

**LSD**

**AND THE  
MIND  
OF THE  
UNIVERSE**

**Diamonds  
from Heaven**



Christopher M. Bache, Ph.D.

FOREWORD BY **Ervin Laszlo**

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## Diamonds from Heaven



Christopher M. Bache, Ph.D.



Park Street Press  
Rochester, Vermont

*This book is dedicated to*

*Stanislav Grof*

*and*

*Christina Hardy*

*Without Stan this journey would not have been  
taken;*

*without Christina this book would not have been  
written.*

# LSD

## AND THE MIND OF THE UNIVERSE

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“Chris Bache demonstrated tremendous courage to embark on the 73 high dose LSD sessions that form the core of this book. The insights and lessons he brought back are fascinating and profoundly relevant as we seek to answer fundamental questions of the meaning and purpose of our own lives. *LSD and the Mind of the Universe: Diamonds from Heaven* is a diamond from Chris!”

RICK DOBLIN, PH.D., FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR OF THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSOCIATION  
FOR PSYCHEDELIC STUDIES (MAPS)

“Chris Bache is an intrepid psychonaut whose 20-year odyssey has yielded an extraordinary harvest of luminous insights into the deeper structure of reality and the underlying dynamics of human existence. Prepare to be amazed, energized, purged, shattered, illuminated, and reborn by penetrating to the heart of this stunning revelation for our times.”

DAVID LORIMER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR AT THE  
SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL NETWORK

“This most remarkable book fuses the critical reasoning of philosophy of religion and the epiphanies of mind that come from direct gnostic access to some of the deepest structures of the universe. That these impossible epiphanies were made possible by a most remarkable scientific discovery, LSD, which is now criminalized, only adds to the power of Chris’s remarkable revelation of who and what we really are.”

JEFFREY J. KRIPAL, HOLDS THE J. NEWTON RAYZOR  
CHAIR IN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AT  
RICE UNIVERSITY

“Every now and then a genuine pioneer arises in our midst. With modest yet profound intelligence, Chris Bache takes us with him on his courageous journey into the depth of the universe as a field of reality that transcends all our beliefs and consciousness. With him we experience the intense suffering and ecstasy of universal reality.”

BARBARA MARX HUBBARD, AUTHOR OF *EMERGENCE*  
AND *CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION*

“This book is an extraordinarily rich journey, and Professor Bache’s cosmic insights represent a rare but profound gift to humanity. Highly recommended!”

EBEN ALEXANDER, M.D., NEUROSURGEON AND  
AUTHOR OF *PROOF OF HEAVEN*

“We have extensive historical, cross-cultural, and experimental evidence that psychedelics can have significant therapeutic and religious benefits. Now we have a new kind of data: the careful reflections by an eminent philosopher and theologian of his own intensive and systematic psychedelic explorations into the farther reaches of human experience.”

ROGER N. WALSH, M.D., PH.D., PROFESSOR OF  
PSYCHIATRY AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR AT THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE

“A stunning and uplifting vision of the cosmos and humanity. This revelatory and transformative text is a genuine treasure; to read it is to open a portal into the vast and mysterious beauty of life.”

G. WILLIAM BARNARD, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES AT SOUTHERN METHODIST  
UNIVERSITY

“Chris Bache has traveled into largely uncharted realms to explore the further reaches of psychedelic experience and brought back hard-won insights into our world and our moment in history. His memoir will be a guidebook for generations to come. This is a gem of a book.”

DUANE ELGIN, AUTHOR OF *THE LIVING UNIVERSE*

“A fascinating and inspiring work by an intrepid explorer. A rare glimpse into realms of consciousness and the transformation such journeys can bring, including a revelatory vision of an enlightened human future.”

PETER RUSSELL, AUTHOR OF *THE GLOBAL BRAIN*

“Words can barely begin to describe the power and the importance of this book. If you open yourself to the paradigm-shattering wisdom of this remarkable book, you *will* be changed, and you will sense great possibilities for humanity. Essential reading for a species at the crossroads.”

STEPHEN GRAY, EDITOR OF *CANNABIS AND SPIRITUALITY*

“Chris Bache’s controlled LSD experiences have been meticulously logged, analyzed, and synthesized in this extraordinary book, which greatly extends our known entheogenic cartography. A must-read for all those interested in psychedelics, psychology, and the furthest reaches of subjective experience.”

DAVID LUKE, PH.D., COEDITOR OF *DMT DIALOGUES*



# Acknowledgments

This was a challenging book to write on many levels, and I want to express my deepest thanks to a circle of friends who helped me give birth to it. Each brought a unique sensitivity to the early manuscript, and their many suggestions greatly improved the narrative. At a deeper level, their love and support sustained my hope that this story might be useful to others. My heartfelt thanks to Manuel Aicher, Anne Baring, Jessica and Travis DiRuzza, Duane and Coleen Elgin, Roger and Brenda Gibson, Bob Lyman and Kaia Svien, Amey Park, Janis Phelps, Richard Welker, and Tom Zinzer. I also want to thank Jorge Ferrer, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Tarnas for their very helpful feedback on the manuscript. A special thanks to Bill Roepke, with whom I spent many days going through these chapters and discussing the experiences they contain. I also want to thank the editorial staff at Inner Traditions for their tremendous support and help making this a better book.

I owe Stanislav Grof more than I can express. Without the clarity of his scholarship and the power of his personal example, I would not have undertaken this journey or had the courage to follow it where it led. I will be forever in his debt.

Lastly, I want to thank my wife and partner, Christina Hardy, who believed in me and in this work so deeply. She has been my life companion on the long trek down the psychedelic mountain. I could not have done this without her.

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*Alienation from nature and the loss of the experience of being part of the living creation is the greatest tragedy of our materialistic era. It is the causative reason for ecological devastation and climate change. Therefore I attribute absolute highest importance to consciousness change. I regard psychedelics as catalyzers for this. They are tools which are guiding our perception toward deeper areas of our human existence, so that we again become aware of our spiritual essence.*

ALBERT HOFMANN

APRIL 19, 2007

# Foreword

Ervin Laszlo

When the author of this remarkable book approached me about writing a foreword to it, knowing his previous work I accepted with pleasure. Having now read the manuscript, I do not regret my decision. I feel compelled to produce a genuine “fore-word”—not a lengthy treatise but a few words. Nothing more is called for because the information conveyed in these pages stands by itself. It needs to be apprehended and absorbed, not explained. However, in view of the controversy surrounding the use of psychedelics to obtain information about the real world, the intellectual conditions under which this book has been written do need a word of introduction. This foreword is dedicated to this task.

This is one of the most insightful and significant books I have ever read. But to understand its significance and to endorse its message, one must be willing to entertain three premises:

That there is an intelligence behind the things that exist in the universe,

That there is purpose exhibited by this intelligence, and

That it is humanly possible to access some elements of this intelligence and learn some aspects of its purpose.

These premises have been debated for millennia, with the debates usually confined to the domains of theology and spirituality. Today, however, they can be raised in the context of the new paradigm emerging in science. If they are raised and debated in this context, the usual

objections to using psychedelics to obtain valid knowledge about the universe lose their cogency. If we sit with this emerging body of evidence with an open mind, we recognize, as Bache says, that our mind is a window on the universe and through this window comes information not only about its physical objects and processes but also about the agency that lies behind them and the purpose exhibited by this agency.

Our window on the universe is not a narrow slit that allows only the penetration of physical information, as mainstream science holds. Under the right conditions, our window opens to holographically complete information sourced in the intelligence that pervades the universe. In its ordinary state, our brain is not equipped to decode all or even most of this information; it is designed to decode only those aspects and segments that are necessary or useful for our immediate life. Under certain conditions, however, the receptivity of the brain can be increased and these aspects and segments can be expanded. There are many ways of doing this, and it is immaterial which means are chosen as long as they are effective and do not damage the brain, the rest of the organism, or the web of life in which the brain and the organism are embedded. Among the various methods for expanding our field of awareness, such as holotropic breathing, meditation, and trance dancing, Bache shows that psychedelics are a particularly powerful method when used in a safe and therapeutically structured manner.

Of course, we need to distinguish valid and real information from misleading and illusory information. Under the influence of psychedelics, we get an expanded stream of information, and most of that stream is still considered illusory by the modern mind. We need to take steps to ensure that the information we apprehend through the chemically modified receptivity of our brain is genuine, even when it goes beyond the modern mind's understanding of reality, and this is the task of critical philosophical reflection.

With his expansion of the therapeutic protocol into the protocol of psychedelic exploration, Chris Bache has provided us with a guide for gathering genuine information from deep states of consciousness induced by psychedelics.

Following his protocol does not guarantee the truth of the three premises stated above; these are premises, not conclusions. However,



there are independently compelling reasons to assume the validity of these premises, as I have argued in my recent books, in particular *What Is Reality?* (2016) and *The Intelligence of the Cosmos* (2017).

When we recognize the validity of these premises, our mind becomes more receptive to the information that reaches us in these expanded states. As we do, we apprehend deeper and wider layers of reality and come closer to understanding the purpose of our existence. This is amply illustrated in Bache's fascinating and courageous investigation of the deep domains of consciousness that open under the influence of LSD.

**Ervin Laszlo**, is a philosopher, systems scientist, and founder of the Club of Budapest think tank. Twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, he has published more than seventy-five books and over four hundred articles and research papers. He lives in Tuscany.

# INTRODUCTION

## 73 Days

Shortly after beginning my career as a university professor in northeastern Ohio, I made a decision that changed the course of my life. Between 1979 and 1999, I chose to take LSD seventy-three times in carefully planned, therapeutically structured sessions. I did this to explore my mind and the mind of the universe as deeply and systematically as I could. This book is about what happened on those seventy-three days and why it matters.

From ancient times, men and women have gathered under the night sky and taken substances that helped them commune with their inner being and with the life that runs through all things. They have sat in prayer and silence, seeking healing and guidance so that they could return to their lives better people and more aligned with the deeper currents of life. Because these substances opened them to the spiritual dimension of existence, they were called “sacred.” Because they healed the wound of forgetting who and what we truly are, they were called “medicines.” From before written history began, the sacred medicine path has been one of many spiritual paths human beings have taken to find themselves, each other, and the Divine.

In my corner of the planet, however, most of these medicines were made illegal in 1970. Officially classified as hallucinogens, they were declared to have no medical or therapeutic value. The powerful visions unleashed by them were held to be distortions of reality and therefore to have no philosophical value. When the Controlled Substances Act was passed, psychedelics became a closed door, not only to psychotherapists but to philosophers as well.

Fast-forward to 2014, a watershed year in the return of psychedelics to respectable scientific and intellectual inquiry. Leading up to that year, a handful of heroic studies had been published on the therapeutic uses of MDMA, psilocybin, LSD, and ibogaine to treat post-traumatic stress disorder, drug addiction, and cancer-caused depression. Newspapers and magazines began reporting these studies, frequently citing the pioneering efforts of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) to reopen psychedelic research as a legitimate field of scientific inquiry. Then in February of 2014, *Scientific American* published an historic editorial with the title “End the Ban on Psychoactive Drug Research.” The tagline read: “It’s time to let scientists study whether LSD, marijuana and ecstasy can ease psychiatric disorders.” That same year two important books on psychedelics were published. The first was *Acid Test* by the award-winning journalist Tom Shroder, describing the resurgence of research on psychedelic therapy and the lives being healed. The second was *Seeking the Sacred with Psychoactive Substances*, a two-volume anthology on the spiritual uses of psychedelics through history, edited by the psychologist and theologian J. Harold Ellens. Soon two more important books on the renaissance of psychedelic research would follow: William Richards’s *Sacred Knowledge* (2016) and Michael Pollan’s bestseller *How to Change Your Mind* (2018).

Clearly, a cultural pivot is taking place around psychedelics. Researchers at Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, UCLA, New York University, University of Wisconsin, the University of New Mexico, and the University of Alabama are now doing legally sanctioned research into the therapeutic potential of psychedelics. Psychedelic research is also underway in England, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Israel, Spain, Mexico, and New Zealand. In San Francisco, the California Institute of Integral Studies has established the Center for Psychedelic Therapy and Research to train the next generation of certified psychedelic researchers. In Brazil, psychologists have documented the positive social impact that ayahuasca has had in the churches of Santo Daime and União de Vegetal. The MAPS Psychedelic Science conference in 2017 drew a record 2,700 attendees. As science slowly replaces politics as the arbiter of whether psychedelics have therapeutic value, we appear to be slowly rejoining our ancestors under the night sky, replicating this ancient path in the modern therapist’s office.

If this trend continues, it will only be a matter of time before we document what many early psychedelic researchers discovered decades ago—that in addition to healing the psychological wounds of life, these substances have a remarkable capacity to initiate us into a deeper experience of the universe itself. We are on the verge of rediscovering that psychedelics have not only great *therapeutic value*, they also have great *philosophical value*.

I was trained as a philosopher of religion, and it is primarily the philosophical significance of psychedelics that has fascinated me, namely, their capacity to break through the sensory barrier and open us to the deeper landscape of consciousness. My interest in psychedelics began in 1978, when I first read Stanislav Grof's *Realms of the Human Unconscious*. I was twenty-nine years old, fresh out of graduate school, and looking for where to take my research now that my dissertation was finished. When I read Grof's book, I immediately saw the relevance of his work to core questions I had been trained to ask as a philosopher, questions about whether life has meaning and purpose, whether human beings survive death, and whether there is a conscious intelligence operating in and through the universe. In that book, Stan distilled decades of clinical research involving hundreds of subjects and thousands of psychedelic sessions. In one reading, he convinced me that when LSD is taken in a therapeutically structured setting, it can be safely used to explore our consciousness with beneficial results. In addition, he suggested that in this setting we could come to know not only our own mind but also the mind of the universe itself. It was the latter claim that riveted my attention. I simply had to see what this substance might teach me about our universe.

The problem, of course, was that my culture had just made psychedelics illegal. I could not keep the job I loved or remain part of the academic community if I worked openly with psychedelics. Harvard had demonstrated this when it had fired Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert in 1963. By 1970, the era of active psychedelic research was over. Faced with these circumstances, I made a difficult choice. I decided to learn Grof's methods for working therapeutically with LSD and use them to privately explore my own consciousness.

