ideals to convince others to support policies motivated by ethnic, class, nationalistic or personal ambition. Medieval history describes a long series of popes, bishops, judges, inquisitors, muftis and ayatollahs employing crusades, church courts, jihads, and pogroms to carry out war, torture, murder, and mayhem in the name of religion. Mixing politics and religion sooner or later creates a toxic brew. Those who believe the two should be mixed need to look closely at current and past theocratic governments and the injustices they promote.

Religious people with political power often take on a tribal identity, and tribal societies often persecute outsiders and look upon them with disdain. Tribalism is corrupting to religious people because it focuses their attention on their enemies instead of their ideals. To become a member of a tribe is to have one's identity defined by what one hates or fears most. To identify with a tribe is to surrender the religious life to the secular, and become truly "of the world".

Sadly, it usually takes many years for those who mix politics and religion to notice the corruption and cynicism it breeds in their ranks. Eventually they discover they are not the victors but rather the losers who have sacrificed their religious ideals and values on the altar of political power and expediency.

The lack of personal religious experience forces the individual to substitute various things for the ultimate reality as God becomes distant and weak, and requires defenders and religious warriors. The "render unto Caesar" biblical quote is completely ignored as religious leaders seek to become "players" on the political stage with "a seat at the table" of power figures. Religious individuals come to distort religion

- by focusing on the rapture and the end-times, and how those outside the faith will suffer during this period
- by joining "culture wars" to fight the forces of evil that are believed to threaten society
- by falsely claiming to be threatened minorities and demanding special protection and consideration when they are, in fact, members of a majority with considerable political power
- by distorting science and investigating theologically based theories that can never be disproven
- by transforming religious congregations into political action committees
- by rewriting history to support a religious world view based on nationalism and the pride of being a nation "chosen by God"
- by making claims about the Bible being against abortion when the concept of abortion is not mentioned in the Bible at all (although Exodus 21:22 says that if men cause a woman to have a miscarriage, then they have to pay a sum of money to the family - they are apparently not accused of murder for killing the unborn child but of theft of an object of value, and are required to pay a civil penalty in the amount determined by a judge to compensate the family).
- by forcing religious rituals and proclamations into secular schools and courtrooms

- by claiming that abortion is killing an "innocent child" when nothing is clearer in Christian theology (from both Augustine's Catholic doctrine of original sin and Calvin's Protestant doctrine of "total depravity") that the child (born or unborn) has original sin - the child is therefore not innocent but inherits the "sin of Adam" and is thus guilty)
- by claiming that state-supported religion is fair when the vast majority of funds go to one's chosen religion, and the money is given with no audit requirements to determine how the funds are spent

This external and highly politicized approach to religion fills the void left when direct spiritual experience is impossible, and religious symbols become signs devoid of real spiritual power. For the spiritual traveler, religion is much more than having the right beliefs, or a supportive community who all believe the same thing as you. It is about employing belief and ritual to generate charged religious symbols which can open up deeper layers of reality so that faith matures into direct spiritual experience.

Breaking Out of a Lucid Dream by Experimenting with Matter

I woke up in a dream, and looked around trying to decide what to do next. I was in a dimly lit room and the environment had little to interest me. I decided to try to experiment with the "matter" in the environment.

I walked over to a plaster wall and pushed against it knowing it was not physical, and was therefore subject to unusual behavior. As I pushed, my hands and then arms penetrated the wall followed by the rest of my body. I was standing inside the wall, my body merging with the "material" structure of it. There was a slowness and heaviness to movement while merged with this object similar to being under water but offering more resistance. It was a curious and surprisingly energetic sensation as if my atoms and the wall's were buzzing around and energizing one another. The altered state of consciousness was a pleasant and novel experience which I perceived as a form of expanded consciousness.

For those who are a little less daring, these travelers can experiment with putting a hand or arm into the wall to get a feel for both the buzzing energetic quality of the sensation and the plastic nature of the dream's material form.

Entering fully into the wall is one way to erase one's dream body which is something sometimes done in dream yoga as a step towards freeing oneself from the limitations of the dream state.

This kind of experience is a small example of the kinds of education that occur as the traveler encounters new realities in the inner worlds.

Doing a Spiritual Practice During Spiritual Travel

I found myself awake in a dream and decided to experiment. I sat down to meditate and quickly decided on a spiritual practice to see what effect it would have.

I repeated the mantra OM only two or three times out loud in my out-of-body state. Almost immediately, the whole atmosphere became charged, and I experienced a floating sensation. I vividly felt my body begin to radiate a strange invisible power as if I became a powerful transmitting tower for some invisible radiant energy. The mantric sound echoed all around like a great echo chamber. A short time later, I was back in my body lying in bed.

Breaking Out of a Lucid Dream by Experimenting with Gravity

Flying and the feeling of defying gravity is one of the joys of spiritual travel. One of the ways of breaking out of a limited state (especially a lucid dream) during spiritual travel is to experiment with the freedom of flying.

I suddenly woke up in a dream and was determined to change my state of mind and take advantage of the possibilities. I started running and as I ran, I began taking larger and larger steps. Soon I was leaping ten or twenty feet per step until finally I was airborne and no longer contacting the ground. I was amazed to see golden fields, sections of trees and rural landscape with great clarity while moving at exhilarating speed with the air whistling past me. At a certain point, I was skimming the treetops feeling the top branches just touching me as I flew past. I was flying over woods and fields brightly lit with golden light.

I had chosen a creative method of leaving the ground and had gained a level of freedom that would probably not have occurred had I stayed in the initial lucid dream environment.

Another easier way to initiate flying is to find a high spot such as a cliff or the roof of a building and simply jump off it. This works surprisingly well but it requires the traveler to have overcome the fear of being hurt in the inner worlds. It takes some time to be comfortable and secure enough to initiate flying in this way.

Breaking Out of a Lucid Dream using the "Skipping" Method

One method of meditation usable in spiritual travel is the practice I call "skipping". This involves shifting (or skipping through) environments during spiritual travel. This method of meditation is quite dynamic and is possible because in the psychic areas, thoughts have much more power than they do while in a normal waking state when the physical senses and body consciousness seems to weigh them down (this is why it is important not to think negative thoughts while in an out-of-body state).

When "skipping", the traveler can literally jump from one space or world to the next. The experience is much like tuning in a station on the radio. The person symbolically moves the tuning dial (some symbolic action like a nod of the head or shutting and opening the eyes will do) with the intention of changing states (stations). The traveler must have associated the symbolic act with the expectation of movement earlier and be prepared to use it.

When the act is performed, there is static or noise (a intermediary state of formlessness and disorder) for a second or two as the transition takes place. Then the traveler "lands" on a new station (i.e. in a new environment).

The next step is to direct the movement toward some desired state or place. This requires discipline, patience, and practice. However, this method can be used to skip out of an

uninteresting dream environment to some place more interesting and spiritual even if the traveler is unable to pick the destination.

The Difficulties of Pursuing a Shamanic Path for Non-Native Americans

Many Americans are interested in practicing shamanic or Native American tribal traditions partly because they emphasize personal religious experience rather than faith in a distant God. The author of this site strongly supports and encourages an interest in personal religious experience. Much of the religious experience present in these shamanic traditions can be classified as spiritual travel. However, attempts by persons who are not members of these tribal groups to participate in these traditions are problematic.

This is because the vast majority of native people in these traditions will tell you that a person *must be born into these tribes* to properly practice the tradition. This is not an arbitrary or selfish statement on their part. There are good reasons that justify such claims.

These shamanic traditions are tightly bound up with a group of tribal ancestors who have an interest in guiding and protecting the tribal members.

If a non-tribal member wants to contact ancestors, who will he or she contact? There is no tradition of being helped by ancestors in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. So the question arises: "With which ancestors are these modern-day non-Indian shamans in contact?"

It is theoretically possible for the tribal ancestors to "adopt" a non-native person into the tribe, but why would they wish to do so? Certainly a non-Indian person cannot "adopt himself" into the tribe (i.e. claim new ancestors) anymore than a child can walk into the house down the street and tell the residents he or she is now their son or daughter.

In addition, the shaman's role of healer and priest is based on a close-knit long-term relationship with a tribal group which trusts his or her judgment and skill. A group of people who show up at a "shamanic workshop" do not constitute a legitimate and cohesive community that resembles the tribes of indigenous peoples. So what group is it that looks to these contemporary shamans for spiritual direction and spiritual vitality?

Other religious groups have a means of accepting new members that were not born into them through the process of conversion. Medieval Christianity has the tradition of being baptized and becoming part of the mystical body of Christ, and the communion of saints. Mainline protestantism allows a person to adopt Jesus as a personal savior to become "saved" or "born again" and become a part of the church.

Hinduism and Buddhism both have the tradition of initiation where a disciple accepts an individual as a *guru* and joins a lineage which in some ways is like a family.

However, non-tribal members attempting to join a Native American tradition are going against the grain of that tradition. Such a convert is subject to being labeled a "plastic shaman", and will likely be resented by the true members of the tribal group. This is especially true if the practitioner makes money from the practice.

These tribal traditions have many attractive elements and it is understandable why many would wish to be involved in them. However, if one is interested primarily in spiritual travel, there are other ways to pursue this interest apart from using these shamanic methods and imitating tribal groups.

The Geography of Spiritual Travel or Soul Travel

Once there is acceptance that the soul may be able to leave the body and travel to other places prior to physical death, the question arises: "Where can the spiritual traveler go on these inner journeys?"

In spiritual travel, [states of consciousness](#) (the places the traveler may visit during spiritual travel) may best be understood using the metaphor of geography.

When the subject of *spiritual geography* is studied and debated, the goal is to produce an accurate map of consciousness. There are spiritual groups that develop these maps of the spiritual universe such as the Theosophical, Tibetan Buddhist, Sufi, and Indian Sant Mat Traditions. They do this in part to help their followers understand the world or plane from which a given experience originates by plotting its location on their cosmological map.

It is probable that early Christians had such spiritual maps as is evident in the bible where Saint Paul mentions a man who was rapt up to the *third heaven* in 2nd Corinthians 12. A third heaven strongly implies a first and second heaven which differ in some way, and a map or hierarchy that describes the relationship of each heaven to the others.

Many times, religious groups also develop such maps because they are interested in describing where the soul can go after death.

In general, I have not found these maps to be of much help in understanding my own out-of-body experience. Here, I suggest a relatively simple three level hierarchy of spiritual travel experience which I have found to be more useful.

The basic areas the spiritual traveler may visit while outside the physical body are the **physical world**, the **psychic worlds**, and the **spiritual worlds**.

The **physical world** is the easiest to explain since it appears much as it does when looked at from an everyday physical perspective. While people in an out-of-the-body state are not restrained by gravity, and cannot interact with physical objects because they are not embodied, many of the visual and auditory elements of the experience remain the same.

A good description of a travel experience in the physical world is from the Sioux medicine man Black Elk who fell unconscious during breakfast one day and had the experience described on the page titled [Black Elk's Description of Crossing Over the Atlantic](#). There are also a number of detailed descriptions of spiritual travel in the physical world in the [Near-Death Experience](#) section of this web site.

More difficult to describe are the **psychic worlds** which are so varied that one can talk about them only in the most general terms. They consist of such abstract elements as imagery, sound, thought, memory, identity, emotion, and different degrees of limitation. On the near end of the psychic spectrum, there are areas that are all but identical with everyday

experience in the physical world. On the far end, there are, for instance, radical alterations in personal identity involving immersion of the soul into powerful environments composed of raw emotion. The soul can also, for example, encounter exotic areas where it becomes aware of some of the collective memories of past civilizations.

These psychic areas can also range from very positive, beautiful, and joyous to very negative and hellish.

We can speak of dream environments as the most common and familiar examples of a psychic world. I call these areas *psychic* because thought has great power to build, mold, and change them. For instance, when the traveler enters dream environments in full consciousness, he or she discovers how plastic and malleable they can be on one hand and how real and *physical* they appear on the other.

This site contains many examples of the [psychic states](#) encountered during spiritual travel.

Even more difficult to describe are the **spiritual worlds**. These are the areas of mystical experience. The most accurate descriptions are the poetic ones that attempt to describe infinite joy, light, love, knowledge, bliss, or emptiness. Slightly below the mystical areas are the places where the mystical light is reflected and refracted. These are the paradises of jeweled skies, rivers of nectar, mountains of flowers, and similar kinds of organic and crystalline imagery. Here, there are also divine currents of music in celestial oceans of sound. The deities with their vast awareness and various attributes are waves, eddies, or vortices on the surface of this vast ocean of consciousness. They preside over their individual paradises and control access to them.

The sections on [Sacred Light](#) and [Sacred Sound](#) describe these spiritual areas. These mystical states are the ultimate goal for the true spiritual traveler.

All Additions for this Section:

States of conscioussnes

From: *Heaven and Hell*

Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation Press, 1962), pps. 111-112

The phrase *state of consciousness* has a special meaning for the spiritual traveler, and requires some added explanation. The following passage which was written by the 18th century thinker Emanuel Swedenborg attempts to define what is meant by this phrase. Swedenborg was a complex man who was part scientist, part inventor, part spiritualist-medium, and part spiritual traveler.

Here he talks about how the concept of "space" (or location) in the outer world must be redefined to mean "state" in the inner spiritual world. Swedenborg uses the phrase "state of the interiors" in his somewhat difficult eighteenth century English (translated from Latin) instead of our phrase *state of consciousness* but the two appear to have the same meaning.

The language is dense enough to require some added translation into modern English prose. My translations will appear in italics following Swedenborg's original text.

Swedenborg writes:

192. All changes in place in the spiritual world are effected by *(are the result of)* changes in state of the interiors *(state of consciousness)* , which means that change of place is nothing else than change in state.

In this way I have been taken by the Lord into the heavens ... and it was my spirit that so journeyed while my body remained in the same place. Such are all movements by the angels; and in consequence they have no distance, and having no distances they have no spaces, but in place of spaces, they have states and their changes.

193. As changes of place are thus effected it is evident that approaches are likenesses of the state of the interiors, and separations are unlikenesses; and for this reason those are near each other who are in like states, and those are at a distance who are in unlike states; and the spaces in heaven are simply the external conditions corresponding to the internal states. For the same reason, the heavens are distant from each other, also the societies of each heaven and the individuals in each society; and furthermore, the hells are entirely separated from the heavens, because they are in a contrary state.

(193. As changes of place that result in nearness are the result of similarities in state of consciousness and separations are the result of dissimilarities in state of consciousness, for the same reason, those near each other are in similar states, and those at a distance are in dissimilar states; and the spaces in heaven are simply the external conditions corresponding to these internal states of consciousness. For the same reason, the heavens are distant from each other, as are the societies of each heaven and the individuals in each society; and furthermore, the hells are entirely separated from the heavens, because they represent a contrary or dissimilar state of consciousness.)

This quote expresses the very important analogy between space and state that is usually difficult to understand by those who have not experienced spiritual travel. In the inner spaces, there is the soul or awareness, and an infinite number of directions in which the soul may travel. It is important to realize that to be oriented in the inner worlds, the individual must plot a course and follow it rather than simply drift. Moving from place to place is actually moving from state to state in this context.

Swedenborg gives us remarkable insight into the nature of the inner world by clarifying the important relationship between places and states.

Black Elk's Description of Crossing Over the Atlantic

From: *Black Elk Speaks*

John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1972), pps. 192-193

Black Elk fell unconscious at the breakfast table while visiting Europe, and was unconscious for three days. He returned to give the following account of what happened. Afterwards, his mother said she had sensed his presence when he saw her in his vision, and confirmed his account of what he saw. The doctor thought he was dead or very close to death, and his caretakers were making arrangements to buy his coffin when he awoke.

Then I was alone in a cloud, and I was going fast. I clung to it hard, because I was afraid I might fall off. Far down below I could see houses and towns and green land and streams, and it looked flat. Then I was right over the big water. I was not afraid any more, because by now, I knew I was going home. It was dark and then it was light again, and I could see a big town below me, and I knew it was the one where we first got on the first big fireboat and that I was in my own country again. I was very happy now. The cloud and I kept on going very fast, and I could see towns and streams and towns and green land. Then I began to recognize the country below me. I saw the Missouri River. Then I saw far off the Black Hills and the center of the world where the spirits had taken me in my great vision.

Then I was right over Pine Ridge, and the cloud stopped. I looked down and could not understand what I saw, because it seemed that nearly all of my people of the different bands were gathered together in one big camp. I saw my father and my mother's tepee. They were outside and she was cooking. I wanted to jump off the cloud and be with them, but I was afraid it would kill me. While I was looking down my mother looked up, and I felt sure she saw me. But just then the cloud started back, going very fast... Soon the cloud stopped over a big town, and a house began coming towards me, turning around and around as it came. When it touched the cloud, it caught me and began to drop down, turning around and around with me.

It touched the ground, and as it touched I heard a girl's voice and then other voices of frightened people.

Then I was lying on my back in bed and the girl and her father and here mother and here two sisters and a doctor were looking at me in a queer way, as though they were frightened.

The Travel Analogy in Spiritual Travel

While the literature of mysticism describes many different "states" of religious emotion and divine awareness, the *travel analogy* brings with it a whole different set of associations than the term state. State implies something static where a particular layer of the mind or cosmological space is entered and maintained. The term travel focuses not only on states but also on stages and transitions between mental or spiritual states. The spiritual traveler moves between spaces or states sometimes in a continuous movement, and sometimes in rapid transitions in a step-like fashion.

The term travel further tries to capture the feeling of movement experienced by those who travel outside the body. Many experiences have a feeling of movement and acceleration similar to the one experienced by those who travel in the physical world. Spiritual travel

experiences also sometimes contain the imagery of flying over spiritual landscapes, and walking through ethereal rooms. Such experience may contain the normal sensory cues we associate with physical environments (depth perception, atmospheric perspective, vanishing points, etc.)

Thus, the *travel analogy* tries to capture the dynamic richness of the inner worlds of perception. It attempts to do justice to the changing geographies and textures of these inner spaces. It is also able to do so without the limitations of the more static "state-based" terminology.

Clearly, the travel analogy breaks down when the person enters the more extreme states of mystical awareness. However, even in these states of infinite light and cosmic nothingness, there is usually some series of different states leading to the advanced state which is beyond all qualities and descriptions. This is evident in the spiritual travel experiences presented in the [Sacred Light](#) section of this site.

A classic example of spiritual travel is the story of Buddha's enlightenment from a second century CE text, the *Buddhacarita* by Asvaghosa. Buddha, prior to his experience of enlightenment, reexperienced his thousands of previous lives during the first watch of the night. The text says he remembered his previous lives "*as if living them over again*". On the second watch, he saw the workings of karma and reincarnation, and nature of causality in the world. It was not until the fourth watch that he actually achieved enlightenment.

The fact that he entered fully into his past lives strongly suggests that he was out of his body, and unaware of the surrounding sensory environment during this period of remembering. He spent the entire night "traveling" through a whole complex of inner states to finally reach the state of Nirvana at dawn.

LEAVING THE BODY, Three Kinds of Transitions

In order to do spiritual travel, the soul or consciousness of the traveler must temporarily leave the physical body. This usually means shutting off all physical sensations and entering completely into an inner environment. There are three basic ways of doing this.

Conscious Transitions Out of the Body:

The most dramatic method of leaving the body is to go directly from a waking state into the inner world. This usually happens during meditation but may happen spontaneously while relaxing, such as while lying in bed.

Waking Up in a Dream (Lucid Dreaming):

By far the most common method of spiritual travel occurs when the traveler "wakes up" in a dream. The sense of waking up brings with it a kind of excitement which is accompanied by a feeling of increased awareness, self determination, and concentration. It is also usually accompanied by a wonderful sense of freedom and possibility. The traveler feels himself to be *free of the limitations of the physical body*.

[Bilocation or Alternating Awareness of Inner and Outer Environments:](#)

An unusual form of spiritual travel involves the ability of shift back and forth between the outer world of the senses, and a separate inner reality. Doing this at sufficient speed makes the spiritual traveler capable of being in touch with two separate realities, or seemingly in two places at once- thus the term bilocation. To control this ability requires a great deal of skill, and such control usually only occurs in advanced practitioners.

ALL ADDITIONS FOR THIS SECTION:

CONSCIOUS TRANSITIONS OUT OF THE BODY

There are a wide variety of psychic and spiritual states that can result from leaving the body consciously. The traveler can find him or herself in either *formed* states (those containing objects) or *amorphous* states when leaving the body in this way. Let us first discuss the states where the traveler immediately encounters forms upon leaving the body.

Entering Formed States Consciously

One type of conscious transition occurs when the traveler simply disconnects the inner spiritual self from the physical body, and moves out and away from the physical body consciously. This "disconnection" happens frequently in near-death experience where the injured person moves a short distance from the physical body and observes it.

This method of slipping out of the body has little drama associated with it except for the fear aroused in the individual who does not understand what is happening. Robert Monroe describes his experiences as follows:

In 1958, without any apparent cause, I began to float out of my physical body. It was not voluntary; I was not attempting any mental feats. It was not during sleep, so I couldn't dismiss it as simply a dream. I had full, conscious awareness of what was happening, which of course only made it worse. I assumed it was some sort of hallucination caused by something dangerous- a brain tumor, or impending mental illness. Or imminent death.

It occurred usually when I would lie down or relax for rest or preparatory to sleep- not every time but several times weekly. I would float up a few feet above my body before I became aware of what was happening. Terrified, I would struggle through the air and back into my physical body. Try as I might, I could not prevent it from recurring.

Robert Monroe, *Ultimate Journey*, (New York: Doubleday, 1994), pps. 2-3

The above experience does not meet our full criteria for spiritual travel since it was not done voluntarily, but it does illustrate a way of moving directly out of the body from a waking state

with which some are familiar. In this case, the forms the traveler encounters are the objects in the immediate physical environment.

Another way of entering into a physical environment more intentionally is by practicing a visualization while lying in bed. Here, one repeatedly visualizes twisting one's body around and sitting up in bed. After many tries and much effort, the experience of actually sitting up while being in an out-of-body state can occur. The surprise that results from actually leaving the body in this way is such that one is usually drawn right back into the physical body almost immediately. When one is able to stay out of the body for longer periods in similar situations there is still the sense of lightness, excitement, and concentration. However, there is also an accompanying feeling of being like a ghost wandering through darkened rooms and adjoining hallways. The experience of being out of the body in the physical world (i.e., in one's house) at night is generally not all that interesting or inspiring.

Another way to move out of the body from a waking state is to practice a form of meditation where one's attention is placed on the space between the eyebrows while maintaining a strong expectation that one will leave one's body. An example of this kind of conscious transition is illustrated in the experience titled [Transitioning From Physical to Psychic States](#).

The traveler can also move directly into a visualized space that is very much like a dream environment maintaining continuous awareness of the transition into this space. This type of experience is illustrated by the [Entering a Visualized Space](#) description at this site. Though the experience talks about being in a light sleep when the transition took place, the author has had a very similar experience where during a waking state, a visualized image turned into a three dimensional environment.

All these experiences are unlike spiritual travel that begins in the dream state where there is a period of unconsciousness between the waking state and the dream state, and the traveler wakes up in the dream to begin spiritual travel.

Sometimes the traveler's transition to *formed* environments will involve dynamic movement, and the traveler will enter the environment soaring above fields and cities, taking in vast panoramas.

In many cases, the body image of the traveler is more or less identical to his physical body but this is not always the case. A common experience is for the traveler to become a "point of consciousness" or a "unit of awareness" with no sense of a body which takes up space. Here the traveler identifies him or herself as pure observer or witness, and is like a disembodied set of ears and eyes. Sight and hearing are the two senses that usually dominate during spiritual travel.

Entering Amorphous States Consciously

Moving consciously into *amorphous states* is more difficult to describe. These states are usually areas of intense experience where the dominant reality is that of light, sound, vibration, motion or emotion.

Going from a waking state or semi-waking state into an amorphous state is usually the most dramatic kind of spiritual travel experience. In one type of amorphous transition, the traveler suddenly senses a powerful vibration or sound and is caught up in that energy. This is

sometimes accompanied by a feeling of being drawn or propelled by this vibration at tremendous speed through a dark space. This experience seems very similar to the descriptions of the "tunnel" associated with near-death experience. Numerous people who came very close to death (no heartbeat or respiration) have near-death experiences where they have described different types of sounds or vibrations which propelled them at seemingly great speed through a dark tunnel or corridor.

Sometimes, there is a feeling of being catapulted out of the body. In these cases, the vibrations usually start at a low pitch and continue gaining in frequency and power until they become almost explosive in their intensity.

In other cases, there is the feeling of the inner sounds or vibrations but not the experience of movement and acceleration. Sometimes such static experiences involve hearing spiritual music or sounds, and can be quite ecstatic.

All these experiences are amorphous in the sense that there are no forms or objects to orient the traveler like there are in the physical world. He or she must use meditation techniques to steer in a desired direction.

Amorphous States That Lead to Formed States

The above mentioned inner sounds along with inner lights (mentioned below) can sometimes act as a means of transition between waking experience and some formed inner world.

In the movie "The Wizard of Oz", the scene of Dorothy flying in her house toward Oz may help in understanding such a transition. Dorothy's house (ego or inner self using a Jungian interpretation) is seized by a whirlwind and carried spinning through the clouds. There is a great flurry of movement followed by the landing of the house in a strange place where all is suddenly quiet. The inner transitions the author is attempting to describe have much in common with Dorothy's experience.

The type of experience described in section titled [Meditation on Inner Lights](#) illustrates in a general way an experience which contains an amorphous stage followed by a formed stage. In this case, the traveler is drawn out of the body consciously while meditating on an inner light.

Here is a transition involving inner light which starts from a waking state, moves initially to an amorphous state of energy and movement, and then to a formed state of stability. This stable state is usually a quasi-physical environment. However, the ability to concentrate and direct the attention in a meditative way is sometimes required to break out of the tunnel-like experience into a stable state.

Sounds which occur during conscious transitions out of the body are usually very powerful, and may result in the obliteration of the body image. The author has found that the nerves which inform the person of his body's weight, size and position in space seem to largely quit functioning when the sound occurs.

Some of the sounds which occur are of a spiritual or mystical nature rather than transitional sounds that carry the traveler to a different place. These "higher" spiritual sounds are of a

heavenly nature and are ecstatic beyond description. They are therefore one of the final destinations of spiritual travel rather than a means to some other place.

Some sample sounds one may encounter are the sounds of a speeding train, a loud buzzing, a flute, or the sounds of nature like the roar of a waterfall. As an example, Gopi Krishna describes an experience he had that began with [a powerful spiritual sound](#). These sounds or vibrations are of such intensity that they seem to pass right through the body, overpowering the other senses. Here we have an example of change of identity during spiritual travel where the individual literally merges with the sound.

Any of the spiritual travel experiences listed on other pages in this site may result from conscious transitions out of the body, but the above mentioned kinds of transitions are the ones with which the author has some familiarity.

This section illustrates conscious transitions out of the body which may occur spontaneously, due to an accident or injury, or as a result of deliberate action and intention during a meditative exercise. The key here is that there is no loss of consciousness during the transition between the waking state and the spiritual travel or out-of-body experience.

WAKING UP IN A DREAM

A common way of initiating spiritual travel is waking up in a dream. While this may be something that occasionally occurs to many people, it has a special value for the spiritual traveler. This is because the spiritual traveler has usually developed skill at directing inner experience through meditation or visualization exercises. He or she can therefore use the lucid dream (a dream where the dreamer wakes up and realizes he is dreaming) as point of departure for a journey into various realms of expanded freedom and awareness.

In general, a spiritual travel experience which begins by waking up in a dream has an advantage over other methods of leaving the body because it is usually a gentle method of entering into the inner world. The powerful forces that one sometimes encounters in direct transitions out of the body from a waking state are avoided. It is also comfortable because the traveler avoids the formless side of spiritual travel which can be a shock to those not experienced in these areas. The traveler usually finds the dream environment familiar and non-threatening.

However, there is also a disadvantage to this method. Dream environments are usually so much like physical environments that the traveler tends to assume he or she has the same limitations in the inner world that exist in the physical world. It takes discipline and effort to break out of the dream environment and find more interesting and rewarding places to explore. The [Spiritual Navigation](#) page gives some methods that can be used to break out of dream environments so that the lucid dreamer can begin spreading his or her wings and become a true spiritual traveler.

Some additional examples of spiritual travel in dream environments can be found in the [Psychic States](#) section of this site.

BILOCATION AND SPIRITUAL TRAVEL

The way of leaving the body that I am least familiar with involves the subtle shift in attention away from the senses and concentration on some non-sensory image or state. The thing that distinguishes this from normal imagination is the uninterrupted or continuous nature of the inner experience and its clarity or three-dimensional quality. In this kind of spiritual travel, the experimenter can instantaneously shift back to the physical senses with no resistance or time required to regain normal waking sensory experience.

This kind of spiritual travel is perhaps a more advanced form since it allows for integration of inner and outer experience. Here the line between spiritual travel and normal waking experience becomes less firm. The shift between the two can take place anywhere. This is perhaps the least dramatic form of spiritual travel, but also the most useful for the purpose of bringing the knowledge of the inner world to the outer world.

This ability to shift back and forth between two completely separate existences, one in the body and one out of the body is sometimes called bilocation. I do not use bilocation to mean having two physical bodies as some authors do, but only to describe the ability to perceive two separate worlds.

[Bilocation at the *end* of a Spiritual Travel Experience](#)

This experience illustrates bilocation in the form of only partially returning to the body while maintaining an awareness of the inner world.

[Bilocation at the *beginning* of the Experience](#)

This experience shows the difficulty of discussing bilocation. It describes the contradictory feeling of being "in the body" while also being "not in the body".

NOW SUBDIVISIONS:

Transitioning From Physical to Psychic States

I will never forget one early spiritual travel experience. I had been thinking about the possibility of doing spiritual travel and reading books on the subject. I was about twenty years old. I was visiting a friend in Brooklyn, New York lying on my back in meditation staring into the blackness at the space between my eyebrows. A couch in his basement playroom was my bed for the evening. The room was completely dark.

Suddenly, I was standing up vibrating in the blackness. I did not get up but was instantaneously standing and found myself in a "non-ordinary" state of heightened awareness. I wanted to see where I was to verify that I was out of my body. At that point I half walked, half swam (space seemed to be a fluid medium) to the edge of the room to try and get a glimpse outside through the patio door. When I arrived at the door I could feel the glass hard and cold upon my hands but could see almost nothing in the darkness.

I pressed hard on the glass and to my amazement, my hands followed by the rest of my body passed right through it. I experienced a painful scraping feeling along each part of my body as it passed through the door. The strange experience of passing through this dense matter disoriented me and as I looked around, I was in a totally different environment. It was a pastoral scene of a field of golden grain but the light was somehow not like the light in a physical environment. Something about it was too intense and too bright as if the objects shown with their own internal light rather than merely reflecting the light of the sun. There were two horses peacefully grazing in the field perhaps fifty yards away.

After about ten seconds gazing at the scene, I was almost instantaneously back in my body lying on my back reflecting on the experience.

Entering a Visualized Space

From: *How I Learned Soul Travel*

Terrill Wilson, *How I learned Soul Travel* (Minneapolis: Eckankar Publishing, 1987), pps. 61, 62

Waking early one morning, I decided to try concentrating on the blackness of my inner mind screen in the vicinity of the Spiritual Eye. I gradually slipped back into sleep, and during the early stage of sleep became partially conscious of a colored picture on the inner screen. The two-dimensional still-picture showed a young lady standing in the middle of a blacktop road in an outdoor, countryside landscape. The picture grew steadily larger as I concentrated, and I felt a slight suction in the vicinity of my Spiritual Eye. Instantly I found myself standing on the road. The young lady with her back towards me came alive, and started walking away from me. It was like zooming into a stop action movie; everything suddenly came to the life the moment I joined the world.

My first impulse was to do something, anything to keep my mind occupied, and hopefully stay out of the body as long as possible. My surroundings included a light-blue sky and rolling, grassy hills dotted with a few shrubs and trees. The blacktop road stretched in front of me in a straight line as far as I could see. Without paying any mind to the lady walking away from me, I jubilantly raised my inner body arms and jumped off the ground, to begin flying over this earth-like terrain. However, my exhilarating flight ended abruptly when I suddenly lost control and was pulled away into the blackness, moments later, ending up back inside my physical body.

Meditation on Inner Light:

Contemplating inner lights can be a method of leaving the body.

