



## Is and OBE a Dream, or are Dreams just OBE's?

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The purpose of this paper is to personal experiences review some studies and some concerning dreams and out-of body experiences.

One scientific finding on dreams and OBEs comes from Osis at the American Society for Psychological Research. In the spring of 1978, he, Donna McCormick, and I did a computerized frequency analysis of 304 OBE questionnaires he had accumulated. Each experient responded to 96 items. In the July 1978 *ASPR Newsletter*, Osis reported that the "vast majority contend that OBE vision is different from both ESP and dream imagery." Only 4 percent found dream imagery to be similar to OBE vision. This suggests that although dreams and OBEs may share some characteristics, there is a distinguishable difference for the experient.

Stuart Harary, in a personal communication (1972), differentiated precognitive dreams from OBEs initiated during sleep:

OBEs to future time and space differ from regular precognitive dreams in that I am definitely "out" and moving through a black, dark area that ends at some lighted future scene. The scene is seen by looking through a "window" that is like a silhouette of myself as I will be in the scene. Upon returning, I awaken and can remember only vaguely that I have been out and cannot remember much about where I have been. When the future scene becomes the present time and space, I get a sensation of nearly blacking out (nearly!) and then I remember the OBE vividly. There is a very strong feeling of *deja vu* and then a sensation that I can only describe as meeting myself "behind" myself as if I were two beings. I feel as if the me of the present were encountering the OBE of the past

who traveled into the future... Lately, I've been experiencing normal precognitive dreams more often than OBEs. This may be a function of state of mental consciousness. Precognitive dreams are more easily remembered than OBEs and are readily identifiable as dreams upon awakening (and to some extent while they are occurring, since I often know when I am dreaming because I can feel my entire self in one place on the bed rather than in several places). When the precognitive dream (later) occurs in reality (whatever that is), *deja vu* is also experienced but without the feelings of slipping into another state of consciousness that accompanying OBE-*deja vu*'s. I do not get a feeling anything like "meeting myself behind myself" when living through what was a precognitive dream either. I remain quite conscious and aware of what is going on around me during precognitive *deja vu*'s.

When I once asked Harary to tell me the difference between realization in an OBE and in a dream, he said it was as clear-cut as being in a room and dreaming about being in that room.

Personal experimenters have repeatedly stated that OBEs are not glorified dreams. Ingo Swan would probably protest vigorously if one were to give the name "dreams" to his exteriorizations. He is only one of the increasing number of experients who claim to be able to exteriorize from their bodies with perception, decision-making abilities, and memory while in a waking state. Alex Tanous, who is an experient being tested at the ASPR, also claims to leave his body consciously and at will. There have been some results that suggest these claims may have some validity and are worthy of further laboratory study. Harary also does not need to go to sleep in order to have an OBE. Modern experients seem to have more control over their experiences than their earlier counterparts.

Robert Monroe in his book, *Journeys Out of the Body*, has the following to say about flying and falling dreams. He appears to classify some dreams as OBEs with sufficient consciousness and memory:

I am quite certain that such dreams are but memories of some degree of Second State experience (OBE). I have often become aware of experiencing the flying dream during sleep, only to discover that I was actually floating out in the Second Body as I brought consciousness to the incident. This involuntary action happens most frequently without any conscious effort. It may well be that many people do have this experience during sleep, but just don't remember it. A dream of riding or flying in an airplane has a similar connotation... Falling dreams were also repeatedly examined in my early experiments. It is a common "feeling" in quick reintegration of the Second Body with the physical. Evidently, the proximity of the physical causes it to accept relayed sensory signals from the Second, which is "falling" into the physical (pp. 187-188).

Monroe has always been concerned that the psychological and psychiatric community is creating mentally ill people by not taking the time to explore and understand patients' personal experiences. It is easier to pigeonhole behaviors and give them worn-out labels than to investigate, define, and validate nonphysical experiences and their meaningfulness to the experient.