To do this, a large part of my life had to go underground. In my public life, I continued my work as a professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Youngstown State University, doing the things that professors usually do. I taught courses, served on committees, published, and in time came to be regarded as a reasonably valuable member of my community, at least as these things are measured by grants, awards, and friendships. Meanwhile, in my personal life I stepped into a circle of secrecy and began an intense inner journey that ended up lasting twenty years.

I retired from my university in 2011 after thirty-three years of service. My entire career had taken place between the time when psychedelics had been made illegal and when *Scientific American* called for lifting their ban. If I had waited for my country to reclaim these substances, as it now appears to be doing, I would have missed an opportunity that comes around only once in a lifetime. I simply could not let this chance pass me by. Given the legal issues surrounding LSD, it is only now, years after ending my long self-experiment and retiring from active university service, that I am finally free to discuss my psychedelic work openly.

I hope that when psychedelics have been fully restored to respectable public discourse, people will understand the choice that I made in 1979. I hope the fact that I have lived a socially responsible and engaged life will give me a small measure of credibility when I tell the unusual story that follows. I hope readers will see that the powerful states of consciousness that psychedelics can unleash can be integrated into a busy householder's life. And last, I hope that people who have had frightening experiences with psychedelics will find strength in learning that one can enter terrifying experiential domains and return unharmed, even strengthened.

Legally sanctioned research on psychedelics has now resumed, but it will likely be years before researchers will be allowed to explore the deeper dimensions of consciousness that have occupied me all my adult life. At the present time, psychedelic research is focused on healing the personal psyche and exploring the neurological and biochemical pathways that psychedelics activate. These are important steps in reclaiming these powerful agents, but as Grof and other early researchers demonstrated decades ago, healing the wounds of the personal psyche is only the first stage of a much longer journey. As the personal psyche falls away, a

deeper horizon emerges. I had to find out what I could discover there and how far I could push this new frontier.

I came to this work as a psychedelic neophyte and deeply skeptical of the transcendent. I was raised in the Deep South, went to a Catholic high school, and studied theology at the University of Notre Dame. The psychedelic '60s passed me by entirely. As I broadened my intellectual horizons at Cambridge University and then Brown University, the furthest I got psychedelically was smoking a little grass. Despite my early religious roots, by the time I finished graduate school, I was an atheistically inclined agnostic, well versed in the rise of science and the eclipse of religion in the modern mind. Essentially, I had studied my way out of religion altogether. My dissertation on the logic of religious metaphor concluded that our finite language simply does not allow us to speak with precision about the infinite, that all discussion of God is shining flashlights at the stars. By both background and training, I am the last person you would expect to have written the book you are holding now. But then came LSD.

There is no way to soften the fact that the story I'm going to share with you here is a radical story that challenges many of our culture's deepest convictions about reality. Early in my career, I had articles rejected by professional journals because their editors simply could not believe that the psychedelic experiences that I was analyzing from Grof's research were possible. They penciled in the margin comments like: "How is it possible for a human being to actually experience this? Do you mean this metaphorically?" Lacking personal experience of these domains, the editors could not comprehend how the boundaries of experience could be stretched to such extreme limits. I understand their reservations. If I had been standing in their shoes, I probably would have thought the same thing. These early rejections taught me that before the philosophical discussion of psychedelic experience could even begin, people would need to understand the inner workings of these experiences better. This would require not arguments and footnotes but the candid sharing and exposition of one's own psychedelic experiences as a first step to a broader conversation.

*LSD and the Mind of the Universe* is the memoir of a psychedelic explorer. It is the story of one person's journey into the mind of the

cosmos. I've tried to tell this story as concisely as I can, focusing on the journey itself and keeping theoretical discussion to a minimum. I will rely on other authors to give the reader the history and science of psychedelics, their psychopharmacology, and their clinical applications. I share my psychedelic experiences here not because I think they are special or unique, for they are not, but because, all things considered, they are the most valuable gift I have to offer the psychedelic conversation.

I've pondered these experiences for many years, trying to fathom their complex patterns. In the end, I think the experiences themselves may be more valuable than anything I say about them. Interpretation may change over time, but experience endures as a measure of what is possible. I place these experiences beside the many other experiences being reported by the psychedelic community, both in print and in Erowid's extensive online Experience Vaults. The psychedelic landscape is so vast, no one person can hold it all. Clearly, our strength is in our collective vision and our overlapping insights.

And last, this book has two titles, what Tibetans would call an outer title and an inner title. *LSD and the Mind of the Universe* is its outer title, describing what the book is about—exploring the mind of the universe through carefully conducted LSD sessions. *Diamonds from Heaven* is its inner title, describing its innermost essence, for at the center of the mind of the universe, one enters the infinite clear light of Diamond Luminosity.

I sincerely hope that the story of this journey will be useful to others, including those who never take a psychedelic themselves. In the end, what is important is not the method of exploration used but what this method shows us about the extraordinary universe we live in.

# ONE

## The Path of Temporary Immersion

*The passionate longing of the human heart has always been to press beyond the boundaries of the known, to break through the limitations of our understanding, to extend the horizon of awareness. This is perhaps our most fundamental and essential freedom.*

ANNE BARING, *THE DREAM OF THE COSMOS*

In this opening chapter, I want to candidly describe how I worked with LSD and share some core observations about the psychedelic process. Even as psychedelic research resumes, there is still a great deal of misinformation and mistrust of psychedelics in our culture. By putting my cards on the table up front, I hope to create as clear a field as possible for the story that follows. Readers who are not familiar with the psychedelic literature will get a solid understanding of how this method of inquiry works, while those who know this literature well will see how I have adapted and personalized it.

I will understand if some readers choose to skip these preliminaries and jump straight to the sessions, but if you do, I hope you will double back and read this chapter later. The experiences I'm going to share in this book go so far beyond what most people think is possible that it's important to lay a strong foundation for them, and that's what this chapter does. In my courses at the university, my strategy was always: start slow, build strong, and go far. So too here, for this is the farthest I have ever asked anyone to go with me.



## The Therapeutic Protocol

I've never dropped acid and gone to a concert, never spent the night tripping with friends. When I took LSD on these seventy-three days, I entered a carefully constructed space dedicated to self-transformation. I was isolated from the outside world, in my home or my wife's private office, and protected from all interruptions. I was lying down on a mattress on the floor, surrounded by cushions, and wearing eyeshades and headphones. The music was carefully selected to support the stages of opening and closing—gentle music as the drug comes on, powerful evocative music as it builds momentum, expansive music for the peak hours, and gentle music for the long, slow return.

Those who have done serious journey work know the set and setting well. Prepare yourself with a centering practice such as yoga or meditation, eliminate outside distractions so that you know that whatever you are confronting is coming entirely from within, give responsibility for your care and safety over to a sitter, take the medicine, and then open to whatever emerges in your experience. I followed the same procedure in all my sessions. They always began in the early morning and lasted all day, about eight hours. They were all solo journeys; I didn't work in groups. This allowed each session to be individually tailored to follow wherever the experience would take me. My sitter was a gifted clinical psychologist who also happened to be my wife. Carol learned the therapeutic protocol by studying the psychedelic literature with me. There are pluses and minuses to having your partner be your sitter, but it worked well enough for us. We learned as we went, and I will always be grateful to Carol for the support she gave me in this work.

The core of the therapeutic protocol is to powerfully amplify your unconscious, allow its patterns to emerge in your awareness, and surrender completely to whatever presents itself in your experience.<sup>\*1</sup> Through the unrestricted engagement of your inner experience, the patterns will build in intensity until they come to a critical threshold. The same patterns will keep showing up in a variety of forms until a climax of expression is reached—some inner gestalt is consciously realized or some reservoir of pain drained—and then they will spontaneously resolve themselves. The energy trapped in these patterns is released, and the psyche is then free to

flow into more expansive states of awareness for the remainder of the session. If this process is repeated many times, deeper patterns begin to emerge. However inscrutable these patterns may be at the time, eventually, they too can be dissolved by undefended engagement, and once they are, new worlds of experience will continue to open.<sup>\*2</sup>

Using a protocol that combines protected isolation, interior focus, and deeply evocative music drives the psychedelic state far beyond what one is likely to experience if one takes LSD in a recreational setting. I'm not disparaging tripping, for clearly many people have had life-changing experiences using psychedelics in this manner. I'm simply pointing out that staying in contact with the outside world will change the pattern of the experiences that emerge. They will tend to be shallower, less cathartic, and less revelatory.

After the session has ended, the work shifts to critical assessment. Psychedelic experiences can be extraordinarily moving and complex. In order not to be swept away by them or simply carried along by their novelty, it's important to step back and critically assess them. What actually happened in today's session? What does it mean? What lessons should I take from it? Sessions have many layers to them, and these layers weave themselves into long overlapping exercises that advance one theme and then another in a sometimes choppy fashion.

In our sessions, we are in dialogue with an infinite intelligence, and this intelligence speaks to us from different depths on different days. Wisdom coming from different levels of consciousness carries different inflections reflecting different starting points, different sets of assumptions. It takes time to map the structure of these sequences, to recognize the logic of the larger whole.

Part of critical discernment also means being brutally honest with yourself. We must stay mindful of our shortcomings if we are to avoid the greatest danger of working with psychedelics—psychic inflation. Psychedelics give us temporary access to realities beyond our pay grade, allowing us to experience things beyond our ordinary capacity. It's all too easy to think that because we have had a deep and profound experience, we have become a deep and profound person, but this is a fool's delusion. Even when psychedelics allow us to experience the person we are in the process of becoming, we have to face the fact that we have not become

this person yet, nor have we fully internalized the wonderful qualities we may have temporarily touched.

## **In a Philosopher's Hands**

While Grof's therapeutic protocol was the foundation of my psychedelic practice, I want to emphasize that I did this work not as a clinician but as a philosopher. I was not primarily seeking healing but an understanding of our universe. I wanted to experience the universe as deeply as I could and to know what I was at the core of my being, underneath all the layers of social and psychological conditioning. In this I saw myself pursuing a philosophical method that in modern times can be traced to William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. There in the context of his extensive analysis of spiritual experience, James describes his own self-experiments with nitrous oxide, which led to his famous observation:

One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. (James [1902] 2002, 300–01)

With the disciplined use of psychedelics, philosophers now have the capacity to step through the door that James opened and explore the territory that he briefly glimpsed. In this, we are witnessing the birth of not just new insights into consciousness but a new way of doing philosophy. This new philosophical method can be boiled down to three basic steps:

1. To systematically push the boundaries of experience in carefully structured psychedelic sessions,

2. To make a complete and accurate record of your experience immediately following each session, and
3. To critically analyze your experience, bringing it into dialogue with other fields of knowledge and with the experiences of other psychedelic explorers.

By moving systematically back and forth between psychedelically amplified states of consciousness and our ordinary consciousness, where these experiences can be digested and evaluated, philosophical discourse is expanded and deepened. It is difficult to overstate the significance of this historic transition. With psychedelics we are entering a new era in philosophy.<sup>\*3</sup>

## **LSD Sessions as a Path of Spiritual Awakening**

Like many in my generation, I was initially drawn to working with psychedelics because I was interested in enlightenment. I had been meditating for a number of years and had encountered the usual blocks that show up in the early stages of sitting practice. I thought that by doing some therapeutically focused LSD sessions, I could work through these blocks faster and accelerate my spiritual awakening. I chose to work with LSD because that was the primary psychedelic Stanislav Grof had done his early research with, and I trusted what I saw there. Both the Eastern and Western spiritual traditions I had studied emphasized death of self as the gateway to liberation, and this seemed consistent with Grof's emphasis on ego-death.

From an historical perspective, therapeutically structured LSD sessions are a modern variation of an ancient spiritual path that has been well documented by scholars.<sup>\*4</sup> From the Eleusinian mystery rites of ancient Greece to the peyote ceremonies of Native Americans and the ayahuasca churches of present-day Brazil, human beings have been ingesting consciousness-amplifying substances for thousands of years and have all come to the same conclusion: these substances are sacraments that help us reconnect with the universe. Seen in this context, therapeutically structured LSD sessions are not an end run around spiritual

practice, as some early scholars thought, but a particularly intense form of spiritual practice, with its own distinctive characteristics and challenges.<sup>†5</sup>

In my university courses, I often called the sacred medicine path the *path of temporary immersion* and contrasted it with the *path of meditation*. Where meditation is a path of self-clarification that allows the layers of the mind to open gradually, the sacred medicine path cultivates intense but temporary surges of awareness. By amplifying our present awareness, the medicine path opens us more quickly to a deeper communion with the universe. This is a good thing, a healing thing, but it can also be a tricky thing because it's easy to overestimate the staying power of these dramatic exercises. To use Abraham Maslow's vocabulary, we can overestimate the value of our *peak experiences* and underestimate the challenge of achieving more stable *plateau experiences*. Or as Ken Wilber reminds us, *states of consciousness are not stages of spiritual development*.

If the ultimate goal of spiritual practice is the permanent transformation of our consciousness, then the soft underbelly of psychedelics is their temporary nature. LSD plunges us into intense spiritual exercises, holds us there for a while, and then brings us back. Clearly, we cannot stay where we have gone; it is a mistaken strategy to try to do so. We must accept these limitations and work with them. But how can we work with these temporary states in a way that will advance our permanent transformation?

In my experience, there are two keys to doing this—courage and grounding. First, we must have the courage to confront whatever negative experiences may surface in our sessions. Opening into bliss is fine if that's what happens, but it's when the shadow rises that the hard work is done. In a therapeutic setting, the challenges one confronts may come from many levels of our being. Beyond those that come from our personal unconsciousness are challenges that come from the womb, from previous incarnations, and from the collective unconscious. In this work, we can confront barriers that are so foreign to us that we cannot see how they are constricting our awareness until after we have broken through to what lies beyond them, and this takes commitment and resolve.

The second key is grounding. Without deep grounding, powerful experiences may come and go but amount to very little in the long run. First, there is the grounding achieved by establishing a strong set and

setting on the day of a session. But deep transformation requires more than this. For enduring change to take root in our lives, we must also create a *container* for holding our experiences in between our sessions—for remembering them, pondering them, and putting their lessons into practice. If we don't do this, we will be pulled to chase new experiences before we have fully digested the gifts we've already been given.

At a practical level, my psychedelic practice was grounded in my long-term commitments as a husband, father, and university professor. These strong bonds were the foundation of my life that kept me rooted in the earth as I absorbed the extreme swings of consciousness this journey unleashed. After every session, there were always children to take care of and dishes to wash. However deeply I was dissolved into the cosmos on Saturday, on Monday morning I was back in the classroom teaching my courses.