Those who are familiar with meditation on the energy center usually known as the spiritual eye located between the eyebrows may be familiar with the cobalt blue light that sometimes appears in the inner field of vision. It usually appears as a amorphous blob of light slowly changing shape with blue concentric circles emanating from it slowly. The circles expand hypnotically resembling something akin to broad smoke rings expanding from a central source.

This kind of light (whether blue or another color) can serve as a focus of meditation either while sitting in disciplined meditation or while dosing off to sleep.

On occasion, the light can draw the traveler out of the body and he or she will be instantaneously flying at a fantastic rate of speed through a powerful force field following the light. It seems that the light recedes as the traveler moves towards it with its center still radiating the rings. Such experience demands a tenacity to hold on to the center of concentration since the powerful forces can be distracting. If the traveler is able to maintain concentration, the scene will tend to shift to a stable environment like a dream environment. However, unlike a dream, the traveler will be fully conscious and able to direct the experience from that point.

The point here is to illustrate the importance of meditation on these inner lights and to know that the appearance of imagery of this sort can be a form of "inner invitation" to do spiritual travel.

A Powerful Spiritual Sound

From: *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness*

Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1992), pps. 6-7

Suddenly, with a roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord. Entirely unprepared for such a development, I was completely taken by surprise; but regaining my self-control, keeping my mind on the point of concentration. The illumination grew brighter and brighter, the roaring louder, I experienced a rocking sensation and then felt myself slipping out of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light. It is impossible to describe the experience accurately. I felt the point of consciousness that was myself growing wider surrounded by waves of light. It grew wider and wider, spreading outward while the body, normally the immediate object of its perception, appeared to have receded into the distance until I became entirely unconscious of it. I was now all consciousness without any outline, without any idea of corporeal appendage, without any feeling or sensation coming from the senses, immersed in a sea of light simultaneously conscious and aware at every point, spread out, as it were, in all directions without any barrier or material obstruction. I was no longer myself, or to be more accurate, no longer as I knew myself to be, a small point of awareness confined to a body, but instead was a vast circle of consciousness in which the body was but a point, bathed in light and in a state of exultation and happiness impossible to describe.

Bilocation at the *end* of a Spiritual Travel Experience

My only experience with bilocation involved a complete break with normal sensory consciousness (spiritual travel) followed by reestablishing of a tentative contact with the bodily senses. I was initially out of the body in dream-like world but then became able to sense events occurring in the physical world. I was able to shift my attention back and forth between the inner and outer world quickly enough so that it was very similar to being in two places at one time- thus the term bilocation.

In this experience, I was only able to perceive non-visual sensory input from my body since any physical movement on my part or visual input from the eyes would be likely to blot out the inner experience. Advanced practitioners may have the ability to do bilocation while walking down the street. I have read such claims but have not had the experience myself.

Bilocation at the *beginning* of the Experience

From: *Lucid Dreams*

J. H. M. Whiteman, *The Mystical Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 60, Cited in C. E. Green, *Lucid Dreams* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968), pps. 39-40

While lying in bed and apparently awake, I perceived a visual opening with a circular boundary, within which there was presented a scene in bright sunlight and vivid colours. It appeared to be a park, with many people walking peacefully about. At the same time I was aware of my physical body lying on its back in bed, but not altogether as if I were in that body. It was as if I was apart and watching the physical body watching. Again appearing to think in the physical body, I conceived a wish to transfer consciousness to a free personal form. Immediately I rose and walked forward towards the opening. The opening appeared to enlarge itself gradually, but before entering wholly within it I had to pass over a patch of sandy coloured ground, as if bared for excavation. It seemed to represent a gulf between the two spheres of existence. Passing through, however, I reach the park and mix with the people. There is difficulty in experiencing details, as if the eyes were out of focus and cannot be brought under steady control...

SPIRITUAL TRAVEL VERSUS DREAMS

Spiritual travel is different from dreaming in a number of important ways.

In spiritual travel, the traveler's awareness is heightened and the traveler is able to direct the experience if desired. This is unlike dreaming, in which the dreamer's awareness is dulled, and the dreamer lacks initiative. In most dreams, the dream drama unfolds as if controlled by some outside force with little or no control exercised by the dreamer.

In spiritual travel, the traveler is also aware that he or she has left the physical body and the world that is encountered is not the physical world. In normal dreaming, however, the dreamer believes the dream to be real as if he or she is acting in the physical world. This explains the great fear in nightmares where any threat is perceived as a threat to the physical body which could result in death.

Since the spiritual traveler's awareness is clear and concentrated, there is usually no difficulty remembering the experience. Many people have trouble remembering their dreams because most dreamers experience a dulled form of awareness during dreams.

Following a spiritual travel experience, very seldom does the traveler fall back into a dream state or unconscious state. The intensity of spiritual travel does not lend itself to immediately

reentering sleep or dreams. In most cases, there is an awareness of returning to the physical body, and the person awakens immediately after a spiritual travel experience.

Though spiritual travel may begin by "waking up in a dream" (lucid dreaming), the dream drama usually stops as soon as the dreamer awakens. The symbolic content of a dream usually stops immediately when the lucid dream begins, and the dreamer senses that he or she is now in control of the dream's events.

Spiritual travel also provides a much broader range of experience than is present in dreams. The lucid dreamer with the right training can use the lucid dream as a jumping off point to explore a wide variety of spiritual and psychic states not available in dreams. Once one inner reality is entered consciously, it is relatively easy to enter another because the lucid dream state is much like being in an elevator in a building. The dreamer who learns how to push the correct buttons can trigger a transition to a different floor or plane of reality.

Lucid dreaming is only one of the ways that spiritual travel can be initiated. Spiritual travel may also begin during meditation, or as a result of a traumatic shock to the body. The fact that a spiritual traveler can go directly into an inner world via meditation without the loss of consciousness that occurs when spiritual travel begins from the dream state seems to indicate that spiritual travel states are independent of and not to be identified with the dream state. The dream state is only one of a set of doorways which can be used to reach spiritual travel states.

One of the difficulties of distinguishing a normal dream state from a lucid dream state is that there are degrees of lucidity. Sometimes there is increased awareness in a dream where the dreamer believes he has awakened but then goes on to act in a way that is uncharacteristic of someone who is completely awake.

Awakening completely means that the dreamer reacts to dream situations in the same way he or she would react if awake in the physical world. Sometimes this semi-waking state manifests as an inability to act to change the dream. Here there is a strong sense of waking awareness which is accompanied by a passive attitude of acceptance and powerlessness. Another form of semi-waking consciousness occurs when the dreamer has limited access to normal memory and cannot recognize familiar persons or situations. Here, the dreamer has a subset of his normal memories and cannot react normally to the dream situation because of these missing memories.

This semi-waking consciousness muddies the distinction between normal dreaming and lucid dreaming. True lucid dreaming has a crystal clarity that somehow feels even more powerful than the usual clarity of waking awareness, and it is this kind of lucid dream state that is easily distinguished from a normal dream state. The [spiritual material](#) page illustrates just how clear and convincing the reality of lucid dreaming is by describing how *reality testing* is done with the objects in the lucid dream.

Another important point to note is that spiritual practices affect dreams. The contents of dreams often echo significant activities performed in the waking state. Therefore, spiritual practices done in waking life on a regular basis will sometimes lead to the dreamer spontaneously repeating such practices in dreams. This will likely result in waking up in the dream and can even precipitate powerful spiritual experiences. Even when the practices are not having obvious results in a waking state, the openness of the dream state can permit such

practices to produce the out-of-body states that they are intended to produce while awake in dreams instead.

Finally, it is not necessary wake up in a dream to do spiritual travel while asleep. Many of the experiences at this site occurred spontaneously while the traveler was asleep without actually beginning in a dream. Adopting a spiritual practice that emphasizes spiritual travel will tend to produce such spontaneous travel experiences where the sleeper "pops into" out-of-body states while asleep without first being in a dream.

Having tried to describe the differences in analytic terms, it is necessary here to state that none of these distinctions really captures the qualitative differences between normal dreaming and spiritual travel or lucid dreaming. The quality of awareness is just *different* in ways that seem impossible to describe. One thing that can be said is that this "difference" in consciousness sometimes inspires awe and fascination. There is also many times the direct and immediate sense that one's soul is composed of spiritual energy with much potential. It only awaits thought to activate that potential energy and direct it towards some end. It is up to the traveler to train his or her mind and increase the ability to concentrate to be able to direct this energy towards some desired state of consciousness or new form of knowledge.

It is important to understand the differences stated above so as not to confuse spiritual travel with dreams. However it may be difficult to convince someone who has not done spiritual travel that it is different from dreaming no matter how many distinctions are drawn.

SACRED LIGHT & SACRED SOUND

The experience of sacred light can be found in all the world's great religious traditions. Perhaps the most famous example in the West of this phenomenon was the biblical account of Saint Paul's vision of light that occurred while he was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

Mircea Eliade, the historian of religions, writes in his thematic study of comparative religion *The Two and the One*:

Now all experiences of the supernatural light present this common denominator: anyone receiving such an experience undergoes a change of being: he acquires another mode of being which gives him access to the world of the spirit ... even in a Far-Westerner of the nineteenth century, a meeting with the light indicates a spiritual rebirth.

Experience of the sacred light when perceived in sufficient depth radically alters the world view of the experiencer. The following paragraph from Richard C. Bucke's 1901 classic book *Cosmic Consciousness* attempts to explain this altered view of the universe:

Like a flash there is presented to his consciousness a clear conception (a vision) in outline of the meaning and drift of the universe. He does not come to believe merely; but he sees and knows that the cosmos, which to the Self Conscious mind seems made up of dead matter, is in fact far otherwise - is in very truth a living presence. He sees that instead of men being, as it were, patches of life scattered through an infinite sea of nonliving substance, they are in reality specks of relative death in an infinite ocean of life. He sees that the life which is within man is eternal; that the soul of man is as immortal as God is; that the universe is so built and ordered that without any preadventure all things

work together for the good of each and all; that the foundation principle for the world is what we call love, and that the happiness of every individual is in the long run absolutely certain. The person who passes through this experience will learn in a few minutes, or even moments, of its continuance more than in months and years of study, and he will learn much that no study ever taught or can teach. Especially does he obtain such a conception of *the whole*, or least of an immense *whole*, as dwarfs all conception, imagination, or speculation, springing from or belonging to ordinary Self Consciousness, such a conception as makes the old attempts to mentally grasp the universe and its meaning petty and even ridiculous.

The following set of experiences show some ways in which the sacred light is encountered during spiritual travel. Each illustrates how people encounter ecstatic states where they lose contact with the physical senses and enter entirely into another space which is one of the defining characteristics of spiritual travel.

[Encountering the Light during a powerful near-death experience](#)

Renee Paraslow recounts her contact with the sacred light during her Near-Death Experience which occurred in 1968 (prior to the publication of any works on the subject of near-death states).

[Experiencing "seas upon seas of light" in an ascent to heaven](#)

The Sufi mystic Bayazid-i Bistami who lived in the ninth century and was a proponent of "intoxicated" Sufism describes seas upon seas of spiritual light as he approaches the throne of God in a Mi'raj (the Muslim term for a saint's or prophet's ascent to heaven)

[Paul Twitchell, the 20th century leader of Eckankar, describes a lengthy experience of spiritual light during spiritual travel](#)

This spiritual travel excerpt describes the culmination of a series of spiritual experiences where the writer Paul Twitchell has been shown a series of worlds leading up to his current state of light devoid of matter or form.

[Robert Monroe, the author of a number of books on Out-of-Body Experience, asks his guide to show him an area of extreme love during spiritual travel](#)

Monroe, an American writer who traveled to hundreds of OBE states, had a set of guides he referred to with the generic term INSPECs (intelligent species). He believed it would be a great help if he could get a feel for a place or state where there was a massive amount of love. His guides directed him to the following experience in response to his request. Monroe is especially adept at describing the "unknowable" nature of deeper religious experience.

[Thomas Merton's Experience of the sacred light](#)

Thomas Merton was a Trappist monk, and one of the Catholic churches' best known writers on the contemplative and monastic life in the 20th century. Here, Merton describes an experience of celestial light which he had in a Catholic church in Havana when he was 25 years old, and comments on its availability to all people. There is some ambiguity about how

transcendent Merton's experience is since it is unclear if he lost touch with his physical senses.

[Ramakrishna's experience of the goddess Kali as an "ocean of light" during spiritual travel](#)

At one point, the 19th century Indian saint Ramakrishna became frustrated, feeling he could not live any longer without seeing the Goddess Kali. He demanded that the goddess appear to him. He threatened to take his own life with a ritual dagger (from the hand of the Kali statue). At this point, he described how the goddess appeared to him.

[The 20th century Indian writer Gopi Krishna's first experience of the Kundalini energy as sacred light](#)

Over a period of years, Gopi Krishna developed the ability to sit for a period of hours in concentration without any discomfort. The following account, which took place in 1937, describes his first Kundalini experience which occurred while he was visualizing "an imaginary lotus in full bloom, radiating light" at the crown of his head.

[Static Awareness in a Dynamic Field](#)

Sacred light has many textures and variations, and is many times characterized as perceiving the whole cosmos in a single perceptual event. Here, an analogy is presented showing a way that awareness of sacred light gives insight into the structures of the universe.

[Paramahansa Yogananda's initiation experience of spiritual light](#)

Yogananda, a 20th century Indian teacher, describes an experience of spiritual light which occurred when he received initiation from his guru.

[A spontaneous experience of Sacred Light](#)

Some experiences of sacred light come out of nowhere like bolts of lightning.

Sacred Sound

Shabda (or Nada-Brahman) is a spiritual musical sound that can be heard during yogic meditation and is believed to have a spiritually transformative power. This belief in the spiritual nature of both the inner spiritual sounds of meditation and physical outer [sounds of mantra](#) and chanting (shabda is associated with both) is a common one throughout India today. Both kinds of sounds have a special power for the spiritual traveler. The emphasis on inner spiritual sounds or a "current of sound" is seen especially in the Sikh and Radha Soami traditions in the Punjab, and was a common theme in the poetry of a popular medieval saint named Kabir who was born in Varanasi in the fifteenth century. Kabir is highly respected by these groups and his poetry has been elevated to scripture by being included in their holy books.

Unfortunately, it is taboo in many of these traditions to speak or write about personal religious experience. It is therefore difficult to find autobiographical examples of this kind of religious experience except indirectly in the poetry of various saints from northwest India.

The theme of sacred sound can also be seen in the ideas of such popular Hindu teachers as Swami Sivananda, Guru Maharaj Ji, Paramahansa Yogananda, and Rajneesh (Osho).

We have already mentioned the experience of sound that is associated with helping the soul leave the body on the [Conscious Transitions Out Of The Body](#) page, but here we will look at sounds which accomplish something equally important. This new class of sounds move the soul through different states of being once it has left the physical body.

The view that the universe contains waves or currents that can be perceived as sound which move between the two poles of existence is a common theme in the Shabda Yoga traditions. The first pole is in the higher spiritual planes of being where the templates for all life forms and the templates that define the basic order of the material world are said to exist. The second and opposite pole is manifestation, and the physical world as we normally perceive it.

These traditions claim that on one hand there is a flow of creative energy or spirit issuing from the first pole that is responsible for the material order and evolution we see around us. The consciousness present in life forms is said to depend on this outward expanding spiritual flow. In this world view, the universe is being constantly created or recreated, and refreshed or renewed by this outward flow.

On the other hand there is also said to be a *returning flow* which reverses creation, and draws or carries the traveler back from the second pole or material world to his or her origins in the spiritual realms. The salient point of this discussion lies in the fact that the spiritual traveler who can perceive these returning currents of sound can learn to catch the returning wave, and ride it back to higher planes of being. This is the reason for our interest in these sound currents. They serve both as the mechanism of travel, and a compass orienting the traveler pointing the way through the psychic planes and into the spiritual planes.

The ability to tune the soul to perceive the sounds of Shabda must come first, and the ability to catch them, and metaphorically ride them is a more advanced stage. The advanced stage involves transitioning from immersion in a single "lower" sound associated with a psychic state represented by, for instance, the sound of drums or thunder to the higher sounds of flutes, violins, or vinas which are associated with different heavenly or spiritual worlds.

Developing one's spiritual hearing is a process that takes time and effort, and is a worthy goal on the spiritual path. It is also a skill that is sometimes ignored or overlooked. The spiritual traveler needs to take a special interest in this form of spiritual development to truly understand the kind of freedom and knowledge that spiritual travel can offer.

The following experiences and poems describe some sample encounters with sacred sound in spiritual travel.

[Kabir's spiritual sky](#)

Kabir, the medieval Hindu-Muslim mystic poet describes his experience of spiritual travel in poetic form. He begins with a reference to a world where sacred music fills the sky.

[A Dream Experience Transformed by Sacred Sound](#)

A dream in which symbolism from the unconscious erupts into a spiritual travel experience.

[The Wonders of Shabda When it Manifests as a Flute](#)

Sacred Sound has many manifestations but hearing the sound of a flute is especially joyous

[Shabda's Manifestations](#)

Encountering Shabda when it manifests as the sound of a speeding train.

[A World Composed of Musical Sound](#)

Encountering a musical space during spiritual travel.

[Mantra Meditation During Spiritual Travel](#)

Simple spiritual practices such as mantra meditation (repeating sacred words or sounds) can have dramatic effects when practiced during spiritual travel even when the same practice has little or no effect when done during normal meditation.

[Phil Morimitsu describes becoming one with Spiritual Sound](#)

At the final stage of a detailed guided spiritual travel experience, Morimitsu is shown the pure worlds of Spirit by his guide.

[Kabir Describes the "unstruck sound" in another Poetic Verse](#)

Here, Kabir writes about listening to inner spiritual sounds that take the form of conches and bells.

[Paul Twitchell describes traveling with his guide to the *Anami* or nameless world](#)

Like many mystical experiences, this one contains a mixture of the elements of sacred light and sound.

ALL ADITIONS FOR THIS SECTION:

Encountering the Light during a powerful near-death experience

From: A Talk on Her Near-Death Experience

By Renee Paraslow

Baha'i Educational Foundation Video Tape

Reno, Nevada 1989

This is the partial text of a very deep near-death experience which happened to Renee Paraslow as a teenager. She had the experience after she became unconscious following an allergic reaction to some food she ate. Here she has just come out of "the tunnel" and into contact with the spirit of her dead uncle with whom she communicates. Following this, she enters into the Sacred Light. The entire text of this experience can be found in the [Near-Death Experience](#) section of this site.

As I came to the end of this place, I wondered if I would be alone, and just like that I was with, I was one with my uncle just like we were two lights that were put together one red and one blue that made purple light, and I was aware of things about him that I had never been aware of in life. I didn't spend much time with him and I didn't know him well. He lived in the south and I lived in California

But it was a very joyful reunion and I became aware that he was concerned that I was there because he communicated to me instantaneously that my mother could not stand the loss of a child, and he was confused, and yet he knew that everything was as it should be.

From that point I became very attracted to the light and this attraction was like an irresistible magnet... I loved that light, and the love was what was pulling me home. I moved past my uncle into what I can best define as a sea of light. It was as if every atom in the universe had been electrified with color and light and sound, but more than that with totally unconditional love. And it was a welcoming to me, and I dove into this ocean with each moment, with each movement, feeling more rapture and more joy and more just absolutely unspeakable love.

As I moved through this sea, I became aware I was moving to the center of the sea of light which I perceived to be, how could I say this, as if you were a gnat and you were flying into the sun, and that is the perspective that I had for this sea of light.

And then in an instant, again like a clap [of the hands], I entered into this light and I became one with this light, and of this light, and no longer an individual, no longer a person, but simply a part of this light. I became like the phoenix. I was destroyed, and it was the most blissful, the most excruciatingly beautiful moment that I could imagine. It seemed to me to be the apex of all existence to get to the point where one was no more. One simply was a part of this light.

After being in this state for what seemed to be a time beyond time, I was gathered again together like sands from the shore as an individual and I was called to recount for my deeds.

Experiencing "seas upon seas of light" in an ascent to heaven

From: *The writings of Bistami, a Sufi Mystic*

While I was asleep, it seemed to me that I ascended to the Heavens in quest of God, seeking union with God most glorious, so that I might abide with Him forever, and I was tested by trial - God displayed before me gifts of all kinds, and offered me dominion over the whole heaven and yet I turned aside my eyes from this ... Then I ascended to the Second heaven and saw winged angles who fly a hundred thousand times each day to the earth to look upon the saints of God, and their faces shone like the sun ... An when God Most High realized the sincerity of my desire to seek Him, He turned me into a bird, and I went flying, past kingdom after kingdom, and screen after screen, and plane after plane, seas after seas, veils after veils, until behold, the angel of the Footstool of God met me with a pillar of light and said to me "Take it" and I took it, and lo, the heavens and all that were therein sought refuge in the shadow of my gnosis, and sought light in the light of my longing, yet all the angels seemed but as a gnat compared with the all-absorbing concern with the search for God. So I continued to fly, until I reached the Footstool of God, and lo, was met by angels, whose eyes were as the number of stars in the heavens, and from each eye shone forth light, and those lights became lamps, and I heard sounding forth from each lamp, "Glory to God", and "There is no God but God". Then I went on flying until I arrived at a sea of light, with waves beating

against one another, and besides it, the light of the sun would seem dark, and upon the sea were ships of light, compared with which the light of those waters appeared to be darkness. I continued to cross seas upon seas, until I reached the greatest of seas, upon which stands the throne of the All-Merciful, and I went on swimming therein, until I beheld, looking from the Empyrean to the earth beneath, the Cherubim and those who bore the Throne of all whom God has created in Heaven and Earth, as less than a mustard seed floating between the Heavens and the earth, in comparison with the flight of my spirit in the quest for God. And when the Most Glorious perceived the sincerity of my desire to seek Him, He called to me and said: 'Oh my chosen one, approach onto me, and ascend to the heights of my glory, and the planes of my splendor, and sit upon the carpet of my holiness, so that thou may see the work of my grace in my appointed time. Thou art My chosen, and My beloved, and My elect among the creatures'. And I began to melt away at that, as lead melts (in the heat of the fire). Then He gave me to drink from the Fountain of Grace in the Cup of Fellowship, and transformed me into a state beyond description, and brought me near unto Him, and so near did He bring me that I became nearer to Him than the spirit to the body. And I continued thus until I became even as souls of men had been in the state before existence was, and God abode in solitude apart, without created existence or space or direction or mode of being, may His glory be exalted and his Names sanctified.

Paul Twitchell, the 20th century leader of Eckankar, describes a lengthy experience of spiritual light during spiritual travel

From: *The Tiger's Fang*

Paul Twitchell, *The Tiger's Fang* (Menlo Park: The Illuminated Way Press, 1978), pps. 109-110

"Then I saw it. You might say it was a mirage, a hallucination, a trick of this world. But then I did see it. The light of God! It was standing above all in the center of the world; the light was fuzzy, shiny and bright, not too bright, just enough. It hung in the center of the landscape within the empty space of this world, a great mass of light, so immense that I cannot describe it, gleaming in the gulf of space. While watching it I began to pray, not in words but in impressions. The scene passed and I felt myself moving gradually, a motion of going into something, a flowing like water. That is the closest description I can give. In a sense I was the same fluid as an atom of spirit. Yet it was motionless with an impression of watching, feeling the flow and the deep motion in every fiber of myself. The impulse went through me that the journey had ended. This was living in God. The music was keened, high and thin, as if coming from within myself. There was no seeing, no hearing, no feeling, just the knowledge that I was part of the absolute - just the intelligence that has power and freedom. Freedom! Yes, this was it. I never had this before. This was wonderful; the freedom to move as desired anywhere at any time. Then I knew that it wasn't the music that was heard but a suspension above me like an almost palpable thing; it faded, spiraled upward and became a part of the sound. Again it was there. It was the softest sound of breathing. I waited. "Who is there?" I sent out the vibratory command. The wave hung in the ether. it moved out and came back like a bolt from space but I shook it off and waited. The light became very strong around me and I knew I was standing in the center of it, suspended in space, an atom within the light atoms; there was no distinguishing them. Nothing! That is all I can say! Nothing! I was part of that cloud of light, a flaming robe around me in the center of this blinding light. Something

entered into my heart, and there was flaming bliss, a glorious light that was the devotion, the adoration, aspiration, reverence, the glory of God, and the divine grace which all writers speak about when becoming one with God. I stood in the center of a mighty, gigantic light, with the current throbbing and pulsing through me.

Robert Monroe, the author of a number of books on Out-of-Body Experience, asks his guide to show him an area of extreme love during spiritual travel

From: *Far Journeys*

Robert Monroe, *Far Journeys* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1987), pps. 178-179

Here, Robert Monroe writes about his experience of "extreme love" using some unusual terminology ("closed", "precept", "INSPEC") which he developed in an effort to describe his spiritual travel experiences. His guide's comments are in italics.

Even closed tightly, the radiation was so strong that it was nearly unbearable . . . I felt as if sweat were pouring off me, I was melting . . . but it wasn't heat . . . and I began to heave with great racking sobs and I couldn't understand why . . . then the radiation eased, and I opened a little. There was a form between me and the radiation, shielding me, and I could perceive a corona effect all around the form from the radiation beyond. It reminded me deeply of religious paintings I had seen, only this one was live and in something far different from pigmented color . . . (*this is as close as you can tolerate. We are diverting most of the effective energy patterns, which are in themselves only the random residue, the leakage as you might call it, from the fundamental. Focus through us rather than the outer rim. It will help.*)

With great difficulty, I narrowed and held on to the center of the form . . . and I began to cool and calm down . . . it was as if I perceived through a darkly tinted window and I had to work continually to keep the emotion below the threshold level, the wondrous and brilliant joy, awe, and reverence, melded into one yet with flashes of each sparkling momentarily . . . all coursing through me as I responded to the radiation, unable to prevent it and barely keeping it under control. This would most emphatically be the ultimate heaven, the final home . . .

(Observe more carefully. You are capable of doing so.)

I looked through the smoked glass shield that was my INSPEC (intelligent species) friend . . . and I was grateful, for I knew if I responded to this degree from just the reflection, the leakage, the full force of the radiation would have shattered me, I was *not ready* for it, if this was a precept [perception] from the distant edge . . . [I saw that] there in the long view was a radiant form of incredible size, my first precept was that of a tall standing humanoid, arms out-stretched, palms up . . . but just as quickly, it was not . . . [it was instead] a shining globe, edges indistinct, behind it another, identical in appearance, behind it another, a continual cascade moving away into infinity, beyond my percept ability, . . . from each came

numberless beams or rays, some huge in diameter, others no wider than a pinpoint, all uniform in size throughout their length and beyond my precept as to their destination, some of them moving past me so close that I felt I could reach out and touch them . . .

(Would you like to do so? We could help if needed.)

I hesitated, then with the warm assurance from the shielding INSPEC form, I stretched a part of me out, cautiously, and touched the smallest ray nearest me . . . in an instant, the shock spread throughout all that I thought I was, and I *knew*, and in knowing knew that I would forget if I tried to remember because what I was could not handle the reality of it . . . yet I never again would be the same even without remembering, except that it occurred, and the indescribable joy of knowing that it did take place and the echoes would reverberate in me throughout eternity, whatever my eternity was . . . gently I felt myself being detached from the ray, and I collapsed behind the shield of my INSPEC friend . . . Friend? INSPEC? I realized how provincial my precepts were. I also realized how limited they were . . .

Thomas Merton's Experience of the sacred light

From: *The Seventh Story Mountain*

Thomas Merton, quoted in Burnham's *The Ecstatic Journey*, (Ballantine Books, 1997), p. 199

But what a thing it was, this awareness, it was so intangible, and yet it struck me like a thunderclap. It was a light that was so bright that it had no relation to visible light and so profound and so intimate that it seemed like a neutralization of every lesser experience. And yet the thing that struck me most of all was that this light was in a certain sense ordinary - it was a light (and this was most of all what took my breath away) - that was offered to all, to everybody, and there was nothing fancy or strange about it. It was the light of faith deepened and reduced to an extreme and sudden obviousness.

Ramakrishna's experience of the goddess Kali as an "ocean of light" during spiritual travel

From: *Ramakrsna Kathamrta*

Mahendranath Gupta, *Ramakrsna Kathamrta* translated by Swami Nikhilananda as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrsna Math, 1952), Book 1, p. 15

When I jumped up like a madman and seized [a sword], suddenly the blessed Mother revealed herself. The buildings with their different parts, the temple, and everything vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead I saw a limitless, infinite, effulgent Ocean of Consciousness. As far as the eye could see, the shining billows were madly rushing at me from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up. I was caught in the rush and collapsed, unconscious . . . within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss, altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother.

The 20th century Indian writer Gopi Krishna's first experience of the Kundalini energy as sacred light

From: *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness*

Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1992), pps. 6-7

Suddenly, with a roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord. Entirely unprepared for such a development, I was completely taken by surprise; but regaining my self-control, keeping my mind on the point of concentration. The illumination grew brighter and brighter, the roaring louder, I experienced a rocking sensation and then felt myself slipping out of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light. It is impossible to describe the experience accurately. I felt the point of consciousness that was myself growing wider surrounded by waves of light. It grew wider and wider, spreading outward while the body, normally the immediate object of its perception, appeared to have receded into the distance until I became entirely unconscious of it. I was now all consciousness without any outline, without any idea of corporeal appendage, without any feeling or sensation coming from the senses, immersed in a sea of light simultaneously conscious and aware at every point, spread out, as it were, in all directions without any barrier or material obstruction. I was no longer myself, or to be more accurate, no longer as I knew myself to be, a small point of awareness confined to a body, but instead was a vast circle of consciousness in which the body was but a point, bathed in light and in a state of exultation and happiness impossible to describe.

Static Awareness in a Dynamic Field

A number of years ago, I was doing spiritual travel while meditating, and I entered a state of extreme knowledge and bliss. The best I can describe the experience is that I became a node of energy in a vast electrical sea of incandescent blue lightning. It was as if my consciousness were a central point where hundreds of bolts of lightning crossed one another superimposing their energy on the single area of space that I occupied. In the midst of these luminous electrical arcs, my consciousness stood motionless and serene, unchanging and continuously aware. The state was beyond thought, beyond imagination, beyond ecstasy, and beyond heaven. It was a static kind of knowing coupled with the dynamic movement of the surrounding powerful energy field.

My attempt to make out some kind of imagery beyond the lightning itself showed only an occasional glimpse of a triangle. This triangle was akin to the pyramid on a one-dollar bill, which represents a human eye emanating spiritual light.

I seemed to be in communion with the electromagnetic forces of the cosmos understanding intuitively their interpenetration of the many layers of the universe. I was the electricity of the nervous system in the human body, the flash of charged particles from a sunspot pouring into the solar system, and the high-energy electromagnetic waves propagating through space. I was identified with the flashing and surging electrical energy of the cosmos. I perceived this energy as a kind of connective tissue permeating and unifying all structures, both mental and physical.

The state contained a vast knowingness, an awareness of certain relatedness, a wisdom that arises from awareness not broken up by thought or image, not sliced and demarcated by time, a monumental stillness surrounded by the continuous movement and surging of the energies of being itself. My consciousness seemed to interpenetrate all form and thereby have unrestricted awareness of its structures, not in analytic terms, but as gnosis. Gnosis is the Greek term meaning knowledge that comes through identification with the object known. Such knowledge is inscrutable and can only be alluded to by analogy.

One analogy that comes to mind is of a chemist who studies the frozen water molecule and its crystalline variations. Such a person knows the shape of the molecular bonds, and the various angles of the water molecule's lattice structure in great detail.

After much investigation, such a scientist might come to spontaneously see how the variations of structure can generate small atomic crystalline shapes. These, in turn, each combine to create larger and larger crystals. Eventually, such a person might come to intuitively understand the minor variations of millions upon millions of snowflakes as they are created and destroyed in a snowstorm, each one unique, but each one based on a fundamental set of basic angular bonds created from the simple water molecule.

Similarly, to enter into the energy of the "ground of being" is to sense a knowledge of all the forms that energy interpenetrates, and all the forms it gives birth to.

In the end, such a state is mysterious, unimaginable, indescribable, and one that cannot be remembered but one that creates mental and emotional echoes that cannot be forgotten. The experiencer feels the need to express it in some form - in poetry, or prose, or artwork. But there is also the realization that the attempt will fail. Such failure is like an artist who tries to create fine line drawings with a broad brush designed to paint houses. The outlines may be there but finished work falls far below the goal.

