

## Reflections on Gackenbach's Conception of Pure Consciousness as Related to Obe's and Nde's

I recently finished Gackenbach's article in 06/89 issue of *Lucidity Letter* (re: your linkings of OBE's/NDE's/UFO abductions/lucidity) and am now excitedly playing with viewing various of my own experiences through her proposed framework. I had my first OBE (that I remember) when I was 10. My grandmother (who lived with us and to whom I was very close) was dying (cancer) in our home. "Something" drew me to her and I crawled up onto her as she died. She began chanting in Cherokee (I'm 1/2 Indian) and I had the sensation of both our bodies slowly floating up to the ceiling. At this point, she "spoke to" me ("passing on a legacy"), then drew her hands away from me at which point I found myself "back in my body", lying on her corpse in the bed. I didn't feel as if I were asleep/dreaming, as I was so acutely attending to what was happening to my grandmother.

My next group of OBE's followed by NDE when I was 17 (auto accident...My NDE seems "typical" of others I have read, e.g., flying down a dark tunnel toward a light at the end, hearing music, seeing people I knew, then feeling "pulled backward" into my body, becoming semi-aware that I was riding in an ambulance, on my way to the hospital). For the subsequent week, I was, clinically, in shock, plus was pumped full of Demerol. My friend, Donna, in the same auto as I, was killed instantly in the accident, but I was not consciously aware of her death until several days later...(I was having NDE at time of accident, then no one told me for 4 or 5 days). I won't spend a lot of time here trying to describe the perceptual state(s) I was in during those few days, but, basically, I was seldom aware of waking, normally-experienced time and space. And, what's really interesting to me is that I had several "escapades" with Donna during this time (e.g., we "flew around" the universe, "visiting" other planets and stars, we'd "look down" at my body, lying in the hospital bed, then snicker about our "sneaking out" of the hospital without anyone's knowledge... Then, the last time I "saw"/spent with her, she told me to tell "everyone" she was "OK" and was going to a "nice place". Obviously, I was later quite confused when I learned of her death (as I'd assumed she'd been in the same state(s) as I). It took me several days to "clearly understand" that she was dead and I was alive...

At this point in my life, I had not regularly practiced any type of meditation/visualization, although I had attended some Indian powwows and participated in some related rituals (e.g., medicine circles, sacred hoops, vision quests). I had been more frequently and deeply involved in the Southern Baptist Church doctrine (which was fairly "fundamentalist", my Oklahoma home being in the "Bible Belt"). The following year, however, I began undergraduate study in Music Therapy and was exposed to guided imagery (Helen Bonny's), which I began practicing regularly. While my use of imagery/visualization has evolved quite a bit over the years, it is still an important and impactful practice for me. If we slice "meditation" into two gross categories, I suppose my practice has been/is a bit more similar to the "concentrative/one-pointedness" (vs. "insight/mindfulness") one, although I can identify certain aspects of each in what I do...

At age 23, I had another OBE during my father's death. I knew he was "going" and was kneeling beside his hospital bed, holding his hand. As with my grandmother, I had the sensation that we were floating upwards; this time, however, the scene I "saw" was not in the room, but one of beautiful clouds and lights. It was so euphoric that I "asked" my father to take me with him, but he gently denied my request, "saying" it was "not my time." Again, I did not feel as if I were sleeping/dreaming, due to the intensity of the moment. And, again, I "found myself back in the body", holding the hand of his body.

As I read Gackenbach's "postulating that at two points the system is forced to create a new mental model of its experience" (resulting in OBE's), I can say that my system was "on sensory overload...with extreme...emotional stress" during the deaths of my grandmother and father. Likewise, following the auto accident, my system was under extreme physical stress (as some "part of me" my have realized Donna was dead); I can also say that, subsequently, parts of my system were "denied sensory inputs" (due to physiology of shock and receipt of Demerol).

About one year after my father's death, I underwent some intensive hypnotherapy with a very skilled therapist. Among other things, I learned how to better recall and work with my dreams, mostly on a personal/egoic level (although I "met" several "dream teachers/guides", two of whom are still in my dreams, lucid and not, these seven years later).

Last September, I began a doctoral program in Transpersonal Psychology which heavily emphasizes integrative (emotional/physical/mental/spiritual) work. Last January, as part of a Psychology of Meditation class, I began regular practice of various insight/mindfulness meditations (in addition to my old, favorite visualizing). Also, as part of a Dream Interpretation class, I read Stephen LaBerge's *Lucid Dreaming*, then, BANG!! I had my first lucid dream (without really trying "that hard"; I was somewhat open to and somewhat skeptical of their "power"...until, of course, I experienced one...)

Over the past months, I've continued developing my lucid dream skills along, I suppose, the usual lines (flying, sex, visiting places/people from waking, psi skills). Two mentions, however, in Gackenbach's article relate to some of my most recent lucid dreaming shifts. I have recently experienced a qualitatively new (to me) type of dream bizarreness (especially when looking at my hands; now they often look mutilated and/or as if they are hands of another creature, not human, not like my waking hands at all). Also, in considering her thoughts on the witness perspective, I've recently experienced splits of my consciousness in dreams, sometimes watching myself and acting in the dream, other times looking/seeing in several directions simultaneously, and sometimes being two simultaneous actors (my usual dream ego and another or animal). This, also, feels newly bizarre.

All this is so new for me that I'm presently only taking in various research/theoretical suggestions from others' proposals (and am not nearly prepared to begin formulating my own with much conviction). And, this a very fascinating and fun time for me.

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