To extract the full transformative value of these powerful experiences, we must integrate them not only into our mind but also into our physical, emotional, and social being. This requires grounding our psychedelic practice in a larger set of transformational practices familiar to spiritual practitioners everywhere. For me, these included: (1) the ethical practice of compassionate service, (2) the psychological practice of self-inquiry, and (3) the physical practice of caring for the body. I would underscore the last here because while psychedelic experiences are usually spoken of as states of consciousness, they are profound states of body as well. Mind-opening states are body-opening states that deeply impact our physical and subtle energy system. To these I would add one more: (4) a daily spiritual practice. The longer I have worked with psychedelics, the more convinced I have become that a daily meditation practice is vital to harnessing the waves of energy and insight that sweep through us on a session day.

Though my initial motivation for doing psychedelic work was spiritual awakening, along the way a second track opened that overtook the enlightenment project. This happened because of the sheer power of the particular psychedelic protocol that I adopted, so let me first describe this protocol, and then I will describe this second track.

## **Low-Dose vs. High-Dose Sessions**

After getting my bearings in several low-dose sessions (200 micro-grams [mcg]), I chose a regimen of working with high doses of LSD. For those unfamiliar with the difference between low-dose and high-dose LSD therapy, let me briefly summarize Grof's description of these two therapeutic modalities and then describe the protocol I adopted.

### ***Psycholytic Therapy***

Low-dose *psycholytic therapy* (75–300 mcg, typically around 200 mcg) activates the unconscious more gently, allowing a gradual unfolding of the psyche to take place. At this dosage level, the psyche releases its secrets and pains in layers. Emotional abreaction and other therapeutic mechanisms are intensified, calling for a flexible, dynamic engagement with the therapist. Grof's early work at the Psychiatric Research Institute in Prague was primarily psycholytic therapy where sessions took place at one-week to two-week intervals and numbered between fifteen and one hundred sessions, averaging about forty sessions.

### ***Psychedelic Therapy***

High-dose *psychedelic therapy* (300–500 mcg) is a very different form of psychedelic engagement. In this therapeutic modality, consciousness is much more powerfully amplified, and the strategy is to push through the psychodynamic level of consciousness and trigger an experience of ego-death and transcendence. Rather than working through one's personal issues layer by layer, psychedelic therapy seeks to evoke an ecstatic state in which the boundaries between the self and the universe are dissolved, allowing one to reconnect with spiritual reality and gain a new perspective on one's life. Verbal interaction during a session is kept to a minimum. This therapeutic protocol is sometimes described as the "single overwhelming dose" approach. At Spring Grove Hospital in Baltimore, where Grof and his colleagues worked with terminally ill patients, high-dose psychedelic therapy was limited to three sessions.<sup>[\\*6](#)</sup>

### ***Psychedelic Exploration***

The protocol I adopted represents a third option I am calling *psychedelic exploration*. When I was doing this work, I did not see myself as

developing a new protocol but simply doing an extended course of psychedelic therapy. When I came to the end of this journey, however, and was looking back over its length, I came to recognize that this was something different. What happened in my sessions went beyond psychedelic therapy as it was originally practiced. Rather than attempting to precipitate a single intense experience of transcendence, this protocol generated an ever-deepening spiral of initiation into the universe. This spiral of initiation opened new experiential opportunities, but it also presented new challenges that went beyond those encountered in psychedelic therapy.

As I am using the term, psychedelic exploration consists of an *extended series* of fully internalized high-dose LSD sessions. I worked at 500–600 mcg. While this protocol incorporates the practices and procedures of psychedelic therapy—physical isolation, minimal verbal interaction, and intensely evocative music—the high number of sessions makes it a different enterprise. One way of thinking about this third protocol is: this is what happens if you push psychedelic therapy as far as you can take it.

On the issue of dosage, I want to note that this protocol is not representative of current trends in psychedelic research, which is focused on working with much lower doses and gentler psychedelics. No federally sanctioned psychedelic study is proposing working with doses of LSD this high, and I think this is a good thing. It's important that psychedelic research proceed slowly and cautiously in this new era. At the same time, the value of moving forward incrementally does not negate the insights and experiences that emerged using this more aggressive protocol. I trust that the public will understand the different historical circumstances in which I did this work and the different opportunities it presented.

I also want to strongly caution anyone who may be considering adopting this protocol to think long and hard before doing so. When I began this work, I assumed that if high-dose LSD sessions could be done safely one to three times, the number of sessions could be increased without increasing the risk. What I found, however, was that while my work always stayed within the margins of safety, increasing the number of sessions made this a much more demanding undertaking than I had



anticipated. It took all my inner resources to manage what unfolded on this journey.

In his book *Allies for Awakening*, Ralph Metzner recommends against working with doses of LSD this high. When doses are raised to this level, he says, heightened awareness flips into dissociative and/or dysphoric responses for most people. A dissociative response is one in which the individual essentially blanks out and is not able to remember or describe the experience. The experience may be pleasant, even blissful, but the person can't bring much of it back. A dysphoric response is one in which one's innate resistance to losing control triggers an intense struggle and possibly paranoid or schizoid reactions. The trauma of being overwhelmed overpowers any positive insights or visions one may have.

Metzner is trying to walk us back from the turbulent '60s, when 500 mcg was considered the measure of "true initiation" and Terrence McKenna was promoting "heroic dosages" for those who wanted to "really get the message." Metzner believes that this more-is-better approach brought with it too much trauma and at the very least wasted a lot of time without yielding long-lasting therapeutic gains. Better to work more slowly and be able to integrate more of what one sees. Accordingly, he recommends a therapeutic dose range for LSD between 50 and 200 mcg, essentially staying within the limits of psycholytic therapy.\*<sup>7</sup>

There is much wisdom and clinical experience in Metzner's recommendations. In a therapeutic setting where the goal is personal transformation, it may well be advisable to stay within the range of 50–200 mcg. This level of activation leaves more of one's psychological equipment intact, making the sessions less threatening and easier to assimilate. Or if one's purpose for doing psychedelic work is spiritual enlightenment as this is classically conceived, this work is better done closer to where the ego lives in the world, and this means working with lower doses.<sup>†8</sup> Clearly, working with low doses has much to recommend it.

At the same time, I think that there is a legitimate role for working judiciously with high doses of LSD in carefully managed sessions conducted in a safe and protected environment. It's certainly true that high doses tend to overwhelm one's psychological defenses and shatter one's egoic identity, but whether this leads to dissociation and dysphoria depends to a great extent on how one engages one's sessions. The

dismantling of one's psychological boundaries is a frightening, gutwrenching experience both physically and psychologically, but *if you are prepared for this unraveling and meet it head-on*, it can be both manageable and beneficial.

My experience has been that if high-dose sessions are managed in a responsible and conscientious manner, they do not generate experiences so deep that you cannot bring them back or so frightening that they cannot be negotiated. One can learn to work productively at these high levels with good recall and good integration, but it takes discipline and practice. I will be completely candid about the challenges I faced using this protocol and let readers draw their own conclusions.<sup>\*9</sup>

Because it is extremely demanding to work at these high levels, this protocol is clearly not advisable for many people. In addition to the usual criteria used to screen subjects for psychedelic sessions, additional precautions should be taken.<sup>†10</sup> Working at these levels becomes less a therapeutic enterprise and more an intense journey of cosmic exploration. Accordingly, it requires something of an explorer's constitution—a capacity to withstand conditions that are highly stressful, extremely disorienting, and deeply ambiguous. In addition, one's life circumstances and support systems must be strong enough to support such an undertaking. No one takes such a journey alone.

While I believe that I worked responsibly and productively at these high-dose levels, I want to say clearly that this is not a protocol that I recommend. If I were starting this journey over again today, I would do it differently. With hindsight, I think I pushed myself harder than was necessary and perhaps harder than was wise. Knowing what I know today, I would be gentler on myself. I would incorporate more low-dose sessions into the work. And because LSD tends to be a “high altitude” psychedelic that pushes the cosmological ceiling, I would balance it with more “body-grounded” psychedelics such as psilocybin and ayahuasca. When I was doing this work, however, I was working alone with no elders telling me how to navigate these depths or advising me when to slow down and when to press on. It was a new method and a new territory, and I had to figure these things out as I went along.

## **LSD Sessions as a Journey of Cosmic Exploration**

I initially chose to work with high doses of LSD because it was difficult to find days for inner journeying in a dual-career marriage and I simply wanted to make the most of each session. I knew that the sessions would be more challenging, but the spiritual literature I had read described one's karmic conditioning as being ultimately finite, and I thought that I could work through mine faster by using this intense method of transformation, in effect biting off larger pieces of karma in each session. I thought that if I confronted my shadow conscientiously and could endure the intensity of the work, it would get me to my goal of personal liberation faster. Later, after this model had imploded for reasons I will give in chapter 6, I continued working with high doses because I had developed a taste for it. It took me where I wanted to go and then further than I imagined possible.

The choice to work with high doses turned out to have enormous consequences for what unfolded on this journey. It radically expanded not only the *depth of consciousness* reached but also the *breadth of consciousness* being activated in each session. It wasn't simply a matter of eating the same karmic meal in fewer bites, as I had naively thought. Because the web of life is an integrated whole from the very start, working with high doses of LSD activates wider portions of this web. Working at these levels changed not only how deep my experiences went but also who or what was actually having these experiences, what the "working unit" of experience was in a session. In these highly energized conditions, the size of the patient literally expands. What I mean by this will become clearer as we proceed.

Though I began this work with the goal of achieving personal liberation, over time I began to realize that there was a great deal taking place in my sessions that fell outside this project. By the third year, I was being drawn into vast purifying exercises that seemed focused on the collective psyche rather than my personal psyche, as though the target had shifted from being my personal liberation to the liberation of the entire human species. Then the sheer power of the catalytic energy unleashed by this protocol kept driving me through one experiential barrier after another, repeatedly expanding the territory of engagement. Eventually, my sessions became a periodically painful but steadfastly ecstatic journey of cosmic discovery. In this journey, I was invited to explore the universe in ways that went far beyond my original project of spiritual awakening.

It's not that I abandoned my commitment to spiritual liberation, for this always remained part of the work, but this journey generated experiences that went far too deep to ever be converted into a stabilized "awakened state" upon my return. This was something different, a *different track* aimed at a *different goal*. One does not have to transcend time, be dissolved into archetypal reality, or return to the birth of the universe in order to realize one's Essential Nature or rest in the condition of nonduality and emptiness. These are distinct if mutually reinforcing undertakings.

All my life I have had a passionate desire to understand how our universe works. Why are our lives the way they are? Why is there so much suffering in life? Is there a larger intelligence operating in the universe, and if so, toward what end? What is the purpose and project of existence? In our culture's current materialist paradigm that reduces everything to physical matter, these questions are considered beyond the pale of genuine knowledge, and attempts to answer them are seen as being purely speculative enterprises. In my sessions, however, I was given the opportunity to explore these questions in exercises of profound experiential instruction choreographed by a vast intelligence. I was shown things that stunned and transfixed me, was allowed to experience things that completely reframed my understanding of existence. What philosopher could turn down such an opportunity?

As this journey deepened, I found myself entering a spiraling love affair with this intelligence, a Being so vast I can only describe it using the vocabulary of the Divine even while the sessions themselves were repeatedly demonstrating how limited and childlike our historical conceptions of the Divine have been. I agree with Jonathan Goldman who in speaking of ayahuasca said, "The rituals of the Daime are not meant to be an 'experience,' but rather to provide a chance to interact intimately with a Divine Being of unimaginable intelligence, compassion, clarity, and spiritual power."<sup>11</sup> I do not know the limits of this Being and I hesitate to even call it a "Being" at all. As I have experienced it, it is the fabric of existence itself. I think of it as the generative intelligence of our universe, the Mind of the Cosmos—both transcendent source and manifest body of existence, beyond all categories of He or She yet infinitely more than any It.

Knowing that I could sustain the deepest intimacy with this intelligence for only a few hours on any given day and that I had no control over which session would become one of these magical days, I kept driving forward. When the communion opened, it was so intense that at the end of the day I would feel supremely fulfilled and at the same time achingly bereaved because I could not stay with my Beloved.

Everyone must choose a name for the Absolute, a title that approximates its truth, power, and beauty. Though I will use many terms to describe it in this book, in my heart of hearts I call it my Beloved. Once held in her embrace, once dissolved into her radiant splendor, I was hers forever. I will be hers until my last breath and after still. If my description tilts toward the feminine, it is because of two things—the specific story of creation that emerged on this journey and the love that reuniting with this reality awakened within me.<sup>†12</sup>

## **Two Phases of a Session**

Using the protocol that I adopted, each of my sessions generally had two phases—a cleansing phase followed by an ecstatic phase. The first hour or two were usually spent in some form of intense cleansing and purification. This process would eventually reach a peak, and then the session would pivot to an ecstatic phase for the remainder of the day. The division between the cleansing phase and the ecstatic phase was a sliding line with many variations. Sometimes I was moved back and forth across this boundary several times in one session. Occasionally, an entire session was spent in cleansing, and the next session opened immediately into the ecstatic harvest. When this happened, the two sessions were functioning as two halves of a larger whole, even though they might be separated by several months.

As far as I could determine, the depth of the ecstatic phase of my sessions was influenced by three factors. The first is the depth of purification that had taken place during the cleansing phase of the session. Usually, the deeper the purification was in the first half of a session, the deeper the visionary experience was in the second half. The second factor is the depth of purification that had taken place in all my previous sessions. One naturally expects a deeper encounter fifty sessions into a

journey than five sessions into it. The third factor is a little harder to describe. There is an *energetic momentum* that builds in one's sessions if you work consistently over a long period of time. It is a tangible power that accumulates and drives you through periodic breakthroughs, similar to the way an athlete in training develops a power that periodically carries him or her to peak levels of performance. It took years of sustained work for me to build sufficient energy to enter the levels of reality I was entering in the later stages of my work. For this reason, I could not return to that territory in one session today no matter how high a dose I took. It would take years for me to generate the energy required to reenter these powerful domains.