Paramahansa Yogananda's initiation experience of spiritual light

From: *Autobiography of a Yogi*

Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1974), pps. 109

Master possessed a transforming power; at his touch a great light broke upon my being, like a glory of countless blazing suns together. A flood of ineffable bliss overwhelmed my heart to the innermost core. It was late in the afternoon of the following day before I could bring myself to leave the hermitage.

A spontaneous experience of Sacred Light

From: The Author's Archives

I was lying in a light sleep on the couch in a college library and as I awoke, I spontaneously entered a state of great light. It was as if the atoms in the material world all simultaneously exploded, converting their mass to quanta or light. I was reminded of fireworks that have a primary exploding core which sends out comets which themselves explode, and the process repeated until the light was so overwhelming that all space became an ocean of light.

As the light grew even more intense, I sensed an emptiness within it. The emptiness is similar to the dark after-image a person sees after having stared at the flash when his picture is taken. The brightness was so great that the process of perception temporarily broke down, leaving a void in its place. During this experience, which lasted for only a few seconds, my sense of self was dissolved and a indescribable feeling of intense fullness and exhilaration replaced it.

The shock of being transported to this state and then back to the couch was tremendous. I jumped up from the couch as if I had been thrown into freezing water while asleep. I started to cry out but was able to catch myself before my vocal chords came into play. My breathing was fast and shallow and my heart was pounding. Around me were people sitting or lying on couches and chairs reading, taking notes, and dozing. My sudden movement had not attracted much attention. The stillness of the library lounge was so different from what I had experienced that I wanted to tell everyone around me that the apparently dull, quiet, low-energy, mostly lifeless universe in which we live has a secret blazing core that usually goes unperceived.

Kabir's spiritual sky

From: *Songs of Kabir*

Translated by Rabindranath Tagore, *Songs of Kabir* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1991), pps. 66-67

There the sky is filled with music:
There it rains nectar:
There the harp-strings jingle, and there
the drums beat.
What a secret spender is there, in the mansion of the sky!
There no mention is made of the rising
and setting of the sun.
In the ocean of manifestation, which is the light of love,
day and night are felt to be one.

Joy for ever, no sorrow, no struggle!
There I have seen joy filled to the brim,
perfection of joy;
No place for error is there.
Kabir says: "There I have witnessed the sport of One Bliss!"

A Dream Experience Transformed by Sacred Sound

From: The Author's Archives

I dreamed that I was walking around my basement and there was a party going on. As the party was ending, I decided to help clean up and started picking up things off the floor.

No sooner had I begun, than I started both hearing and feeling flute music coming from within my body. I immediately realized I was out of the body. The music was a kind of harmonious jazz flowing without repetition. It increased in volume until I felt like a flute being played by some mysterious musician. It had a sweet feeling of joy, airy with some accompanying light issuing from the body as if a by-product of the sound. The sound resonated my entire being overwhelming the sense of a limited self.

Using a Jungian interpretation, my childhood basement was a symbol of the collective unconscious which sometimes contains objects and events from cultures outside the individual's personal experience. The party was everyday experience which many times leaves trash and disorder in its wake. The act of cleaning it up was symbolic of purification which led to a mystical breakthrough, and the peak experience that followed.

After the experience, I thought of the Persian poet Rumi, who was like the reed of God. When the wind of God blew, Rumi the reed vibrated creating a hollow flute-like sound. God was the actor and Rumi was simply the instrument through which God expressed himself. "The reed" is also the name of one of Rumi's most famous mystical poems.

The Wonders of Shabda When it Manifests as a Flute

From: The Author's Archives

An unforgettable experience occurred when I heard the flute sound as spiritual music one night while traveling out of my body. The form of the flute sound I experienced was a slow drawn-out version of the first four notes of the old 1960's "Star Trek" theme from the television show. The notes came in the form of a rich and resonate flute which seemed to fill all space. The sense of freedom and joy that this music brought with it were indescribable. The limited self was completely gone replaced by the spiritual music that permeated the vast sky of that world.

This experience of sound was partly symbolic since the words that follow these introductory notes in the television show are "Space, the final frontier ...". However, the "space" being referred to in my case was not physical space but the inner space of the spiritual worlds which is according to the philosophy of spiritual travel truly "the final frontier" of human exploration. Exploring physical frontiers has its own element of fascination. Physical frontiers are, however, pale reflections of the spiritual frontiers within the deeper self which are accessible via spiritual travel.

Shabda's Manifestations

From: The Author's Archives

One manifestation Shabda is compared with the sound of a speeding train. Based on my limited experience with this state of being, comparing this state of consciousness with the sound of a train is appropriate in more ways than one.

As with other types of Shabda, the experience consists not only of sound but also has a strong kinesthetic component. One not only hears the sound but it is as if one were standing on the platform as a mighty locomotive passes. The platform shakes and trembles as the train roars past. The sound together with its trembling manifestations permeates the body and the world. Like other forms of Shabda, it blots out and overpowers the body image and draws the individual into a wholly other space.

It is not a state of bliss but one of pressure and power with an underlying feeling of purification. It is as if the self were being burnished or sand blasted undergoing purification perhaps in preparation for high states of being.

A World Composed of Musical Sound

From: The Author's Archives

I was asleep a few years ago when an extraordinary event occurred. I do not remember being in a dream and do not recall any transition out of an earlier state but I was suddenly out of my body. I found myself in a world composed entirely of orchestral music with large numbers of strings and woodwinds filling the space. I had no visual sensations at all sensing only darkness if I attempted to view the environment. The unusual thing was that I had not the slightest interest in the visual element because I was taken up by the music that so completely filled me. I was soaring as the both the atmosphere and myself were permeated with this mysterious symphonic music. There was no body, and no mind or thoughts. The fullness and richness of the sound had a strong component of ecstasy or bliss which made the quality of the experience difficult to relate since listening to similar music in the physical world does not have near the same effect.

This was truly a heavenly world. The experience went against everything I had been led to believe as a child about the kind of limitations that we expect we have as embodied beings. I concluded we have access to a much broader range of experience while alive than many of our religious leaders assume.

The experience also confirmed to me the accounts of some of the great composers like Mozart, who claimed he "heard" his symphonies inwardly and simply wrote them down without having to actually "compose" them. Had I a composer's training, I believe I could have transcribed the melody into sheet music.

Mantra Meditation During Spiritual Travel

From: The Author's Archives

I found myself awake in a dream and decided to experiment. I sat down to meditate and quickly decided on a spiritual practice to see what effect it would have.

I repeated the mantra OM only two or three times out loud in my out-of-body state. Almost immediately, the whole atmosphere became charged, and I experienced a floating sensation. I vividly felt my body begin to radiate a strange invisible power as if I became a powerful transmitting tower for some invisible radiant energy. The mantric sound echoed all around like a great echo chamber. A short time later, I was back in my body lying in bed.

Phil Morimitsu describes becoming one with Spiritual Sound

From: *In the Company of ECK Masters*

Phil Morimitsu, *In the Company of ECK Masters* (Minneapolis: Eckankar, 1988), pps. 62-63

"OK. Imagine something so vast, that it keeps expanding before you, yet you keep expanding with it. It's just out of your reach, but you keep expanding, ever outward in a sphere. You're expanding at the speed of thought, in all directions at once. Now you exceed even the speed of thought - faster! You've caught up with the expansion."

His words echoed in my being. I *had* caught up. But the movement stopped. The only way I could describe it, was that the whole inner universe had a bigness to it, and there was a gigantic rocking and shaking going on. But it wasn't just me that was shaking, all of the inner universes were shaking until, when it all stopped, there was nothing . . . but wait - there *was* something different. I *was* the atmosphere, if you could call it that. There was the faint sound of the ECK [spirit], a pure but piercing single, high-pitched sound. It wove in and out, but this was different from the ECK sounds I had heard on other planes. I *was* this sound! At first it was almost painful - the pure piercing of It - but as I grew accustomed to It and stopped resisting It, It became soothing. My normal sight was gone. Instead I saw things by knowingness. I knew that there was a great white sheet of Light that was extending upwards at a forty-five degree angle into infinity. The Light was so pure and bright, It would have blinded all the physical universes, had it been revealed there. But I didn't *see* this sheet of Light - I *was* it.

Wah Z's [the guide's] voice came to me as if it were my own. "The pure worlds of Spirit!" he said, laughing. This is you. This is your true self and destiny. Never accept anything less, for to do so is to cheat yourself!"

Kabir Describes the "unstruck sound" in another Poetic Verse

From: *The Inner Treasure*

Kabir Translated by Jonathan Star *The Inner Treasure* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), p. 184

The Shadows of Evening grow deep
while love comes in to
soothe every mind and body.

Look out toward the last glow of sunlight
and look in
to an endless sky.

Drink the nectar from the petals of your heart
and let wave upon wave
sweep through your body.

What glory in that ocean!

Listen!

The sound of conches!

The sound of Bells!

Kabir says, "O Brother, listen!

The Lord of all

plays His song within you!

Paul Twitchell describes traveling with his guide to the *Anami* or nameless world

From: *Dialogues With the Master*

Paul Twitchell, *Dialogues With the Master*, (MenloPark: The Illuminated Way Press, pps.
191-193)

Rebazar Tarzs took my hand and gradually lifted me. Then within the brief pause of the moment he bade me to look around. The shock of fear was too great to tell you. But the deep waves rolled away from this strange body of light which I was wearing. It really wasn't a light but a strange robe of dazzling white, like a cloak. Even my feet were clad in it. Rebazar Tarzs was clad in a similar cloak, like a great white shining aura.

A million - two million and possibly a billion similar lights were moving in a brilliantly lighted void, so completely blinding I could hardly look at it. I was standing on the edge of mighty precipice ready to lead to a bottomless world. I clutched at the Master, but he smiled and waved his hand.

You are in the nameless world. The light you see is the light of God so vastly brilliant in all its glory that human eyes could not look upon it. You are now the perfect atom, for this is the Ocean of love and mercy, the true home of the SUGMAD where all souls return in time.

Everywhere you look, see the great rain of transparent drops, not true rain as you know it but the rain of the perfect atom, the rain of Souls upon the mighty ocean of ECK [spirit] brilliant majestic and awe inspiring in the sight of God. No man looks upon the face of God and remains the same. Thereafter, he is soul, complete Soul of God for he has seen and heard. Look ye yonder and see.

I saw a river, a great white river that seemed to flow out of the heavens and moving, ever widening like a gigantic avalanche, covering all space, and then disappearing or evaporating into the millennium of brilliant lights or atoms.

"The river of God," he explained. "A river which pervades all the universes, for it is the great spiritual current flowing out of the throne of God, Listen!"

The terrifying flowing light had a singing, a musical sound, strangely penetrating - forever moving and singing. It was the word of the spiritual Current. And then a strange cloud hovering over the flowing light seemed to dissolve and a face which filled all space seemed to hang with eyes gazing upon all. Yet seeing nothing. And then suddenly I was caught up in a white sheet of flowing light and singing sound, moving toward that terrifying face. Yet with the ECK Master at my side. "Beyond the face of God is God. Look behind the mask of God and see God. If this is terrifying and awe-inspiring then you must gird up your loins for the great sight. For you must go on and on into the very heart of God. Look and see, from whence comes the river of Light and Sound!" I could not look for the sight was too great. Millions upon millions colors exploded in the great forehead of that gigantic face before us. But then they seemed to dim, and I saw a tiny circle, the round eye within the forehead of the Deity and from out of that passed a continual stream of light - the great spiritual Current flowing to all the worlds upon worlds. A gigantic spirit sun that manufactured its own spiritual atoms and electrons poring them into that continuous stream of light.

"I will take you into the sun of light - into the truth of truths," he said. "We go by becoming one with this current upon which we now ride."

Then suddenly there was nothing of ourselves except the consciousness of joy, light and bliss. No light-body, nothing except the craving of a drowning man for air, and a feeling of great movement toward the gigantic spiritual eye, and then within the moment of feathery floating we seemed to shoot into another world - a world of extreme light inside a vast arching electrical ring from which the light itself poured out of a Niagara of indescribable sound.

PSYCHIC STATES, The Vast Reality of the Psychic Worlds

The psychic worlds are so varied that one can only describe them in the most general terms. They have also been called the supernatural worlds, or intermediate worlds by writers who describe their own inner journeys. Traveling in the psychic worlds is sometimes called shamanic journeying by those interested in indigenous societies and their methods of spiritual travel. The psychic worlds can range from very positive, beautiful, and joyous to very negative and hellish.

Here I will note that my own experience with these negative areas is very limited and I therefore rely on other author's claims to backup this assertion about the hellish states.

Many spiritual leaders claim that enlightenment can come without any involvement with these psychic areas and warn against any contact with these realms. This is partly because contact with the psychic planes is associated with psychic abilities such as predicting the future and telepathy. Such skills have the potential of giving the psychic person power over

others, and can be valuable commodities that can be used to make money. These psychic skills therefore offer great temptations to leave the spiritual life behind.

Attempts to turn spirituality into a business though many times well-intentioned are fraught with difficulty, and a significant portion of the New Age subculture has become a gigantic mall with countless shopkeepers selling their spiritual wares.

However, spiritual travel only seeks to open the individual to new vistas and is by itself of little help in controlling other people, or in improving the traveler's wealth or position in society. These kinds of new vistas serve as preparation for entering the mystical Oneness which is both the source and final destination of all life. Therefore, the author views encounters with these psychic areas as stepping stones to the spiritual areas, and important parts of a spiritual education rather than threats to the seeker that might lead him or her astray.

The Western approach to some Eastern traditions focuses on long periods of meditation where over a period of years the seeker's restless mind is quieted. Using the Buddha's life as a primary example, the tremendous struggle and period of mental discipline is then followed by a grand leap to enlightenment where suddenly all confusion and ignorance is left behind. This is the sudden enlightenment approach.

However, in my experience, the spiritual search is much more like learning a craft where the student takes multiple small steps over a period of years which gradually lead to mastering the craft. This gradual approach is consistent with the spiritual travel approach and is also consistent with the way most human beings learn any new field.

Spirituality is like playing the piano where the process of learning is sometimes dull, and involves discipline and repetition. However, the piano sonata which finally results from all the practice is sublime and transcends the musician, the practice involved, and the instrument on which it is played. All the seeker needs is to have few spiritual travel experiences to conclude that in spiritual travel, the Whole is much greater than the some of the parts.

The psychic planes are the areas of creativity and individuality. They represent a gradual expansion of identity where the traveler discovers not ultimate freedom but a widening of consciousness to include greater wisdom and freedom. There is a gradual *stretching* of identity to include awareness of more and more ways of being. The ability to travel outside the body consciously and explore these areas represents a form of freedom and individuality that is unimaginable to those who have not experienced it.

The following examples attempt to show a range of states on the more positive end of the psychic spectrum.

[Monroe's Experience of joining with a Collective Consciousness in the Psychic Worlds](#)

Mystical literature is replete with stories of mystics claiming to instantaneously learn libraries of information from a single encounter with the inner reality. In this quote, Robert Monroe describes a spiritual travel (OBE) experience where his consciousness is joined with a series of other beings to form a vast reservoir of collective knowledge and experience. The experience comes close to describing what the psychologist Carl Jung called the "collective consciousness" of humanity. This collective consciousness was the locale of archetypal or

collective symbols which represent the collective experience of the human race. However, Monroe's experience seems to go beyond Jung's theory, and asserts that the collective consciousness holds the experience of other intelligent non-human species as well. The latter parts of the experience transcend the psychic area and border on a mystical experience.

[A Classic Example of Entering a Dream-like Psychic World](#)

This experience is a common one where a spiritual travel practitioner meditates on the way into sleep. In this case, the individual concentrates on a flat image that becomes three-dimensional as he leaves the body to enter a psychic space represented by the picture.

[A Description of a "Heavenly" Psychic World during Spiritual Travel](#)

This experience describes the world of Sat Lok ("place of light or purity" in Sanskrit). The more distant psychic worlds have many fascinating heavenly qualities and features which are illustrated in this travelogue.

[A Description of a Spiritual Travel experience which involved "exquisite touch"](#)

Emanuel Swedenborg describes his experience of being "carried away by the spirit to another place".

[A Description of Supernatural Flight in Spiritual Travel](#)

Annada Thakur was an Indian visionary who considered the dead Indian saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar to be his inner guide (in this account Ramakrishna is called Thakur, or Lord). Annada had been sick and had been musing about his desire to see something of hell before he died. When he fell asleep, he had the following spiritual travel experience. Later, he was shown a series of hells, but this description concentrates on his spiritual flight with his guide and the experience of a heavenly breeze.

[The Sioux Medicine Man Black Elk Visits the Land of the Ancestors](#)

Black Elk's vision illustrates a shamanic method of inducing spiritual travel. Shamans are priests or healers of tribal peoples who act as go-betweens bringing messages from the ancestors to their tribal group. As a note, many Americans have taken to imitating shamans and their practices but this is a difficult path for those outside these Native American communities. The section titled [Shamanic Subcultures and Spiritual Travel](#) discusses this in greater detail.

[Brief Encounters With a Mandala](#)

Mandala areas are composed of powerful imagery containing a variety of clear multi-colored moving geometrical forms tied together in an overall circular pattern. In tantric meditation, they are symbolic maps of the heavens.

[The "Clay-like" Nature of some Psychic Worlds](#)

This experience illustrates the malleable nature of some kinds of experience in the psychic worlds. In some states, the reality encountered is plastic and will rapidly reform itself if the traveler has the presence of mind to examine it closely. This power of concentration during spiritual travel has the effect of producing a much wider variety of experience during spiritual travel than is usually present in dreams.

[Meeting a Spiritual Guide in a Surreal Other-worldly Environment](#)

The traveler discovers his body appears as a sphere of light as he embarks on a journey to meet his spiritual guide.

[Shape-shifting or Altering the Body Image in Spiritual Travel](#)

One unusual aspect of spiritual travel is changing the body image to a different form. In this example, the change happens spontaneously but it is likely that some experienced travelers can change bodily forms at will.

[Three Dimensional Spaces Containing Luminous Objects](#)

There are a broad variety of visually interesting spaces to explore in the psychic areas.

[The Joy of Flying Gives a Taste of Spiritual Freedom](#)

Exploring the skies of the psychic worlds is a creative outlet which is exciting for the spiritual traveler, and a refreshing alternative to embodied existence.

All Additions for this Section:

Monroe's Experience of joining with a Collective Consciousness in the Psychic Worlds

From: *Far Journeys*

Robert Monroe, *Far Journeys* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1987), pps. 120-122

I am in a bright white tunnel and moving rapidly. No, it is not a tunnel, but a tube, a transparent radiating tube. I am bathed in the radiation which courses through all of me, and the intensity and recognition of it envelop my consciousness and I laugh with great joy. Something has changed, because the last time, they had to shield me from the random vibration of it. Now, I can tolerate it easily, the actual energy itself. The radiation flow is two-directional in the tube. The flow moving past me in the direction from which I came is smooth, even, and undiluted. The flow that I am moving in the opposite direction and appears much different. It is organized in a more complex form. It is the same as the wave moving past me, but it contains a multitude of small waves impressed upon the basic. I am both the basic, and the small wave forms, moving back to the source. The movement is steady and unhurried, impelled by a desire I know but cannot express. I vibrate with joyous ecstasy just by knowing.

The tube seems to become larger as another joins it from one side, and another wave form melds into me and we become one. I recognize the other immediately, as it does me, and there is a great excitement of reunion, of this other I and I. How could I have forgotten this! We move along together, happily exploring the adventures, experience, and knowledge of the other. The tube widens again, and another I joins, and the process repeats itself. Our waveforms are remarkably identical and our pattern grows stronger as they move in phase. There are variegations in each which, when combined with another related anomaly, create a new and important modification of the total that we are.

The tube expands again and I am no longer concerned with the walls as still another I enters the waveform flow. This is particularly exciting, as it is the first I perceive as returning from a nonhuman sojourn. Yet the intermesh was near perfect and we become so much more. Now we know that somewhere, a consciously controlled physical tail, much like a monkey's is useful in ways far more than balance and acting as a third hand for holding things. It can be a very efficient means of communication far beyond a super sign language just as eloquent as the spoken word.

Steadily and surely, one I after another joins us. With each, we become more aware and remember more of the total. How many does not seem important. Our knowledge and ability is so great that we do not bother to contemplate it. It is not important. We are one.

With this, we divert from the underlying wave form and move away from it. We watch motionless in unified respect as the action of it continues away from us into infinity. We also perceive easily the smooth originating wave coming from such infinity and dissolving into the pattern from which it came.

Flowing through all of us is a coherent energy that is our creation, that displays immensely the reality of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Our ability and knowledge seem without limit, yet we know at this point such is valid only within the energy systems of our experience.

A Classic Example of Entering a Dream-like Psychic World

From: *How I Learned Soul Travel*

Terrill Wilson, *How I learned Soul Travel* (Minneapolis: Eckankar Publishing, 1987), pps. 61, 62

Waking early one morning, I decided to try concentrating on the blackness of my inner mind screen in the vicinity of the Spiritual Eye. I gradually slipped back into sleep, and during the early stage of sleep became partially conscious of a colored picture on the inner screen. The two-dimensional still-picture showed a young lady standing in the middle of a blacktop road in an outdoor, countryside landscape. The picture grew steadily larger as I concentrated, and I felt a slight suction in the vicinity of my Spiritual Eye. Instantly I found myself standing on the road. The young lady with her back towards me came alive, and started walking away from me. It was like zooming into a stop action movie; everything suddenly came to the life the moment I joined the world.

My first impulse was to do something, anything to keep my mind occupied, and hopefully stay out of the body as long as possible. My surroundings included a light-blue sky and rolling, grassy hills dotted with a few shrubs and trees. The blacktop road stretched in front of me in a straight line as far as I could see. Without paying any mind to the lady walking away from me, I jubilantly raised my inner body arms and jumped off the ground, to begin flying over this earth-like terrain. However, my exhilarating flight ended abruptly when I suddenly lost control and was pulled away into the blackness, moments later, ending up back inside my physical body.

A Description of a "Heavenly" Psychic World during Spiritual Travel

From: *The Tiger's Fang*

Paul Twitchell, *The Tiger's Fang* (Menlo Park: The Illuminated Way Press, 1978), pps. 65-66

We traveled for a time in this dark world where only the faint sound of mystical bagpipes could be heard. Finally, we came out of the gloom into the light of a wondrous land where golden palaces were set in open fields of silvery light. The landscape was beyond human description and the beauty of the travelers living there were incomprehensible, the brilliancy of each equal to the light of many suns.

In the distance was a gigantic reservoir like those on the earth plane from which flows the most delicious nectar, out through canals to supply the distant regions.

This world, Sat Lok ... is rich, prosperous, comfortable, fertile, delightful and crowded with godly Souls. The countryside emitted many fragrant odors and was rich in great variety of flowers, trees and fruits, especially jewel trees which were frequented by flocks of various birds with sweet voices which Sat Nam's power has created for his world.

This world has various colors, many colors, many hundreds of thousands of colors. They are variously composed of the seven precious things in varying combinations of gold, silver, beryl, crystal, coral, red pearls and emeralds. Such jewel trees and banana trees and rows of palm trees are all made of precious things and grow everywhere in this region. On all sides it is covered by strange golden nets and these nets are covered with lotus flowers made of precious things.

Some of the lotus flowers are huge in proportion, a half a mile in circumference, and others up to ten miles. From each lotus issues many rays of light, and at the end of each ray there is a saint whose golden-colored body bears the great mark of a spiritual traveler, and who in all directions and in countless world systems, demonstrates the love of God for man.

Rivers flow through this gigantic world. There are rivers there from a mile in width to hundreds of miles wide, and the same in depth. All flowing calmly with fragrant waters, and resounding with the delightful music of bagpipes, and once you have drunk of their waters, never again do you have the desire for the worlds below, but clamor with anxiety to reach the higher worlds. You can bathe in their waters and be refreshed with heavenly bliss, furthermore you can make the waters at the temperature you desire.

A Description of a Spiritual Travel experience which involved "exquisite touch"

From: *Heaven and Hell*

Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation Press, 1962), pps. 294-295

The following passage, which was written by the 18th century thinker Emanuel Swedenborg, attempts to describe what happens when a person is "withdrawn from the body and is carried away by the spirit to another place".

Swedenborg was a complex man who was part scientist, part inventor, part theologian, part spiritualist-medium, and part spiritual traveler.

Of particular interest here is first his attempt to put spiritual travel in a biblical context by describing the soul as "being carried away by the Spirit". This is something that happens in a number of places in the Bible such as in Saint John's vision in the book of Revelations. He also makes reference to Saint Paul's vision of light on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) in describing the state of "not knowing one is in the body or out of it".

Second, his emphasis on the the capacity of the spiritual traveler for the sensation of touch is unusual. He emphasizes how this sense of touch is very pronounced because he believes that all the bodily senses are available to the spiritual traveler (as well as to the angels and to man's disembodied spirit after death). This is a topic which is not much discussed by other authors.

This passage contains some confusing elements. He apparently, while walking and "conversing with spirits", went into an out-of-body state without realizing it, and only became aware of it when he returned to his body and saw he was at a different physical location.

Swedenborg writes:

439. To make clear that man in respect to his interiors (*inner state*) is a spirit I will relate from experience what happens when man is withdrawn from the body, and what it is to be carried away by the spirit to another place.

440. First, as to withdrawal from the body, it happens thus. Man is brought into a certain state that is midway between sleeping and waking, and when in that state he seems to himself to be wide awake; all the senses are as perfectly awake as in the completest bodily wakefulness, not only the sight and the hearing, but what is wonderful, the sense of touch also, which is then more exquisite than is ever possible when the body is awake. In this state spirits and angels have been seen to the very life, and have been heard, and what is wonderful have been touched, with almost nothing of the body intervening. This is the state that is called being withdrawn from the body, and not knowing whether one is in the body or out of it. I have been admitted into this state only three or four times, that I might learn what it is, and might

know that spirits and angels enjoy every sense, and that man does also in respect to his spirit when he is withdrawn from the body.

441. As to being carried away by the spirit to another place, I have been shown by living experience what it is, and how it is done, but only two or three times. I will relate a single instance. Walking through the streets of a city and through fields, talking at the same time with spirits, I seemed to myself to be fully awake, and in possession of my usual sight. Thus I walked on knowing what I was doing, and all the while with clear vision, seeing groves, rivers, palaces, houses, men, and other objects. But after walking thus for some hours, suddenly I saw with my bodily eyes, and noted that I was in another place. Being greatly astonished I perceived that I had been in the same state as those were who were said to have been led away by the spirit into another place. For in this state the distance, even though it be many miles, and the time, though it be many hours or days, are not thought of, neither is there any feeling of fatigue; and one is led unerringly through ways of which he is ignorant, even to the destined place.

A Description of Supernatural Flight in Spiritual Travel

From: *A Life of Visions*

Shree Shree Annada Thakur, *A Life of Visions*, (Calcutta: Adyapeath Dakshineswar Sangha, 1968)

Suddenly I saw as if Thakur was coming to me smiling. Thakur came and sat by the side of my head; and placing his hand on my head said, "What is this whim of yours... Will you tell me why you are so eager to see hell?" ...

Thakur tried to dissuade me in many ways. When I would not be dissuaded at all Thakur said, "Then come- let us go; let me show you hell and give you an idea of it."

Then I came out with Thakur with a cheerful heart and stood outside the room. Pointing his finger to a great distance Thakur said, "Do you see there? That high road you see there is the road to heaven; we have to approach that road."

Lost in wonder I looked at something with keen eyes. There was a wonderful feeling of joy in my heart. I asked Thakur with a joyous heart, "Thakur, how long and along which way are we to go?"

"Come on- I am leading the way" saying this Thakur began to fly with a flutter. In my attempt to follow Thakur I slowly got up into space. Ah! what a delightful journey! What a thrilling experience of supernatural aerial flight! If anybody had ever dream flown in the sky like a bird- he only would feel this joy; none else would be able to guess it. Both of us were flying so fast as to produce a hissing sound; our hands seemed to serve as wings and the legs and feet as the tail of the flying bird guiding flight. We had flown a great distance; the way seemed to have no end; both of us were covering the distance silently. After a while a soft breeze touched my body. Thakur exclaimed, "Annada, this is the breeze of heaven; this is what they mean by Moloy breeze (zephyr); heaven is not far off. Is it painful to you?"

I said with a cheerful heart, "No, Thakur. Where is the pain. It is a matter of great joy; it is the height of peace. I have no objection if you thus make me fly day after day. Ah! how sweet is the breeze of your heaven! How Pure! How soothing!"

The Sioux Medicine Man Black Elk Visits the Land of the Ancestors

From: *Black Elk Speaks*

John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1972), pps. 205-206

The Oglala Sioux medicine man Black Elk returned from Europe to find his people involved in the Ghost Dance. It was one of the last large collective attempts of the Plains Indian tribes to reinvigorate their traditional religion. In the following vision, he visits the land of the ancestors after falling unconscious during the dance ritual. This kind of trance is a form of conscious entry into the inner world since he appears to have never lost consciousness during the transition.

After awhile I began to feel very queer. First my legs seemed to be full of ants. I was dancing with my eyes closed, as others did. Suddenly it seemed I was swinging off the ground and not touching it any longer. The queer feeling came up from my legs and was in my heart now. It seemed I would glide forward like a swing, and then glide back again in longer and longer swoops. There was no fear with this, just a growing happiness.

I must have fallen down, but as I fell, I had fallen off the swing when I was going forward, and I was floating head first through the air. My arms were stretched out, and all I saw at first was a single eagle feather right in front of me. Then the feather was a spotted eagle dancing on ahead of me with his wings fluttering, and he was making the shrill whistle that is his. My body did not move at all, but I looked ahead and floated fast towards where I looked.

There was a ridge right in front of me and I thought I was going to run into it, but I went right over it. On the other side of the ridge I could see a beautiful land where many, many people were camping in a great circle. I could see they were happy and had plenty. Everywhere there were drying racks full of meat. The air was clear and beautiful with a living light that was everywhere. All around the circle, feeding on the green, green grass, were fat and happy horses, and animals of all kinds were scattered over the green hills, and singing hunters were returning with their meat.

I floated over the tepees and began to come down feet first at the center of the hoop where I could see a beautiful tall tree all green and full of flowers. When I touched the ground, two men were coming towards me, and they wore shirts made and painted in a certain way. They came to me and said: "It is not yet time to see your father who is happy. You have work to do. We will give you something that you will carry back to your people, and with it they shall come to see their loved ones."

I knew it was the way their holy shirts were made that they wanted me to take back. They told me to return at once and then I was in the air again, floating fast as before. When I came right over the dancing place, the people were still dancing, but it seemed that they were not making any sound. I had hoped to see the withered tree in bloom, but it was dead.

Then I fell back into my body, and as I did this I heard the voices all around and above me, and I was sitting on the ground. Many were crowding around asking what vision I had seen. I told them just what I had seen, and what I brought back was the memory of the holy shirts the two men wore.

Shamanic Subcultures and Spiritual Travel

Many Americans are interested in practicing shamanic or Native American tribal traditions partly because they emphasize personal religious experience rather than faith in a distant God. The author of this site strongly supports and encourages an interest in personal religious experience. Much of the religious experience present in these shamanic traditions can be classified as spiritual travel. However, attempts by persons who are not members of these tribal groups to participate in these traditions are problematic.

This is because the vast majority of native people in these traditions will tell you that a person *must be born into these tribes* to properly practice the tradition. This is not an arbitrary or selfish statement on their part. There are good reasons that justify such claims.

These shamanic traditions are tightly bound up with a group of tribal ancestors who have an interest in guiding and protecting the tribal members.

If a non-tribal member wants to contact ancestors, who will he or she contact? There is no tradition of being helped by ancestors in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. So the question arises: "With which ancestors are these modern-day non-Indian shamans in contact?"

It is theoretically possible for the tribal ancestors to "adopt" a non-native person into the tribe, but why would they wish to do so? Certainly a non-Indian person cannot "adopt himself" into the tribe (i.e. claim new ancestors) anymore than a child can walk into the house down the street and tell the residents he or she is now their son or daughter.