If a psychiatrist asks you about your dreams, he or she may show a keen sense of interest in what you relate. If you are asked if you have ever had the feeling of being someplace other than in your body, not much interest will be shown in your experience but it may be used to diagnose your "illness". Indeed, this is used as a diagnostic question. In this society, dreams are okay but OBEs are not. If your listener is fond of you, but skeptical, your OBEs may be classified as "just" dreams. But personal experimenters, such as Monroe, may suggest the opposite--that dreams are "just" OBEs with poorly developed consciousness.

Dreams may be launching pads for OBEs. This seems especially true with lucid dreams. A lucid dream is one in which you are aware that you are dreaming and can actually exert some control over the dream content. In other words, if you can increase your awareness during dreaming, you may find that you are not dreaming at all but having a totally different type of experience similar to the waking state but without the physical vehicle (body).

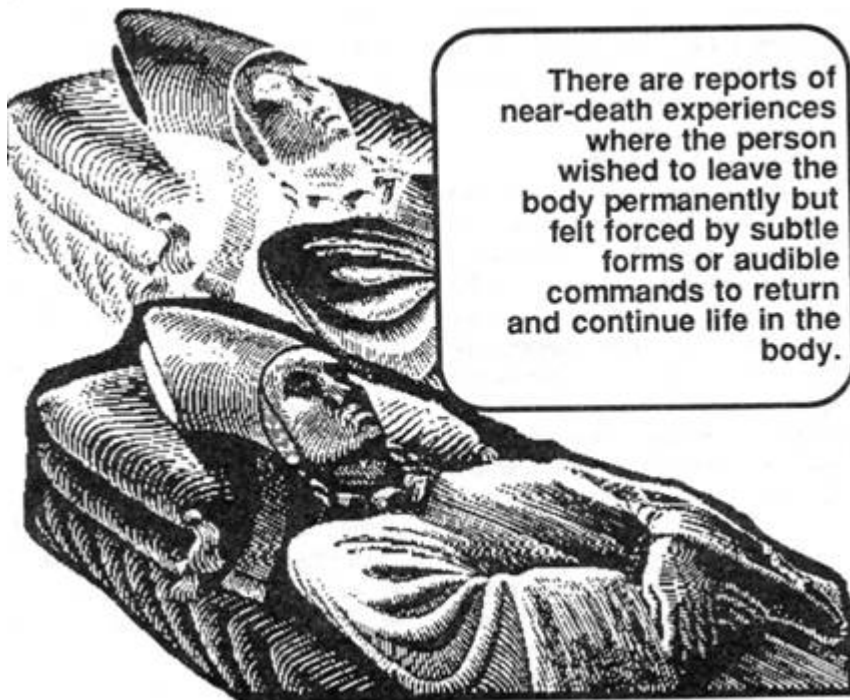
Oliver Fox used what he called the *dream of knowledge* as a technique for leaving his body. What he describes is similar to what is now called a lucid dream. He would try to keep his critical faculty awake while he physically went to sleep and then try to discern any discrepancy in a scene so that he might realize he was dreaming. Objects are often transformed in strange ways in dreams. For instance, you may dream that you are driving down the road in your car, but suddenly find yourself on horseback. You may then realize that the transformation of a car into a horse is impossible and that therefore you must be dreaming. Once you have realized this, you can wake up or you can simply watch the dream unfold or you can try to guide your horse to a specific destination and see what is going on there, and then when you awaken, check to see whether what you saw there actually took place or not. If you can begin to pick up correct information in this way, you may through repeated attempts begin to distinguish between "just dreams" and real information gathered while you sleep; and you may be on the way to voluntary, controlled OBEs.

We may all have OBEs nightly but never realize it--possibly only the awareness is lacking rather than the experience itself. We are told that we have several dreams every night, but there are many mornings when we remember none. If our memory and awareness are so feeble in the face of an ordinary accepted human experience, consider how crippled they may be in the face of the fear and nonacceptance to reports of OBEs.