There may be another factor that influences what emerges in our sessions. Because our solar system is constantly moving, the variable of planetary setting changes in subtle ways from day to day and month to month. In a collaboration of many years, Stan Grof and Richard Tarnas have proposed the bold hypothesis that people's experiences in deep nonordinary states move in synchrony with the rhythms of our solar system. Using case histories, Grof has argued that natal and transit astrology can illumine and even predict the tenor of one's psychedelic session on any given day.<sup>\*13</sup> This is too large a topic for me to take up here, but in the interest of encouraging this discussion, I will give my birth information and the dates of all my sessions in appendix II at the end of the book.

## **The Craft of Remembering**

While the issue of set and setting has been much discussed in the psychedelic literature, I find less attention being paid to the issue of systematic recall after a session has ended. I don't know why this is the case because I have found that making an accurate record of each session can pose a significant challenge. This may be because of the high doses I was working with, but I think it represents a larger issue as well.

LSD generates a powerful but temporary increase in the mind's sensitivity. Our habitual conditioning is interrupted and our field of awareness is dramatically expanded, but after a number of hours our consciousness returns to its familiar patterns. If we don't take steps to

accurately record our experiences as soon as we return, our memory of them tends to fade. What was overwhelmingly powerful one day becomes slightly dimmer the next and dimmer still a month later. Preserving the memory of our experiences as carefully as possible completes the circle of learning and lays a stronger foundation for our next session.

I envy artists like Alex Grey, Pablo Amaringo, and Martina Hoffmann who have recorded their psychedelic experiences in stunning works of art. I don't have this gift. I am a writer and I paint with words. Part of my protocol for working with LSD, therefore, has included writing a detailed account of every session within twenty-four hours. I found that if I waited even a few days, recall was more difficult and the transcript less complete, so I learned not to wait.

Recording my sessions often required writing at the very limits of my understanding as I struggled to describe experiences that were deeply mysterious to me at the time. I had to repeatedly stretch language to describe realities beyond any I had known. Psychedelic experiences are cognitively elusive. The further a session throws you into new and unfamiliar territory, the harder it is to describe it in precise detail. To help with this process, I developed a strategy.

When I write up a session, I listen to the music used in the session in exactly the same order it was played inside the session. I play each piece over and over until I feel I have captured the essence of the experience I had with this music, then I move on to the next segment. The day after a session, you are still porous around the edges. By listening to the music in this porous state, with my verbal functions restored, I found that I was able to reenter the edges of my experience and get it down on paper more effectively. I called it "standing at the edge of the well."

On those precious days when I would break through to a new level of consciousness, recall was sometimes challenging. My write-up would have more gaps in it. Sometimes I would be able to recall only fragments of a particularly deep set of experiences, the rest disappearing into the shadows. The experiences were so unlike anything I had previously known that my mind could not hold on to all of them. I learned, however, that with repetition, recall and comprehension improved. When I returned to the same level of reality in subsequent sessions, I was able to retain the experiences more completely. My system was acclimating to the new

territory, and I was able to remember things I had previously forgotten. The pieces began to fit together into more coherent patterns, and meanings became clearer. As a result, my session narratives became more complete.

This is an important epistemological point. *With persistence and practice, cognition can be trained to operate in these unusual and novel conditions.* Profound experiences are not simply given to you; you have to train yourself to receive them and hold on to them. I cannot emphasize this too strongly. This is especially important if you want to incorporate psychedelic work into any critical endeavor.

In this context, I want to mention that I think that ineffability is often overrated as a mark of genuine mystical experience. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James made ineffability one of the four marks of mystical experience, and it has become standardized in the Mystical Experience Questionnaire developed by Walter Pahnke and Bill Richards. This interpretation echoes Dante's view in the *Paradiso*, where he wrote:

*I was within the heaven that receives  
more of His light; and I saw things that he  
who from that height descends, forgets or can  
not speak; for nearing its desired end,  
our intellect sinks into an abyss  
so deep that memory fails to follow it.*

CANTO I: 4–9.

While it may be true that language falters before the transcendent, making ineffability a cardinal virtue of mystical experience almost suggests that the transcendent wants to remain opaque. My experience, however, is that the Divine wants to be known. I think forgetfulness and inarticulateness, even ecstatic inarticulateness, is primarily a symptom of hitting one's experiential limits. If you can't describe where you've been, you probably just got lost. Though you always lose pieces of experience when you break into new territory, you recover these pieces in subsequent sessions and eventually learn how they fit together. We should exhaust



ourselves struggling to find the right words before surrendering to the silence. The well-known scholar of mysticism Walter Stace also had major reservations about this “alleged ineffability” because, he said, mystics do describe their experiences, sometimes quite extensively.<sup>\*14</sup>

The heart of this book comes from my psychedelic journal, approximately four hundred pages of session accounts. With a sincere bow to Carl Jung, this journal is my “Red Book” without the pictures. It is the record of my deepest experience of the universe, the primary text that for me comes before all subsequent interpretation and reflection. Once I have written up a session, I do not change or edit it. I have learned that attempting to make improvements in the account may distort something contained in the original raw language, so I leave it alone. Whenever I quote from this journal in the chapters that follow, a unique font will be used. I will also number the sessions. Numbering them simply makes it easier to track the stages of the journey as it unfolds.

## **Defining the Conversation**

Psychedelic sessions are so multidimensional and multi-thematic that isolating a narrative in them can be challenging. Themes from personal and transpersonal levels of reality braid themselves together in a complex fashion. Scenarios repeat themselves across many sessions, their plot thickening as more layers are added. In the chapters that follow, I don’t want to oversimplify this complexity by making the sessions appear simpler than they actually were. At the same time, I need to consolidate what took place in order to present them in a reasonably efficient manner. I’ve had to make decisions about what is important to share from them and what can be left out. In order to convey the most important elements of this journey, I’ve done some judicious pruning.

Working at these high-dose levels, I found that insights into my personal life tended to surface at the beginning and end of a session, when I was leaving and returning to my life in the physical world. During the middle hours when the session was at its peak, I was usually operating beyond the range of personal reality, at least after the first fifteen sessions or so. This doesn’t mean that the personal element was completely absent, for sometimes I was shown the personal relevance of this or that teaching

and sometimes an entire session was spent in personal healing or instruction. But in general, there was a marked difference between the content of the peak hours of a session and the content of its beginning and ending hours. The following image may help convey this point.



Fig. 1. Session Peaks

(image by Jason Bache, Nerds Ltd.)

These bell-shaped curves represent a series of sessions. I have drawn them overlapping to emphasize their thematic continuity. The larger circles at the top of the curves mark the hours of peak visionary intensity; the smaller circles at the bottom mark the milder experiences that took place during liftoff from and reentry into ordinary consciousness.

The story I'm telling in this book is compiled from the visionary experiences that took place inside the circles at the top of these curves. I will skip over the experiences that took place inside the smaller circles where the content was more personal and addressed my immediate circumstances. Though these experiences were valuable to me personally, they are not philosophically significant enough to warrant sharing with the world, especially when there are so many larger issues to discuss.

*LSD and the Mind of the Universe* is primarily a cosmological narrative, not a therapeutic narrative. In a therapeutic narrative, the personal details are important; in a cosmological narrative, they are less so. Of course, this entire journey was deeply personal and I own it as such, but my personal story is not the important story here, nor is it essential to the story I want to convey. It is when one moves beyond the shoals of the personal psyche and enters the ocean of the deep psyche that the larger and more philosophically interesting story begins to emerge.

Just as dreams build on one another if you attend to them carefully, psychedelic sessions build on one another if you engage them systematically, at least they did in my case. Over the years, a systematic deepening of my visionary experience took place. I think the

standardization of the procedures that I used in my sessions—same sitter, same set and setting, same medicine and dose, same location, and same recording process—contributed to the stability and continuity of my visionary conversation. Being taken into great depth one step at a time allows our cognitive faculties to stabilize at each level before we are ushered into the next, otherwise we would be swallowed whole by the enormity of the encounter, and what would be accomplished but a transient ecstasy that built little?

From this perspective, when we are attempting to understand specific psychedelic experiences, I think it is important to hold them in the context of our entire journey. In a sustained psychedelic inquiry, our sessions are always advancing our learning—sometimes breaking new ground, sometimes clarifying and commenting on what took place in previous sessions, and sometimes giving us glimpses of where we will be going next. In addition, different levels of reality operate by different rules. Words take on different meanings and significance as the process deepens. If we lift an experience out of its context, its meaning is halved.

Let me step back and say this more carefully. There is an important set of insights that emerges from gathering and analyzing the psychedelic experiences of large numbers of people, and this does require lifting experiences out of their original context. This has been one of Stan Grof's invaluable contributions. By phenomenologically mapping the psychedelic experiences of hundreds if not thousands of people, Stan has established the ontological validity of the transpersonal territory. A different set of insights emerges when we follow one person through this territory. Without this collective database, the individual's journey could be written off as being merely a private fantasy. Against the background of this collective database, however, tracking one person through this terrain brings out certain features of the psychedelic process more sharply: the multiple stages of initiation, the deepening spiral of death and rebirth, and the participatory dynamics of psychedelic disclosure. It is this work for which context is vital. Each of these perspectives complements and strengthens the other.

## **The Participatory Dynamics of Disclosure**

The more I have thought about the extraordinary range of experiences that opened on my journey, the more I have come to appreciate the complex dynamics of psychedelic disclosure. In these states, we are using consciousness to explore consciousness, and a fascinating dance takes place between the mind doing the exploring and the larger mind being explored.

All psychedelic disclosure is interactive. Everything we see and learn in these visionary states is shaped in subtle ways by what we are at the moment of contact. This does not mean that the visions we experience are merely projections of our personal psyche, as though we were not experiencing something that truly exists in the cosmos. Rather, it means that *all visionary encounter is participatory*. Our being evokes the portion of the universe we experience in these states, and the more conditioning we have let go of when this communion takes place, the more open-ended and far-reaching are the experiences that present themselves.<sup>\*15</sup>

As I have experienced it, consciousness is an infinite ocean of experiential possibilities. When we take these amplifying medicines, the mind we drop into this ocean acts as a seed crystal that catalyzes a certain set of experiences from its infinite potential. As we are gradually healed, purified, and transformed by these encounters, the seed crystal of our mind is changed. In subsequent sessions, it catalyzes still deeper experiences from this ocean. If we repeat this process many times in a sustained fashion, a sequence of initiations into successively deeper levels of consciousness takes place, and a deepening visionary communion unfolds. Each segment of this communion tends to pick up where the previous segment stopped. Sometimes there is a very tight continuity between the sessions, sometimes it is broader, but it's always there woven into the fabric of engagement.

In this context, I will mention that this may be one advantage of the long LSD time window compared with short-acting psychedelics like 5-MeO-DMT.<sup>†16</sup> LSD does not blast you through the many layers of the cosmos as quickly as 5-MeO-DMT does, but the eight-hour LSD interface invites/propels/forces a polishing of the consciousness doing the exploring as it is impacted/instructed/healed by the consciousness being explored. An LSD session grinds slow but it grinds fine. It gives us time to be engaged and changed by the realities we are encountering. I think this

polishing influences both the eventual clarity of our perception in these states and what we are able to bring back from them, both in terms of healing and understanding.<sup>\*17</sup>

## Platforms of Experience

The story I am telling in this book, therefore, is a story of entering progressively deeper states of consciousness and through these states experiencing progressively deeper levels of reality. Because the universe is holographically integrated, experiences of great depth may open at any point along the way, so I don't want to make a gospel of linear progression. Many variables influence what emerges in a person's sessions on any given day.<sup>†18</sup> That said, it was my experience that by standardizing as many of these variables as possible, the universe by and large revealed itself in stages. Each of these stages had its distinctive characteristics and dynamics. I think of them as different *platforms of experience*. On my journey, I was systematically moved from one platform of experience to another over many years.

I don't think that the order in which these platforms emerged in my sessions necessarily reflects a universal, cross-cultural norm. In addition to the individual variability already mentioned, there are different sequences of initiation presented in different spiritual traditions around the world and a considerable variance of opinion on what is regarded as the deeper and deepest levels of reality. In this book, I am simply marking the stages in how the universe took me in without suggesting that these are normative for other people in other settings. I also know that I did not explore these platforms in their entirety. There is so much I didn't see on my journey that others have seen. In the end, I think I drilled a deep "bore hole" in the universe, penetrating many of its levels but certainly not experiencing the complete territory associated with any of them.

I will follow Stan Grof in describing these platforms of experience as the *psychic*, *subtle*, and *causal* levels of consciousness. Ken Wilber first used these terms, together with *non-duality*, in *The Atman Project* (1980) to identify what he believed were the four stages of psycho-spiritual development. Drawing largely from Hindu and Buddhist sources, Wilber saw these four stages as evolutionary stepping-stones culminating in

nondual spiritual realization.<sup>\*19</sup> While referencing Wilber's model, Grof does not use these terms to classify stages of spiritual development but rather to distinguish different states of consciousness that emerge in psychedelic and Holotropic Breathwork sessions. That is, his description is phenomenological rather than hierarchical. In this context, he distinguishes low and high psychic, subtle, and causal consciousness, giving examples of each drawn from his extensive archives.<sup>†20</sup>

Like Grof, I will use these terms to identify states of consciousness without endorsing a specific model of spiritual development. While my psychedelic experiences unfolded in this general order, there were many variations along the way. I will also use these terms for the different levels of reality one becomes aware of through these states. That is, I accept the premise that subtle states of consciousness reveal subtle levels of reality, causal states reveal causal levels, and so on. This is the great value of entering these states, that through them we gain access to deeper dimensions of existence.<sup>‡21</sup>

As one would expect in a participatory cosmology, each of us will experience these platforms of experience somewhat differently. Let me, therefore, share a few observations about what these terms mean to me personally as a starting point for the story that follows.

At the *psychic level* of transpersonal experience, consciousness expands beyond physical reality into nonphysical or spiritual reality, but our experience of this reality still tends to be constrained by conditioning that carries over from our space-time experience. Inside space-time, for example, we experience life to be composed of separate beings, and psychic level transpersonal experience tends to mirror this assumption. At this level of consciousness, we often experience ourselves as distinct spiritual beings in the company of other distinct beings. There is an "atomistic" quality to the experience, a "soul-centric" quality, and the soul we experience at this level tends to be the spiritual self of our present life, our "discarnate self," as it is sometimes called.

At the *subtle level* of consciousness, the conditioning of physical reality is more deeply eclipsed and we begin to open to the deeper architecture of life. I've always thought that "subtle" was a strange name for this level of consciousness because there is really nothing subtle about it at all. Quite the opposite, in fact. At this level, we begin to be drawn into

the larger realities and more fundamental structures that our individual lives are part of. Subtle reality is like the steel girders of a skyscraper; it is the deeper structure that supports the individual rooms of the finished building.