In addition, the shaman's role of healer and priest is based on a close-knit long-term relationship with a tribal group which trusts his or her judgment and skill. A group of people

who show up at a "shamanic workshop" do not constitute a legitimate and cohesive community that resembles the tribes of indigenous peoples. So what group is it that looks to these contemporary shamans for spiritual direction and spiritual vitality?

Other religious groups have a means of accepting new members that were not born into them through the process of conversion. Medieval Christianity has the tradition of being baptized and becoming part of the mystical body of Christ, and the communion of saints. Mainline protestantism allows a person to adopt Jesus as a personal savior to become "saved" or "born again" and become a part of the church.

Hinduism and Buddhism both have the tradition of initiation where a disciple accepts an individual as a *guru* and joins a lineage which in some ways is like a family.

However, non-tribal members attempting to join a Native American tradition are going against the grain of that tradition. Such a convert is subject to being labeled a "plastic shaman", and will likely be resented by the true members of the tribal group. This is especially true if the practitioner makes money from the practice.

These tribal traditions have many attractive elements and it is understandable why many would wish to be involved in them. However, if one is interested primarily in spiritual travel, there are other ways to pursue this interest apart from using these shamanic methods and imitating tribal groups.

Brief Encounters With a Mandala

From: The Author's Archives

One encounter with a mandala in spiritual travel reminded me of a shooting gallery with a circular symmetry. There were bright and detailed forms of different colors moving in a precise almost mechanical fashion, some around the circle's center, some up and down, some spinning on their own central axis as they moved across other arcs. The moving objects were abstract circles, squares, triangles and lines filled with bright high-contrast colors.

One characteristic of these areas is their overabundance of energy. The forms radiate a great deal of light, and are somewhat surprising to the traveler in their visual intensity. In my experience, the mandala appears without prior warning spontaneously during a dream state. These areas are difficult to experience for more than a few seconds at a time, since a strong emotional response of surprise tends to bring the traveler back to the body shortly after the onset of the experience.

In general, strong emotional responses tend to terminate the experience. It is difficult to say where such imagery would lead if a skilled traveler were able to follow it for an extended period of time. The best way to prolong an experience is usually to be detached from what happens, although this is, in practice, sometimes a difficult rule to follow.

The "Clay-like" Nature of some Psychic Worlds

From: The Author's Archives

I was dreaming and suddenly woke up. The most interesting aspect of this experience was the way the objects in the mind changed form when I concentrated upon them.

In the dream, I heard music and the clarity of awareness associated with lucid dreaming appeared. I let the music carry me along. I was gliding down a hallway on my back. I enjoyed not having to walk in this dream environment, and the associated feeling of weightlessness. The music was similar to a Judy Collins folk song I had heard.

As I floated on the music, I noticed a somewhat ape-like older gentleman walking down the corridor who invited me into his office to talk. I told him I probably did not have much time, as out-of-body experiences tend to end at a moment's notice. I then told the man of my opinion of his strange appearance.

As I continued to stare at him studying his features, his face began to change into a variety of different forms. His neck seemed to disappear, and he assumed a bird-like look with a large beak-like nose. The transformations continued into different figures one after another as if I was watching a claymation movie. The final transformation was that the man shrunk down and was transformed into a series of bent wires like a set of complex wire earrings. I marveled at this last transformation and picked up a piece of the wire separating it from the rest of the tangle to examine it. I then put it back, thinking it should be an integral part of the whole. As I placed it next to the other wire, a little flash of light occurred fusing the piece I had separated with the part I had left lying there.

I then found myself without any effort back in my body.

While some environments in the inner worlds seem stable and resist efforts to change them, others are plastic and can change form dynamically in front of the travelers eyes.

Meeting a Spiritual Guide in a Surreal Other-worldly Environment

From: *The Tiger's Fang*

Paul Twitchell, *The Tiger's Fang* (Menlo Park: The Illuminated Way Press, 1978), pps. 3-4

Almost as quickly as my eyes were closed I awoke in the Atma Sarup or soul body to find myself walking along a beach where the wild surf lashed the shore and a wind whipped the pines along the edge of the strand.

There were pale, white clouds in an azure sky. Something about the landscape was ethereal and my pulse quickened with the thought that this was an out-of-the-body projection via the dream technique. The color, the invigorating air and the beauty were beyond words. It seemed as if there was God in everything.

I felt no fear at this sudden transportation but curiosity, tugging at my mind, asked the question of where was I? Somewhere in the back of my mind it seems that this was not a strange place at all... that sometime, in the afterwards, in the earlier travelers with Rebazar Tarzs, I had gone through this section of landscape. But a peaceful feeling settled over me and all was accepted for what it was.

The sea of crystal blue and the lacy surf was like a million sparkling diamonds that dashed up against the sand beach and ran off into the sea again.

The distance was majestic with foaming whitecaps. Yet there was a silence, a strange wonderful silence so deep reaching that it stirred through me. Looking down at my body a feeling of joy went through me. I was wearing a white robe of light which flowed around me in a circular motion in a gentle swirling current. There were no feet, no hands, nothing but a ball of swirling light. My vision was below where my feet should have been and it was also in the back of my head. It was anywhere I directed my attention... all simultaneously. When I spoke, there was a multitude of sounds issuing from me.

A brilliant sphere appeared on the horizon and as it came closer and grew larger it revealed itself as a small sailing vessel, at the tiller was [my spiritual guide] Rebazar Tarzs.

Shape-shifting or Altering the Body Image in Spiritual Travel

From: The Author's Archives

I was once in a dream state and witnessed a bodily transformation. My body changed from its normal form to a shining cross. Immediately, I realized I was out of my body and fully conscious. The cross was similar to two crossed bright white fluorescent bulbs. The feeling was one of great energy and vitality. The cross which was now my body vibrated with an electrical radiant energy. As soon as the transformation occurred, the cross left the ground and began moving through the darkness. Becoming a being of light made me weightless and I literally floated upward moving slowly hovering above the ground.

I vividly saw and felt myself to be this shining cross during the experience.

This is a case where my new body image during spiritual travel in no way resembled my normal body image. My sense of body consciousness was completely changed.

Three Dimensional Spaces Containing Luminous Objects

From: The Author's Archives

Once while out of the body, I encountered a space containing thousands of suns a few feet across moving in random patterns much like the movement of a group of insects buzzing around a light (except moving somewhat more slowly). Each sun gave off bright yellow-white light. The background was dark like a night sky. These spheres were too bright to see the outline of their disks clearly, each one having a kind of bright corona radiating from it.

There was no particular emotional feel to the space and I felt myself to be a distant observer of the passing scene. I also did not sense any consciousness or self-awareness in these suns.

This kind of space is probably typical of many different three dimensional spaces filled with varied forms composed of energy or light in the psychic worlds.

The Joy of Flying Gives a Taste of Spiritual Freedom

Flying during spiritual travel and the joy it brings is mentioned more than once at this site. However this activity merits some additional comment. This is because the freedom of flight is a kind of faint echo of the more extreme states of spiritual freedom that come at later stages of the spiritual path.

The sensation of flying completely unrestricted by gravity has many ecstatic elements and shades of subtlety. On one hand, there is the creativity of sky-dancing as the traveler explores different positions while moving through the air. There is the tumbling, the rolling, the twisting, the spinning, and the diving. All of this can be done at break-neck speed. A sparrow would have a difficult time outmaneuvering the individual with some experience of spiritual flight.

Normally we might associate such movement with skydiving in the physical world but spiritual flight is different in that it is self-powered rather than depending on gravity for movement as the skydiver does. It also contains the option of soaring through an airless void where the wind which limits the skydiver's movement is not present. The effect is for the person in soul flight to experience fewer limits on his or her movements because of this lack of air resistance.

Beyond this dancing approach to soul flight, there is the powerful sensation that sometimes comes when moving rapidly across the sky, as if the soul were powered by some mysterious engine that vibrates it with great energy. It is as if the soul is a craft specifically designed to soar at fantastic speeds through the atmosphere. The experience of freedom, speed, and power differs significantly from normal body consciousness. It is another flavor of experience- yet another altered state of consciousness. There are many such different modes of being that occur in the psychic worlds during spiritual travel.

WESTERN TRADITIONS, Spiritual Travel in Christianity and Judaism

Spiritual Travel in the Christian New Testament

Some of the most important visionary experiences in the Christian New Testament can be understood as spiritual travel. While the number of examples listed below from scriptures are small, they are only samples from a larger set. But even with this limited number, there are enough to show that the concept of spiritual travel has been unjustifiably ignored or devalued in these Western traditions. In the author's view, the topic of spiritual travel needs to be revisited by scholars and religious leaders to first document, and then assert the importance of spiritual travel in Western religious scripture and practice.

For Christians who value the authority of Saint Paul, an important biblical passage is Paul's story of the man who was transported up to the third heaven in Corinthians 12. This experience clearly fits our criteria for spiritual travel (assuming the man did not visit heaven while actually in his physical body). Some scholars believe Saint Paul was the person who experienced heaven but that he described the experience as happening to another man because of his humility.

This story is important because it is a passage from the new testament that describes in *literal terms* the soul leaving the physical body and traveling to heaven. It does this when Saint Paul questions: "Was the man in his body when he visited heaven or not?" By wondering about these two possibilities, Saint Paul is stating that he believes that the soul of a living person can leave the body, visit heaven, and return to the body to tell the story of what happened. This is precisely what appears to happen in deeper spiritual travel experiences.

... I shall go on to tell of visions and revelations granted by the Lord. I know a Christian man who fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of it, I do not know- God knows) was caught up as far as the third heaven. And I know that this same man was caught up into paradise, and heard words so secret that human lips may not repeat them. About such a man as that I am ready to boast; but I will not boast on my own account, except of my weaknesses. (2 Corinthians 12:1-5)

The most pronounced and longest spiritual travel experience in the new testament is in the book of Revelations. In Revelations 4, the description of spiritual travel is clear and unambiguous. This following passage from Revelations precedes the famous section where Saint John meets the four heavenly figures with the faces of a human, an eagle, a lion, and an ox. This spiritual travel experience appears to go on almost to the end of the book of Revelations. Saint John never does describe returning from heaven to his physical body, but clearly he had to return to write the Book of Revelations.

After this I looked, and there before my eyes was a door opened in heaven; and the voice that I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen in the hereafter." At once I was caught up by the spirit. There in heaven stood a throne, and on the throne sat one whose appearance was like the gleam of jasper and cornelian; and round the throne was a rainbow, bright as an emerald. In the circle about the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and on them sat twenty-four elders, robed in white and wearing crowns of gold. Burning before the throne were seven flaming torches, the seven spirits of God, and in front of it stretched what seemed a sea of glass, like a sheet of ice. (Revelation 4:1-6)

Paul's conversion experience where he had a vision of light on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9) is unclear as to whether it qualifies as spiritual travel since it is unclear whether he left his body. It may or may not have been a spiritual travel experience.

3 As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" 5 "Who are you, sir?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! 6 Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men with Saul stood speechless with surprise, for they heard the sound of someone's voice, but they saw no one! 8 As Saul picked himself up off the ground, he found that he was blind. 9 So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days. And all that time he went without food and water. (Acts 9:3-9)

This vision which blinded him for three days was a crucial turning point in the history of the early church since Paul, after his conversion, was the primary figure who spread Christianity to the Gentiles. One indication that the vision may qualify as spiritual travel was that Paul lost his ability to see. This might indicate his other senses also failed during the experience. If this were the case, his experience might meet our criteria for spiritual travel since if all of his senses were inoperable, his vision may have occurred during an out-of-body state.

Spiritual Travel in the Old Testament

There are a few examples of spiritual travel in the Old Testament where individuals are transported to heaven while awake rather than in dreams. Ezekiel 8 is one such example:

1 Then on September 17, during the sixth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, while the leaders of Judah were in my home, the Sovereign LORD took hold of me. 2 I saw a figure that appeared to be a man. From the waist down he looked like a burning flame. From the waist up he looked like gleaming amber. 3 He put out what seemed to be a hand and took me by the hair. Then the Spirit lifted me up into the sky and transported me in a vision of God to Jerusalem. I was taken to the north gate of the inner courtyard of the Temple, where there is a large idol that has made the LORD very angry. 4 Suddenly, the glory of the God of Israel was there, just as I had seen it before in the valley. 5 Then the LORD said to me, "Son of man, look toward the north." So I looked, and there to the north, beside the entrance to the gate of the altar, stood the idol that had made the LORD so angry. 6 "Son of man," he said, "do you see what they are doing? Do you see the great sins the people of Israel are doing to drive me from my Temple? But come, and you will see even greater sins than these!" (Ezekiel 8:1-6)

Ezekiel 40 is another example of spiritual travel in the Old Testament where a vision transports the prophet to what appears to be a physical location (the land of Israel).

1 On April 28, during the twenty-fifth year of our captivity fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem the LORD took hold of me. 2 In a

vision of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me down on a very high mountain. From there I could see what appeared to be a city across from me toward the south. 3 As he brought me nearer, I saw a man whose face shone like bronze standing beside a gateway entrance. He was holding in his hand a measuring tape and a measuring rod. 4 He said to me, "Son of man, watch and listen. Pay close attention to everything I show you. You have been brought here so I can show you many things. Then you will return to the people of Israel and tell them everything you have seen." (Ezekiel 40:1-4)

Dreams are also a very important element in the Old Testament. Numerous prophets such as Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Amos have visionary and prophetic dreams.

The following passage from the Song of Solomon actually describes Solomon *waking up in a dream* which is something that happens often in spiritual travel.

2 "One night as I was sleeping, my heart awakened in a dream. I heard the voice of my lover. He was knocking at my bedroom door. 'Open to me, my darling, my treasure, my lovely dove,' he said, 'for I have been out in the night. My head is soaked with dew, my hair with the wetness of the night.' 3 "But I said, 'I have taken off my robe. Should I get dressed again? I have washed my feet. Should I get them soiled?' 4 "My lover tried to unlatch the door, and my heart thrilled within me. 5 I jumped up to open it. My hands dripped with perfume, my fingers with lovely myrrh, as I pulled back the bolt. 6 I opened to my lover, but he was gone. I yearned for even his voice! I searched for him, but I couldn't find him anywhere. I called to him, but there was no reply. 7 The watchmen found me as they were making their rounds; they struck and wounded me. The watchman on the wall tore off my veil. 8 "Make this promise to me, O women of Jerusalem! If you find my beloved one, tell him that I am sick with love." (Song of Solomon 5:2-8)

In the following famous passage from Joel, the importance of dreams for the believer is emphasized. Implied in this statement is that spiritual dreaming is an important part of life, and that the ideal world or the "end times" would contain many individuals who had spiritual and visionary dreams. Since many visions and dreams in the Old Testament appear to involve spiritual travel, it would seem that the bible recommends this practice. If it is good for the prophets, it may be just as valuable for ordinary men and women.

28 "Then after I have poured out my rains again, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. 29 In those days, I will pour out my Spirit even on servants, men and women alike. 30 "I will cause wonders in the heavens and on the earth blood and fire and pillars of smoke. 31 The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon will turn bloodred before that great and terrible day of the LORD arrives. 32 And anyone who calls on the

name of the LORD will be saved. There will be people on Mount Zion in Jerusalem who escape, just as the LORD has said. These will be among the survivors whom the LORD has called. (Joel 2:28-32)

In the next passage from Daniel, the concepts of visions and dreams is equated. In the Old testament, the two are very close and sometimes confused, or spoken of using the same terminology.

1 Earlier, during the first year of King Belshazzar's reign in Babylon, Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he lay in his bed. He wrote the dream down, and this is what he saw. 2 In my vision that night, I, Daniel, saw a great storm churning the surface of a great sea, with strong winds blowing from every direction. 3 Then four huge beasts came up out of the water, each different from the others... (Daniel 7:1-3)

In addition to the above examples of spiritual travel in the Old Testament, there are prophets who enter heaven while alive and sometimes appear to take their body with them. Elijah saw a "chariot of fire" and "went up by a whirlwind into heaven" apparently never to be seen again by those who witnessed this event.

This cannot be classified as spiritual travel since the prophet never returned but it has some clear similarities.

THE FLUID SELF, Changing Identities in Spiritual Travel

Everyone knows what it is like to be embodied living in the physical world from day to day. In what ways does the individual's identity, self-concept, and body image vary during spiritual travel?

One fascinating aspect of spiritual travel is the ability to shift from one's normal body image to a different form. Taking on an identity or form different from one's normal body image happens on occasion during spiritual travel.

It sometimes happens spontaneously and advanced practitioners can probably choose to create a new body image through visualization. Some claim that those who reside in the more ethereal places seem to use this ability to change shape as a form of artistic creativity. They are said to be able change bodies the way we in the material world change clothes.

An example of a change in body image can be found in the section on [shape-shifting](#) at this site.

However, it is more common to find one's self with little or no bodily sensation thus creating the sense of having no body at all than to shift shapes.

One of the basic lessons learned during spiritual travel is that the soul can take many forms and identities when outside the body. However one generic thing that happens repeatedly is the soul or individual becomes a kind of energy or vibration. The qualities of this difficult to describe "energy based identity" differ much like the varying qualities of color and texture differ on the surface of a body of water such as a lake. The surface of the water changes so much depending on the kind of wind and the quality of the natural light as it reflects off the surface.

Raymond Moody talks briefly about these alterations in body image that occur during near-death experience:

I have heard this new body described in many different terms, but one may readily see that much the same idea is being formulated in each case. Words and phrases which have been used by various subjects include a mist, a cloud, smoke-like, a vapor, transparent, a cloud of colors, wispy, an energy pattern, and others which express similar meanings.

Raymond Moody, Jr. M.D., *Life After Life*, (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1976), p 50

However, it is important to remember that those undergoing a near-death experience are usually experiencing out-of-body states for the first time. The above terms are descriptive of how such persons felt immediately after their accident or injury when they first found themselves outside their physical body. Spiritual travelers are likely to experience a wider variety of identities than those described as occurring during near-death experience.

Generally, this kind of experience is very important for the following reason. Once the individual gets acquainted with this unusual way of being during spiritual travel, it is not such a big step to mysticism since once the soul becomes aware of its own energetic nature and essence, it can approach the mystical areas of light and sound with a sense of relatedness. One form of energy is not so easily alienated by another form of energy, whether in the form of another disembodied individual or a vast ocean of light or sound. This is one way in which spiritual travel in the psychic areas prepares the individual soul for its encounter with ultimate Truth or God.

There are many who write on the subjects of mysticism and meditation who talk of the illusion of separateness, and how true spirituality consists of overcoming this illusion. However, when the individual's consciousness is focused within the body, the barriers which account for this feeling of separation are solid and substantial. It is during out-of-body experience that the self becomes permeable and can merge partially or fully with other forms of consciousness and states of being.

In whatever form the individual takes as he or she experiments, the freedom to vary one's bodily form and identity can be one of the beautiful and fascinating aspects of spiritual travel.

Shape-Shifting

From: The Author's Archives

I was once in a dream state and witnessed a bodily transformation. My body changed from its normal form to a shining cross. Immediately, I realized I was out of my body and fully conscious. The

cross was similar to two crossed bright white fluorescent bulbs. The feeling was one of great energy and vitality. The cross which was now my body vibrated with an electrical radiant energy. As soon as the transformation occurred, the cross left the ground and began moving through the darkness. Becoming a being of light made me weightless and I literally floated upward moving slowly hovering above the ground.

I vividly saw and felt myself to be this shining cross during the experience.

This is a case where my new body image during spiritual travel in no way resembled my normal body image. My sense of body consciousness was completely changed.

RETURNING TO THE PHYSICAL BODY

The Ease of Getting Back to the Physical Body

One fear of those considering spiritual travel is that once one's consciousness is outside the body, the traveler may not be able to return.

My experience with respect to this concern is that it is *quite difficult* to leave the body but very easy to return. I have never had difficulty returning. Once out of the body, it is difficult to stay out since there seems to be a kind of gravitational pull to return.

Two ways of intentionally returning are either to have a strong emotional reaction, whether to some event or consciously induced, or to simply tense up one's being, which reasserts the natural connection to the physical body. One of the reasons I call it travel, is that the individual has gone somewhere new, and therefore must make the return trip. Both actions usually involve time. It takes a few seconds at most to return to the body.

The experience of returning is akin to using a camera to unfocus on a distant object while refocusing on a much closer one. The distant object blurs out at first and eventually disappears completely as the new one comes into focus. The non-physical body image seems to slowly evaporate like water on hot pavement, as the normal physical body image coalesces and takes its place.

One of the peculiar things that occurs on *rare* occasions is that upon return from a spiritual travel experience, the traveler is unable to move any part of the physical body for up to thirty seconds. On these occasions, the sensory nerves seem to work as usual and the traveler can feel every part of his or her body. However, the motor nerves which carry nerve impulses to the muscles seem to take longer to readjust to the return. This can be disconcerting while it is occurring. However, it is short-lived and the traveler regains control of the muscles after a few seconds.

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

Examples of Spiritual Travel During Near-Death Experience

The concept of near-death experience was developed by Dr. Raymond Moody Jr. in the 1970s. It was based on interviews with over a hundred (and later more than a thousand)

patients who described the phenomenon of leaving their body during a medical crisis where they came close to death.

The vast majority of the people Moody interviewed had no heartbeat or respiration during the near-death experience, and a few also had no measurable brain-waves at the time. The experiences were based on first-person interviews with the patients as well as the medical staff that were present during the event. Moody considered it important for his study that medical personnel experienced with emergency medicine were present to verify that the patients were thought to be dead during the period when their NDEs (near-death experiences) occurred.

There are two general phases to the NDE. The first phase consists of the person's soul leaving the body and viewing the lifeless body and its surroundings (usually a hospital room or accident scene). The second consists of the soul entering and passing through a psychic tunnel which ends in another world. Here the dying person sometimes meets a "being of light" and reviews their past existence with the aid of this being. At some point the person is told that it is not time to die or makes a conscious choice to return to life, and the soul returns to the physical body.

There are about ten stages to the common near-death experience outlined by Dr. Moody. Not every person experiences every stage and it is common for a person to experience only four or five out of the ten. We will list the stages briefly.

The first stage is "hearing the news". This occurs when an accident victim or patient in a hospital hears someone say "I think we have lost him" or "He is dead" or words to that effect. This statement describing the person's death is many times the last sensory event a person experiences before the onset of the NDE.

The second stage of an NDE is "the noise". This is an unusual auditory sensation experienced by the individual as he or she leaves the physical body, and sometimes as he travels through "the tunnel" (described later). It is described variously as "a buzzing sound", "a loud click", "a banging sound", "a beautiful majestic musical sound", or "Japanese bell-like wind chimes". Such sounds are many times associated with a feeling of movement through space.

The third stage is "the dark tunnel". There is a sensation of being pulled or drawn through a dark tunnel at great speed. The tunnel is also described as "a corridor", "a black valley", "a well", "a sewer", or "a cylinder". One person in the tunnel said, "I was moving beating all the time with this noise, this ringing noise". Another said, "I went through this dark black valley at super speed". The tunnel sometime has a light at the far end which the person moves toward.

The tunnel is sometimes perceived as a transitional experience - as a place between two places or worlds. It overwhelms the senses like a roller coaster, and the person in the tunnel is usually completely involved in the experience and can think of little else.

The fourth stage is "being out of the body". This is a complex stage with many elements. The descriptions listed below will hopefully give the reader a sense of how this feels.

The fifth stage is "meeting others". This usually occurs either in the tunnel or shortly after the end of the tunnel is reached. The others that are met are usually dead relatives or dead friends. The people are usually supportive and happy, and sometimes the individual helper is only sensed rather than seen. The others are also sometimes called guardian spirits or spirit-helpers.

The sixth stage is the "the being of light". This being asks the person to reflect on their life and acts as a guide. He or she is described as composed of white or yellow or clear light that has an "unearthly brilliance". The being is supportive and compassionate and helps the individual review their life.

The seventh stage is the "review". The review consists of a series of pictures or snap shots in two or three dimensions of the person's past life on earth. They may be very detailed or show just the highlights of the life. More important events are examined in greater detail but the whole process proceeds very quickly. Some describe having great intuition and understanding concerning their own behavior and the reactions of others to that behavior.

The eighth stage is "the border". At some point, the dying person understands that it is not their time to die and they must return to their physical body. They see or sense a barrier and have the feeling that if it is crossed, they will die. People undergoing NDEs do not cross the border and thus return to life. It is described as a door or threshold or line which separates those who can return to life from those that cannot.

The ninth stage is "coming back". People describe returning in various ways and some do not remember returning but wake up later and remember the NDE.

The tenth stage is "telling others". Individuals in many cases find it difficult to talk about the experience, and difficult to readjust to their normal lives following the experience. They also find that many of their friends and relatives do not believe that the experience was real. It is characterized as a dream, a fantasy, or an illusion. Some people change religions, jobs, or enroll in a different program at school. Many emphasize the profound effect the NDE had on them.

These are the common stages of an NDE.

There has been considerable effort put forth in the scientific community to reduce NDEs to physical changes in the brain and nervous system thus denying their spiritual causes. The [Reductionist Arguments Explaining Near-Death Experiences](#) page discusses these arguments in some detail.

As mentioned in the introduction, near-death experience does not meet our full set of criteria for spiritual travel since it is almost never voluntary (except for failed suicide attempts) and much of the experience is beyond the control of the individual.

The descriptions of spiritual travel that occur during near-death experience are extremely detailed. People who have NDEs are many times able to describe the precise conversations of relatives who were in other rooms of the hospital during the experience.

Doctors and nurses are many times surprised when a patient tells them the exact medical procedures that were used to try and resuscitate him or her. The injured person usually has

great concentration while out of their body and can remember the procedures in detail. Such enhanced memory is consistent with the heightened concentration and clarity that is associated with spiritual travel experience.

Here are some examples of NDEs in which individuals experience the out-of-body stage in some detail.

[A Child's Description of a Powerful Near-Death Experience.](#)

A fourteen year old describes an intense NDE he experienced when he was eleven. In a bad accident, he was hit by a car while riding his bicycle, and was taken to the hospital. These experiences were chosen by Dr. Moody to counter the criticism that only adults who were "socialized" had near-death experiences. The criticism was an attempt to prove that NDEs were false and only a product of social conditioning. However Dr. Moody countered these criticisms by giving examples that show that children also have NDEs.

[Another Young Child's Description of a Near-Death Experience.](#)

A nine year old girl describes an NDE she had which occurred during her appendicitis surgery. She had complications during the surgery and had to be resuscitated.

[Entering into the Sacred Light during a Near-Death Experience.](#)

This is a beautiful and lengthy NDE which contains many mystical elements, and much detail about the physical events observed by the experiencer while in the out-of-body state.

[Meeting a "being of light" During a Near-Death Experience.](#)

A man has a near-death experience in the operating room at a hospital, and while outside his physical body describes his encounter with a "Being of Light" .

[A Swimmer Almost Drowns and Describes his Near-Death Experience.](#)

A swimmer lost his strength and describes his near-death experience when he almost drowned in the middle of a lake.

[A Women Describes her Near-Death Experience, and Watching from a Distance the Efforts by Nurses to Revive her.](#)

A women with heart trouble is able to describe in precise detail both leaving the physical body, and the efforts by nurses to revive her while she was out of her body during a near-death experience.

ALL ADITIONS FOR THIS SECTION:

Reductionist Arguments Explaining Near-Death Experiences

Providing a scientific explanation for the phenomenon of near-death experience has been a difficult challenge for scientists ever since data in the form of NDE testimonials started

appearing in the mid 1970s. Some of the scientific arguments against the validity of NDEs (i.e., that they are only hallucinations) are also applicable to out-of-body experiences in general since out-of-body experiences are an important component of most NDEs.

When examining the Near-death experience, we might first ask the question, "Why did the NDE concept emerge when it did?"

One explanation is that prior to the 1970s, ambulances were little more than transport services whose personnel had little knowledge of emergency medicine. The result of this was that most serious injuries resulted in the death of patients before they reached the hospital or shortly thereafter. The medical art of resuscitation was in its infancy, and the well known role of the Emergency Medical Technician did not yet exist. Thus, few patients came back to describe their near-death experiences. The large amounts of data necessary to develop the NDE concept probably came into being as a result of improvements in emergency medicine.

As NDEs became better known, psychologists, physiologists, and neurologists began looking for ways to account for NDEs using physical and medical explanations. Reducing complex psychological phenomena to simpler material laws and processes is a primary occupation of scientists. The goal is to explain away the supernatural, and reduce it to physical causes such as brain chemistry (neural noise, hypoxia, etc.), psychological states (wish fulfillment or reliving the birth trauma), and sociological factors (religious fantasies based on social conditioning). The scientist's refusal to accept supernatural explanations for natural phenomena has in general been very advantageous for society, and resulted in many of the advances in material comfort that we see today. Their skepticism is therefore something to be praised and makes a valuable contribution to the world we live in.

However, when it comes to investigating the events and experiences which occur on the borders of life and death, their standard assumptions and methodologies become somewhat problematic. As with scientific attempts to describe the origins and fundamental makeup of matter, seemingly implausible or contradictory claims lead to questioning the basic premises of science when investigating borderline or liminal areas. Such areas of investigation as Near-death experience or subatomic matter seem to defy the clear explanations and rational analysis that are so fruitful in the other more common domains of scientific inquiry.

Because NDEs contain so many elements, a number of different complementary explanations are needed to account for this complexity. But in most cases, each explanation focuses on only one element of the NDE and ignores the others. Such explanations use the *divide and conquer* approach to weaken the overall NDE concept by reducing one of its component parts to physical causes.

Here are some common explanations for the elements of NDEs followed by some reasons why these explanations seem implausible or inadequate. The first set of explanations are physiological or medical explanations, and the second set are psychological explanations.

Physiological or Medical Explanations for NDEs

The NDE euphoria is caused by hypoxia (lack of oxygen to the brain)

The euphoria associated with an NDE is said to come from lack of oxygen to the brain. Such euphoria is identical with the pleasant sensation we experience sometimes when fainting. The most common

reason that this occurs is a medical situation known as *orthostatic hypotension*. Here, a sudden change in the position of the body (such as getting out of bed too quickly) causes dizziness or fainting due to a lowering of blood pressure in the brain.

However, the euphoria associated with fainting usually lasts at most a few seconds before leading to complete loss of consciousness. NDE victims many times describe a kind of euphoria of "being in a quiet and peaceful space" initially after leaving the body. However, this euphoria usually lasts for longer periods, and does not lead to unconsciousness. Such experience is usually followed by the "tunnel experience" or observing the events occurring around the body in what many times appears to last a period of minutes.

The other type of euphoria associated with NDEs is associated with the "being of light" and it also appears to last up to several minutes, and does not lead to unconsciousness. Instead, it leads to the "past life review". In both cases, the NDE euphoria experience differs in both duration and in what follows from the normal experience of hypoxia.

The question also arises as to why most people who have a temporary lack of oxygen to the brain as in the case of those who faint from an intense experience of horror, pain, or fear (neurogenic shock) do not experience NDEs. **Shock or the lack of perfusion of oxygen to the brain is very common in many medical situations but is not associated with NDE-like experience at all.** For instance, patients who sustain a great deal of blood loss but do not stop breathing also have brains that are starved for oxygen. NDEs are not associated with such situations. It is only when the heart stops beating and breathing stops and the body appears to be dead that NDEs occur. This simple observation calls the hypoxia-related theories into question.

Finally, the experience of fainting (in my own experience) is a state where normal perception (sight, balance, vision) is blurred and a floating sensation overtakes the fainting person. The person usually blacks out and falls to the ground as the experience occurs. The detailed analysis, memory, and clarity of perception that occurs during most NDEs seems to be very much at odds with this blurred state which borders on unconsciousness.

The NDE euphoria is caused by the of secretion of endorphins (natural analgesic or pain-relieving chemicals secreted by the body during physical trauma)

Euphoria which is traceable to the secretion of endorphins is an unusual explanation, because at least some endorphins appear to be "local anesthetics", and not systemic ones. They are associated with specific trauma local to the injured part of the body. However, if they were released in sufficient quantity and get into the bloodstream to affect the entire body, they could lead to an anesthetic high which might be responsible for the NDE's euphoria. However, as explained previously, euphoria is only one of many elements of an NDE. Explaining one component of the NDE is a long way from explaining the entire NDE.

Also, many forms of injury which might result in death (drowning or taking an overdose of drugs, for instance) are not associated with specific injuries that would be likely to release endorphins because they are not associated with trauma. Yet NDEs are associated with such medical events. This seems to indicate that endorphins are not the sole cause of euphoria in NDEs. Again, this simple observation seems to call all the endorphin-related arguments into question.