Shiels (1978) reported on an ethnological study concerning beliefs in OBEs in 67 non-Western cultures. His idea was to test a dream theory proposed by Sir E.B. Tylor in 1929 which suggested that the rise of belief in the soul and OBE were based on dreaming (Tylor, 1871). For instance, if a sleeper saw and spoke with a dead person

during sleep, on awakening he or she might suppose that an immortal soul had survived physical death. To advance to a belief in OBEs from this idea is logical: If there is a soul and one experiences being in another place in a dream, one could easily believe the soul had left the body. Shiels tested this theory by determining from his data what proportion of dreams were interpreted as OBEs in the different cultures.

He had adequate data on only 44 cultures to perform this type of analysis. In 14 of these societies most (and usually all) dreams were seen as OBEs. In a third of the societies, dreams were not interpreted as OBEs even though OBE beliefs were present. In some of these cultures it was felt that only shamans could experience OBEs. In three of these societies OBE beliefs were absent, so dreams could not be interpreted as OBEs. Of the sample, 31 percent distinguished between the dreams that are OBEs and dreams that are "just" dreams and nothing more. If all members of each population dream but only some special members or no members at all have OBEs, then dreams cannot be interpreted as OBEs. Tylor's dream theory therefore appears to be inadequate to explain OBE beliefs in a fairly good sample of non-Western cultures. How often in dreams do we find ourselves in other places with other people, sometimes those who are deceased? But when we awaken, we think it was only a dream. On the other hand, those who realize OBEs awaken and feel that somehow they were actually in a distant place. So in the unconscious state, there appears to be two different experiences just as we can have two experiences in the waking state: thinking of being in another place and actually going there. The sensations of physically going to another place can never be mistaken for fantasizing being there, but in the unconscious state it is possible that going somewhere in a mental body (which is taboo) may be considered only a dream.



Defense mechanisms may be put into operation to keep our experiences from conscious realization because with every new freedom there is added responsibility. Can we assume the responsibility for being able to move about and have effects while in invisible form? A need for a different order of ethics is apparent here. The adamant argument which implies that OBEs are dreams indicates that we are not yet ready for the increased responsibility.

Nor do we seem to be ready to accept a new self-image that declares our spiritual beingness. We have been too cleverly and consistently taught that we are bodies by materialistic philosophies and behavioristic psychologies. Although physical scientists can withstand uprooting of established theories, unstable social scientists cling to their theories, whether proven or not.

But, there is a far more important personal idea that prevents us from realizing our experiences in the mental body and that is fear of death. Robert Monroe has been trying to train people to leave their bodies for years, and he states that the fear of not being able to return to their bodies is the major stumbling block. In some cultures, people are careful not to awaken a person too rapidly for fear that the soul will not have sufficient time to return and take control of the body. Therefore, they are actually afraid of killing other persons by awakening them too suddenly. Have deaths occurred in this manner? I know of none. But we do know how very unpleasant it is to be jarred from sleep by a loud noise or violent movement.

Contrary to this stated fear of death, Osis (1977) has determined that fear is not typically the dominant emotion as one dies. There are reports of near-death experiences where the person wished to leave the body permanently but felt forced by subtle forms or audible commands to return and continue life in the body.

It is so much easier for us to think that some inexplicable experience was a dream than to think it was an OBE. Conformity is comfortable--in present-day society, one is not intellectually rejected for reporting a dream. A dream can be forgotten and it need never trouble our thinking processes again. If we were to accept the reality of an OBE, we would have to withstand the pressure of disagreeing with societies concept of reality for the rest of our days. In practically every spontaneous case of OBE that has been acknowledged, the experient stresses the profound effect of the experience on the rest of his or her life--effects concerning the way in which one views oneself, the world, life, and death. In this anxiety- ridden world, can we accept this additional pressure? Or, is it in fact the only way to our freedom? Can we begin to view the body as our anchor to the physical world, or must we continue to be imprisoned by it?