At the subtle level of consciousness, we may experience the collective consciousness of our species and other species or even the archetypal forces that create space-time and all it contains. At this level, the personal soul of our present life may open to the larger Soul of our reincarnating self—which is generally how I will use the term “Soul” in this book, often capitalizing it to mark this distinction. The subtle level of consciousness covers a wide range of phenomena, but what they all have in common is that they reflect the more fundamental building blocks of existence. One is still experiencing a world divided into parts, but the parts are larger and more basic than at the psychic level.

At the *causal level* of consciousness, the world of separate parts begins to yield to an experience of the universe moving as a single entity. There are many ways of experiencing this vast domain, but for me the signature of causal consciousness is Oneness. Intimations of Oneness show up in lower levels of consciousness as well, for it is a primary truth with many variations, but there is something distinctive about the experience of Oneness at the causal level, where it ripens into a vivid experience of ontological transparency and all-encompassing wholeness. There is no reference point outside this Oneness from which to get a perspective on it, as it *is* the whole of existence. Here, as Plotinus succinctly put it, “Everything breathes together.” Or as Sri Aurobindo described it, “In this vision of things the universe will reveal itself in its unity and totality as a manifestation of a single Being, Nature as its power of manifestation, evolution as its process of gradual self-revelation in matter.”<sup>[\\*22](#)</sup>

The second feature of causal reality that stands out for me is Light. Light may enter at the subtle level of consciousness, but it becomes more potent at the causal level. As the experience of Oneness becomes more refined at deeper causal levels, the experience of Light also becomes more refined. If the lower causal realm is the domain of the one God, the higher causal realm is for me the domain of Diamond Luminosity. Sometimes it feels that the domain of Diamond Luminosity may even lie beyond causal reality, but I won’t press this point.

In the end, all these categories are only labels of approximation and convenience. One may divide the spectrum of spiritual reality in many ways, and I do not have a vested interest in championing one cosmological map over another. Indeed, it would be foolish to think we could do justice to the vast expanse of spiritual reality by using just three or six categories. These are simply broad divisions that I will use to frame some of the transitions in my journey.

## Calling Down Heaven

The visionary story I am telling in this book is not a story of escape into transcendence but one of deepening sacred presence on Earth. This may not be apparent in the early and middle stages of the story, but it will become clear by its end. I mention this because the classical religions of the Axial Age<sup>\*23</sup> are at their core teachings of ascent, and this archetype runs deep in our culture. Both Western and Asian religions affirm stories of an “up-and-out” salvation that place the final goal of life in some off-planet spiritual paradise, be it the Christian Heaven, the Islamic Garden, or the Buddhist Pure Land. Even the Buddhist Bodhisattvas who pledge to keep returning to Earth to liberate all sentient beings are trying to liberate them into *parinirvana*, “final enlightenment” or enlightenment without a body.

I think that Sri Aurobindo was correct when he said that these cosmologies reflect an incomplete understanding of existence. They reflect the deepening of humanity’s contact with the spiritual universe that took place about three to four thousand years ago. Once we began to gain *experiential* access to the bliss of this mother universe through meditation, yoga, and psychedelic substances, how could we not but conclude that we “belonged” there more than here, that Earth was not our “true home,” and that we had “fallen” from paradise through some kind of cosmic blunder? Our enthusiasm for these theologies of return is understandable given their historical context, but in the context of the dramatically expanded understanding of the universe emerging in science combined with our deepening psychedelic experience, we are beginning to see that these theologies reflect an incomplete model of the cosmos.



The reality of a spiritual universe surrounding our physical universe is a great truth, but it is only half a truth. The other half is the long evolutionary gestation of the physical universe *inside* this spiritual universe and the progressive infusion of the mother universe into the daughter universe over a vast time frame. The Creative Intelligence that gave birth to space-time and to everything in space-time thinks in terms of magnitudes that dwarf our horizons. We are waking up inside a garden that has been in the making for billions of years with billions more still to come. From this perspective, the purpose of spiritual awakening appears to be not escaping from physical existence, as these early religions proposed, but awakening ever more completely *inside* physical existence and participating in its continuing self-emergence through our awakening. If this feels initially disappointing, it may be that we are underestimating what the fruition of the divine project on this planet might look like.

The in-taking of sacred awareness and the activation and stabilization of our innate capacities is the long and patient work of reincarnation, and I believe it is the long work of psychedelic practice as well, at least after the early excitement of discovery passes. In our later sessions, we are no longer running to explore a universe “out there,” but rather are “calling down heaven,” pulling higher states of awareness into our physical being, alchemically mixing heaven and earth in the vessel of our human body. When *nirvana* (enlightenment) and *samsara* (cyclic existence) are truly one, when full transparency lives in the sea of perpetual change, then heaven is realized on earth and there is no felt need to go elsewhere.

## **The Suffering of Death and Rebirth**

Let me bring this chapter to a close by addressing a final important issue. The single largest concern I have about sharing my visionary journey with others is that people may be frightened by the large amount of suffering it contains. I am concerned that they will either judge the psychedelic method harshly or become fearful of the unseen universe. Both of these are the last things I want to happen. In order to avoid this, I have considered blunting the pain and diluting its role in the plot, but this would be dishonest. I may make mistakes in telling this story, but I pledge to give an honest account of what took place in my sessions. It is important,

therefore, that we understand the role that suffering plays in the psychedelic process, and specifically the suffering of death and rebirth. It's also important that I own the fact that some of this suffering came from my personal decision to push myself as hard as I did.

Let me begin by saying that I am deeply and forever grateful to have taken this journey. I would not trade these seventy-three days for any treasure on Earth. I count them as the most important days of my life. The pain I encountered in them was paid willingly, and I was more than amply compensated by the blessings that followed.

Our natural instinct is to avoid pain. We pull our hand away from the fire, instinctively withdrawing from what harms us, and this is good. But *in the context of a psychedelic session*, pain is something we learn to embrace. It is part of a purification process, and therefore pain becomes our ally in the work. One learns to reverse one's instinct to avoid suffering and to open to it instead, not because we like to suffer but because of what lies on the other side of suffering. Padrinho Sebastiao, one of the founders of the Santo Daime religion, expressed it well when he said, "Look, suffering is the best thing that exists to cleanse oneself. We suffer, but when we come out on the other side we say, Thank God! . . . Like that old woman in the last works—the more she suffered, the more she gave thanks for the beauty."<sup>24</sup>

Confronting our personal shadow is always challenging work, but to understand the deeper suffering that emerges on this journey, we must understand the role that death and rebirth play in an extended psychedelic practice. The experience of dying and being reborn is one of the central dynamics of therapeutically focused psychedelic work. Death is simply the price one is asked to pay to gain access to the myriad worlds that lie beyond the body-mind ego, death not as a metaphor or symbolic enactment but the agonizing loss of everything we know to be real and true, the spasm of our last breath, the terrifying surrender. Death comes in many shapes and sizes. It may steal in softly, melting our resistance slowly, or break through the door violently with drums pounding. Either way, if we want to experience the deeper currents of the cosmos, sooner or later death calls to us.

But why is this so? Why must we psychologically die and surrender everything we know in order to gain access to these deeper levels of

reality? It comes down to a simple principle. As we are now, we are too small to engage these vast dimensions of existence. Our capacity for cosmic experience is constrained by our conditioning inside space-time.

In deep psychedelic work, *one learns by becoming*. This is especially true when working with high doses of a powerful psychedelic like LSD. We cannot transport the egoic self into these depths where it can then “have an experience” of how the world works there. In order to know the universe at these levels, we must *become* a citizen of these levels. We must *become* the levels themselves. To do this, our smaller sense of self must cease to be the container of our experience. It must die. Giving up everything is simply the price of inheriting everything else.

Because the universe is infinitely deep with many layers, one faces many deaths on this journey. Ego-death is only the first. Death and rebirth is a cycle that repeats itself multiple times because the universe tends to yield its treasures in layers. The death of the egoic self is followed by other deaths at deeper levels, harder to describe because the terrain is less familiar but no less demanding to undergo.

As I mentioned earlier, there is an energetic aspect to this cycle of initiation. In my experience, each step deeper into our multidimensional universe is a step into a more intense field of energy. *Deeper* states of consciousness are *higher* states of energy. This is an unmistakable sensation and a widely recognized principle in spiritual traditions. One may have glancing contact with deep levels of reality without this becoming apparent, but to have *stable experience* of a given level of reality, one must acclimate to its energy. Just as when climbing a mountain we must acclimate to the atmospheric conditions of higher elevations, here we must acclimate to the energetic conditions of deeper levels of reality. In mountain climbing, we are adjusting to less oxygen; in psychedelic work, we are adjusting to more energy, and this activates intense purification processes.

It took me many years to understand this spiral of purification and initiation. The phenomena that I will describe in this book fit coherently within this model, and few make sense without it. The spiral of death and rebirth is the combustion cycle that drives the work forward.

So why, then, is there so much suffering in this story? It's not that the universe wants us to suffer as the price of knowing her; it's that there is a

certain suffering inherent in repeatedly shedding our psychological skin in order to enter more deeply into the universe.

But there is also a second variable at work here, and that is the speed with which we tear these skins away, how impatient we are to know the universe at these depths. If we choose a form of transformational practice in which our conditioning is released slowly, the result is a series of smaller initiations spread over a longer period of time, perhaps even many lifetimes. By contrast, working with a psychedelic like LSD is an example of a transformational practice that triggers an accelerated purification process that gives us quicker access to these realities, but there is a price to be paid for this quicker access. The price is the intensification of the death-rebirth process.

If I pushed the psychedelic method harder than was sometimes wise and suffered extra for it, this was not the universe's fault nor the method's fault, only my own fault. Once I discovered that I could enter heaven by embracing hell, embracing hell became a core practice in the work. All the more so when I found my way to the heaven of heavens where the diamonds are kept. No hell is too terrible to endure if it opens the door to this paradise.

And yet, as I write this last sentence, something in me pulls back. This may have been my truth, but as I begin to share the story of my journey, I find that I can't wish anyone to undergo some of the trials I went through on it. If there were no other way to reach paradise, that would be one thing, but there are other ways, slower ways, and therefore I counsel a gentler entrance into the Great Expanse. I recognize better now that the protocol I adopted represents an extreme form of the sacred medicine path. The story that follows, therefore, is *not* representative of what happens on this path in gentler hands. We do not need to undergo such extreme ordeals to come to our spiritual senses.

Fortunately, I have survived the enthusiasms of my youth and have come through this journey intact. If I pushed myself harder than was sometimes wise, I was also given a great deal of help along the way by a universe that seemed to take delight in being known this deeply by one of her children. Indeed, our hours together seemed as precious to it as they were to me. This is the story that I would like to share with you now.

## TWO

# Crossing the Boundary of Birth and Death

Sessions 1–10

*Before you get started, you own the journey. After you start, the journey owns you.*

MALIDOMA SOMÉ,  
*THE HEALING WISDOM OF AFRICA*

As I begin the story of this journey, what is foremost in my mind is how many levels of consciousness I will be asking the reader to enter with me in the chapters ahead. In this respect, the story that follows is very different from some early influential accounts of psychedelic experience. Aldous Huxley wrote his beautiful book *The Doors of Perception* after only one mescaline trip, and he took psychedelics only ten times during his life.<sup>\*25</sup> Similarly, when the great historian of religion Huston Smith published his collected reflections on psychedelics, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception*, he had taken LSD only a half dozen times. After that, he said, “The utility seemed to go down quickly and the bummers increased,” leading him to adopt Alan Watts’s advice: “When you get the message, hang up the phone.”<sup>†26</sup> This book is about what happens if you don’t hang up the phone.

If you don’t hang up the phone, a long journey begins. The sheer length of this journey, with its many ports of call, has shaped my sense of what is

important to share from these early sessions and what can be safely left out. The spiritual experiences that surfaced in them, for example, were so much thinner than those that surfaced later that though they were important to me at the time, they hardly seem worth mentioning now. And yet, these early sessions were important too, because they prepared the way for everything that followed.

LSD unleashes such dramatically different states of awareness from anything we experience in our everyday life that we have to learn how to work with it. Like an athlete undertaking a strenuous sport, we have to train for the event. Not only do our minds have to adjust to the expanded capacities LSD awakens, so do our bodies. Our subtle energy system has to be conditioned and strengthened to sustain the enormous flows of energy evoked by the LSD state. As I look back on these early sessions, they seem to have functioned as an intensive training camp, preparing me physically and psychologically for the long journey that was beginning. They also broke me down existentially, taking me into my first death and rebirth.

Given the emphasis being placed today on the therapeutic applications of psychedelics, it may be surprising to learn that my early sessions did not involve much personal healing. There was some but not much. If I had been working with lower doses, there would probably have been more, but when you work with doses of LSD this high, you tend to drop quickly beneath the personal unconscious into what Stanislav Grof calls the perinatal level of consciousness. Instead of engaging the individual wounds we have collected in life, one goes deeper to confront a universal wound shared by all human beings—the certain destruction of everyone and everything we love and care about, including ourselves.

This chapter is about crossing the perinatal level of consciousness. It is about crossing the boundary of birth and death, for birth and death define the limits of our physical existence. We get here by being born; we leave by dying. In order to enter what lies beyond space-time awareness, we must first break through the membrane of our physical consciousness. This first stage of the journey lasted two and a half years and ten sessions.

In order to help me remember and internalize my sessions, I took to giving them names that reflected the pith of each session. When I would see the name, it would bring the entire session back to mind. The names I gave these first ten sessions are:

- S 1 What Am I?
- S 2 Infant Bliss
- S 3 Confession to the Universe
- S 4 Cosmic Attunement
- S 5 Overload
- S 6 Distillation of My Life
- S 7 Seamless Fabric
- S 8 Extreme Convulsions
- S 9 The Girls of the Neighborhood
- S 10 The Killing of the Children

When I quote a complete session in the following chapters, I will give its name at the top of the session, but for short or medium-length excerpts, I won't. In the few instances where it will be helpful to give an excerpt a title, I will follow it with the session number in parentheses.

Taking these early sessions as a whole, what stands out for me from them are four things:

- the way the universe welcomed and strengthened me before shattering me,
- the intense purification of my body they exacted,
- the confrontation with death and dying, and
- the eventual collapse of my physical identity in ego-death.