The NDE tunnel vision is caused by hypoxia (lack of oxygen to the brain)

Jet fighter pilots experience "tunnel vision" as they gradually lose consciousness as a result of blood draining from their brains because of the extreme gravity forces generated during flight. Their peripheral vision darkens and blurs while the circle of vision becomes smaller as the pilot nears unconsciousness. However, the pilot still perceives the material world during this experience. The central area of vision that remains still shows the cockpit gauges and the horizon.

The person having an NDE, however, perceives light at the end of a tunnel, not material reality. The experiences have in common that the individual has a circular visual field, but they differ both in what the visual field contains (image versus light), and how the visual field changes. While the jet pilot gradually sees the visual field decrease in size to a smaller and smaller circle, the NDE experiences described by those who have had the experience do not mention this gradual narrowing over time. Instead, the field starts out as a pinpoint or small circle, which may or may not increase in size during the "tunnel experience". It generally does not decrease in size. In some cases, the light at the end of the tunnel gradually grows to engulf the individual as he or she nears the end of the tunnel. The tunnel experienced during an NDE is usually 3-dimensional and surrounds the individual while the pilot experiences a narrowing of the visual field but not a "tunnel".

Thus the analogy comparing the tunnel-vision caused by hypoxia, and the NDE tunnel falls short. There are more differences than similarities in comparing the two kinds of tunnel experiences.

The "neural noise" concept is another theory which claims to explain the NDE tunnel experience

Noise (neural or otherwise) is by its nature random, and contains no usable information. "Noise" is how one scientist-researcher explains the experience of the NDE tunnel. Whether the tunnel is composed of sound with a circular light in the distance, or is just a black vibrating corridor in space, the tunnel experience is reduced to random noise produced by a faltering nervous system.

What is unusual, however, is that this tunnel leads somewhere. It leads to another space, or a being of light, or a talk with dead relatives.

The "neural noise" raises similar questions to the hypoxia theory when it tries to explain the tunnel experience.

We may ask the question why the random noise of a dysfunctional nervous system does not lead to complete unconsciousness? Instead, it seems to lead to a different kind of consciousness during the NDE.

If the nervous system is so damaged as to bring about disorientation and random perceptions of a tunnel of light, why is such degraded experience followed by complex detailed past-life reviews and meaningful coherent conversations with beings of light? Why is this noise so symptomatic of a nervous system in crisis many times followed by a dramatic improvement in the patient's mental condition?

Such dramatic improvements in the brain's condition seem unlikely after such a shock yet they happen repeatedly. The failure to answer such questions casts considerable doubt on the "neural noise" theory.

Also, "noise" is by its nature random which means it does not follow any prescribed pattern. The tunnel experience presents a repeating and very definite pattern which means that the term "noise" is not well chosen.

Psychological Explanations for NDEs

NDEs are religious hallucinations caused by Freudian wish-fulfillment fantasies (Freud thought these infantile longings were the basis for all religious experience)

The general notion that all elements of NDEs (and all religious visions) are simply hallucinations is pervasive among psychologists. One common theory is that religious hallucinations are especially likely to occur in adults who are familiar with religious views of heaven. They are more likely to project these views into a dream state or fantasy during an NDE.

Freud said that wish-fulfillment fantasies and dreams were common in people, and religious experience could be reduced to such fantasies in less functional adults. These individuals could not satisfy their desires in the real world and so retreated into an infantile world of fantasy where religion promised them eternal happiness. His theories are defined in his book titled *The Future of an Illusion*.

The major problem with the infantile fantasy approach is that NDEs hardly resemble notions of Christian or Jewish heaven. Saint Peter, Christ, Moses, pearly gates, harp music, and angels with wings are entirely absent (with the exception of a very few who believe that the being of light is Christ or another religious figure in spite of the fact that this being possesses none of the appropriate physical attributes). The NDE might be more appropriate for a believer in Vedanta (a philosophical form of Hinduism) with its emphasis on spiritual light. However, attempts to present NDEs as projections of a Christian or Jewish heaven seem a fruitless endeavor.

We will note that Freud viewed all mystical experience as regressive and infantile, and thus reduced one of the highest goals of religious mankind to the longings of a child retreating into a fantasy world in an attempt to escape the painful adult world.

The NDE's euphoria is based on a birth memory of peace and satisfaction of the fetus in the womb (Romain Rolland believed that euphoric feelings associated with religious experience could be traced to the "oceanic feeling" of the experience of the fetus in the womb. NDEs contain such euphoria and the memory of womb consciousness may be the source of this euphoria).

A theory related to Freud's psychological theory states that the blissful component of the NDE is explained by a memory (as opposed to a fantasy) of the happiness and peace of the "oceanic feeling" experienced by the fetus floating in the womb prior to birth. Romain Rolland, a contemporary of Freud, believed that this memory accounted for the joyous sense of oneness with the universe experienced by mystics.

We will note here that there is some evidence to show that the womb is anything but a silent place. Any pregnant women with a stethoscope can listen and conclude for herself that though the womb may be ocean-like, it is certainly not a silent ocean. The notion that peace and quiet go together and depend on each other does not seem to be supported by the sensory environment of the fetus in the womb. The idea that the womb was peaceful seems to have been based largely on the fact that the fetus had all of its desires met through the sustenance supplied by the umbilical chord, while remaining warm and secure in the womb. But it is an open question whether being without desire is truly a state of happiness. The act of becoming satisfied after being hungry or in need may bring a temporary state of happiness but being continuously satisfied may be described more accurately as a state of peace or detachment rather than the joy associated with an NDE.

As for mystical oneness being associated with a memory of the womb, very few NDEs involve this complete feeling of mystical transcendence even though many NDEs contain lesser feelings of happiness and joy. We will therefore not attempt to account for mystical phenomena in our discussion of NDEs.

The "tunnel experience" during NDEs is caused by the re-experience of the birth trauma (the tunnel is the birth canal, the light at the end is the external world, and the doctor is the being of light)

Carl Sagan's theory of reliving the birth trauma seems false based on even the most naive analysis. A child going through the birth canal would be completely blind with his or her eyes pressed against the vagina during the entire birth process. Only when the head emerged would the child see anything at all. The "light at the end of the tunnel" experience during the NDE would not exist for such a child during childbirth. The tunnel is sometimes described as a rocking and shaking corridor through which the individual moves during an NDE, but the individual is said to fly at great speed through such a space. The child in the birth canal moves or slides extremely slowly and under extreme pressure. The birth trauma memory analogy is very tenuous.

Sagan goes further by explaining that the being of light is a doctor or nurse which attends the birth and first holds the child when it is born. Reading descriptions of this being of light and equating him with a doctor or midwife is quite difficult to imagine.

Drugs as an Explanation for NDEs

The web page <http://www.skeptdic.com/nde.html> repeats a common theme that if a drug is capable of producing some of the elements of an NDE, the NDE must be the direct result of changes in brain chemistry caused by the drug. The web page states:

According to Dr. Karl Jansen, ketamine can reproduce all the main features of the NDE, including travel through a dark tunnel into the light, the feeling that one is dead, communing with God, hallucinations, out-of-body experiences, strange noises, etc. This does not prove that there is no life after death, but it does prove that an NDE is not proof of an afterlife.

The previous sentence is a very strong statement and is also highly dubious.

For instance, the history of people claiming that they communed or talked with God, beings of light, or non-physical entities is vast and plays a large role in many of the world's religions. Mediums and Shamans have talked to disembodied entities for centuries, and have been an

important part of cultures from ancient Greece to Tibet to modern day America (with its interest in such religions as Theosophy, Scientology, and the Spiritualist movements). Many Shamans have used drugs to enhance their vision. Dr. Jansen's claim that he knows that none of the people under the influence of ketamine are talking to such entities has no basis in fact. His belief that such claims are obviously false reveals more about his own presuppositions about the way the world works than it does about what is actually happening with his subjects. Dr. Jansen has softened his claim about the unreality of drug-related experience over the years, but his earlier position is still a popular one in and out of the scientific community.

Note that the above statement does not say that all or even some of these experiences occur to one individual or that those that do occur appear in a prescribed sequence as often happens in an NDE. It only says that at least one of the above experiences can occur to a single individual under the influence of the drug. Ketamine certainly does not cause NDEs to occur though it appears to sometimes cause the dissociation where the mind separates from the body in a way that appears similar to what occurs in many NDEs.

It also does not talk about the content of the hallucinations under ketamine influence. Why is it that during NDEs, such "hallucinations" consist of swimmers seeing themselves drowning. Why do people with allergic reactions in their home or children hit by cars while riding bicycles see themselves flying through space following ambulances to emergency rooms? Why do people in hospitals repeatedly watch themselves being given CPR (See: [Near-Death Experience](#) for detained examples)?

The scientific answer to such questions brings us back to the projection of fantasy worlds and social conditioning arguments but, as stated earlier, if the mind is so good at creating hallucinations of accident scenes, hospital rooms, and operating room procedures, why is the same mind so bad at creating hallucinations of God the Father, angels, Saint Peter, Moses, and heaven?

The fact that a specific drug can cause "hallucinations" is not a new or unusual discovery. Therefore, the importance of ketamine research depends on the quality and contents of the hallucinations and their similarity to the NDE experience if they are to help researchers understand near-death experience better.

Without precise statistics, it is difficult to know the contents of the hallucinations of patients under ketamine influence but I suspect that their subject matter does not mimic the complex, detailed, and highly structured kinds of out-of-body experiences of people who have NDEs. Dr. Jansen, so far as I am aware, does not claim that they do this either.

Dr. Jansen does acknowledge some of the limitations in the present research on ketamine:

Unfortunately, the study in which persons who have had NDE's are given ketamine and asked to compare the two experiences has yet to be carried out, although the psychological effects of ketamine have been well documented in numerous clinical studies by anaesthetists (see Domino, 1992). Information in the area of ketamine and NDE's remains largely anecdotal, and some of these references are necessarily to secondary sources. (Reference: <http://leda.lycaenum.org/?ID=9260>)

The primary objection to Dr. Jansen's claim is that a drug capable producing such a wide variety of "side-effects" is probably not the primary cause of such effects but is more likely an ingredient in

opening up a huge area of experience which is difficult to classify. The kinds of experience that results from such a drug appear to be more dependent on personality differences of the people taking the drug than on the drug itself. Similarly, trying to reduce the enormous range of LSD experience to simple categories like "psychotomimetic" (imitating psychosis) provides little insight into the effect of the drug because some people become "psychotic" while others remain lucid and rational under LSD influence. One stimulus (a drug such as LSD or ketamine) cannot be accurately said to "cause" dozens (and even hundreds) of different complex psychological effects which vary greatly from individual to individual.

Dr. Jansen's claims are nothing new. LSD experience can produce all the experiences (and a great many more) that are on his list for ketamine. Experimenting with a different drug and repeating similar claims about a range of experience associated with it does not in itself provide new information.

The above quote from skeptic.com is a good illustration of this kind of false reasoning which attempts to account for myriad effects which vary tremendously from individual to individual with a single drug stimulus.

Aldous Huxley's claims that certain drugs open the "doors of perception" thus removing the brain's normal filtering of perception is relevant here. The fact that certain drugs in certain individuals in certain situations permit expanded awareness (or psychotic episodes for that matter) does not mean that they are the primary cause of such awareness or episodes. They may simply remove the barriers to such experience which are normally present.

A similar approach postulates that the human unconscious is opened and made available to the conscious mind by the use of such drugs. Drugs such as ketamine and LSD merely provide access to huge areas of the mind that are normally unconscious rather than mechanically causing illusory perceptions to occur to the individual by altering brain chemistry. Stanislov Grof, the well-known LSD researcher, describes these areas as the "Realms of the Human Unconscious".

The Fundamental Incompatibility - A Tortured Body and an Ecstatic Spirit

The basic quality of consciousness usually described during NDEs is quietness, peacefulness, clarity, happiness, and wonder, accompanied by excellent memory. A crisis of the nervous system should be accompanied by confusion, disorientation, impaired consciousness, and vague or nonexistent memory. The many positive elements described during NDEs should not exist if the brain is in such a degraded state, *if NDEs are only a by-product of brain states*. Experiences of life-threatening sickness, weakness, shock, and trauma generally have no such positive elements associated with them. Shock or the lack of perfusion of oxygen to the brain is closely associated with a terrible "feeling of impending doom" in the literature. In psychological terms, trauma, danger, and injury may cause the individual to react strongly. These reactions are associated with adrenaline and the "fight or flight" reflex. They ready the individual for dynamic action and movement to increase the probability of survival in dangerous situations. This adrenaline-induced reaction of nervousness and high arousal is also inconsistent with the positive emotions of an NDE.

At bottom, it is quite well known that very sick or injured people do not feel at all well. It might therefore follow that the most profound elements of NDEs are not the result of the

sickness or injury but instead arise from a set of causes unrelated to the state of the physical body. NDEs are very positive and joyous even when the physical body and brain are in their very worst condition.

Science and the Necessity of Explaining the NDE Phenomenon

The fact that many scientists take many of the explanations listed above seriously seems to indicate that they are in a "holding pattern" waiting for a better explanation to emerge. In the mean time, they feel the need to say something about the NDE phenomena, and the above theories represent their best efforts to date.

The strong desire of scientists to explain out-of-body experience in scientific terms is best illustrated in a report that received world wide interest in and out of the scientific community.

Olaf Blanke, a neurologist at the Geneva University Hospital in Switzerland, made the "discovery" while performing surgery. He stimulated the right angular gyrus, a small region in the brain's right hemisphere, of a woman and triggered out-of-body experiences. The patient told doctors, "I see myself lying in bed, from above, but I only see my legs and lower trunk." Subsequent zaps with the electrodes were reported to replicate the effect.

Normally, for a scientific experiment to be worthy of mention, it would require rigorous design and execution followed by a careful analysis of the results. In most cases, it would need to be performed on a number of patients, and a double blind approach would be taken that involved patients who would be given placebo drugs or stimuli. This makes sure the results were not spurious and attributable to something other than the specific intended stimulus of researchers.

In Dr. Blanke's case, we have a situation where one or more doctors interacting with a single patient inadvertently applied a stimulus (stimulation by a electrode to the brain) and "caused" an out-of-body experience. The patient was also prone to "a brain disorder that causes seizures", and therefore not an ideal subject for such an experiment. The credibility of the patient was not questioned, and it appears that an earlier milder stimulus did not cause an OBE but only a change in body image where the body image was distorted in the patient's view (the arm and legs were first shortened and later appeared to be flying up towards the patient's head). Finally, having read many out-of-body experience descriptions myself, I have never read about one where only half the person's body (the lower half in this case) appeared. The patient's perception seems quite confused and distorted when compared with more common out-of-body experiences where the person sees his or her entire body.

Here, we have only this untested hypothesis appearing as the primary subject of articles in scientific journals. The fact that such a haphazard event was treated as science and given so much media and scientific attention shows how heavily invested the scientific community is in their reductionist worldview.

A Child's Description of a Powerful Near-Death Experience.

From: *The Light Beyond*

Raymond Moody M.D., *The Light Beyond*, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988), pps. 49-50

I don't remember being hit but suddenly I was looking down at myself. I saw my body under the bike and my leg was broken and bleeding ...

An ambulance came. I wondered why people were worried because I was fine. ... The ambulance drove off and I tried to follow it. I was above the ambulance following it. I thought I was dead. I looked around and then I was in a tunnel with a bright light at the end. The tunnel seemed to go up and up. I came out on the other side of the tunnel.

There were a lot of people in the light but I didn't know any of them. I told them about my accident and they said I had to go back. They said it wasn't my time to die yet so I had to go back to my father and mother and sister.

I was in the light for a long time. It seemed like a long time. I felt everyone loved me there. Everyone was happy. I felt that the light was God. The tunnel whirled up towards the light like a whirlpool. I didn't know why I was in the tunnel or where I was going. I wanted to get to that light. When I was in the light, I didn't want to go back. I almost forgot my body.

When I was going up in the tunnel, two people were helping me. I saw them as they got out into the light. They were with me the whole way.

Then they told me I had to go back. I went back through the tunnel where I ended up back in the hospital where two doctors were working on me.

Another Young Child's Description of a Near-Death Experience.

From: *The Light Beyond*

Raymond Moody M.D., *The Light Beyond*, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988), pps. 48-49

I heard them say my heart had stopped but I was up on the ceiling watching. I could see everything from up there. ... I went out in the hall and I saw my mother crying. I asked her why she was crying but she couldn't hear me. The doctors thought I was dead.

Then a pretty lady came up and helped me because she knew I was scared. We went through this tunnel and went into heaven. ... The tunnel I went through was long and very dark. I went through it real fast. There was light at the end. When we saw the light I was very happy. I wanted to go back for a long time. I still want to go back to that light when I die. ... The light was very bright.

Entering into the Sacred Light during a Near-Death Experience.

From: A Talk on Her Near-Death Experience
By Renee Paraslow

Baha'i Faith Educational Series Video Tape
Reno, Nevada 1989

This is the full text of a near-death experience which happened to Renee Paraslow as a teenager. She had the experience when she lost consciousness after she had an allergic reaction to some food that she ate.

It is unusual because in addition to containing many of the classical elements of an NDE, it also contains mystical elements normally not associated with near-death experience - an encounter with and immersion into spiritual light.

After Renee fell unconscious, her mother's first thought was to put her in the car and bring her to the hospital. But since Renee was not breathing, she decided to lay her on the sidewalk and wait for an ambulance to arrive. A crowd then gathered around Renee's swollen body.

Renee describes her experience:

I only became aware when I heard the very loud sound of the fire engines arriving... I heard my best friend from elementary school calling to me. She was calling, "Renee, don't die, don't die Renee".

And I heard this and it seemed as if it was in a foreign language to me, and I finally computed the meaning of this and I realized that my life was in danger, and I had an obligation to fight for my life because of my mother and my friend, because she had such terror in her voice that it cut through to my heart and I tried to fight for my life, but the battle became overwhelming.

At this point I just surrendered myself, my soul, to the power that brings us all into existence and that gives us all life, knowing that this was the source of all life and the way of all things, and I surrendered to that and I entered a state of peacefulness...

Then, like that (clapping her hands) I became like a ball of light or energy in the midst of this crowd that was circling the body. I became massively aware, unlike any awareness I had had during physical existence, because I was aware really not of myself. I was aware of everyone around me. I was aware of my mother and my neighbors, and my friends and the firemen and what they were thinking and what they were feeling and what they were hoping and what they were praying. This was such a pummeling input of emotion and information that I was at once overwhelmed and confused, and rather disoriented.

I followed their attention to something on the sidewalk and I looked at this body on the sidewalk, and I looked at the curve of the wrist bone, and I recognized that and I remember looking at it and thinking "that looks so much like my wrist bone". And then I became aware that that thing on the sidewalk, that thing that suddenly became a piece of meat to me, was what I had identified as myself before, and I had no connection with this thing on the sidewalk other than that I had been with it for a very long time, but it had nothing to do with me because suddenly, I was more a person than I had ever been; I was more conscious than I could ever be; I was free of the limitations of being a physical being. I looked at this body and I was repulsed with the grief and the tumult around it and by the very idea that I had ever considered something physical to be my reality, to be a human reality.

And with that (taps the table) again like this, I bumped way up, up above some light wires and from that point I could watch everyone beneath me, but I was not as closely associated with them so I was completely feeling everything they were feeling. And I watched my mother and a boy come out of the house up the hill that I could not have seen physically, and I watched the fireman. And I was very sad for my mother; I was very sad for my friend who kept calling me, and I was very said for the child who had come out of the house, and I was very sad that he would think this was death...

And so my concern was for them and I spent my time observing them and calling to them, calling to them that everything was as it should be, that everything was fine, that I was free, that it was wonderful; that I loved them and that they loved me and that that bond, unlike physical bonds, would never be destroyed...

I tried to communicate this to them over and over again, and I realized that I had no mouth, I had no body, that they could not hear what I was saying to them, and that I would have to leave them in the same hands I had left myself in the process of dying.

And with that I turned away, just sort of like a ball, just turned away. My attention turned away lovingly but knowing that there was nothing I could do, I turned away from them, and began to pull up, and became aware, it was as if I were a camera on a space ship or something, I became aware of our place, my particular little street and then my particular little town, and I kept pulling up and pulling up and pulling up to a point where I could observe the whole earth and this was wonderful!

Because the earth was alive and the earth was singing, and it was singing a single song, and in that song everyone had a voice. Every human being had a very important note to add to this precious song of the earth. It was a song of love and every living being had something to add to the song of earth, and every one of these essences was very much connected. I was seeing it not like we see normally. I was seeing it both from a macroscopic (from the point of view of the spaceship) and from a microscopic vantage point. [It was] microscopic in that I could see that amoeba in the ocean was connected to the song of the heart of all humanity, and that this world was responding to the song in our hearts in a miraculous and unified, and beautiful way. And I too began to sing I was so overcome with joy. It wasn't a song obviously with the mouth. I had no mouth. I had no body. I simply was. But I became a part of that song and very full of joy that I could have something to contribute to this sacred beauty of our earth, and our planet and of all people.

I became very aware that we as people have a unique influence on the world even if we are not actively doing something. We influence this planet by our state of being. We influence this planet very positively if we are filled with love and respect for others or negatively if our hearts are negative.

At this point I became aware that there was a light calling me from somewhere else, and I entered what people speak of as the tunnel. I will speak of it as that although I did not quite perceive it as a tunnel. It was a transition place where I became aware of other beings who seemed to be rather disoriented, rather confused and lost and some of these beings were moving through to their home. I simply wanted to go home.

I moved through this place and I became aware that I was not moving like we move physically. When we move physically we have an intent, we have a goal, and we move step by step to that goal.

But what moved me through this place where I was aware of people who were not moving through and were somewhat confused, what moved me through this place was love. It was the love of God, and the love all things sacred and all things beautiful and all things just, and I could go on and on and on but this was what propelled me on was my connection and my affection for God.

As I came to the end of this place, I wondered if I would be alone, and just like that I was with, I was one with my uncle, just like we were two lights that were put together. [We were] one red and one blue that made purple light, and I was aware of things about him that I had never been aware of in life. I didn't spend much time with him and I didn't know him well. He lived in the south and I lived in California

But it was a very joyful reunion and I became aware that he was concerned that I was there because he communicated to me instantaneously that my mother could not stand the loss of a child, and he was confused, and yet he knew that everything was as it should be.

The Light

From that point I became very attracted to the light and this attraction was like an irresistible magnet... I loved that light I loved what was pulling me home. I moved past my uncle into what I can best define as a sea of light. It was as if every atom in the universe had been electrified with color and light and sound, but more that with totally unconditional love. And it was a welcoming to me, and I dove into this ocean with each moment with each movement, feeling more rapture and more joy and more just absolutely unspeakable love.

As I moved through this sea, I became aware I was moving to the center of the sea of light which I perceived to be, how could I say this, as if you were an gnat and you were flying into the sun, and that is the perspective that I had for this sea of light.

And then in a instant, again like a clap, I entered into this light and I became one with this light, and of this light, and no longer an individual, no longer a person, but simply a part of this light. I became like the phoenix. I was destroyed, and it was the most blissful, the most excruciatingly beautiful moment that I could imagine. It seemed to me to be the apex of all existence to get to the point where one was no more. One simply was a part of this light.

After being in this state for what seemed to be a time beyond time, I was gathered again together like sands from the shore as an individual and I was called to recount for my deeds.

Renee at this point describes a number of things she was shown such as a group of individuals on the earth she referred to as "the just" who were working towards the unity of mankind instead of focusing on divisions like many countries and religions do. She describes seeing groups of individuals she "knew as well as here own parents" who were living and working in other non-physical worlds.

She then describes an encounter with "a being of light" who showed her various elements of her past past life and reviewed them with her. She talks in general terms about how little acts

of kindness were far and away more important than the activities we usually give so much value to in normal life. She describes how the most positive thing she did was to give special attention to a not so lovable boy at a summer camp so that he would know he was loved. During the review, she said this act of kindness was more important from her viewpoint of expanded awareness than if she had been president of the United States, or the queen of England.

After the life review, the being of light told her "it was not time" for her to enter that world. She then described returning to her physical body:

I was catapulted back down what I did perceive to be a tunnel this time, down a rainbow tunnel of light and sound and vibrational frequency of love and with a terrible hard crash, I became aware of the scene I had left earlier - the fire trucks, and now an ambulance had arrived, and there were men who were picking up the body and loading it into the ambulance. And I was in a state of complete grief. I felt that I had become Eve and was cast out of the garden of Eden. As I was descending down this tunnel, my heart was already attached to my home beyond. And I was begging not to leave. And I crashed down into this plane of existence and was suddenly confused by time and space. It was as if I had never existed physically.

And I was suddenly disoriented. And my concern was for my mother, because she was by herself and she was losing a sixteen year old daughter, and she knew that this was happening because the ambulance attendant looked at the driver in front and said "DOA, DOA" which means of course dead on arrival, and the driver turned off the siren and slowed down the ambulance. Before, he had been driving in a very reckless manner. We were coming out of the mountains. And as he did that, my concern was for the pain of my mother. I simple wanted to comfort her, to wrap my soul around her. And to assuage the loss of a daughter, the loss of a child, and found myself simply praying for her.

I followed the ambulance to the hospital and I watched as the body was unloaded, and my mother followed the gurney into the emergency room. And I watched as the first doctor went to work on me. I wasn't particularly interested in the first doctor because the first doctor had that day been through motorcycle accidents coming out of the mountains, and he had been through a very long day, and he was not concerned with someone who had been brought in dead on arrival. And he had no connection with me, he didn't care, he had no affection. So I had no interest in watching what he did because my interest was based on affection and love.

And I then left the emergency room and was above my mother and was above some friends who had followed them into the other room. And I again tried to communicate with them. I tried to let them know that this was a very joyous occasion and that I was dead on arrival

and hopefully all would go well and they would never be able to revive me. And I was going to be dead now. And death had become life to me. Death was not something to be frightened of but something to look forward to.

What happened then was the first doctor pronounced me dead and was sending the body off to the morgue, when my own personal physician who was a country doctor and a very gruff man stormed into the emergency room in a tuxedo with his black bag. And he looked at the nurse on the phone who was calling the morgue, and looked at the doctor who was washing his hands, and looked at the [covered] body and said, "what the hell happened here?" And he said, " where is the patient?"

They said she was dead on arrival and he said, "the hell she was". And he proceeded to scream at the other nurse who was sort of standing off in the corner "I want injections of adrenaline, and bring them to me immediately and come over here and assist me", and he began to go to work on the body. He began to beat on the chest and began to shock. I was simply terrified by this turn of events and disgusted that they would treat a body so brutally. All of a sudden I sort of became protective towards my body, even though I wanted nothing to do with it, I began to be protective. They could at least be nice about it.

But they were beating on the chest and shocking the body, and I was up in the corner of the emergency room accompanied by other essences who were keeping me contained in that emergency room. And this seemed to go on for a very long time until my doctor stopped and asked if there was a cardiologist on duty. And they said there was no cardiologist on duty, and I [telepathically] heard-felt my doctor thinking about injecting my heart with adrenaline, and this was something I had never heard of before - it seemed a barbaric and brutal and appalling thing to do, and I was just repulsed by the very idea. But there was no cardiologist and my doctor was swearing at the nurses that that should happen and decided that they would try one more time - that they would give up to six shots of adrenaline.

Now the other doctor started arguing with my doctor that this was a dangerous thing to do - to try and bring me back now because there could be brain damage, and I was brought in dead on arrival and it was best not to do that and that he could do terrible damage trying to revive me. And my doctor looked at him and said, "what the hell, she can't be any worse off than she is already".

Renee goes on to describe how she did finally return to her body as a result of her doctor's last effort to revive her. She also told of facing depression and had difficulty adapting to the physical world after the experience. The medical professionals she talked to did not know

how to deal with her experience, and eventually said her experience was a religious one and they were not qualified to give advice in that area.

Meeting a "being of light" During a Near-Death Experience.

From: *Life After Life*

Raymond Moody, Jr. M.D., *Life After Life*, (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1976), pps 63, 64

I knew I was dying and that there was nothing I could do about it, because no one could hear me I was out of my body, there's no doubt about it, because I could see my own body there on the operating room table. My soul was out! All this made me feel very bad at first, but then, this really bright light came. It did seem that it was a little dim at first, but then it was this huge beam. It was just a tremendous amount of light, nothing like a big bright flashlight, it was just too much light. An it gave off heat to me; I felt a warm sensation.

It was a bright yellowish white - more white. It was tremendously bright; I just can't describe it. It seemed that it covered everything, yet it didn't prevent me from seeing [sic] everything around me - the operating room, the doctors and nurses, everything. I could see clearly, and it wasn't blinding.

At first, when the light came, I wasn't sure what was happening, but then, it asked, it kind of asked me if I was ready to die. It was like talking to a person but a person wasn't there. The light's what was talking to me, but in a *voice*.

Now I think that the voice that was talking to me actually realized that I wasn't ready to die. You know, it was just kind of testing me more than anything else. Yet, from the moment the light spoke to me, I felt really good - secure and loved. The love that came from it is just unimaginable, indescribable. It was a fun person to be with! And it had a sense of humor, too - definitely!

A Swimmer Almost Drowns and Describes his Near-Death Experience.

From: *Life After Life*

Raymond Moody, Jr. M.D., *Life After Life*, (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1976)

All of a sudden I felt as though I was away from my body, away from everybody in a space by myself. I saw my body in the water about 3 or 4 feet away bobbing up and down. I viewed

my body from the back and slightly above the right side. I still felt as though I had an entire body even while outside the body. I had an airy feeling that's almost indescribable. I felt as light as a feather.

A Women Describes her Near-Death Experience, and Watching from a Distance the Efforts by Nurses to Revive her.

From: *Life After Life*

by Raymond Moody, Jr. M.D., 1975

I turned over and as I did I quit breathing and my heart stopped beating. I heard the nurses shout "code pink, code pink". As they were saying this, I could feel myself moving out of the body sliding down between the mattress and THROUGH the rail on the side of the bed. I started to rise slowly. I saw the nurses running into the room. I felt as though I was a piece of paper floating up to the ceiling. I watched them reviving me from up there. I heard the nurse say "Oh my God, she's gone", while another leaned down to give me resuscitation. I was looking at the back of her head as she did this. I'll never forget the way her hair looked, it was cut kind of short. Just then, I saw them roll this machine in there and they put the shocks on my chest. When they did, I saw my whole body just jump right off the bed, and I heard every bone in my body crack and pop. I thought "why are you going to such trouble, I'm just fine now."

SPIRITUAL NAVIGATION

Changing Course in the Spiritual Worlds

The methods of moving between states and navigating within the psychic and spiritual worlds vary enormously. Here the author hopes to provide a sampling of the various methods used to successfully change states while doing spiritual travel. Most of the following deal with altering lucid dream environments. This activity is a natural first step to overcoming the limitations of the dream state in preparation for more advanced forms of spiritual travel.

One of the classical ways of navigating is through the use of *mantra*. Repeating certain spiritual words has a way of directing the soul towards certain destinations. This is discussed in greater detail on the page titled [Surfing the Mantric Wave](#)

Visualization of specific images can have a similar effect. One practice illustrating such visualization is described briefly on the [Tibetan Dream Yoga](#) page. This page illustrates an Eastern method but the Christian traveler can as easily practice the visualizations from the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola or visualize images from Ezekiel's vision of heaven from the Old Testament.

One of the functions of a spiritual practice is to create these spiritually [charged symbols](#) (prayers, mantras, or religious imagery) so they can be used effectively to direct the soul towards spiritual states when the opportunity arises during spiritual travel. **Spiritual travel**

provides a unique means and opportunity to explore transcendent states of consciousness but it is the traveler's religious system that determines the spiritual destination or goal of spiritual travel.

The best way to navigate is to have a guide that knows the territory who will assist the traveler, but this is not always possible. However there are also advantages to discovering things for oneself, since it makes the traveler more independent and capable of standing on his or her own.

It is good idea to be open to accepting guidance and even to *mentally invite* helpers or guides who can assist you if you get into difficult situations while doing spiritual travel. Though such helpers may be unseen, that does not mean that they are not present and able to assist the spiritual traveler when called upon to do so.

Here are some simple methods that can be used to break out of or increase freedom in a lucid dream environment.