A good way to start to free ourselves is to begin to feel and know our experiences for what they are, in the face of every contradictory argument. There will always be those to discourage these pursuits. Conformity is important in a densely populated, technological nation, but personal nonconformity that allows one to enjoy his or her own unique experiences and learn from them is also essential. You are the only one who has your exact experience. Take the initiative to realize and begin to understand your own experiences for their own personal value, while maintaining a cautious attitude toward self-delusion. Do not let others limit you, and by all means do not limit yourself

in the realm of experience. We are here to live and to live abundantly.

First, you might like to consider a method for analyzing your dreams. Van Eeden (1913) began to study his dreams in 1896. In 1913 his first report, "A Study of Dreams," was published in London. He classified different types of dreams and was particularly interested in lucid dreams. He experiences and recorded more than 350 lucid dreams as a part of his study.

He concluded he had a "dream-body" and that he could "remember as clearly the action of the dream-body as the restfulness of the physical body." He did not classify dreams as OBEs, but he did speak about a continuum of dreaming from floating and flying to lucid dreams. He mentions an astral body when speaking of his dream-body and then emphasizes the distinct sensation of having a body in certain dreams. Van Eeden considered this short, easy-to-read article as only a preliminary sketch of a greater work, which apparently he was never able to complete.

How can you differentiate ordinary dreams, lucid dreams, and OBEs? Attention to your experience is crucial, but intention may be even more meaningful. Therefore, tonight as you go to sleep you may use the powerful forces of suggestion to increase your awareness. To become aware of more than common, chaotic dream content, you may try affirming, "I will be conscious that I am dreaming in my dreams tonight." If you have difficulty remembering your dreams at all, you may start your mental exercises by affirming, "I will remember my dreams tonight." Dream structure will shift to accommodate your own personal assumptions, expectations, and intention. Changing these personal views is the key to working consciously with the dream state. Expectancy cannot be underestimated in influencing our experience, so to expect to have a lucid dream is fine but to expect the actual shape it may take could prove limiting. It is better to expect things such as that it will be pleasant and important for your growth.

As a technique, try something personally motivating. For instance, going to bed thirsty may cause you to dream you are in a desert with no water or it may cause you to move out of your body in order to satisfy your thirst, as Sylvan Muldoon (Muldoon & Carrington, 1968).

You may also use intention to obtain freedom and peace on an inner level. Once you have brought lucidity to your dreams, you may try the following experiment. If you are having a nightmare, confront the frightening entity in an effort to learn its purpose. If you get no satisfaction, but continued threats, remove the presence from your dream. You can visualize doing this with anything from a pencil eraser to a hydrogen bomb. Some will prefer to surround the entity with love and light. You could also just announce in the dream, "You are only a figment of my imagination." If you are in any sort of confining enclosure in the dream, dissolve it. Above all, remember that you are the producer-director of your dreams. By maintaining peace and freedom in your dreams, you may experience a new peacefulness in your waking state, as well. Decreasing inner anxiety will release waking energy and probably help to relieve feelings of depression.

Now that you are enjoying lucid dreams in which you are able to exercise some control over your experience rather than the symbolic, chaotic dreaming that is little understood, suppose you desire to have an OBE. Try saying to yourself something like,

"Tonight while I am asleep I am going to consciously leave my body and remember all the details of the experience when I awaken." You may want to travel to a physical location to derive information that can later be verified. Perhaps you will ask a friend to place some object (unknown to you) in full view in a specified room in their home; you can try to identify this target object and thus can verify your experience later with an understanding friend. What may happen is that you find yourself in a nonphysical environment. Do not be alarmed. Learn what you can and continue to try to shape your experience to your personal desire. If your quest is to come to know your spiritual beingness, some external verification of your experience will undoubtedly be necessary.

Gaining awareness and control of your dream experiences is certainly a valid way of changing your self-image and, in turn, your personal experiences. Dreams are not OBEs and OBEs are not dreams, but it is up to each of us to learn for ourselves how to discriminate these two altered states of consciousness. You have the assurance that others have tried and succeeded. You need motivation and courage to discern these realms of experience for yourself. It seems you already have the motivation if you are reading this article, and courage is simply the ability to confront what one can imagine.

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