## **The Welcoming**

In my first four sessions, the universe took me in and taught me the rules of this new game, then grounded and strengthened me before asking me to begin the really hard work.

In my 1st session, I was absolutely and completely stopped. My life became a giant jigsaw puzzle drifting apart in zero gravity. I watched helplessly as the pieces of my life came apart, mixing in confusion with

powerful energies rising underneath me. I was being disassembled, and there was absolutely nothing I could do to stop it.

*For a long time, I could not remember who I was no matter how hard I tried. I could not remember what I did for a living, whether I was educated or not, or what I looked like. I could not even remember what sex I was. I panicked. I became desperate to recover who I was. I frantically searched in a thousand mirrors but found nothing familiar, no trace of my previous identity. (S 1)*

Later in the session, my continuity of memory returned, but the point had been made. I was not going to be able to control what happened in these sessions. I could not even control my self-memory, and that's about as basic as it gets. The absolute surrender that this journey required jarred me deeply. In my journal I wrote:

*I had read accounts of ego-death and had felt drawn to the challenge and the promise of liberation, but what was I thinking? Did I think I could die without really dying? Suddenly, this wasn't an experiment anymore. It was everything I was under attack. Ego-death isn't an experience that "I" can have, which will liberate "me," allow "me" to find more satisfaction in life. In this death, nothing survives. (S 1)*

By forcing this hard lesson on me at the very start, this session saved me a lot of time and energy later trying to hold on to some semblance of control when things would fall apart. Experiencing LSD's ability to radically interrupt my ordinary consciousness forced me to prepare myself for the true scale of the work ahead.

In the 2nd session, the warmer side of welcoming emerged as I opened directly into memories from my early infancy. My fingers regressed to a newborn infant's awkward coordination, and I was flooded with feelings of peace in my mother's arms. There was no struggle to be born, no memories of birth at all. I simply dropped straight into what Grof calls positive Basic Perinatal Matrix I, a memory matrix that stores our earliest memories of being loved and nurtured.

*For two hours, I experienced extraordinary peace. There were periods of thought, but most of the time was spent absorbed in utter tranquility in my mother's arms. Complete peace of "being" before any "doing." Spontaneous disturbances of position or feelings were repeatedly stroked away. (S 2)*



I find it interesting that this peace came before any of the other perinatal matrices, as though bestowing a blessing that was freely given, not earned.

The 3rd session was another gentle session in which I entered an arena of attentive inner awareness. As I observed my life, I began to feel painful memories surface from my childhood and realized that I had an opportunity to release many personal burdens I had been carrying. Drawing on my Catholic background, perhaps, I found myself making a “confession to the universe.”

*For over two hours, I lay quietly, bringing various portions of my life into focus and letting whatever problems existed there emerge. Any memory that came forward was experienced, accepted, and then released. After this had continued for a long time, I began to understand large causal patterns stretching from my early childhood into adolescence and then early adulthood. By accepting these with understanding, they spontaneously resolved themselves. As this continued, I began to feel psychologically lighter, deeply rested, and forgiven without being judged. (S 3)*

The 4th session was my first high-dose session, and the pace stepped up accordingly. It began with some strong perinatal elements, which I will return to in a minute, but what stands out for me is the experience of being judged and found worthy followed by a process of deep attunement. This pattern of crisis followed by resolution and realignment would repeat itself in many subsequent sessions.



## Session 4

*It began with difficult episodes of pain and purification. Powerful spasmodic jerks and convulsions. When I vomited, it felt like I was throwing up poisons.*

*Eventually, these brought me to a moment of judgment. A voice asked, “Shall we see what is inside now?” In earlier sessions, the questions had been, “Was I good enough? Did I pass? Was I real?” I was terrified because in my heart of hearts I wasn’t sure the news would be good. Then it said, “We know your doubts and fears. Now, shall we see what comes out of you at the deepest level?” I answered “Yes” and stepped aside apprehensively. A series of doors opened until a long pause signaled the beginning of my judgment. My entire existence hung in the balance, and I was powerless to influence the outcome.*

*To my complete surprise, what came forward were magnificent scenes of nature’s beauty. The ocean rushing onto a beach. A clear running stream. An eagle flying. Snowcapped mountains. Sky. Sun. I was overwhelmed by the sheer grace of it all. These vistas symbolized what I was simply by virtue of being alive.*

*Then I was taken through a series of experiences designed to bring me into deeper alignment with this reality. My body was drawn into a posture of perfect balance—legs together, toes pointed, chest expanded, arms extended 90 degrees from my sides. I was being tuned like a human tuning fork to an energy that was at one level pure love and at a deeper level the silent underside of all diversity. In being tuned, I was being healed. In the early stages, this healing took the form of being loved, and the texture of the love changed as the healing deepened. A child in a mother's embrace; a man chosen by a woman; a friend mirrored in companionship; a seeker of truth loved by a universe that delights in being known.*

*Soon biography was left behind, and the healing took a more elemental form. Cutting through the details of my life, it went to the core of my being and plugged me directly into the universe. An "electrical cord" of pure energy about eight inches in diameter plugged itself into my lower stomach, and powerful currents of energy flowed into me and throughout my body. As I lay pulsing with this energy, I felt myself being healed and becoming whole. I felt myself being perfected.*

Though these first four sessions made me work, they seemed to be focused on strengthening me for what was coming. First, they taught me to surrender control. Then they took me straight into the peace of infancy, followed by some light housecleaning work at the psychodynamic level. Then came the grace of being judged worthy for no apparent reason other than simply existing, followed by a deep infusion of healing energy. Now the hard work would begin.

## **The Perinatal Domain**

As soon as I shifted to working with higher doses in the 4th session, the sessions dropped me into the hard side of the perinatal encounter. Many readers will know what this means from having read Stan Grof's books. For those who don't, I will summarize his concept of the perinatal level of consciousness at the end of this chapter (see [here](#)). The perinatal domain is a complex territory that Stan has mapped with great therapeutic insight, demonstrating the influence that unresolved birth trauma can have on our subsequent psychological development. Rather than give a complete account of these dynamics here, let me say just this.

In Grof's model of the psyche, the perinatal domain is a level of consciousness that lies between the personal psyche and transpersonal levels of consciousness. It is both the basement of the personal unconscious and the doorway to spiritual states of awareness. Entering this domain triggers an extremely realistic confrontation with death that is

often combined with reliving one's birth and a variety of intense physical and emotional discharges. This existential confrontation with death and the limits of physical existence drives a fundamental question: Do our lives have any true meaning and purpose in the larger scheme of things, or are we just the random products of a blind and indifferent universe? Through systematically engaging these physical, psychological, and existential trials, one works through a series of core issues that eventually culminate in the complete collapse of one's physical identity, followed by rebirth into spiritual reality.

My experience of the perinatal domain closely mirrored Grof's description of it in *Realms of the Human Unconscious*. When I entered this territory, my sessions became filled with fetal sensations, convulsive seizures, intense confrontations with the futility of existence, and many experiences of dying. I felt like a poster boy for the perinatal, and I deeply appreciated having Grof's map of this confusing domain. During the first four sessions, these experiences had been relatively mild, but this changed dramatically in the 5th session.

The 5th session was the first time I was able to use music in my sessions, and this took the experience to a new level of intensity, underscoring the important role that music plays in helping us surrender more completely to the psychedelic state. It began with uncomfortable fetal sensations, mounting anxiety, and convulsive spasms. Then the music drove me into a rapidly escalating spiral of negativity. I was engulfed by an extremely powerful whirlpool of negative experiences. My last conscious thought was "perinatal vortex!" then I lost control and disappeared into the maelstrom.

*About a half an hour later, I was suddenly overwhelmed by an urgent sense of danger. In the midst of the chaos, I suddenly felt that something I was doing was endangering my wife and my dog, who were home with me. I was about to become dangerously violent or something. I didn't know what the danger was, but I knew I had to stop before they were injured. With this thought, I suddenly "sobered up" and pulled myself out of the psychedelic flow. I pulled off the headphones and sat up, refusing to put them on again despite my sitter's best efforts. (S 5)*

When I later pieced together what had happened, I felt frustrated. I had gotten knocked off balance by the overwhelming assault, externalizing the threat to my ego by projecting it onto my environment. Next time I would

be better prepared. And I was. I never got knocked off balance like this again.

The violence of this session was so incongruous with the peace of the previous session that I understand why people facing similar ordeals might think they had gotten some “bad acid,” for this was the proverbial bad trip. In fact, however, these two sets of experience are close companions in this work. Positive experiences strengthen us and help us face the deeper levels of disturbance that surface in the psychedelic process, even though I failed miserably in this particular instance. This pattern of positive experience alternating with negative experience became a recurring pattern in the years ahead.

The perinatal engagement became more intense from this point on. The physical symptoms were particularly severe. Grof describes these symptoms in *LSD Psychotherapy*.

Subjects may spend hours in agonizing pain, with facial contortions, gasping for breath and discharging enormous amounts of muscular tension in tremors, twitches, violent shaking and complex twisting movements. The face may turn dark purple or dead pale, and the pulse show considerable acceleration. The body temperature usually oscillates in a wide range, sweating may be profuse, and nausea with projectile vomiting is a frequent occurrence. (Grof 1980, 72)

Although I was mentally prepared for these experiences, I was surprised by how violent they were. Perhaps they were made more so by the high doses I was working with; I don't know. In the first hours of every session, I experienced fierce electrical spasms exploding in my body, sometimes accompanied by hyperventilation and nasal discharge. Convulsions would shoot through me, bouncing me across the mattress. It felt like someone was jamming a cattle prod in my stomach. Sometimes they had a wrenching quality, like having the dry heaves for hours at a time. I became very familiar with vomiting.

Grof's understanding of these convulsions is that they are the body's way of throwing off large quantities of physiological stress. The body is purifying itself so rapidly that it is literally convulsed by the discharge.

This was my experience as well. The perinatal seizures were difficult to weather, but they broke down my muscle armoring and left my body more open and structurally realigned afterward. The effect was like getting Rolfed from inside out.

Purification is one of those “pay me now or pay me later” things. In Tibetan Buddhism, monks must do *Ngöndro* before they are allowed to receive the higher initiations that engender realization. Ngöndro are the foundational practices that prepare the body and mind to receive the advanced teachings. Part of Ngöndro involves doing one hundred thousand full-body prostrations while reciting prayers and mantras. These exercises strengthen and purify the body and its subtle energy system. On the other hand, if one moves into higher states of awareness quickly, as one tends to do in an LSD session, the body is spontaneously thrown into a purification process by the sheer power of the state one is entering. Pay me now or pay me later. Either way, entering deeper states of awareness requires purifying one’s psycho-physical system.

As the negative perinatal experiences continued to build over the next several sessions, so did the positive experiences that emerged during the ecstatic portion of the sessions. In one session, I experienced life as a living fabric of interwoven intelligences—atomic, molecular, cellular, human, societal, and planetary. This early taste of the weave of Oneness was just a metaphysical appetizer for the deeper experiences of Oneness that would follow later, so I will not spend time on it. I would, however, like to share one experience from this period because it speaks to the rationale for this book as a whole. This session helped me let go of my conventional academic training and embrace psychedelics as a new method of philosophical inquiry.



## Session 6

*The intense cleansing lasted hours, seizures alternating with periods of deep sobbing for my pain and the suffering of humanity. There were periods of intense hyperventilation and some gasping for breath. Various existential questions and insights pressed themselves forward at different places.*

*Eventually, I felt myself coming to a breaking point. Curled in a fetal posture, I reached into the pain and was propelled through a vortex that swept me into a vast spaciousness. In this spaciousness, I found myself surrounded by all the knowledge and experience I had collected up to this point in my life. This information was*

*orchestrated with the speed of thought to teach me things. The subtlety and complexity of this instruction was breathtaking.*

*What followed was a spiritual distillation of my life. My life was broken down into its essential components and examined from multiple perspectives. I received personal guidance in several areas of my life that deepened and reframed my understanding of my existence. One of these areas concerned my work as an academic, or as the session put it, as a “professional knowledge-man.”*

*Rising in space, I experienced explorers in different fields of learning as part of a vast cooperative enterprise. With a view stretching through history, I felt myself joining a community of explorers who were popping through in different places with different skill sets. I saw without my usual anxiety how much less developed I was than many of these explorers. I felt myself being welcomed as a beginner into a process that had been going on for eons. This experience of fellowship made me feel incredibly full and empty of old ego concerns.*

*The intellectual commitments I had absorbed from my undergraduate and graduate education were systematically reviewed, and I experienced the deep accountability I feel to my philosophical and intellectual lineage. I looked at all the disciplines of knowledge I had taken in and saw that many of their conflicts derived from their selectivity. As I surveyed the evolution of Western thought, I was repeatedly struck by its fragmentary nature and the vehemence with which the fragments had been defended as the whole. I knew that my own work shared these limitations.*

*Going further, I then saw that a purely intellectual approach to philosophy would produce only limited results. I saw that the path I was on represented a fundamentally different approach to philosophy. On this path, experience is first expanded, then critical reflection clarifies and evaluates. I felt myself being freed of an enormous burden of accountability to my academic tradition. If I tried to defend every advance to my colleagues’ satisfaction, I would be stuck in polemic forever. These insights clarified my loyalties and tuned me to a higher set of responsibilities. My life was about forging a new path forward in philosophy.*

## **Ego-Death**

The perinatal process became more intense session by session until it eventually triggered a complete collapse of my personal reality in sessions 9 and 10. I did not relive the details of my physical birth as some have reported doing at this stage. In my case, the physical components backed off slightly as the existential crisis peaked.

There are many ways to break the grip that the body-mind ego has on our consciousness. As tough and resilient as the psychological shell of our physical being is, it turns out that it’s not that difficult to take apart when you get right down to it. The last two sessions in this series unlocked my life with devastating efficiency. They snapped me like a twig by forcing

me to become the exact opposite of everything I had ever known myself to be. I began these two sessions as a white, educated male obsessed with the meaning of life. That's not how I ended them.

The 9th session began with the usual pains, convulsions, and vomiting. Then about an hour into it, I began to get caught by something. At first it was just an interesting aside, but then it grabbed me and wouldn't let me go. I was getting trapped inside lives that were not my own, forced to become the opposite of what I was and unable to experience life in any other way.