[Breaking Out of a Lucid Dream by Experimenting with Matter](#)

We normally believe that matter obeys certain laws, and breaking those laws is a means of breaking out of a common lucid dream state.

[Doing a Spiritual Practice During Spiritual Travel](#)

Simple spiritual practices such as mantra meditation can have dramatic effects when practiced during spiritual travel when the same practice will have little or no effect when done during normal meditation.

[Breaking Out of a Lucid Dream by Experimenting with Gravity](#)

Flying, while not an advanced spiritual state, can be one of the joyous and liberating aspects of spiritual travel for the beginner.

[Breaking Out of a Lucid Dream using the "Skipping" Method](#)

Skipping is the process of using mental expectations to change environments during spiritual travel.

ALL ADDITIONS FOR THIS SECTION:

Surfing the Mantric Wave

Mantras are a common method used to reach destinations during spiritual travel. Mantras in my limited experience are a somewhat advanced form of spiritual travel suited to those who are capable of traveling in a disembodied state (without bodily sensations or body image). Practicing mantras during spiritual travel has the effect of moving the soul through different inner spaces much like a surfer rides a wave. They provide a definite sense of continuous forward movement with the mantric vibration or current acting as the basis of propulsion. The author will attempt to describe elements of travel by mantra but as with most deeper experience, the words simply fail to convey the experience.

One curious thing about travel by mantra is that though the mantra is being silently chanted by a single voice (the practitioner's inner voice), the mantric sounds often seem "larger" and more all pervading than sounds a single voice could normally produce. Instead, they sound as if they are being intoned by a chorus of voices. This creates the sense that the traveler is not riding the mantric wave or current alone. The wave therefore seems more like a bus than a single passenger car with many beings riding together through a common environment experiencing the same scenery.

In my experience, mantric spaces usually have no horizon and as such are more like moving through an underwater environment than moving through a normal atmosphere. The spaces have different textures, densities, and emotional qualities which create varying background sensations that permeate the space. These qualities naturally also determine the sensations of those traveling through the space.

The visual component may also vary but a complex visual field of changing patterns and colored lines (sometimes in 3-D) is one class of imagery that is familiar to me.

The author has experimented with different mantras but the one that seemed to work best was the one that had been practiced for many hours in normal meditation. Much positive emotional and spiritual energy had been poured into this sound during meditation, and the mantra seemed to function like a battery storing the spiritual energy. As a [charged religious symbol](#), it therefore had the power to move me into and through radically altered states of consciousness when other less familiar mantras had much less effect when practiced while out of the body.

My intuitive sense is that those who are more familiar with disembodied states of light and energy use mantras the way we in the physical world use vehicles to take them to many destinations in the inner worlds. However, mantras are used to traverse dimensions in the psychic and spiritual worlds rather than streets and highways in the physical world. Many of these mantric roads are ancient pathways created by spiritual explorers eons ago.

Another function of mantras somewhat unrelated to spiritual travel is that mantras can link individuals with gurus, entities, and gods. The empowered mantra given to a disciple during a spiritual initiation when repeated can act much like dialing the number of a being in the inner worlds. The being may not always answer but the line is there, and communication can occur over the line once the link is established.

The question also arises as to what mantra to use in spiritual travel. In general, the mantra or prayer chosen needs to come from the spiritual tradition the practitioner follows. For those with a yogic orientation, using simple Sanskrit mantras (sometimes one syllable) is effective since they are sounds that are understood to originate in high spiritual planes, and will therefore draw the practitioner towards those points of origination. Names of deities or buddhas, or names of respected living or inner spiritual guides can also be used as mantras. This is especially true if the practitioners has an inner or outer relationship with one of these beings. Simple prayers such as the "prayer of the heart" from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, or phrases from Psalms or the Lord's Prayer can also be repeated, and they can function as mantras. Again these names or phrases will act as powerful symbols since they usually have very positive spiritual associations for a person practicing the religious tradition connected with these deities, guides, or prayers.

Once the person has even a little experience with riding these mantric waves, he or she is presented with a new way of being that is not easily forgotten. The method of using mantras to travel is an advanced form of spiritual travel since it requires considerable concentration. It is good to be able to experience this method of travel but the real challenge is to catch the wave, and then ride it long enough and with enough determination and skill to reach spiritual states of cosmic light and sound. This is the goal of the true spiritual traveler who by wisdom or by grace hopes to touch the infinite.

Travel by mantra is perhaps the best way to direct the soul toward specific destinations in the psychic and spiritual universes. The experience of travel by mantra also justifies using the term *spiritual travel* rather than more generic terms like meditation or contemplation. This is because the phrase spiritual travel is much more phenomenologically descriptive of the actual experience than these other two less specific terms.

As with all spiritual travel practices, it is important to emphasize that mantras should be used only for ethical purposes that further the practitioner's knowledge, or for helping and healing others.

Tibetan Dream Yoga

The tradition of Tibetan Dream Yoga described by Evans-Wentz in *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935) is a good example of a practice that uses conscious visualization of sacred images or symbols to bring about mystical states in dreams. Dream yoga is one of six subtypes of yoga elaborated by the Tibetan guru Marpa and passed down by his well-known disciple Milarepa.

The practice has a number of steps, which permit the individual to gradually gain increasing amounts of control in the dream state.

First, the individual must become lucid or wake up in the dream state.

Second, the dreamer must overcome all fear of the contents of the dream so there is the realization that nothing in the dream can cause harm. For instance, the lucid dreamer should put out fire with his hands and realize fire cannot burn him in the dream.

Next the dreamer should contemplate how all phenomena both in the dream and in waking life are similar because they change, and that life is illusory in both states because of this constant change. Both the objects in the dream and objects in the world in the Buddhist's worldview are therefore empty and have no substantial nature. This is the stage of contemplating the dream as *maya*, and equating this sense of maya with everyday experience in the external world. **

Fourth, the dreamer should realize he has control of the dream by changing big objects into small ones, heavy objects into light ones, and many objects into one object. He should also experiment with changing things into their opposites (i.e. fire into water).

After gaining control over objects and their transformations, the dreamer should realize that the dreamer's dream body is as insubstantial as the other objects in the dream. The dreamer should realize that he or she is not the dream body. While this realization is very difficult in

normal waking existence, presumably it is quite obtainable in the dream since the dreamer who has control over dream objects could, for instance, alter the body's shape or make the dream body disappear all together.

Finally, the images of deities (Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or Dakinis) should be visualized in the lucid dream state. These figures are frequently seen in Tibetan religious art (*thangkas*) and used in meditation. They are said to be linked to or resonate with the clear light of the Void. They can therefore serve as symbolic doorways to this mystical state of being (the Void or clear light). The dreamer is instructed to concentrate on these symbolic images without distraction or thinking about other things so that the revelatory side of these symbols will become manifest.

We will note here that some of the early practices of dream yoga where the yogi tests and alters the dream reality were done spontaneously by the author before being introduced to the formal practices of dream yoga. Some examples of the practices done are listed on the [Spiritual Navigation page](#).

*** Note: The notion that dreams and everyday experience are similar in nature is best understood by Westerners by examining the concept of "idealism". The philosophy of idealism says that all experience is delivered to the individual via the brain and nervous system, and is therefore a product of the mind. Idealism (better termed "ideaism") characterizes all sensation as indirect mental representations or "ideas" rather than direct experience of an external or objective world. Without the brain and nervous system, such experience would not exist. All experience, both ideas and sensations are therefore mental phenomena. In this way, everyday material experience is very much like dream experience..*

Charged Symbols

Paul Tillich, the 20th century Protestant theologian, defined a symbol as *something that points beyond itself*. Symbols are unique mental objects which have no fixed referents. They can be contrasted with signs which have fixed meanings. Symbols are described as layered, multi-valent, multi-dimensional, or multivocal (Victor Turner's term). Their personal meanings and interpretations evolve to reflect the evolution of the individual, and the meanings of cultural symbols that are shared evolve as the culture changes.

Symbols are complex because they have different meanings that change as they are explored. The figure of Christ has meant different things to different people at different times. For instance, Christ was characterized as a warrior during the crusades going into battle to defeat the unbelievers. In the early 20th century, he was characterized as a businessman and the perfect salesman and marketer, a union organizer and a friend of the working man during the rise of unions, and a strong athlete who could fast and control his desires through physical and mental discipline as preachers focused on the masculine virtues of Christ. Jesus is both the ideal capitalist and socialist depending on differing interpretations.

In the early medieval period, Christian Neoplatonists saw Christ as the *logos* or "divine mind". Here, God the Father was infinite being or awareness which supplied the light and power of creation. Jesus as logos was the set of archetypal patterns or templates that took this

power and created the "world soul" or *Anima Mundi* realm where living things such as plants, animals, and humans came into being. The Holy Spirit was God's presence that infused matter and living things. These three abstract entities were "personalized" by later Christians, and became the basis for the three persons of the trinity. For many early Christians, Christ symbolized the divine intellect and salvation was attained through wisdom rather than faith. This abstract and universally creative function of Christ differed greatly from the incarnate Christ who served as the ethical model for the path to salvation popular in more modern interpretations.

These examples all illustrate how broadly the symbol of Christ has been interpreted over time.

Symbolic statements such as "Christ is the Light of the World", "In the beginning was the Word", and the necessity of having faith the size of a mustard seed also have different possible meanings and interpretations. Literal interpretation of such statements renders them absurd, and metaphor is a dangerous slippery slope that threatens those who believe the Bible or other holy book must be literally true.

Symbols are dynamic as they grow and reinvent themselves.

Symbols can be looked at as having a spatial dimension. As one layer of meaning is peeled away or shed, another comes into view from behind the first one. Symbols also have a volume dimension. They are receptacles that "hold" meaning and power for the individual. The more power they hold, the more they become holy and a focus for prayer and contemplation. As they gain power, they also provide motivation and inspiration for religious individuals and groups.

A symbol is multivocal because it communicates different things depending on where the individual is on his or her spiritual journey. Symbols may be said to *speak to people* in much the same way that sacred scripture becomes like a living thing when religious people are able to enter into a kind of contemplative dialogue with the text.

Symbols also have a vitality dimension. Symbols are in a sense alive. When a symbol fails to hold power, it becomes dead or meaningless.

Religions can be looked at as systems of symbols. Whole cultures evolve as newer symbol systems replace older ones. No one believes in the Greek or Babylonian gods any more. They are part of dead symbol systems (and therefore dead religions). Many of the symbols from mainstream religions such as Christianity and Buddhism derive from religious narratives describing the activities of founders of these religions and their disciples. For instance, the life of Christ is turned into a set of symbols in the Catholic Church's stations of the cross, which distill the major events in the life of Christ into a set of fourteen images. The Buddha's life is also captured in a set of images documenting his adventures in some Tibetan Thangkas, and the incarnations of the god Vishnu appear in depictions of the "ten avatars" in Hinduism.

A **charged symbol** has power and is alive with meaning. Symbols may be charged spontaneously, and have power when first encountered. This often happens in religious conversion where an individual finds him or herself irresistibly attracted to a religious figure or symbol system, and converts to a new religion. Symbols may also become charged as an individual uses them in prayer and meditation, and directs attention and positive emotion

towards them as part of a spiritual discipline or search. Such charged symbols can be very valuable when the individual directs attention towards them during spiritual travel.

One extraordinary thing about spiritual travel is that religious people who adopt a spiritual practice involving contemplative prayer and meditation do not have to wait until death to perceive the power of the symbols that they employ in their practice. They can get glimpses of the value and power of these symbols here and now which can be very motivating and inspiring. Contemplating a *charged symbol* while in an out-of-body state can be much like stepping into a whirlwind of powerful forces. The individual is picked up and carried to mysterious and extraordinary states of consciousness with the symbol acting as the method of transport. The symbol can function as the key that opens the door to a sacred reality.

The Downside of Losing Symbolism

One trend seen in modern religion is the idea that there is one literal interpretation of scripture on which all reasonable people will agree. Passages from sacred texts are many times highly symbolic and multidimensional containing many possible interpretations. However, scriptures are being flattened and frozen into a single interpretation by authorities that know, for instance, what the Bible literally means. The other common levels of interpretation including the allegorical, ethical, and mystical interpretations are denied and suppressed.

The first result of such an approach is that the authority of preachers who claim to know the correct interpretation is vastly increased. The twin doctrines of literal interpretation and inerrancy (the Bible is one hundred percent true, perfect, and without error) give vast authority and credibility to those professionals who preach the true word. The individual believer's power is in equal measure lessened.

The second result of this concept of literal interpretation is that it leads to an over simplification of religion where only a short list of "fundamentals" are deemed important. This occurs because the same confidence that leads people to claim to know exactly what the Bible means also makes them certain that they know which parts are most important, which parts can be ignored, and what needs to be done to gain salvation. In this environment, simplified stripped down religion tends to become a formula. Here a personal relationship with the divine is reduced to uttering a prescribed set of phrases, which when spoken sincerely and correctly become a ticket to heaven. Salvation is achieved by employing a simple ritual formula.

When such formulas are treated like life preservers thrown to the drowning, they are grasped so tightly by the individual that they become an excuse for some to stop growing spiritually. The formula for salvation is repeated over and over again as if it were some sort of magic charm for luck and protection. Once the formula is accepted, the practice of religion becomes primarily the task of getting others to subscribe to and repeat this same formula. Thus we see the emphasis on evangelism.

Being certain about one's salvation because there is faith that sins are forgiven lays the foundation for a happy life and a joyous self-confidence. It is difficult to fault anyone who seeks such assurance in their spiritual life. The people who seek this kind of security and the church leaders who try to provide it are sincere and honest in their efforts to create a viable

religious tradition that can stand against the many challenges to religion posed by the modern world.

However, there is a hidden or dark side to such an approach. When one has the ultimate answer which is distilled in this simple formula, why continue to seek and ask questions? For some, spiritual growth or the process of sanctification becomes irrelevant and unnecessary. For others, when salvation is certain, religious practices can be put aside. Still for others, when forgiveness of sin is assured, ethics can be put aside, and this can be very dangerous. If all sin is forgiven, committing another sin is not such a bad thing.

This is especially true if the ultimate goal of the sin has a higher purpose. This "end justifies the means" type of morality has been responsible for much of the evil and suffering in the world because it sugar coats evil making it appear virtuous, and having some religious or idealistic goal. The more grandiose the goal, the greater the dishonesty and cruelty. Thus we have religious "stealth candidates" who lie about their true views running for political office and judges seeking court appointments that avoid answering questions that will give a true picture of who they are and what they think. We also have religious leaders making claims that Christianity is a religion of war and vengeance, who advocate torture of enemies while they claim to follow Christ who told them to "love their enemies". On a more subtle level, we have clearly biased religious authorities with limited educational backgrounds making dubious pronouncements on matters of history and science.

Certainly not everyone takes these approaches but many seem to be attracted to these fundamentalist traditions because of them. Modern religions that take the twin approaches of the certainty of salvation and of all sin being forgiven are seeing increased membership.

The richness and beauty of religious texts become sterile and dry as monolithic interpretations are accepted by whole church councils, denominations, and congregations. Agreements arise on what and how people must believe in the name of group unity, or faith, or security, or salvation. Some protestant denominations that protested the authority of the Catholic hierarchy in the reformation so that each individual could become his own priest have now taken on different authorities in the form of church conventions or charismatic preachers who tell them the true and only interpretation of the Bible.

Formerly congregational churches where the local church members decided doctrine are being pressured by interchurch hierarchies to adopt the true interpretation or be expelled. Authoritarianism is ascendent, and the individual is expected to adapt and conform to the group. Fortunately, Bible study groups, where people are sometimes encouraged to discuss differing interpretations, run counter to this trend.

These group interpretations have the virtue of clarity and simplicity, and can be very helpful, but they are only a point of departure on an individual spiritual journey, and not a final destination. Those who tell people who are at the beginning of a journey that they have already reached their final destination do them a great disservice.

These group interpretations also have the distinct down side of creating tendencies towards a "fortress religion" where everyone who does not believe the proper interpretation becomes a threat or an enemy or of the devil. Religious communities, which should be cohesive based on bonds of love, can shift the basis of this community to bonds of fear and hatred of the outsider. Having the correct religion combined with its correct interpretation has been the

basis for many religious wars in the past, and could easily become the basis for another wave of cultural and religious wars in the future.

It is the deeply symbolic nature of religious texts and imagery, and the inability of some religious people to accept the pervasive ambiguity of a religious life based on shifting meanings and interpretations, that is the source of these fundamentalist revivals. In this situation, scripture becomes history and its symbolic doorways can become closed and locked. The revelatory nature of symbols requires that their meanings change in order for the symbols to function as doorways to the sacred.

The literalist is continually caught in confusion trying to make clearly symbolic statements sound literal and fighting to give them only one interpretation. Ironically, the Book of Revelation which is among the most highly symbolic books in the Bible is one of the most important texts for most Christian literalists. Similarly, those who treat the Bible as a kind of divinatory text which predicts what has happened in the recent past, and what will happen from now until the rapture are on very shaky ground. The dense forest of symbolism which must be crossed to understand, for instance, who is the Antichrist, what country will produce him, and the states that will be at war during the end times is anything but literal. People who claim a literal interpretation as they wade through a sea of symbolism seem to simply have forgotten what the term literal means.

The literalist is also largely cut off from the power of sacred symbols and therefore from religious experience. This being the case, the individual turns to external authorities for guidance. Faith-based religions which rely mostly on external authorities are excellent places for the autocrats and the power hungry to gain followers because it is easy to gain the trust of those that consider faith a saving virtue. Religious language is easily learned and easily manipulated, and con artists have been using religion for centuries to swindle the unsuspecting.

Perhaps even more dangerous is the sincere but confused religious person who as a political leader uses religious ideals to convince others to support policies motivated by ethnic, class, nationalistic or personal ambition. Medieval history describes a long series of popes, bishops, judges, inquisitors, muftis and ayatollahs employing crusades, church courts, jihads, and pogroms to carry out war, torture, murder, and mayhem in the name of religion. Mixing politics and religion sooner or later creates a toxic brew. Those who believe the two should be mixed need to look closely at current and past theocratic governments and the injustices they promote.

Religious people with political power often take on a tribal identity, and tribal societies often persecute outsiders and look upon them with disdain. Tribalism is corrupting to religious people because it focuses their attention on their enemies instead of their ideals. To become a member of a tribe is to have one's identity defined by what one hates or fears most. To identify with a tribe is to surrender the religious life to the secular, and become truly "of the world".

Sadly, it usually takes many years for those who mix politics and religion to notice the corruption and cynicism it breeds in their ranks. Eventually they discover they are not the victors but rather the losers who have sacrificed their religious ideals and values on the altar of political power and expediency.

The lack of personal religious experience forces the individual to substitute various things for the ultimate reality as God becomes distant and weak, and requires defenders and religious warriors. The "render unto Caesar" biblical quote is completely ignored as religious leaders seek to become "players" on the political stage with "a seat at the table" of power figures. Religious individuals come to distort religion

- by focusing on the rapture and the end-times, and how those outside the faith will suffer during this period
- by joining "culture wars" to fight the forces of evil that are believed to threaten society
- by falsely claiming to be threatened minorities and demanding special protection and consideration when they are, in fact, members of a majority with considerable political power
- by distorting science and investigating theologically based theories that can never be disproven
- by transforming religious congregations into political action committees
- by rewriting history to support a religious world view based on nationalism and the pride of being a nation "chosen by God"
- by making claims about the Bible being against abortion when the concept of abortion is not mentioned in the Bible at all (although Exodus 21:22 says that if men cause a woman to have a miscarriage, then they have to pay a sum of money to the family - they are apparently not accused of murder for killing the unborn child but of theft of an object of value, and are required to pay a civil penalty in the amount determined by a judge to compensate the family).
- by forcing religious rituals and proclamations into secular schools and courtrooms
- by claiming that abortion is killing an "innocent child" when nothing is clearer in Christian theology (from both Augustine's Catholic doctrine of original sin and Calvin's Protestant doctrine of "total depravity") that the child (born or unborn) has original sin - the child is therefore not innocent but inherits the "sin of Adam" and is thus guilty)
- by claiming that state-supported religion is fair when the vast majority of funds go to one's chosen religion, and the money is given with no audit requirements to determine how the funds are spent

This external and highly politicized approach to religion fills the void left when direct spiritual experience is impossible, and religious symbols become signs devoid of real spiritual power. For the spiritual traveler, religion is much more than having the right beliefs, or a supportive community who all believe the same thing as you. It is about employing belief and ritual to generate charged religious symbols which can open up deeper layers of reality so that faith matures into direct spiritual experience.

Breaking Out of a Lucid Dream by Experimenting with Matter

From: The Author's Archives

I woke up in a dream, and looked around trying to decide what to do next. I was in a dimly lit room and the environment had little to interest me. I decided to try to experiment with the "matter" in the environment.

I walked over to a plaster wall and pushed against it knowing it was not physical, and was therefore subject to unusual behavior. As I pushed, my hands and then arms penetrated the wall followed by the rest of my body. I was standing inside the wall, my body merging with the "material" structure of it. There was a slowness and heaviness to movement while merged with this object similar to being under water but offering more resistance. It was a curious and surprisingly energetic sensation as if my atoms and the wall's were buzzing around and energizing one another. The altered state of consciousness was a pleasant and novel experience which I perceived as a form of expanded consciousness.

For those who are a little less daring, these travelers can experiment with putting a hand or arm into the wall to get a feel for both the buzzing energetic quality of the sensation and the plastic nature of the dream's material form.

Entering fully into the wall is one way to erase one's dream body which is something sometimes done in dream yoga as a step towards freeing oneself from the limitations of the dream state.

This kind of experience is a small example of the kinds of education that occur as the traveler encounters new realities in the inner worlds.

Doing a Spiritual Practice During Spiritual Travel

From: The Author's Archives

I found myself awake in a dream and decided to experiment. I sat down to meditate and quickly decided on a spiritual practice to see what effect it would have.

I repeated the mantra OM only two or three times out loud in my out-of-body state. Almost immediately, the whole atmosphere became charged, and I experienced a floating sensation. I vividly felt my body begin to radiate a strange invisible power as if I became a powerful transmitting tower for some invisible radiant energy. The mantric sound echoed all around like a great echo chamber. A short time later, I was back in my body lying in bed.

Breaking Out of a Lucid Dream by Experimenting with Gravity

Flying and the feeling of defying gravity is one of the joys of spiritual travel. One of the ways of breaking out of a limited state (especially a lucid dream) during spiritual travel is to experiment with the freedom of flying.

I suddenly woke up in a dream and was determined to change my state of mind and take advantage of the possibilities. I started running and as I ran, I began taking larger and larger steps. Soon I was leaping ten or twenty feet per step until finally I was airborne and no longer contacting the ground. I was amazed to see golden fields, sections of trees and rural

landscape with great clarity while moving at exhilarating speed with the air whistling past me. At a certain point, I was skimming the treetops feeling the top branches just touching me as I flew past. I was flying over woods and fields brightly lit with golden light.

I had chosen a creative method of leaving the ground and had gained a level of freedom that would probably not have occurred had I stayed in the initial lucid dream environment.

Another easier way to initiate flying is to find a high spot such as a cliff or the roof of a building and simply jump off it. This works surprisingly well but it requires the traveler to have overcome the fear of being hurt in the inner worlds. It takes some time to be comfortable and secure enough to initiate flying in this way.

Breaking Out of a Lucid Dream using the "Skipping" Method

From: The Author's Archives

One method of meditation usable in spiritual travel is the practice I call "skipping". This involves shifting (or skipping through) environments during spiritual travel. This method of meditation is quite dynamic and is possible because in the psychic areas, thoughts have much more power than they do while in a normal waking state when the physical senses and body consciousness seems to weigh them down (this is why it is important not to think negative thoughts while in an out-of-body state).

When "skipping", the traveler can literally jump from one space or world to the next. The experience is much like tuning in a station on the radio. The person symbolically moves the tuning dial (some symbolic action like a nod of the head or shutting and opening the eyes will do) with the intention of changing states (stations). The traveler must have associated the symbolic act with the expectation of movement earlier and be prepared to use it.

When the act is performed, there is static or noise (a intermediary state of formlessness and disorder) for a second or two as the transition takes place. Then the traveler "lands" on a new station (i.e. in a new environment).

The next step is to direct the movement toward some desired state or place. This requires discipline, patience, and practice. However, this method can be used to skip out of an uninteresting dream environment to some place more interesting and spiritual even if the traveler is unable to pick the destination.

SPIRITUAL MATTER

The "material" Nature of Some Non-material Worlds

One of the fascinating elements of spiritual travel experience (out-of-body or lucid dream experience where there is a spiritual goal) is the *material* side of the psychic or non-physical worlds. While out of the body in non-physical environments, one experiment the spiritual traveler can perform is to closely examine the properties of the "matter" encountered.

The surprising thing is that if the spiritual traveler in an out-of-body state or lucid dream environment examines and analyzes non-material objects closely, they have the same qualities as physical objects. If one looks at objects in an attempt to determine if one can tell

the difference between an object in the inner world and a physical object, it seems impossible to tell the difference. I would pick up an object, examine it visually, tap it, feel its texture and weight, examine its hardness, or my reflection in it, all in great detail. If I was not intending to change the object in any way, it almost always appeared to be an everyday physical object.

Recently, I examined the shoes I was wearing while in an out-of-body state in a dream environment. They were made of medium brown suede and try as I might, one could not find anything unusual about them. I felt the texture of the suede, and looked at the stitching and the way the piece that held the laces was attached to the body of the shoe. I used to work with leather and was surprised at the fineness of the "workmanship" on these nonmaterial shoes.

In a similar situation, I examined my hands feeling the fingers and watching them move as I made fists and then opened my hands repeating the activity over and over again. My spiritual fingers, hands, arms, and wrists worked as expected with each movement creating the appropriate corresponding internal sensations.

Some time ago, I was in a jungle environment, and the sharpness and clarity of the vegetation was equally apparent. I examined how the light reflected off and filtered through the leaves in this tropical dream environment.

The inability to distinguish between material and nonmaterial objects also holds for individuals. At one point, I was conscious in a dream and met a small girl and looked into her eyes intently. She seemed, at least on the surface, to be a normal child that one would meet in the physical world. I was interested in seeing if I could sense a consciousness in this child. As I examined her closely, she seemed to be looking back at me just as if it were a normal interaction between two people on any street corner.

The traveler can determine through this kind of experimentation that there is no obvious way to distinguish physical objects and, to a lesser extent, individuals from nonphysical objects and individuals. The senses give the same impressions in spiritual travel or OBE environments as they do in the physical world, each sense (sight, sound, and touch) corroborating and confirming a consistent view of the object or person.

Though the traveler knows with complete certainty that the *dream object* is not real in the conventional sense of being made of physical matter, it still appears real.

The realization that inner environments can appear in every detail as real as physical environments is another important lesson that spiritual travel teaches. The implications of experimenting and learning such a lesson have a vast reach that affects philosophy and religion in countless ways.

Philosophical and Religious Issues

For instance, in the area of religion, this discovery has implications for those who wonder about life in heaven and hell, or any non-physical or spiritual environment. If the objects in the mind can appear completely real while also being non-physical, the notion of an afterlife where beings live in environments much like physical environments seems quite plausible. Individuals could exist in an afterlife interacting with familiar objects and normal environments without ever even considering them alien or peculiar.

Another religious idea that can be explored in relation to lucid dreaming is the concept of creation with respect to the notion of design. There is a medieval argument for the existence of God that is best summed up by the following 19th century philosopher's statement: "If you find a watch on the road, there must be a watchmaker somewhere." Similarly if you find a complex universe, God must have designed it (this is Saint Thomas Aquinas' "argument from design"). But in a lucid dream, one can find enormous complexity and detail where objects and people are not designed. They just appear. Some might say they are designed by the unconscious mind but the concept of design seems to require a rather extreme form of attention to detail and considerable planning. The concept of design seems antithetical to both unconsciousness and the unconscious mind.

In the lucid dream as with the material world, we have objects with a complexity that far outstrips anyone's ability to create or design them, yet they appear anyway. There seems to be creation or design but without a designer. This puts the lucid dream reality in the same category as physical or objective reality where either God "designs" the dream environment, or its complexity spontaneously grows (or evolves) out of the cosmic material or spiritual soil like a plant. Whether the lucid dream is a product of material or spiritual reality, its complexity of design offers the same challenge as the physical world in terms of looking for an explanation of how this complexity arises.

In philosophy, the father of modern philosophy in the West, Descartes, developed the foundation for our scientific world view by emphasizing rational analysis and pointing out that mathematics was the key element in understanding the material world. He did this by making a distinction between the mind and the body that continues to influence the way we see the world. This mind-body dualism is echoed in such oppositions as heaven/earth and spiritual/material.

This fundamental dualism of Western philosophy is based on the following two elements. The first is the realm of the mind (which cannot be measured or has no size or extension) which is the realm of thought (and perhaps heaven). The second is the world of the body (or matter) which is the realm of things (which can be measured and are therefore the objects of scientific investigation). Based on our previous discussion, an argument can be made that there are indeed "things" in the realm of the mind and it is not just a place of pure thought. If this is true, the classical distinction no longer applies and much of the analytic reasoning that tried to understand the world in terms of this false distinction loses its power to persuade.

The experience of lucid dreaming could have changed the course of Western philosophy by seeing the mind as not only the location of thoughts but also a place of "material" things that stimulate the inner senses and present a cohesive realm of being parallel to the physical world. The classical mind-body dualism where the thoughts of the mind stand in stark contrast to the measurable things of the physical world seems to blur and even dissolve.

Most of today's philosophers are materialists who do not believe in dualism at all since they believe that only the material world exists and the mind is a by-product of the physical world and derivative in nature. However, in the past, when philosophers were less interested in language and more interested in truth and the "love of wisdom", such observations might have seriously affected their world view and by shared intellectual inheritance our collective Western world view.

William James, the psychologist and philosopher of religion who wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience* proposed extending the empiricism of his day (empiricism holds that the best way to understand the nature of reality is through the five senses) to embrace a wider arena of experience. He proposed a *radical empiricism* which extended empirical data beyond the physical or biological senses. He said that the study of religion and psychology should include *sense data* from the inner senses and the areas of dreams, visions, religious experience, and psychic phenomena. The author's approach to spiritual travel accepts this notion of "radical empiricism" and denies the typical empiricist's approach which excludes such data as illusory, too difficult to study, or not worthy of study.

What is difficult to accept is that those doing brain research (psychologists and neuro-physiologists) could believe that the physical brain is so complex and sophisticated that it can create entire inner landscapes and interactive three-dimensional worlds involving all the senses all by itself. This seems more plausible when in a normal dream state where the process goes by as the dreamer sits passively like when watching a movie. In such a state, there is very little analytical skill and the powers of perception are dimmed.

However when the full light of consciousness (lucid dreaming) is brought to the dream world, and the individual is able to closely observe and analyze the environment, the inner world looks less like an illusion of the brain, and more like a stand-alone world - a *completely separate and parallel reality* to the physical world.

SPIRITUAL TRAVEL TECHNIQUES

Methods and Techniques to Induce Spiritual Travel

The methods of leaving the physical body are varied, and different methods work for different individuals based on the person's temperament. The ones below have worked for myself to different degrees. However, it is important to be creative and feel comfortable with the method used. The most important thing is to get interested in the technique and play with it. Play is characterized by relaxed concentration. Generally, the thing to avoid is tension and struggle since this usually rivets the soul to the body.

Maintaining a strong sense of expectation during the day that one is capable of leaving the body or waking up in a dream is helpful. It also helps to get extra sleep since it seems that most individuals require a certain amount of time to dream in a normal or semi-conscious fashion in order to purify the unconscious and process the day's events. Getting additional sleep beyond the minimum required makes additional time for more conscious or lucid dreaming to occur.

It is also important to remember that seeking out-of-body experience is part of a spiritual search and a stepping stone to spiritual awareness. Therefore any religious activity or practice which sharpens awareness and draws the attention away from material goals or objects such as meditation, prayer, devotion, service to others, going to church, mosque, or temple, reading spiritual books, or doing yoga will improve the probability of having a spiritual travel experience.

Doing practices that are intended to induce out-of-body experience are meant to supplement other more conventional spiritual practices. The time and effort spent doing such practices

can be very worthwhile because having out-of-body experiences can provide vivid evidence of a spiritual or supernatural world that is distinct from the physical world. Personal experience is many times more convincing than relying on the experiences of others. Such experience can therefore serve as a counterweight to the overwhelming materialism of the present age.

