

Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor,

I have recently read the December, 1985 issue of *Lucidity Letter* and was particularly fascinated and puzzled by the subjectivity/objectivity debate that occupied much of its contents. Since I realized in college that there is no consensus whatever concerning even the most basic quantum phenomena, I have pretty much concluded that larger segments of "reality" were up for grabs. I have no particular stake in either side of the issue.

My reason for writing is both general and specific. I am specifically concerned by the assertions put forth by Robert Monroe ("WANTED: New Mapmakers of the Mind"), probably considered the guru of the OBE position. On page 48, he claims to have been in communication with "20,000+ individuals" who have experienced OBE's. A moment's reflection would indicate that he would have to be a master of time-distortion techniques as well. My specific complaint, though, is his claim that "those who have actively participated in these efforts [his organization's ongoing studies] have inescapably and conclusively accepted the reality of the out- of-the-body experience."

I attended the entire Monroe course led by a certified disciple several years ago. It consisted of a series of audio tapes made by Monroe himself (in a very creaky wooden chair!); these tapes contained a series of hypnotic suggestions, some desultory visualization exercises and then suggestions that the physical body could be left behind by a variety of means. Finally suggestions are given to protect the "travelers" from evil or lower-order entities and to beseech the protection of entities of higher intelligence. The hypnotically suggestible, after absorbing the miraculous fascinations of the Monroe book and then specific suggestions in the presence of a "certified expert", might indeed have hallucinated that they had left their bodies behind. As a clinical psychologist who has frequently used hypnotherapy, I would find it difficult to devise a program which would be more effective in inducing hallucinations and that would convince the hypnotically suggestible that they had left their physical bodies. To me, this is a far more parsimonious explanation than that of Monroe.

I have spoken with a number of people who have completed the Monroe course and none of them has experienced any hint of an OBE, obviously rendering false

Monroe's statement that those who have completed the course have "inescapably and conclusively accepted the reality of the out-of-body experience." None of the above implies that Monroe's own experience is not valid, though the casual manner in which he presents his "data" does make one wonder about his facile presentation of other more spectacular phenomena.

On to my general concerns: It appears that there are no insuperable obstacles to placing OBE research on the same footing as that of lucid dreaming. Monroe, for example, claims he is able to function in the Level I waking reality, (although he failed miserably in a controlled test situation). If OBE consciousness in general is in fact more suited for functioning in non-terrestrial environments, then experimental designs such of that of Salley, presented in the June, 1986 Lucidity Letter, could be easily implemented and should settle the question conclusively and perhaps open an exciting line of research. My disillusionment with a particular individual, the package he is marketing to the public and the sweeping claims he has set forth notwithstanding, a program of research attempting to seriously establish the authenticity of the OBE state would be very exciting and could perhaps parallel and certainly stimulate lucid dreaming research. At this point in time, however, nit picking about metaphysical differences with exponents of an unverified parapsychological position dilutes the impact of the soundly empirically-based and replicable contributions of LaBerge and others. The point is that until OBE's have been established as genuine measurable phenomena, as have lucid dreams, entering into debates with parapsychologists whose anecdotal claims have been repeatedly unsubstantiated and whose position has not one shred of evidence to support it, and further to feel that the scientific position presented is in need of defense, seems to me to be, scientifically, a giant step backwards. The entire idea of such symposia seems quite inappropriate or at best premature, and can do nothing but weaken the major breakthrough in consciousness research achieved by the lucid dream investigators. The burden of proof, and the right to participate in a debate with lucid dream researchers, rests squarely on the shoulders of those who hold to the OBE position. LaBerge, Hearne, and others have made a truly revolutionary leap in consciousness research. It is unfortunate that they feel it productive to waste time with the higher-level metaphysics of phenomena that have in no way been substantiated, rather than simply proceeding with further replicable experimentation.

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