*It was excruciating. I was being stripped of my maleness and trapped in the lives of women. I became countless women of all shapes and sizes. Women who were uneducated and poor. Women of color at the laundromat with no prospects. Women trained by television in the art of living. I was completely absorbed with my makeup, my house, and the melodrama of life lived at its most superficial level. The intellectual barrenness was excruciating, and the loss of my sexual identity was terrifying, with layers of metaphysical and existential anguish folded into it. (S 9)*

It was the perfect hell for an Ivy League-educated male academic. It wasn't women that were the problem, of course, or race or poverty; it was the tight grip that my physical and social identity had on me, telling me that "I" was not any of these.

I fought what was happening with all my strength. I was fighting for my psychological life, begging this inversion of my reality to stop. It felt like I was being tortured but didn't even have the basic elements of my identity to help me through the ordeal.

After hours of this struggle, I was at something of a standoff with the women who had taken over my life. I had not given in to them, but they were slowly wearing me down. I felt the effects of the LSD beginning to weaken and knew that I could hold out until the end of the session if I chose to do so. In the middle of this impasse, my sitter made a mistake that jolted me into the final surrender. (I'll save this mistake for the next chapter, where I will give a more complete account of this session.) "I give up," I laughed. "You can't beat the girls of the neighborhood. All you can do is join them." With that I let go and allowed myself to become fully a woman.

As soon as I did, I felt a calm joy wash through me. I was immediately comfortable in my new skin, so much so that I wondered, “What was all the fuss about? Why would I not want to experience *this?*” I stayed with the women for a long time. They took me in and out of many women’s lives. It was an extraordinary adventure. Along the way, I felt how monotonously “masculine” my way of living had been—my aggressive desire to know by dismantling and reassembling, my insensitivity to the softer textures of life, my willingness to confront and do intellectual battle. These drives seemed one-sided and blind to the extent that they ignored the quality of living itself. The women whose lives I was experiencing felt closer to the earth. They preserved and deepened life.

Together the women and I laughed at all the things they had put me through. As the session neared its end, I returned to the most difficult experiences of the day. This time the women who had been my tormentors came before me one by one, bowed, then dissolved into sparkling gold dust. Everyone had shown up and played their part in service of a larger good.

The second half of my death and rebirth came eight months later in the 10th session. The set and feeling of the 9th session immediately reestablished itself, and once again I was made to become a woman. This time, however, I did not fight the experience but flowed with it willingly, exploring different aspects of women’s lives.

Then pain began to come to me through this medium of female experience. In a building swirl, I experienced a hundred ways to die as a woman, enacted in great detail. At one level, the experience was the deadly wounding of young hearts, at another it was physical death. “So many ways to die.” I felt I was being softened up by wave after wave of dying. Then after a brief lull, a new and terrible scenario began—the killing of the children.



## Session 10

*I saw it first in the distance, coming toward me like a storm sweeping off the ocean. Then it rushed over me, catching me in its fury. The killing of the children. Infants and children were being killed, mauled, and destroyed. Their little bodies were being torn to pieces by warriors and flung on piles beside the road. It was a horror beyond words.*



*I was an old Oriental woman screaming at the soldiers, beating on their chests, trying to make them stop. "Butchers!" I screamed. "Stop! Stop!" But they just flicked me aside without breaking stride and kept going about their work, hacking the children to pieces, smashing their heads against stones, tearing them apart with their bare hands. Thousands of little lives lost every minute.*

*My agony was beyond imagining. Now I was not one woman but thousands. My anguish at that moment was the anguish of all the mothers who had ever thrust themselves between their children and the life-destroyers, the war-makers, the bomb-droppers, the poverty-creators. I was powerless to stop them. I screamed and beat the ground with my fists, weeping for my children. There was nothing I could do. Nothing any of us could do.*

*Then in the dizzying swirl of anguish, a question sounded. "Are you dead yet?" I was so caught up trying to stop the killing that at first I didn't hear the question. Then it repeated itself. "Are you dead yet?"*

*"Dead?!" I screamed. "Save the children, please! Yes, I'm dead! But for God's sake, save the children!"*

*I was frantically pleading, begging. In the confusion of so many deaths, where was my death? I could not find it and became confused. There was terrible pain, my wish to save the children, and my death, but I could not sort them out. All I knew was that I wanted above all else to save the children, that my pain for them was enormous, and that I cared nothing about surviving myself.*

*Then suddenly a shift happened. A pause opened, and I found myself saying, "I don't know how to die as a woman. Show me how to die." Now everything became very still and quiet. I lay down on a high mesa in the desert under a night sky. As I did, I fell through my physical body into a flowing stream of experience underneath it. It was the positive side of women's experience. The care they give to the quieter time of day. Their watchful eye on the moods of children, sensitive to small shifts I had never noticed. Their inner strength.*

*From here I was taken for a long stay in the world of women under the arm of the Great Mother, sampling a wide range of female experiences and knowing them more intimately than I ever dreamed possible. No aspect of women's lives was closed to me. I conceived in passion, walked heavy with child, and suckled my newborn. I prayed at dawn and laughed with my sisters at our husbands. It lasted hours. I was fully woman. I was beautiful.*

Somewhere along the way, as the LSD wore off, I resumed my male identity. It is a comfortable fit, for I like being a man, but my maleness would never define me as completely as it had before.

For reasons that I will describe in chapter 5, I believe reincarnation is a basic fact of life, and so I believe that all of us have lived male and female lives. From this perspective, there is really nothing foreign to us about the "opposite sex." In the cycle of rebirth, changing sex is as simple as changing one's clothes. But I don't think these two sessions were about recovering memories of my former lives as women. They didn't feel like

that. The message was not “Own your female lives.” The message was “Where you are going, gender does not exist. Let go.” By being forced to become a woman, and a particular kind of woman, my earthly consciousness was shattered and my awareness opened to a larger world of experience.

My early understanding of the 10th session was to see it as representing a deepening of my ego-death, and I think this is true. By deepening my experience of the world of women, it completed the shattering of my male ego, and the blessing of being allowed to experience so many women’s lives was a life-changing grace. I wish every man could have the privilege of experiencing what I experienced on these two days.

But other parts of the session did not fit this interpretation. Why the killing of the children? What did this specific ordeal have to do with the death of Chris Bache’s ego, other than to force me to endure a particularly brutal horror? It didn’t make sense to me that this was simply a variation of ego-death, but I didn’t have enough information at the time to see it any other way. It was only years later, after many more sessions had come and gone, that I was given the missing piece of information that allowed me to understand the larger process that was unfolding. I will share this understanding with you now, but it will only make complete sense later.

I learned that the ordeal of the killing of the children was given me to activate a commitment I had made before I was born. By tearing open my heart, this excruciating experience stirred into action a compassion that lies deep within me. It summoned in me a commitment I had taken on in this incarnation to help end the violence that plagues humanity by standing between it and the next generation. The Buddhists would say this was an exercise in awakening *bodhicitta*, the desire to save all sentient beings. For me, it was a reminder of my life’s work. After the death of my earthly identity, my compassion was being aroused and focused on saving the children because a new phase of the work was about to begin.

## **Addendum: The Perinatal Level of Consciousness**

Grof discusses the perinatal level of consciousness in many places.<sup>[\\*27](#)</sup> The following summary of this concept is taken from my book *Dark Night, Early Dawn*, with the headings added for this presentation.

## ***Confrontation with Death***

The dominant motif of the perinatal level is the confrontation with death, a confrontation that is so realistic that subjects often lose awareness that they are in a therapeutic session and come to believe that they are actually dying. This ordeal forces them to experience all the fears and resistances that surround dying and to confront the frailty, impermanence, and suffering inherent in human existence. The resulting existential crisis can become so extreme that persons transcend the boundaries of their individual lives and begin to experience the suffering of entire groups of people, in some cases even reaching beyond human experience. Paradoxically, this confrontation with death is often intertwined with an equally vivid reliving of one's birth, specific aspects of which have sometimes been verified by family members or attending physicians (twisted cord, breech birth, forceps, resuscitation maneuvers, odors, sounds, and lighting).

The perinatal level thus combines birth and death, personal and transpersonal experiences in a complex fashion that is difficult to dissect. The exact relation of perinatal experience to biological birth is still uncertain. On the one hand, the content of these experiences cannot be reduced to the memory of biological birth, while on the other hand many of the physical symptoms that manifest in this context appear to derive from biological birth. In addition, both the physical symptoms and their corresponding experiential content seem to form four experiential clusters that can be modeled on the four consecutive stages of biological birth.

## ***COEX Systems***

To explain these patterns in his data, Grof introduced the concepts of COEX system and Basic Perinatal Matrix (BPM). A COEX system, short for "system of condensed experience," is a specific constellation of memories (and fantasies) from many periods of an individual's life that share a common theme and are marked by a common emotional charge. For a simple analogy, imagine taking a novel and highlighting the protagonist's many experiences in different colors according to their emotional content—red for anger, green for jealousy, yellow for fear, etc. If you were then to cut up the entire book and gather all the cuttings of each color into separate piles, each pile would represent a single COEX

system. The surface layers of a COEX system are made up of more recent or superficial experiences of that particular emotion. As you move deeper into the system, the experiences tend to become older and more basic. At the center of each system is a core experience or set of experiences that represents the primary disturbance, the seed experience around which later experiences cluster.

### ***The Four Perinatal Matrices***

A Basic Perinatal Matrix is a COEX system whose core is anchored in fetal experience, especially the experience of birth. According to Grof, the four phases of birth come to constitute four basic matrices in which are stored subsequent memories of psychologically similar experiences. Our unresolved and unintegrated birth experience is carried in these matrices. It is always there, below the surface and out of view but shaping in subtle and pervasive ways how we experience the world, even influencing what parts of the world we draw to ourselves to experience. In addition, when one reconnects with the memory of one's birth as preserved in these matrices, one also gains experiential access to the collective unconscious and other transpersonal realms that contain similar material. When one of the perinatal matrices emerges in a psychedelic session, therefore, it manifests as a multi-level repository of experience and insight, and always with an overwhelming emotional charge.

Turning to specifics, Grof defines the four stages of biological birth as:

1. Intrauterine existence before the onset of delivery;
2. Labor before dilation of the cervix;
3. Labor after dilation of the cervix;
4. Final propulsion through the birth canal and separation from the mother.

Before delivery, the fetus has “good womb” or “bad womb” experiences depending on the quality of prenatal support given the mother. In the first phase of labor, the fetus experiences a biochemical and physical assault; but because the cervix is not open, it has no place to escape to, experiencing a literal “no-exit” situation. In the second phase,

the cervix is open, thus creating a possible way out of the dilemma, and a heroic struggle to navigate the birth canal begins. In the final phase, the labor agonies culminate, followed by sudden release and separation from the mother.

The prototypical themes of the four stages of birth as matrices for storing subsequent memories include the following: (This is not an exhaustive list.)

1. Good womb: satisfaction of important needs, fulfilling love, dissolution of boundaries, unitive, oceanic bliss. Bad womb: experiences of malaise, disgust, anxiety, paranoia, unreality.
2. Unwarranted, violent aggression against the helpless innocent, hopelessness, guilt, unspeakable aloneness, the absurdity of human existence, entrapment without escape, the sovereignty of death.
3. Titanic struggle: life-death crisis but not absolutely hopeless, high-energy experiences of various sorts—murderous rage, volcanic ecstasy, sexual excitement, sadomasochism.
4. Death-rebirth experience: total annihilation of the individual followed by breaking through to a new level of existence; sudden liberation, profound love, spiritual illumination.

Infant, child, and adult experiences (and fantasies) that approximate these themes cluster around the relevant perinatal core in our memory, with the result that each constellation gathers energy through time and comes to influence behavior.

When a subject in a psychedelic session engages a perinatal matrix, then the experience will be multidimensional but thematically coherent. He or she may experience simultaneously one or more phases of the original birth trauma, similar real or imagined traumas from later life of both a physical and psychological nature, and, in addition, thematically congruent spiritual and philosophical conflicts and insights. . . .

### ***Death and Rebirth***

The death-rebirth process is never fully completed in a single session. Many sessions of repeatedly engaging the same issues are required before one has exhausted them. The usual pattern is that a subject working at this level will eventually experience a major perinatal crisis centering on one of the phases described above. Yielding to and resolving the crisis will usually shift the person into positive transpersonal experiences for the remainder of the session even though perinatal content may remain for future sessions. If the process is continued through serial sessions, a final death-rebirth experience eventually will completely exhaust all perinatal content. Making copious use of case histories, Grof has demonstrated that systematically engaging this traumatic material can actually dissolve the perinatal matrices, thus permanently removing their influence from the individual's behavior. In subsequent sessions, the subject moves directly into transpersonal experience as the journey in consciousness continues. Grof has found that *every single person who reaches this level in their work adopts a spiritual interpretation of existence, regardless of their prior psychosocial conditioning*. This includes such unmystical types as staunch atheists, skeptics, Marxists, and positivistically oriented scientists.<sup>[\\*28](#)</sup>

# THREE

## A Session Day

Readers of an early draft of this book asked me to take them inside a typical session day to show what actually happens there. The following narrative is my attempt to do so. It is the backstory to session 9 and thus overlaps the previous chapter slightly. I've woven pieces from session 10 into the narrative to present a more rounded account. This is what a session day looks like.



I closed the door behind me as I climbed the stairs to my study on the third floor. Passing the overflowing bookcase on the landing, ducking my head where the ceiling drops low, I turned the corner into my haven, a long cream-colored room with low ceilings slanting down to four-foot drop walls on its two long sides. The mattress and cushions from our living room sleeper sofa filled the center of the room. Through the large skylight on the left, I saw the tops of the trees softly lit by the early morning sun.

I looked at my watch. I had taken it ten minutes ago and only had time for one more check before closing everything out. A green blanket lay folded near one corner of the mattress, a large aluminum bowl and towel at another. Carol had already placed her seat and notepad beside the cassette deck, along with her snack for later. The food looked good. As always, I had skipped breakfast and was hungry, but the last thing I needed in my stomach now was food.

The tapes for the day were stacked beside the deck. Last night I had chosen the music and made a detailed chart of the options for each phase of the session, noting how long each piece lasted and its level of intensity on a scale of 1 to 5. Earlier this morning, I had positioned the tapes to

begin their music immediately when played, so that detail was taken care of. The last thing you want during a tape change is to be left hanging in excruciating silence for thirty seconds while a tape runs its lead. Headphones, eyeshades, washcloth—everything was here.