An interest in spiritual travel experience need not be the primary focus of one's spiritual path. As mentioned in the introduction, spiritual travel is a tool for the spiritual seeker. Efforts to induce spiritual travel experience can be an important component of a larger set of spiritual practices because having just a few spiritual travel experiences can provide a powerful justification for living a spiritual life and added motivation for adopting a regular spiritual practice. There can be a [synergy between spiritual travel practices and more traditional religious activities](#) where each supports and reinforces the other.

Spiritual travel also makes the spiritual quest into a dynamic, interesting, and adventuresome process that helps overcome the dullness and repetition that can be associated with both traditional religious ritual and many secular activities.

The following practices are generic in the sense that they belong to no one religious tradition.

[Creative Visualization](#)

Visualization of Environments on the Way into Sleep

[Dynamic Visualization involving Movement](#)

Taking Advantage of the Space between Waking and Sleeping

[Meditation on Inner Lights](#)

Awareness of the Inner Blue Light can be an Invitation to do Spiritual Travel.

[Focusing Attention on the Screen of The Mind](#)

Meditation on the Blank Visual Field on the Way into Sleep

[Improving Visualization Skills](#)

Visualizing a Work (or Play) Activity from Start to Finish

[Focusing on Dreams](#)

A Method for Increasing Consciousness in Dreams

[Getting in Touch with a Spiritual Guide](#)

A Visualization for Gaining Guidance on the Spiritual Path

[Climbing the Stairs to the Top of the Lighthouse](#)

A Visualization for Focusing on Spiritual Light

[Counting Your Way into Sleep](#)

Setting Up the Expectation of a Spiritual Travel Experience

[Kinetic Visualization](#)

Visualization of Fast Movements Involving Strong Gravitational Forces

ALL ADDITIONS FOR THIS SECTION:

synergy between spiritual travel practices and more traditional religious activities

One distinction that is often seen in public discourse on contemporary religious issues is the distinction between spirituality and religion. New age followers often say that they are interested in spirituality and not religion. Implicit in this approach is the view that traditional religions are lifeless, antiquated (appealing only to previous generations), and rejecting of direct religious experience.

Modern religion became more rational as it practiced the "social gospel" to compete with science for relevance to modern life. Rational religion emphasized uniting and renewing communities, and supported ethical or service activities for improving the world. Church meetings and picnics, running religious schools, hospitals, and soup kitchens, and converting nonbelievers to the true faith in order to adopt them into the group became the dominant religious activities. Such modern community oriented ideals and activities replaced the patristic and medieval monastic ideals of seekers going into the wilderness or monastery cells to seek visions of God.

People seeking direct insight into the Truth, the nature of God, or *being itself* were forced to look outside religion. They became spiritual seekers rather than joiners of traditional religions where faith was the primary religious virtue and direct experience was an impossibility (the time of prophets was over). An exception to this trend was the Christian Pentecostal tradition which emphasized personal experience of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism is a recent addition to Christianity and has only entered into the cultural mainstream in the last decade or two.

Religious seekers were interested only in spirituality, and not religion. Much of their seeking activity involved spiritual practice (individual prayer and meditation) rather than liturgy. The primary community for them became the New Age seminar rather than the church meeting. When they were quasi-religious, they were nondenominational accepting religious symbols and narratives pragmatically. If a symbol or a particular world-view from a religion or self-help philosophy worked to produce a greater insight, direct religious experience, or personal growth and satisfaction, it was adopted. When it stopped working, it could be discarded and another substituted.

Religions and religiously oriented philosophies became like suits of clothes to be worn for a while, put away in the closet, worn again, and finally thrown away when they became stained, moth eaten, or no longer stylish.

The philosophy of Spiritual travel presented at this site tries to find a **middle ground between the spiritual and the traditional religious world-views**. Spiritual travel focuses on a practice directed towards a class of experience called out-of-body experience, which is

extremely broad. It then narrows the field by requiring that the ultimate goal of such travel be spiritual experience. It thereby avoids the goals of some psychics who use out-of-body experience to seek primarily power, excitement, entertainment, or authority over a group of followers or students.

Spiritual travel therefore satisfies the New Age individual's desire for practices that seeks direct transcendent religious experience.

However, the spiritual goal requires the kind of spiritual framework and spiritual symbolism that is embodied in traditional religious systems to support and enable the spiritual traveler to reach this spiritual goal. This encourages the individual to return to traditional religions and their symbols, and to look at these symbols in a new and expanded way. The religious symbols become doorways to spiritual or heavenly realms, or ladders through the heavens.

In many traditional religions, the doorways had become locked and considered dangerous. Even for more experientially oriented believers such as Pentecostals, these doorways are closed because they focus on immanence (the Holy Spirit comes down to earth), which usually excludes transcendent religious experience. During spiritual travel, the doorways function in the ways they were intended to function. They open up the heavenly worlds to the traveler.

In support of more traditional religious loyalties, it is important to adopt a symbol system, and work with in a consistent way in order that it may become [charged and alive with meaning](#). It can then function properly during spiritual travel. It is therefore important not to change religions lightly. Consistency is a virtue in religious practice, and too much change is a threat to empowering the practitioner's chosen religion. Religious conversion can still occur as the individual evolves and changes, but too much mixing and matching can drain the life out of spirituality, even as it has the virtue of educating and expanding the individual's knowledge of other cultures. For those who are attracted to more than one tradition at a time, this consistency can also be found in following a consistent spiritual practice even if it mixes symbol systems.

In the above-mentioned ways, the philosophy of spiritual travel unites the function of spiritual travel (direct transcendent experience) with the forms of religious tradition (scripture, ethics, religious symbolism, group ritual, and narratives) to produce a unified whole - a means of access to transcendent religious states using the mechanism of out-of-body experience. There is a *synergy* between the two where both support each other in a mutually beneficial way.

The spiritual travel approach makes one requirement: **that all religions be respected as valuable and useful pathways to the heavens**. This is religious universalism. This has the effect of limiting the religiously based conflict between cultures, which leads to war and strife. Using this approach, cultures may be still in conflict but they cannot use religious ideals to justify and exacerbate such conflict.

The use of spiritual travel in traditional religions will certainly be a source of change. This is especially true in Western religions where divine revelations have ceased, and the canon (inspired scripture) is closed or finished. Spiritual travel will lead to visionary experience which will effectively reopen it.

Creative Visualization

When I was young, I used to love trains. In my travels to visit relatives, I would be a passenger and visit large railway stations and see dozens of different trains from all over the United States. The colors, the smells, the porters and brakemen and travelers, and the enormous thundering vehicles all served to stimulate my imagination.

Sometimes I used to visualize the various train cars designing the contents of the sleeper, diner, passenger, entertainment, and lounge cars. I would create my ideal train on the way into sleep. I would move from car to car describing and visualizing elements of the environment such as seating, windows, and the colors and textures of surfaces.

Sometimes, I would find that my dream would take up where my visualizations ended and I would continue designing and riding that ideal train during the dream. Because I entered that dream state while involved in a creative activity, I would sometimes find myself in an expanded state of awareness and able to control the progress of the dream to varying degrees.

These visualizations and the resulting dream experiences were antecedents to spiritual travel. Getting involved in a visualization that crowds out all other sensations on the way into sleep is one way to initiate spiritual travel. Creative interest in a subject matter is in many cases a less stressful and more enjoyable method of entering into spiritual travel states than alternate approaches such as concentration exercises. Painters and musicians can compose canvases and musical scores using much the same technique.

Dynamic Visualization involving Movement

The experience below resulted from attempting to stay conscious on the way into sleep. If the practitioner is able to stay conscious and become aware during this transition, the kind of dynamic visualization used below can be a means of leaving the body from this intermediate state. Note that running was the method used but any activity that the practitioner is familiar with and finds easy to visualize would be appropriate.

I had been thinking about spiritual travel and reinforcing the expectation that it would happen. I was in the early stages of sleep somewhere between waking and sleeping. I became conscious that I was lying on my back but feeling very little sensory input from my body. I became aware that I might be able to leave the body from this state.

I then imagined myself running and immediately found myself outside the body running towards a bright white marble wall made of large tile-like square sections with a black sky in the background. After a few moments of running, another transition occurred. I found myself soaring high in the air towards a beautiful large city on the banks of a dark lake. The city was constructed of this same white marble in square sections. The place was built up with larger rectangular buildings towards the center and smaller ones along the edges. It had an ethereal quality due to the lighting which appeared to come from the buildings themselves or from some invisible light source. The background was very dark as was the lake before it. The feeling of flying was exhilarating and the city was majestic.

The decision to try running was a method of doing a "dynamic" visualization involving movement which had the desired effect of blotting out other physical sensations and precipitating spiritual travel.

[Meditation on Inner Lights](#)

Contemplating inner lights can be a method of leaving the body.

Those who are familiar with meditation on the energy center usually known as the spiritual eye located between the eyebrows may be familiar with the cobalt blue light that sometimes appears in the inner field of vision. It usually appears as an amorphous blob of light slowly changing shape with blue concentric circles emanating from it slowly. The circles expand hypnotically resembling something akin to broad smoke rings expanding from a central source.

This kind of light (whether blue or another color) can serve as a focus of meditation either while sitting in disciplined meditation or while dosing off to sleep.

On occasion, the light can draw the traveler out of the body and he or she will be instantaneously flying at a fantastic rate of speed through a powerful force field following the light. It seems that the light recedes as the traveler moves towards it with its center still radiating the rings. Such experience demands a tenacity to hold on to the center of concentration since the powerful forces can be distracting. If the traveler is able to maintain concentration, the scene will tend to shift to a stable environment like a dream environment. However, unlike a dream, the traveler will be fully conscious and able to direct the experience from that point.

The point here is to illustrate the importance of meditation on these inner lights and to know that the appearance of imagery of this sort can be a form of "inner invitation" to do spiritual travel.

[Focusing Attention on the Screen of The Mind](#)

From: *How I Learned Soul Travel*

Terrel Wilson, *How I Learned Soul Travel* (Minneapolis: Eckankar Publishing, 1987), p. 148

The author recommends persons doing this exercise wake themselves up by alarm clock or other means in the middle of the night or early in the morning. At this point, the person should splash some water on the face to bring some mental clarity. The following exercise can be practiced anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour while laying on one's back. The author had considerable success in leaving the body on the way into sleep when using this method. Note that the same exercise can be done at the beginning of a night's sleep but is more likely to result in just passing into sleep due to tiredness.

With eyes closed, take a couple of minutes to relax the whole body, then rotate the eyeballs upward, far enough to cause a slight strain on the muscles around the eyes. This points the inner vision towards the forehead; then focus it upon the black inner screen. Do not try to

drift into sleep at this point, just try to keep the attention focused in this manner. Whenever the mind wanders, simply retrieve it and start over again. Listen to the faint high whistle in the top of the head, and place a secondary attention on listening to it.

Think of the high whistle as a sound current flowing upward through the physical body and out the top of the head at a certain spot about two inches just in back of the top center. Let the sound lift the inner vision upward in a relatively natural way. Gently stop focusing on the inner vision on the blackness of the inner screen; doing this any longer can prevent sleep. Instead just keep a peripheral awareness at about the location of the spiritual eye in the inside of the forehead, in order to keep the black screen close to the inner point of vision. Eventually, you will slip unsuspectingly into sleep.

[Improving Visualization Skills](#)

Visualization plays a large part in the variety of methods used to induce spiritual travel. Improving one's ability to visualize will tend to improve the likelihood of spiritual travel.

However it can be a difficult practice especially for westerners who are used to constant physical activity. Attempts to perform the inner practice of visualization are often interrupted by a variety of distractions.

The following practice can be effectively used to take advantage of the goal oriented nature of westerners. Those who are "task oriented" and are most able to concentrate when there is a specific job to perform.

This visualization involves choosing a job and visualizing all the subtasks required to complete it, one by one. It is best to choose some activity that one is familiar with which can be completed in a period of fifteen to thirty minutes. It should be a neutral or enjoyable job, easy to visualize, and have enough variation to stave off boredom.

One somewhat neutral example is painting the side of a house.

The worker first visualizes getting the paint, ladder, brushes, roller and drop-cloth from a tool shed. The drop-cloth and ladder are positioned. The paint is opened and placed in the rolling pan. The worker climbs the ladder and begins painting, moving the ladder, and repositioning it as necessary as the work progresses. The process continues until one side of the house is painted. Then the tools are cleaned and put away, and the visualization is complete.

Any activity is possible such as playing a song on an instrument, painting a picture, or mowing the lawn. Visualizing less goal oriented "play" activities is also possible such as skiing, or hitting a tennis ball against a wall but in these examples, the lack of a clear goal can sometimes lead to boredom and a loss of concentration.

The key here is to improve one's ability at visualization and do it in a relaxed and concentrated fashion. The act of visualizing a created world so clearly and completely that it replaces all other physical sensations is one method of inducing a spiritual travel experience.

[Focusing on Dreams](#)

Many of the techniques mentioned at this site revolve around increased consciousness in dreams. A very effective way of breathing life into the dream world is adopting the discipline of writing down dreams.

Dreams are valuable because they permit the dreamer to examine the contents of his or her personal unconscious and interpret dream symbols to discover hidden conflicts that can then be exposed to the light of waking awareness. They reveal to us our personal weaknesses, our blind spots, and our unacknowledged pain from the past. Thus, dream analysis can be a form of spiritual purification.

However, apart from this psychological function, dreams also represent an entrance to the vast realms of the human unconscious that are accessible through spiritual travel. This consists of both the personal unconsciousness with its layers of conflict and unfulfilled need, as well as the deeper layers of the self which contain a broad variety of transpersonal psychic and spiritual states. To direct attention towards dreams is to focus the waking awareness on these areas and give them value and importance.

Writing down dreams informs the deeper self that the dreamer cares about the unconscious and the variety of states it contains. It enlivens the unconscious contents and increases awareness in dreams. Increased awareness in dreams can lead to lucid dreaming and spiritual travel.

Writing down dreams draws the dreamer's attention to the subtle elements in dream experience that permit the individual to recognize what his or her dreams are like. To become familiar with the contents of one's dreams also increases the probability that a dream will be recognized as such, and the dreamer will wake up.

There are many difficulties and challenges to be confronted when keeping a dream journal. A first step is choosing a place to sleep one or two nights a week where the dreamer can do writing upon awakening without disturbing anyone else.

The person keeping a dream journal should go to bed early with the journal at the bedside. The mental reminder that the dreamer will remember and write down the dreams upon awakening should be given before going to sleep. A small nightlight is helpful to see enough to write in the journal but not so powerful as to shock the journal writer into consciousness so he or she cannot go back to sleep after adding an entry to the journal.

Keeping a dream journal represents a quantitative shift of attention from the outer to the inner life. It can be a useful tool in improving the dreamers ability to do spiritual travel. As dreams become clearer, the person can extend the reminder to include the directive that the dreamer will awaken in the dream and do some activity that will lead to an altered state of consciousness (spiritual travel).

[Getting in Touch with a Spiritual Guide](#)

Visualize a dim room containing a large blue sapphire, its facets gleaming and shining cobalt blue light which bounces off the walls of the room. In your mind's eye, see yourself walking towards the sapphire and as you near it, you perceive it as a transparent three dimensional blue doorway. You

walk through the doorway and within the facets you see a chrome ladder reflecting the blue color around it.

You step up to the ladder, and begin climbing it rung by rung. As you near the top, you see that it opens into a snowy nighttime mountain scene. When your eye level reaches the top rung, you see a mountain landscape with a crisp but not cold breeze blowing through the pine trees. You continue to climb and step out into the snowy terrain gazing down the slope of the mountain. The whole environment is lit by a blue sun that sheds its light across the landscape giving it a grey-blue cast.

You walk up a small hill and notice a bench which looks down over a partially cleared snowy slope. You sit down gazing at the blue sun shining rays overhead against a blue-black sky causing shadows where the pines grow. You listen to the sound of the breeze amidst the pine needles and feel the freshness of the air.

Next you issue an invitation to your spiritual guide to join you. You may see, him or her, or perhaps just feel the guide sit down next to you on the bench. Strike up a conversation asking the guide for advice or assistance on the spiritual path. Ask for guidance and protection in dreams or talk about whatever concerns you spiritually. Ask for guidance in spiritual travel and write down any suggestion you receive. If the guide gives you a name or spiritual word (mantra), remember it and use it in future sessions to get in touch with him or her .

[Climbing the Stairs to the Top of the Lighthouse](#)

Light is one of the most powerful and universal spiritual symbols. Meditations on light are therefore part of many religious traditions. This kind of meditation will not relate specifically to spiritual travel experience but meditation on light has the effect of loosening the ties that bind the soul to the body. It is therefore good preparation for spiritual travel.

The first visualization involves visiting a lighthouse. Visualize yourself standing at the base of an east coast lighthouse in the shape of a tall cylinder as can be seen in pictures taken in the coastal areas of Virginia and the Carolinas. Walk up the steps onto a concrete base and enter through a door at the bottom of the structure.

Once inside, visualize a set of spiral stairs leading to the top of the lighthouse. In the dim light, you grasp the railing and begin climbing. As you slowly move upward, step by step, you spiral around counting perhaps a hundred steps to the top. As you approach the top, you begin to see flashes of light which grow brighter, They are coming from the bulb through a huge lens which directs the beam out over the ocean to warn ships of danger.

The reflective unit that emits the light at the top of the lighthouse revolves once every second or two emitting a blazing ray as it faces you for a brief moment. You stand watching the light revolve being blinded as the light briefly shines upon you and then continues its revolution.

The idea is that you briefly experience a very bright light perhaps like a flash bulb but lasting perhaps a half second which fills your being, and then recedes only to come around again a few seconds later. You visualize being filled with spiritual light periodically for about ten minutes. One can prepare for this visualization exercise by glancing at the sun for a half a

second a few times with the goal of remembering what a very bright light looks like. Then it will be easier to visualize the lighthouse's light during the meditation.

You can change the speed of the light's revolution, the period the light faces you directly, and the color of the light from white to golden to cobalt blue. Other options involve shining the light towards a part of the body such as the heart, the head, or another part of the body that requires healing.

The lighthouse meditation can also be a meditation on compassion. In this case a mirrored heart is visualised in the chest which absorbs and reflects the beam while creating a strong feeling of love and compassion. This feeling radiates from the heart along with the reflected light.

To end the meditation, you slowly walk down the stairs to the base of the lighthouse and exit through the door. The meditation ends here.

[Counting Your Way into Sleep](#)

This exercise involves counting as one goes to sleep. The first step is to choose a number based on how sleepy you feel and decide that you will be asleep by the time you get to that number. If you are sleepy, choose the number twenty but if you feel more awake, you can choose a higher number like fifty.

The next step is to tell yourself that you will wake up as soon as you enter the sleep state as the number is reached. You can suggest an environment that you will wake in and visualize it , or simply choose to be standing in the room next to your bed out side of your body.

Then begin counting your way into sleep. Some may prefer to count backwards down to zero since it takes a bit more concentration whereas counting forward is automatic and does not require much attention. But counting in either direction will work.

[Kinetic Visualization](#)

Much of the problem with meditation based on Eastern techniques is that it does not appeal to Westerners who tend to have active minds. Methods which focus on, for instance, counting the breath tend to produce sleep and boredom in such people.

Visualizing movement is one active method of visualization which may help avoid the problem of boredom. Try the following method to improve visualization skills:

Visualize a bobsled like the ones in the Olympics at the gate at the top of a bobsled run. Note its color, the steering wheel, and the view from the cockpit as you look down the steep slide of snow that leads down the mountain. Now feel yourself being pushed and the bobsled starts careening down the track. Feel the vibration as it picks up speed and steer into the turns as they present themselves. The feeling of gravity rivets you as the turns appear in front of you, and the sled alternately goes sideways on the left and right walls of the track. To vary the ride, you can see the track as a wormhole and ride the sled upside-down for a time and make 360 degree rotations on the track. Try doing this for ten or fifteen minutes feeling the power and dynamic movement of the sled as it barrels down the track to the bottom of the mountain.

As an alternative, you can also visualize a roller-coaster or a sliding board that goes for miles with twists, turns, loops, and dramatic rises and falls which you ride at great speed.

The goal is involve the meditator fully using the powerful sensations of movement and gravitational forces to avoid boredom and disinterest. As always with visualization exercises, the meditator wants to take himself out of the physical world and activate the inner senses in order to induce an experience of spiritual travel. Though such exercises may not produce an experience at the time, they also prepare the individual for controlling his or her movements should a spiritual travel experience occur at a future time.

SHAMANISM FOR NON-INDIANS

The Difficulties of Pursuing a Shamanic Path for Non-Native Americans

Many Americans are interested in practicing shamanic or Native American tribal traditions partly because they emphasize personal religious experience rather than faith in a distant God. The author of this site strongly supports and encourages an interest in personal religious experience. Much of the religious experience present in these shamanic traditions can be classified as spiritual travel. However, attempts by persons who are not members of these tribal groups to participate in these traditions are problematic.

This is because the vast majority of native people in these traditions will tell you that a person *must be born into these tribes* to properly practice the tradition. This is not an arbitrary or selfish statement on their part. There are good reasons that justify such claims.

These shamanic traditions are tightly bound up with a group of tribal ancestors who have an interest in guiding and protecting the tribal members.

If a non-tribal member wants to contact ancestors, who will he or she contact? There is no tradition of being helped by ancestors in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. So the question arises: "With which ancestors are these modern-day non-Indian shamans in contact?"

It is theoretically possible for the tribal ancestors to "adopt" a non-native person into the tribe, but why would they wish to do so? Certainly a non-Indian person cannot "adopt himself" into the tribe (i.e. claim new ancestors) anymore than a child can walk into the house down the street and tell the residents he or she is now their son or daughter.

In addition, the shaman's role of healer and priest is based on a close-knit long-term relationship with a tribal group which trusts his or her judgment and skill. A group of people who show up at a "shamanic workshop" do not constitute a legitimate and cohesive community that resembles the tribes of indigenous peoples. So what group is it that looks to these contemporary shamans for spiritual direction and spiritual vitality?

Other religious groups have a means of accepting new members that were not born into them through the process of conversion. Medieval Christianity has the tradition of being baptized and becoming part of the mystical body of Christ, and the communion of saints. Mainline protestantism allows a person to adopt Jesus as a personal savior to become "saved" or "born again" and become a part of the church.

Hinduism and Buddhism both have the tradition of initiation where a disciple accepts an individual as a *guru* and joins a lineage which in some ways is like a family.

However, non-tribal members attempting to join a Native American tradition are going against the grain of that tradition. Such a convert is subject to being labeled a "plastic shaman", and will likely be resented by the true members of the tribal group. This is especially true if the practitioner makes money from the practice.

These tribal traditions have many attractive elements and it is understandable why many would wish to be involved in them. However, if one is interested primarily in spiritual travel, there are other ways to pursue this interest apart from using these shamanic methods and imitating tribal groups.

AFTER-DEATH EXPERIENCE

The Tibetan Buddhist and Spiritualist Views of After-Death States

Tibetan Buddhism has concentrated more attention on helping the dying person cross the borders of death than any other living religious tradition. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and other sources give detailed descriptions of the stages of death and afterlife, as well as instructions about how the dying individual should confront and react to these mysterious places and events. Dealing with a tradition that contains so many lineages, deities, and philosophical subsystems in a short article will necessarily involve generalizing about the tradition. Though the material is complex and sometimes difficult to interpret for a Westerner who must rely on English sources, the author will describe the stages of death, and attempt to show how they are relevant to our discussion of spiritual travel.

The *Bardos* or Stages of the Afterlife

The realm of the afterlife is called the world of the *bardo*. The term *bardo* literally means "in-between" and in this context denotes a transitional state, or what Victor Turner calls a *liminal* situation. For the dying individual, the *bardo* is the period of the afterlife that lies in between two different incarnations.

In Tantric Buddhist cosmology, existence has a foreground which consists of the many worlds of incarnation, and also a background which is the space between these worlds which is called the *bardo* world. The stars are the many worlds, and *bardo* is like the night sky which is the backdrop or the space where the stars are hung.

The first stage or *bardo* of the afterlife follows the initial experience of the dissolution of the five elements of the physical body at the time of death. These consist of something similar to the concepts of earth, fire, water, air, and ether in the West, and are related to the progressive dissociation of the soul from the physical body. This dissolution follows a prescribed progression: the senses fail, the muscles lose their strength, there is loss of control over bodily fluids (water), the body loses its warmth (fire), and the breath fails (air). All this is experienced in sequence by the dying person.

Note here that the "soul" in Tibetan Buddhism is only a collection (or bundle) of karma (credits and debits based on previous actions which mold both the habit patterns of the

individual and the kinds of conditions encountered in life). In Buddhism, the soul has no substantial nature but otherwise the soul and this "collection" seem very similar and are functionally equivalent for our purposes. We therefore use the term soul above even though it is not a Buddhist term.

The First *Bardo*

Following this, the person's experience of the *first bardo* commences. However, for most individuals, it passes by in a split second and goes unnoticed. Only those who have undergone training in and practiced meditation, contemplative prayer, and similar spiritual disciplines will likely even be aware of the first bardo state. For some of those fortunate souls, there will be several opportunities to meet with spiritual beings and enter the realms of enlightened beings. One description of the kind of meditation done by advanced practitioners consists of a conscious effort to "dissolve space into light", which if successful will propel the dying soul into an a state of light and bliss beyond the continual cycles of birth and death to which most souls are subject.

For those experienced in spiritual travel who were able to enter spiritual states of light, sound, and emptiness during life, the first bardo may offer an opportunity to enter into these areas shortly after the time of death. Also, those with a devotional disposition who were able to develop a strong bond with a deity during life may have similar opportunities to enter into one of the heavens of that deity during the first bardo. The devotion must usually be intense and concentrated to draw the deity's attention in this circumstance. Though the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is not primarily devotional, it like most of the world's great religious traditions contains devotional aspects where practitioners are encouraged to focus on dakinis, bhairavas, Bodhisattvas, Buddhas, and other helpful beings.

The spiritual aperture that opens briefly at the time of death presents a wonderful opportunity to those who can control their thoughts as the first bardo begins. This is probably why there is a common folk belief in the Hindu tradition which puts much emphasis on controlling and directing the *last thought* of the dying person. If this thought is strong, clear, and of a spiritual nature, it may permit the person to enter through this doorway into a spiritual world immediately at the time of death, and thus avoid the confusion of the *second bardo*.

The Second *Bardo*

If the first bardo passes and attempts to access spiritual states were unsuccessful, the next bardo begins. The *second bardo* or the "bardo of becoming" is a stage in which the desires of the individual are said to carry the largely helpless soul through a great variety of intense emotional states. Good thoughts bring great bliss and pleasure, and hateful or negative thoughts bring great pain and desolation. The soul bounces from thought to thought as a torrent of thoughts and feelings come like a waterfall. Existing thought habits and desires are said to define the experience of the soul during the afterlife in this way.

Spiritual Travel and the Second *Bardo*

It is here where some experience and training in spiritual travel and out-of-body experience may be of greatest help. It may first help the individual maintain a state of detachment. The spiritual traveler who has experienced the inner world during life can take the whirlwind nature of inner world following death with more calm and detachment. Those who have read

examples of the kinds of states encountered in spiritual travel located on other pages of this site will understand that some experimentation and discovery in the inner worlds may prepare the soul for many of the dynamics of the states it may encounter after death. The similarity of certain aspects of the near-death experience (a temporary bardo state) and elements of spiritual travel experience (the "tunnel" experience for example) show some common qualities between certain spiritual travel states and these bardo states.

The soul experienced in spiritual travel is less likely to be disoriented by this inner torrent of psychic experience. To put it another way, while the spiritual traveler or yogi swims through the ocean of consciousness, the inexperienced soul may feel more like it is drowning in that ocean. But as with a drowning person, the most important thing is to have a direction in which to swim to safety. The point of orientation or goal for the person in the second bardo may be a deity, a mantra, a prayer, a heaven, a guide, or some similar spiritual goal but the spiritual traveler must be able to focus and move towards that goal using meditative techniques learned and practiced during their former life in the physical world. *This is the active approach of the spiritual traveler.*

The second advantage is that the spiritual traveler has entered the waters of consciousness *consciously* on many occasions and is practiced at directing his or her experience in the inner worlds.

The greatest problems of the soul in the second bardo are negative emotions like guilt and fear (which results from a lack of familiarity with the inner worlds), and lack of conscious control over its own experience. Fear is particularly harmful because it fragments the self making concentration on one thing difficult or impossible, and this can lead to confusion and loss of conscious control.

The soul in the second bardo is many times caught in a dream state sometimes unaware that it has died, and incapable of taking action to raise its state of consciousness to a threshold level of awareness where it can direct its attention towards spiritual states.

This is one of the reasons it is important to do a regular spiritual practice during life. Doing meditation or prayer every day establishes a pattern of spiritual activity. It then becomes automatic and the habit of seeking after the divine reality continues during the after-death state where it can have powerful results. A daily spiritual practice differs from other more common spiritual practices such as going to church or temple because it is done more often than once or twice a week. Meditation therefore establishes a stronger habit pattern in the individual and is a valuable addition to group oriented spiritual activities such as attending church.

Regular meditation can also be more powerful because it is usually a less passive activity than church since it fully involves the individual in the meditative process rather than making a spectator out of him or her.

What the soul in the second bardo needs to do is "wake up", as in a lucid dream, and begin a meditation or mental exercise that draws it towards a desired stable and more conscious state of awareness where it can have some control and continue to evolve spiritually. The opposite of conscious control is a dream-like state where the individual experiences only the results of his or her previous actions, and mechanically moves from thought to thought based on thinking patterns developed during life.

Waking up within a dream is one of the activities the spiritual traveler practices when he or she leaves the body to travel the inner planes. Beyond this, the traveler is also always practicing and perfecting the art of directing his or her attention towards some desired state. It is the contention of the author that experience with meditation and actual spiritual travel experience during life can both be of great help in rising above the semi-conscious state characteristic of the second bardo, and moving into a more conscious and desirable state following physical death.

For those who practiced a devotional tradition in life, some will semi-consciously repeat a religious or a meditative ritual asking gods or intercessors to draw them out of the second bardo world. We see an example of an attempt to create such a ritual in the Catholic rosary, where Mary as intercessor is requested to

Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death ...

This phrase is from the Hail Mary Prayer. One effect of the repetition of this prayer fifty times in the rosary is that such a prayer for help and intercession may become an automatic process, which will repeat itself in the bardo.

For those fortunate enough to be more conscious in these bardo states, a petition to a god, guru, guide, saint, or intercessor can be made in hopes that the individual will be lifted or guided out of the bardo worlds by one of those entities. But here again, the call must be concentrated and the ability to ignore the surrounding chaos somewhat developed. When such grace is given, it is a form of salvation where the individual is saved from the discomfort and confusion of the "outer darkness" of the bardo by a powerful entity - usually one that individuals formed a bond with in their former life. To use the swimming analogy, here the individual calls out to a lifeguard in hopes of being rescued from the turbulent waters of the bardo state. *This is the more passive approach of the devotee.*

We should also note that souls in this bardo are thought to be very sensitive to the thoughts and attitudes of those they knew during life. The Tibetans therefore put great effort into doing chanting, reading of sacred texts, and other religious rituals to help the dying soul on its journey in the afterlife. Praying for the peace and happiness of the dying person therefore has great value and provides a benefit to both the living and the dead. This process of sending good wishes to those who have recently died can create a positive spiritual atmosphere which can orient and bring peace to the person in the bardo realm, and can also counter some of the sorrow and upset that accompanies the loss of a loved one.

The Third Bardo

The third and last bardo consists of the stage of reincarnation where the soul is pulled into another body to start a new life, often but not always in the physical world. Tibetan Buddhists believe that the most desirable world to be born in is the physical world, since it affords the most opportunity for spiritual growth and realization. The third bardo consists of a series of images determined by the soul's karma that lead to psychic vortices that draw the soul into a womb. The soul's reaction to the images (attraction or repulsion) determines which vortex the soul enters and in which womb the soul ends up. The Tibetan tradition gives detailed advice on which representations to choose and which to avoid in order to gain a desirable rebirth.

This ability to choose a good incarnation requires discrimination, and a certain degree of conscious awareness. The new age approach to reincarnation which claims we choose our new incarnation is idealistic and not always true from this vantage point. Many souls desperate to escape the confusion of the second bardo will grab on to the first opportunity that presents itself like a swimmer who grasps a log in dangerous rapids in hopes of making it to calmer waters. Choosing the first object (or incarnation) that comes along may not be the wisest choice.

The average person is said to spend a period of about forty-five days in the second bardo. However, passionate souls with strong desires or those responsible for evil acts in their most recent life are said to reincarnate almost immediately. In some cases, the individual can stay in the bardo state for long periods, and be drawn into its currents awaiting rebirth.

If the individual does not reincarnate in the physical world, he or she will go to one of the other five worlds of rebirth. These are the heaven worlds, the hell worlds, the world of hungry ghosts, the asura (demigod) worlds, and the animal worlds. Each of these is believed to be limited and inferior to obtaining another body in the material world. This is because they exist mostly to receive good or bad karma (the results of previous actions), and are not considered places to create new karma.

The least familiar of the above worlds is the asura world which is a place of conflict and struggle where kings, knights, and warlords battle each other for dominance. Persons who were fascinated with gaining and exercising power over others during life are said to be likely to incarnate in the asura realm. The hungry ghost realm is a place of need and desire where souls are denied fulfillment or given only small rewards. Here souls experience states of continuing anxiety and frustration. The animal world is reserved for those whose extreme instincts for violence, gluttony, or sexual gratification dominated their previous lives in the physical world to the extent that they devolved into the instinctual and unreflective state of animal existence. The heaven and hell worlds have wide variations, but it is interesting that the Tibetan tradition has both burning hells (as in the Christian tradition) and freezing hells.

The Freedom to do Spiritual Travel in the Afterlife

One factor that helps the soul achieve the freedom of conscious control and spiritual travel during the afterlife is acceptance of death. Those who have not accepted death will resist the process of dying and introduce conflict into the bardo stages. This is why it is important for people to take care of any unfinished business as they near death so they can let go of life completely.

In Brahmanical Hinduism, there is a stage of life called the forest dweller or *vanaprastha* stage in which the older individual who has finished raising a family is supposed to begin letting go of pleasures and attachments to life in preparation for death. However, in the West the goal is to keep spending money and maximize enjoyment up to the end of life. This makes it difficult for many to make a graceful transition into death. Intense attachment to the material world makes it difficult to do spiritual travel both during life and after death.

It also usually helps to have faith in something beyond the material world at the time of death. Those with a strong faith in Jesus or another religious figure will be more calm and relaxed as they enter the bardo realms. While the religious person can look forward to heaven at the time of death, the spiritual traveler who has been trying to do spiritual travel all his or

her life can also look forward to death in certain respects. This is because the opportunity for exploration and spiritual travel will hopefully be greatly expanded after death when the physical body and its needs will no longer be a major distraction. Of course the areas the spiritual traveler wishes to explore are the heavenly areas and beyond, and in that sense, he or she has much in common with other more conventional religious people.

Both have a distinct advantage over the secular individual because they expect to enter into a positive afterlife (heaven), and expectations have great power in the inner worlds. This expectation combined with love and devotion towards some religious ideal can propel the religious individual towards a heavenly state just as the practice of spiritual travel does. The secular individual with no faith or expectation of heaven is more likely to flounder after death and get stuck in some intermediate gray area surrounded by thoughts and emotions from the past waiting for something to happen.

A brief mention of ethics is appropriate when discussing the state a person enters at death. In general, both the state of mind of a soul and the world it inhabits is presumed to be the result of its past thought patterns and actions (*karma*). Trauma and intense pain whether experienced by the soul, or inflicted on another during life will tend to fragment the self and make conscious control after death difficult. Violence, cruelty, and hatred expressed towards others in life will almost certainly have a limiting effect on the soul's freedom both in the after death state and in subsequent existences. This is true even for souls who have become proficient in spiritual travel during their life. Unethical actions during life seem to separate the soul from the knowledge and wisdom attained while living, and leave it helpless to experience the results of its actions in the afterlife.

Interestingly enough, some of the Western ideas of heaven and hell can be accounted for by the Tibetan notion of the second bardo. The saint or righteous soul will find itself in places of bliss, happiness, and light based on the kinds of thoughts it was in a habit of thinking, while the evil person will lead an existence of fear, anger, and torment in the afterlife. However, the second bardo is a temporary transitional state that actually precedes the longer term experiences of heaven, hell, or rebirth in the physical world which can occur following the third bardo.

Spiritualism as an Alternative View of the Afterlife

The focus of Buddhism in the afterlife is similar to its approach to earthly existence. The emphasis is on passion, and its restrictive and destructive consequences. It is therefore not surprising that the Buddhist view of after death states concentrates on desire as the mechanism which turns the dead into machines who must live out a karmic destiny in the afterlife. These individuals will exist in a depleted state of awareness with little freedom of choice during the bardo.

As an alternate and competing view of the afterlife, we will briefly examine the Western tradition of spiritualism which has been around for more than one hundred years, and is still popular in some quarters today.

The central conclusion of the data provided by the spiritualists and trance mediums is that dead people have scarcely more insight and wisdom in death than they had while alive. Such a proposition emphasizes the importance of learning spiritual skills such as spiritual travel while alive instead of hoping for spiritual redemption and transformation after death. Though

the spiritualist's view differs from Buddhism in the specifics, it supports the contention that people should not wait until death to begin learning since such a delay can result in a very limited and routine afterlife. We examine the spiritualist's view on the page titled [A Spiritualist's Approach to After-Death States](#).

Kabir, the Hindu-Muslim poet of India, talks about the afterlife in an ambiguous way describing it as the "city of death" which could be consistent with either the Tibetan or Spiritualist's view of the afterlife. He offers the following words which support the notion that a person who is limited in life will also be limited in death.

O friend! Hope for Him whilst you live, know while you live, understand while you live:
for in life deliverance abides.

If your bonds be not broken whilst living, what hope of deliverance in death?

It is but an empty dream that the soul shall have union with Him because it has passed from the body:

If He is found now, He is found them,

If not, we do but go to dwell in the city of Death.

If you have union now, you shall have it hereafter.

Bathe in the Truth, know the true Guru, have faith in the true Name.

Kabir says:

It is the spirit of the quest that helps;

I am a slave of this spirit of the quest.

Songs of Kabir (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1991), pps. 46-47

ONE ADDITION FOR THIS SECTION:

A Spiritualist's Approach to After-Death States

Spiritualism as a movement became popular in America with the Fox sisters in the mid 1800s when they encountered a spirit that rapped in a code that they could interpret. They began communicating with the spirit of a dead pedlar who had been murdered in their family home in upstate New York. In the late 1800s in Britain, groups such as the Theosophical Society began making efforts to combine Eastern and Western religions into a syncretism or blending of religious ideas. They also practiced mediumship and communicated with spirits. Spiritualists developed abilities to talk to the dead on one hand and to *ascended masters* or spiritual adepts on the other. Spiritualism continued to gain popularity and was most widely practiced during and after World War I. So many people had loved ones who died in the war that there was a great need to feel the dead were happy and well even though they died in the midst of the suffering and madness of that war.

Anyone who has attended a spiritualist church or group will be familiar with the basic formula where the dead interact with the living using a medium or spiritualist minister as a kind of communications relay station. The medium communicates with a dead person, and passes the information on to the person the spirit wishes to contact. This formula appears to have changed little in the past one hundred years.

This description of spiritualists necessarily involves some generalizations, and we will not here attempt to discuss the channeling of spiritual teachers such as Kuth Hoomi, Seth, and Emmanuel but only the communication with ghosts and dead individuals. The spiritualist's basic view of the afterlife is one where the dead are able to watch the living from a distance, and often want to offer advice to living friends and relatives about how to solve their earthly problems. They also offer encouragement to the living about the certainty of an afterlife that is largely pleasant and satisfying, and in doing so contradict claims about the extremes of heaven and hell described in mainstream Christianity.

Spiritualism can even be viewed as a concrete alternative to Christianity because the spirits purport to offer direct evidence of an afterlife by telling the audience facts about individuals in the audience that are unknown to the spiritualist and the rest of the audience. The target individual then confirms the facts to be correct and the audience concludes that the dead are indeed speaking. If the information is wrong or irrelevant (does not apply to the target individual), the spiritualist has various excuses about how or why the information got garbled.

The spiritualist's approach usually requires no faith in God or Christ though some churches wed the two very different systems of Christianity and Spiritualism in a strange admixture of often contradictory ideas (most spiritualists believe in reincarnation). There is also no need of attaining salvation to escape hell in the afterlife. This statement that there should be no fear of hell in the afterlife generally applies to the average person who has not committed egregious evil acts during life. And even such evil doers will not experience torment eternally but will eventually move beyond it.

One fundamental tenet of these groups is the well-known maxim attributed to the ancient Hermetic philosopher Hermes Trismegistos that is commonly phrased "As above, so below". In the context of the afterlife, the statement can be interpreted to mean that earthly life (below) is basically a reflection of the afterlife (above). The two are different only in subtle ways. It also means that the "lower" earthly reality is derived from the higher reality, and that changes in the state of mind of the individual (in the mind or "above" world) can have direct bearing on future events in the physical or "below" world. This opens up the whole area of positive or magical thinking where our thoughts and attitudes are believed to ultimately create the world we live in. Spirit (or spirits) can also influence matter in a different way as in the case where the dead interact with the living to give knowledge and advice that can be channeled by a spiritualist medium.

The curious and surprising thing about communications with the dead is that despite their increase in telepathic skills, they seem to know very little about the workings of universe. Their vision and interests appear to be quite limited. They behave in some ways like tribal ancestors, and are often helpful and interested in the welfare of living friends and relatives. However, the quality of the counsel they offer seldom reaches the level of a "Dear Abby" advice column in a daily newspaper. The spirits, for instance, advise grandchildren or former spouses to go to the doctor and have a checkup, or to stop fighting with other relatives, or to leave a job where they are unfulfilled and find a new one.

Those who are convinced that the medium is actually in contact with the dead in the spirit world conclude that death is not the end, and that they will survive dying to enter into a comforting and familiar afterlife when their body is laid to rest. This is how spiritualism competes effectively with Christianity, which attempts to convince people of their

immortality by pointing to Jesus' promise that the dead will rise again. The spiritualist, however, will survive death without having faith in Christ and without living what is normally considered to be a religious life.

Generally, the dead seem to be quite limited, sometimes discontent, and mostly concerned with the kinds of things that were important to them while on earth. They seem to be basically as conventional and narrow in the afterlife as they were while alive.

This spiritualist's view of the afterlife is in some ways more disturbing than the Tibetan Buddhist view because at least the Buddhist view offers a change in consciousness and an opportunity to meet spiritual beings. Similarly, Christianity offers the extremes of heaven and hell, and therefore predicts a radical change in consciousness in the afterlife when compared to the spiritualist's provincial view of the afterlife.

One possibility is that it is the limitations of the spiritualist who cannot understand and communicate the level of consciousness of the spirits that is the problem. Another is that the audience would be alienated by beings who are too far above their state of consciousness. The spirits therefore avoid speaking about certain elements of their experience in order not to lose their audience. Both could explain the lack of spiritual insight and low level of consciousness of the dead.

However, if one attempts to work with the raw data and takes the information at face value, one must conclude after examining the concerns and goals of the dead in these spiritualist groups that learning spiritual travel during life is very important. Without such spiritual knowledge, the opportunities for exploration in the afterlife appear to be negligible. Expanding one's consciousness using spiritual travel techniques during life will likely carry over to the world of the afterlife because one world is said to closely parallel and mimic the other. Spiritual travel skills developed during life will therefore allow for expanded vision in the afterlife hopefully providing the increase in freedom and awareness that will make the afterlife more worth living. Knowledge of spiritual travel may help avoid the trap of an afterlife that closely resembles our lives on earth.

The tradition of spiritualism has two very important results with respect to death. First, it provides comfort to the grieving who have lost loved ones by providing a world view that shows they still exist and it even provides a means of contacting them. It shows that they can watch our activities, and even read our thoughts. We can therefore think about them and they can be aware of it. The dead and the living are connected and contacting them through a spiritualist or medium is not required. This can be very comforting to those who have lost loved ones. The power of this connection can be seen in older traditional cultures such as China, India, and Bali where ancestors are respected, and this kind of connection with and reverence for the dead is an important element of life and society.

Second, spiritualism makes death less fearful because death does not mean a severing of relationship with those that are loved. Death is no longer the fear of losing everything since a connection with the living can be maintained. The spirit following death can even continue to help and guide the living though in ways that are different from what was done while he or she was alive.

The spiritualist tradition truly has some positive sides when looked at from the point of view of a living, dying, or dead soul.

SPIRITUAL TRAVEL AND DEATH

Spiritual Travel as a Dress Rehearsal For Death

Spiritual travel and the experience of leaving the body may provide a kind of dress rehearsal for physical death.

The spiritual traveler realizes by immediate personal experience that the everyday world that is normally so stable and predictable can disappear at a moment's notice, just as it will at the time of physical death. At this point, an entirely new world opens up to replace it. In some travel experiences, the traveler has the feeling of traveling huge distances from his or her earthly home and normal state of waking awareness in just a few seconds. The feeling that you are leaving the comfortable and familiar world of five senses behind is very strong in some spiritual travel experiences.

There is a saying that only the bold and adventuresome find heaven. There is sometimes a decision at the onset of a spiritual travel experience:

Do you wish to play it safe and stop the experience because it may challenge the ego and its limited view of the world, and by doing so stay ignorant of some facet of reality, or are you willing to take the chance and perhaps learn something new?

The intuitive feeling that spiritual travel may involve travel through the realms of the afterlife gives it a certain gravity, since it means one may be experimenting with life and death.

Mystical experience is often said to transcend all dualities including the opposition of life and death. Shamans are believed by their cultures to enter the realm of the ancestors and converse with the spirits of the dead during ecstatic journeys out of the body.

One great gift that spiritual travel may provide is a feeling of confidence that death is not the end, and a familiarity with the realms beyond the physical world. To experiment and gain knowledge of spiritual travel may provide a sense of familiarity with the other worlds so that death will be less of a shock. Those who have had near-death experiences almost always *confirm this sense of increased confidence about their ability to handle the act of dying, and their belief in the existence of life after death.*

Death can be a new birth into a confusing and alien world where like an infant, the soul is dependent and incapable of choosing its destiny. Or it can be a kind of graduation where after a long period of schooling, the soul enters a new world with a confidence that comes from having learned what it needs to know to survive, to thrive, and continue its evolution. Spiritual travel is schooling for the soul as it approaches the death of the physical body.

Death is like traveling on an airplane for someone who has never ridden one before, and is unfamiliar with modern technology. The noise is frightening, the passenger is cramped and uncomfortable, once in the air he or she is a long way from earth and what is familiar, the air on the plane is different, and there are warnings of possible dangerous situations. It can be frightening. But riding planes often (as in practicing spiritual travel) lessens the fear.

Death is one of life's greatest challenges. But death is like war, childbirth or any challenging experience. To use the war example, the inexperienced soldier never knows how he will react under fire. The best he can do is train and learn everything he can to help him face the battlefield situation with confidence. If his training is good, he will likely return from battle with life and limb intact.

Learning spiritual travel only increases one's ability to face death with confidence. There is no guarantee that fear, confusion, and anxiety will not complicate the dying process. But how is it that so many are willing to go to *the hour of their death* without any training whatsoever? As Kabir says of those who make an outer show of religiosity but have no true religious experience:

You are going to death's door bound hand and foot!

The knowledge of spiritual travel can serve as a set of wings for the soul as it enters the vast open sky of the afterlife at the time of physical death.

BEYOND SPIRITUAL TRAVEL

Advanced Spiritual Perception Containing Both Physical and Nonphysical Elements

For myself and other seekers who attempt to practice the art of spiritual travel, the concept of spiritual travel seems a natural one. In considering the variety of spiritual travel experiences presented here (some of which are of a personal nature), it seems justifiable to maintain a solid wall between two realities - the reality based on perception in the body, and the one based on perception outside of the body. This fits well with distinctions in Western philosophy by Plato, the church fathers and later Descartes who subscribed to the dualism which separates the spiritual and the material spheres. The spiritual world is defined as the realm of the mind (and afterlife for those with a religious world view) where thoughts exist, and time, size, and distance are irrelevant. The material world is the realm of earthly existence and the body where time, measure, substance, and matter are the dominant reality.

However, there are people who have experiences that seem to violate this clear separation between "in the body" and "out of the body" experience. The following examples give a picture of souls who enter high states of spiritual awareness, and perceive both the spiritual and physical worlds simultaneously as part of one vast spiritual panorama.

Though they violate the basic distinction we have drawn up to this point, it is our position that the physical world is dependent on and derivative of the spiritual world and not the reverse. If this is the case, advanced awareness of the spiritual world must also optionally include awareness of the physical world. Reaching a high state of spiritual awareness therefore allows souls to peer into the physical world while also perceiving a broad spectrum of spiritual and psychic states. At a certain stage of spiritual development, the soul is said to have no concrete location but is able to perceive any reality it directs its attention towards, physical or spiritual. As with most mystical systems, the dualism of inner and outer must eventually give way to a fundamental monism, or the all-pervading unity of the infinite spiritual reality. As Kabir states when referring to this spiritual reality:

If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed:
If I say that He is without me, it is a falsehood.
He makes the inner and outer worlds to be indivisibly one;

Songs of Kabir (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1991),
p. 53

[Gopi Krishna describes a spiritual travel experience where the physical world becomes transparent to the spiritual world.](#)

Gopi Krishna avoided meditation for a number of years after an initial experience with the Kundalini which threw him mentally off balance. He then adopted a very strict diet and physical routine while the Kundalini energy slowly transformed and strengthened his body and mind to prepare him for this experience. His extraordinary spiritual experience occurred as the physical world continued to exist as little more than a transparent vapor through which he saw the spiritual one.

[Wilhurst perceives the interpenetration of the transpersonal light and the worshipers at a church service](#)

This vision describes the way a participant at a church service comes to perceive physical objects as transparent. An all-encompassing spiritual light is then perceived to pass through the church, the environment beyond the walls of the church, and all the people of the congregation.

[Franklin Merrell-Wolff describes his experience of rising above the physical world](#)

Franklin had been analyzing the components of his own inner experience over the years slowly separating out the changing elements from the unchanging spiritual essence which exists in the background. Here he describes a breakthrough experience where he was able to perceive this essence directly which did not interfere with or negate his sensory perceptions but propelled him into a radically altered state of consciousness.

ALL ADDITIONS FOR THIS SECTION:

[Gopi Krishna describes a spiritual travel experience where the physical world becomes transparent to the spiritual world.](#)

From: *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness*

Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1992), pps. 165-166

Without any effort on my part and while seated comfortably on a chair, I had gradually passed off, without becoming aware of it, into a condition of exaltation and self-expansion

similar to that which I had experienced on the very first occasion, in December 1937, with the modification that in place of the roaring noise in my ears there was now a cadence like the humming of a swarm of bees, enchanting and melodious, and the encircling glow was replaced by a penetrating silvery radiance, already a feature of my being within and without. The marvelous aspect of the condition, lay in the sudden realization that although linked to the body and surroundings I had expanded in an indescribable manner into a titanic personality, conscious from within of an immediate and direct contact with an intensely conscious universe, a wonderful immanence all around me. My body, the chair I was sitting on, the table in front of me, the room enclosed by walls, the lawn outside and the space beyond including earth and sky appeared to be most amazingly mere phantoms in this real, inter-penetrating and all-pervasive ocean of existence which to explain the most incredible part of it as best I can, seemed to be simultaneously unbounded stretching out immeasurably in all directions, and yet no bigger than an infinitely small point. From this point, the entire existence of which my body and its surroundings were but a part, poured out like radiation, as if a reflection as vast as my conception of the cosmos were thrown out upon infinity by a projector no bigger than a pinpoint, the entire intensely active and gigantic world picture dependent on the beams issuing from it. The shoreless ocean of consciousness which I was now immersed in appeared infinitely large and infinitely small at the same time, large when considered in relation to the world picture floating in it and small when considered in itself, measureless, without form or size, nothing and yet everything. It was an amazing and staggering experience for which I can cite no parallel and no simile, an experience beyond all and everything belonging to this world, conceivable by the mind or perceptible to the senses. I was intensely aware internally of a marvelous being so concentratedly and massively conscious as to outluster and outstature infinitely the cosmic image present before me, not only in point of extent and brightness but in point of reality and substance as well. The phenomenal world, ceaselessly in motion characterized by creation, incessant change and dissolution, receded into the background and assumed the appearance of an extremely thin, rapidly melting layer of foam upon a substantial rolling ocean of life, a veil of exceeding fine vapor before an infinitely large conscious sun, constituting a complete reversal of the relationship between the world and the limited human consciousness. It showed the previous all-dominating cosmos reduced to a state of transitory appearance and the formerly care-ridden point of awareness, circumscribed by the body, grown to the spacious dimensions of a mighty universe and the exalted stature of a majestic immanence before which the material cosmos shrank to the subordinate position of an evacent and illusive appendage.

Wilhurst perceives the interpenetration of the transpersonal light and the worshipers at a church service

From: *Contemplations*

W. L. Wilmhurst, p. 142, quoted in:

The Two and the One by Mirchea Eliade, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) pps. 70-71

I caught sight in the aisle at my side of what resembled bluish smoke issuing from the chinks of the stone floor. Looking more intently, I saw it was not smoke but something finer, more tenuous - a soft impalpable luminous haze of violet colour, unlike any physical vapour.

Thinking I experienced some momentary optical defect or delusion, I turned my gaze further along the side of the aisle, but there too the same delicate haze was present ... I perceived the wonderful fact that it extended farther than the roof and walls of the building and was not confined by them. Through these I could look and see the landscape beyond ... I saw from all parts of my being simultaneously, not from my eyes only. Yet for all this intensified perceptive power, there was yet no loss of touch with my physical surroundings, no suspension of my facilities of sense ... I felt happiness and peace beyond words. Upon the instant, the luminous blue haze engulfing me and all around me became transformed into golden glory, into light untellable ... The golden light of which the violet light seemed now to have been a veil or outer fringe, welled forth from a central immense globe of brilliancy ... But the most wonderful thing was that these shafts and waves of light, that vast expanse of photosphere, and even the central globe itself, were crowded to solidarity with the forms of living creatures ... A single coherent organism filling all space and place, yet composed of an infinitude of individual existences ... I saw moreover that these things were present in teeming myraids in the church I stood in; that they were intermingled with and passing unobstructedly through both myself and all my fellow-worshippers ... The heavenly hosts drifted through the human congregation as wind passes through a grove of trees.

Franklin Merrell-Wolff describes his experience of rising above the physical world

From: *Pathways Through To Space*

Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Pathways Through To Space* (New York: Warner Books, 1976), p. 19

Franklin had been reading a chapter from a book on the subject of spiritual "liberation". He realized that a common mistake in meditation, which seeks enlightenment, was that the meditator seeks something that can be experienced. He realized the falseness of this approach and proceeded to "drop the expectation of having anything happen". He was then able to abstract the *atman* or "I am" from the objective reality around him. He found nothing but "darkness and emptiness" from an objective viewpoint but realized "it as Absolute Light and Fullness" and that he was That. He writes:

I found myself above the universe not in the sense of having left the physical body and being taken out of space but in the sense of being above space, time, and causality. My karma seemed to drop away from me as an individual responsibility. I felt intangibly, yet wonderfully free. I sustained the universe and was not bound by it... I seemed to comprehend a veritable library of knowledge, all less concrete than the most abstract mathematics. The personality rested in a gentle glow of happiness.

CONCLUSION

The Comet Flying Through the Darkness of Space Attracted to the Infinite Spiritual Sun

The facets of spiritual travel are many and varied. They range from near-death experience to mystical union, from immersion in states of spiritual light to shamanic journeys to the ancestor world, from soaring through skies filled with celestial music to riding mantric waves of sound, from encountering spiritual landscapes to rocketing through the tunnel that connects the physical world to higher worlds of being.

In the past, spiritual travel might have been classified as an obscure form of mysticism on one hand, or as "astral projection" (as defined by Theosophy, the turn of the century spiritualist philosophy) on the other. The interest in it was very limited.

But the recent interest in the indigenous religions of tribal peoples, which includes shamanic experience, has added a new class of experience to the list, and a certain respectability to the category. Also, the enormous interest in near-death experience has greatly expanded the awareness of spiritual travel and out-of-body experience as a valuable form of spiritual exploration.

However, despite these developments, the fundamental question arises:

Why is spiritual travel not a wider topic in human conversation? Why is it unknown to the vast majority of humanity?

One explanation is that it is not an easy path, and inducing spiritual travel experience usually involves discipline, effort, time, inner experimentation, and even some good fortune since this ability is in some respects a gift. This is true to the extent that it is easier for some to leave the physical body than others. Therefore those who are not predisposed to this kind of experience might have to work harder and spend more time than those who have this predisposition to bring about out-of-body experience. As stated earlier, for most people (including the author), it is quite difficult to leave the physical body and some regard it with a certain amount of fear.

Another explanation is that the physical world offers so many challenges and distractions that it fills the entirety of mankind's consciousness.

But the pain of the death of a loved one, the dissatisfaction with the shallowness of the media-saturated consumer culture of the modern world, the sense of limitation that seems inherent in the makeup of the physical body, the knowledge that one's own old age and death are inevitable would seem to be enough motivation to counter at least some of life's distractions.

In the West, there are other cultural and historical reasons for this lack of interest in and awareness of spiritual travel. In addition to the obvious wide acceptance of the philosophy of materialism, and a scientific world view that reduces both the universe and the mind of man

to complex machines, spiritual travel is a radical notion which goes against several centuries of religious belief, and most interpretations of the Bible and Muslim Quran.

In Hinduism and Buddhism, it is generally believed that a person can enter the highest or holiest states of religious consciousness while still alive in the physical body. If you are not a Buddha or an enlightened sage (*siddha*) with insight into the nature of reality, it is *your limitation*. The universe is infinite even if you cannot perceive its infinity because of your limited perspective. Each person has a unique set of barriers to overcome to get beyond his or her own limited view of the world.

In mainstream Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, however, it is believed that the soul can only experience heaven after the physical death of the body. These areas are thought to be inaccessible to living people in the Western traditions, except perhaps for a rare saint or prophet chosen by God to reveal something specific to mankind. No individual can see religious visions of the world of God or visit heavenly worlds by his or her own choice. The person must wait for God's grace. Exploration is forbidden and attempts to explore are a sign of vanity.

It is in this context of alienation from the spiritual world that some Christians look forward to and even seek to bring about the end of the world in order that they be "raptured" or taken into heaven. Similarly, some Muslims commit suicide as an act of religious war to reach heaven. Even when such events bring about so much obvious death, suffering, and destruction, they are desirable because they are believed to also bring about transcendent spiritual experience and immediate heavenly salvation. The motivations for both groups are complex but certainly one primary motivation is the desperate desire for the spiritual experience of heaven, and destruction of the earth and/or the physical body is only a means to this heavenly end.

In addition, these are religions of surrender to a "higher power" that will take care of the individual like a parent caring for a child. At death, God, Jesus, or an angelic intercessor will take the soul of the individual and control its movements and destination. For Catholics, there is also the hope that prayer will move Mary or a Catholic saint to petition Christ to be charitable, and through grace give the dying individual a better afterlife than he or she might otherwise deserve.

In mainstream Protestant theology, much of which is based on Martin Luther's doctrine of "justification by faith", the individual is subject to sin, and therefore cannot be saved by imperfect works and gains heaven by faith alone. Curiously, having faith is not classified as "a work" even though serious Protestants both now and in the past seem to work very hard at having faith. But it is clear that without access to deeper spiritual experiences during life in these traditions, maintaining such faith becomes a Herculean exercise.

In each tradition, the unwritten *religious contract* states: "Once I am saved or have faith or live a good life according to the principles of my religion, I am guaranteed eternal life in a heavenly paradise". I sincerely hope this is true because so many religious people are depending on it.

Spiritual travel certainly has an element of trust and surrender, but is really more like yoga in that its major focus is self-mastery rather than surrender. It is a kind of continuing vision quest in which the arena of the quest is the mind instead of going out into nature to seek a

vision. Spiritual travel makes individuals responsible for their own limitations, and their spiritual perception or the lack of it. It is for those who are not quite able to trust the glowing promises of the mainstream religions, or at least those who would like some additional evidence for the existence of a spiritual world in the afterlife now instead of waiting until death.

Taking the concept of spiritual travel seriously means extending and expanding the helpful and valuable Christian virtue of faith beyond a strong belief in God and his inspired word, and the equally important virtue of works beyond prayer, charity, good will, and helpful action towards one's neighbor.

For the spiritual traveler, faith must be more than confidence in a distant deity which can only be encountered after death. It must also be faith in one's own ability to see and know the heavenly worlds and this ultimate reality here and now. Faith is also not the end of the individual's spiritual journey on earth. It is rather an important beginning of the spiritual journey because it provides a solid foundation for developing and pursuing a spiritual practice which leads to spiritual realization. Many in the West believe that faith divorced from works, spiritual practice, and the deeper study of a spiritual tradition is a ticket to heaven, and that salvation can come at the last moment of life after a long history of misdeeds. For these individuals, investment professionals have some valuable advice which can be applied to the spiritual path as well:

If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

The doctrine of "justification by faith" if wrongly understood could even be dangerous because it can be used to avoid living a spiritual life and to avoid doing any spiritual practice. While many mainstream religious traditions are strong in the areas of encouraging ethical action and religious community in their members, as educational institutions, they have a serious limitation. That is that they have low expectations of their members. The religious leaders or teachers who are many times very sincere in their desire to help others unfortunately have so little faith in their members (and also in themselves) that there is virtually no mention that such members are capable of having transcendent spiritual experience prior to death. If there is some glimmer of experience, it has to fit a narrow mold so as not to threaten the prevailing view of what is acceptable and possible.

The concept of spiritual travel shows this view to be unnecessarily pessimistic, and substitutes for it a view of an individual who should have great expectations and great optimism about his or her spiritual potential. It further shows that spiritual experience is wide-ranging and that the universe is a very big place with many rooms in God's mansion, and that spiritual experience should be encouraged rather than feared.

In the context of spiritual travel, works means adopting a spiritual practice that leads the individual step by step to mystical knowledge, and experimenting with such a practice and changing it if it does not produce results after extended effort. Works also means **taking whatever religion one is currently part of and searching for the transcendent and esoteric elements in that tradition**. This includes examining the lives of the saints, prophets, and saviors to uncover the core of transcendent religious experience that is at the heart of these great religious traditions. Spiritual travel as a practice is like mysticism. Both are largely nondenominational. They can be a part of almost any religious tradition.

The philosophy of spiritual travel as outlined at this site asserts that the individual is not trapped in the body while living in the body. He or she is capable of making voyages into the inner worlds and returning to report on the experience.

We can use various analogies to describe our identity during spiritual travel. The spiritual seeker becomes the comet flying through the darkness of space (the pictorial theme of this web site) attracted to the infinite spiritual sun which is its ultimate destination.

But the change in how we view ourselves during spiritual travel goes beyond a simple analogy. We are all **literally sailors on a cosmic sea**. Even though our current home port is the physical body, there is no reason to insist on staying moored at home port indefinitely. Sailors are safe while in port but their role requires them to leave and explore the sea. At physical death, we must move out on the ocean again anyway, so why not do some exploring now? Sailing is always smoother when the boat is controlled by an experienced seaman who has navigated in a broad variety of waters and weather conditions.

Through spiritual travel, we can become the captains of our vessels and master the inner sea of awareness. This mastery comes with a process of spiritual purification, and as it occurs, the inner sea of thought, space, imagery and emotion gradually becomes a sea of sacred light, sound, and Truth. When this occurs, the spiritual traveler can only echo the words of the Indian medieval poet Kabir:

I have drunk from the Cup of the Ineffable,
I have found the Key to the Mystery,
I have reached the Root of Union.
Traveling by no track, I have found that Sorrowless Land ...

There I have seen joy filled to the brim,
Perfection of Joy;
There I have witnessed the sport of One Bliss! ...

The inward and outward are become one sky,
The Infinite and finite are united:
I am drunken with the sight of this All! ...

Kabir says:

"My heart is frenzied, and I disclose in my soul what is hidden.
I am immersed in that one great bliss which transcends all pleasure and pain."

- THE END -