Carol sometimes thinks I sweat these details too much. She may be right. I'm never in great shape on these mornings. Our sharp words in the bedroom ran through my head. Stupid tensions over nothing had almost caused us to cancel the session. At least now we understood the pattern. Just stress before getting started. I hate these last hours.

I plugged in the headphones and straightened the wires, wondering what the day would bring. Would the pain be worse than last time? Where would it strike, and what would it ask of me? There was the ecstatic side, of course, the visions and the teachings, but at the beginning of a session it's always the pain I remember most.

I had already meditated, asking for guidance and renewing my commitments. Now I put some lotion on my face and hands, a small thank-you to my body for what I would soon be putting it through. Part of my ritual to help set a positive mood, like always wearing my favorite old clothes. Little things that had come to matter. I wondered if other people had their own private rituals of self-support.

I lay down and fussed with the eyeshades and earphones until both were snug and comfortable, then turned on the cassette deck. Willie Nelson's voice flooded my head. I often start with Willie these days. His voice has the wisdom of hard knocks softened by kindness and humor. It eases the early waves, helps me stay centered as the energy builds. Fifteen minutes into the tape, I caught myself wondering what Willie would think if he knew where he was singing today. "Café Psychedelic. Minds shattered while you wait." I laughed. That's a trippy thing to say. It's beginning. Where is she? Carol should be here by now.

I calmed myself by turning back to the music, trusting that my support line would be in place before I fell apart completely. A few minutes later, I heard the door open and Carol's steps on the stairs. She sat down beside me and gave my shoulder a small squeeze.

"Sorry I took so long," she said. "I had to tell Stephanie about Jason's medicine. How are you doing?"



“I’m good,” I said, turning my sightless face toward her. “It’s just starting. A little more time and then we’ll escalate. Everything all right downstairs?”

“Everything’s fine. She’s taken Jason to her house. Go ahead. And good luck.” A moment later, she squeezed my shoulder again. Everything from this morning was forgiven. I touched her hand and then turned back to the music. Little Jason’s earache. How far away that precious world seemed to me already. It was starting.

My teeth ached and I was feeling sick. There was no way to get comfortable any longer. I felt like I had the flu, except that the symptoms kept shifting around my body. First my stomach hurt, then my shoulders, then legs, now neck and head. I hate this phase. I had dumped 600 mcg of LSD into my system, and my body was straining under the acceleration. So much energy for it to adjust to so fast. Maybe someone will invent time-release LSD someday. That would help. Poor body. I stretched my arms and legs and arched my back, trying to ease the nausea. No relief. Damn, my teeth hurt.

“Time to go,” I said out loud. “Let’s get this show on the road.” After a brief pause, Willie’s voice disappeared and “Ride of the Valkyries” took its place. Great, I thought, as my mind began to fragment into the swirling flow. This ought to be fun.

That was my last “rational” thought. There was no holding on any longer. Sanity as I had known it would not return for eight hours. Now everything was dissolving into chaos. Now there was only anguish without logic.

After changing the music, Carol watched him draw further away from her and the world they had built together. She sat for him, but she didn’t really like the sessions. She hated the suffering. She hated seeing him all curled up like this, whimpering while God knows what was being done to him. She never knew what he was absorbed in while she sat with his body. So severe and unpredictable.

Why does he do it? she asked herself. Why can’t he be satisfied with the slower methods? He’s too impatient, that’s why! she answered. Does he really know what these sessions are doing to him? Are they really as safe

as he insists? How could it be safe to experience this much pain in one day? Sometimes when he tries to tell me what he's been through, he stops midsentence, unable to say more.

He was curled up in a tight ball, his arms folded across his chest, hands turned in at sharp angles. His fingers dangled awkwardly, trembling, uncoordinated. Judging from his body, he was in some kind of fetal space. She noted it in her log. He kept shifting his position as if trying to avoid something, but all his efforts seemed to fail. He would withdraw physically and then collapse into stillness, making sounds of whimpering, of being overwhelmed.

He hyperventilated for brief periods, blowing thick fluid from his nose and throat, never seeming to notice when she wiped it away. Then the convulsions began.

She hated the convulsions. Without warning, his body would suddenly jolt, snapping him around, bouncing him across the mattress. She got up and dragged him back to the center, surrounding him with cushions so he wouldn't hurt himself if one of the big ones threw him farther than usual. Between spasms, he was breathing fast, like he had run a hundred yard dash. Whining, whispering something. She bent in close but couldn't catch the words.

The seizures lasted over an hour. Small respites shattered again and again. She had read the books and knew the theory. Perinatal seizures, the body discharging deep tensions, waves of stress leaving his system. Maybe so, she thought, but it was so foreign to her nature, she could not understand why anyone would submit to it.

Suddenly, his body began to writhe more rhythmically, and he drew himself up on his hands and knees. She jumped and grabbed the bowl, shoving it under his head just in time to catch his vomit. He heaved as if throwing up more than the clear liquid that came out of him. He finished, and she wiped his face as he fell back on the mattress.

Don't let him start talking; get the headphones and eyeshades back on him, and send him back inside. Crumpled on the bed, he passively accepted her caretaking, marginally conscious of her moving around him. As she got the headphones back over his ears, he grabbed them, pressing them hard against his head, as if trying to extract more power from them.

Inside, I was locked in a life-and-death struggle, caught in a private hell sculpted with nightmarish precision. I was being forced to become the opposite of what I was, trapped inside lives that were not my own and unable to experience life in any other way.

I was being stripped of my maleness and trapped in the lives of women who were uneducated and poor. I became countless women of all shapes and sizes, races and classes. Women of color at the laundromat with no prospects. Women in poverty trained by television in the art of living. I was completely absorbed with life lived at its most superficial level. The intellectual barrenness was excruciating, and the loss of my sexual identity was terrifying, with layers of metaphysical and existential anguish folded into it. I fought what was happening with all my strength, but the more I pulled away from it, the tighter it gripped me.

I began to scream at it, trying to make it stop. Long plaintive cries. “Nooooo! Nooooo!”

Carol jumped up and closed the windows.

What in blazes is going on? she thought. If he keeps this up, someone’s going to call the police.

She grabbed a pillow and covered his head slightly, just enough to muffle his shouts but not enough to interfere with his breathing.

“Please stop,” she whispered, knowing he couldn’t hear her. “Please stop.”

Inside, I couldn’t make it stop, so I kept screaming at it. I was showing it all the pain it was causing me, begging it to stop, but it wouldn’t stop. Why wouldn’t it stop? It could see my anguish; it could see exactly what it was doing to me, but it wouldn’t stop. Pain from earlier periods of my life laced what was happening. Being teased at school, my dad’s early death. I had always kept silent in the face of these injuries. Now I was screaming my rejection of them all.

I pulled the headphones off and sat up. “Got to stop!” I gasped. “Just for a minute. I’ll go back. Got to catch my breath.”

“No,” Carol said firmly, following our established agreement. “You’ve got to go back inside *now* and see what is happening.” She put the

eyeshades and headphones back on me. I tried to object, but I could not mount much of a defense. She was right, of course.

Back inside, the women pounced on me immediately. The more I rejected them, the more tightly they grabbed me. Wave after wave of female experience engulfed me. At times I experienced parts of my personality emerge in the flow but now in a feminine form. It was excruciating to feel pieces of my life that were so familiar but stripped of their maleness.

Mixed into the flow were painful snippets of life so universal I could not help but open to them. I became a young girl at a party on Saturday night, all dressed up but knowing no one would ask me to dance. In another scenario, I became a twelve-year-old African American girl in her after-school world, dying alone in a hospital bed, unable to contact my best friend. No one knew I was dying. They would learn only after I was dead, when it was too late. I wept at that girl's fear and sorrow. "So many ways to die," I said out loud. "You don't have to go far to find them." Carol wrote it down and noted that my voice had taken on feminine tones.

After hours of struggle, I was at a standoff with the women who had taken over my life. I had not given in to them, but they were wearing me down. The sheer number of female experiences I was having was slowly making me feel more comfortable feeling as a woman feels, but I was still resisting the final surrender. I didn't know how this was ever going to resolve itself.

In the middle of this impasse, Carol accidentally put on the wrong tape, one of those little synchronistic miracles that sometimes happen in a session. Suddenly, Louis Armstrong's gravelly voice was in my head singing, "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows my sorrow." The jolt of his deep voice putting the perfect words to my distress broke my resistance. "I give up," I laughed. "You can't beat the girls of the neighborhood. All you can do is join them." With that I let go and allowed myself to become fully a woman.

From here I was taken for a long stay in the world of women under the arm of the Great Mother, sampling a wide range of female experiences and knowing them more intimately than I ever dreamed possible. No aspect of women's lives was closed to me. I conceived in passion, walked heavy with child, and suckled my newborn. I prayed at dawn and laughed with

my sisters at our husbands. It lasted hours. I was fully woman. I was beautiful.

Late in the afternoon, I took off my headphones and eyeshades, coming slowly back to shared reality. I saw Carol watching me from across the room. I had never seen her as I saw her now. Tears filled my eyes as I experienced her womanliness anew. How little I had truly understood her before. So much to make up for.

“Is everything alright?” she asked, seeing my tears.

“Yes, everything’s fine,” I assured her. “It’s the overflow.”

“Would you like something to eat?”

“What time is it?”

“Four-thirty. It’s been eight and a half hours.”

“Yes, that would be nice,” I said, scratching my head with both hands.

She got up and walked to the stairs, stopping at the top. “I’m going to call Stephanie and check on Jason. Any messages?”

“Tell her I love you all.”

She looked at me quizzically, knowing she was not supposed to understand. “I look forward to finding out what that means,” she said and disappeared down the stairs.

It was always a shock to come back and realize that no one knew where I had been all day. The sessions were so powerful, how could they be so private? And how will I ever be able to describe to her what happened? To anyone? When I write up the sessions, I can never convey their full intensity and realism. The experiences are so concentrated, so multilayered. And they cut to the bone.

She returned thirty minutes later with a small plate of grapes, cashews, dried pineapple, and carob-covered raisins. Good primal hand food. Well, okay, the carob-covered raisins weren’t very primal, and the pineapple? Who knows, but eating with your fingers always feels natural after a session.

After the light snack, Carol left to collect our son, and I went downstairs to wash off the sweat of the day. I was wobbly, holding on to the walls for balance, operational if I went slowly, but just barely. The

effects of the LSD had faded, but I moved in a field saturated by the day's events.

The hot shower was wonderful. Reconnecting with my body, I noticed that my posture had changed, just like before. I stood a bit differently, more aligned, more balanced over my feet. My chest a little more open, shoulders lower. I knew this postural realignment would not last. Over the next week, it would slowly fade as old muscle habits reasserted themselves, but they never reclaimed everything. Slowly, my body was being restructured. Standing under the running water, I looked at my future. How good it felt to be this open to the world.

In our bedroom, objects weren't just objects anymore but clues overflowing with significance. Everything I saw told a story of where we had gotten it and when, who had given it to whom, how much we had enjoyed it since or not. Everything represented something within one of us or both of us, some need, some vacation whimsy. The story of each object flowed to me against the backdrop of the day, revealing details I had not seen before.

Once or twice, memories from the session washed through me, causing me to pause and steady myself. Time to get back upstairs before the window closed completely. Dressed in fresh clothes, I made my way back up to the study. The room was a mess. Pillows and blankets tossed about, cassette boxes everywhere. How friendly it looked. It was always like this after a session. It only took a few minutes to put things back in their places.

Soon I was lying down, looking out the skylight, remembering the details of the day, trying to reconstruct the exact sequence of events. Later Carol and I would go over her notes and share impressions from the day, but only lightly. My verbal functions are never fully back online for twenty-four hours, and I had much to sort out. I would spend most of the night connecting the dots, falling asleep shortly before dawn. By then I would have a rough outline of the day fixed in my mind. Another piece of the mosaic. Another step deeper into my soul.

## FOUR

# The Ocean of Suffering

Sessions 11–17

*The oceanlike immensity of joy  
Arising when all beings will be freed,  
Will this not be enough? Will this not satisfy?  
The wish for my own freedom, what is that to me?*

SHANTIDEVA, *THE WAY OF THE BODHISATTVA*

I've resisted starting this chapter for weeks, troubled by what I will be asking the reader to endure, afraid that some may slot these experiences into primitive theologies of hell, reinforcing stories of punishment and damnation when this is actually a story of rescue and deliverance. I've been advised by friends to temper the story, that those who have not entered these hell realms will not be able to understand them, that people will be frightened and contract. But I'm not going to take their advice. I'm going to ask the reader to follow me into deep suffering, and I do so for three reasons. First, this is simply where the journey went, and I promised an honest account. Second, these experiences offer us important insights into the workings of the collective unconscious of humanity. And third, I hope that by following me into this hell, you will be able to participate more fully in the heaven that follows.

In the sessions following the killing of the children, I entered a domain of collective anguish that was more challenging than anything I had previously faced and worse than anything I could imagine. It was

completely different from the personal meltdowns that had preceded it. In session after session, I was brought back to the same landscape and systematically taken deeper into its mayhem. I came to call this domain the Ocean of Suffering, for it was a vast ocean of fury and pain, enormous in scope and intensity.

In the second half of these same sessions, I was taken on an extraordinary series of adventures that I will describe in the next two chapters. It is this pairing of great anguish with great blessings that makes these painful episodes bearable. Once you learn the rhythm, you learn to trust the cycle. If you open completely to whatever arises in your experience, however difficult it may be, and let it take you where it wants to go, the ordeal will build until it eventually reaches some peak expression. When it has spent itself for the day, your experience will then shift into positive transpersonal domains for the remainder of the session.

Completion is the key that keeps this suffering from becoming lodged in your system as trauma. If you take each round of suffering through to its completion, peace follows. What you then take away from the session is the complete cycle—pain followed by resolution followed by peace. How you meet these experiences makes all the difference in how they live in you afterward.

I think it's better to bundle these early experiences of the ocean of suffering together rather than take you through them session by entire session. Concentrating them into a few pages, however, may make them appear worse than they actually were, if that's possible. In actual practice, the ocean of suffering was broken up into installments lasting a few hours each and separated by months in which I had time to digest them and prepare myself for the next round. Once I learned what was waiting for me inside the sessions, the mornings of a session day were tense. Like a woman going into labor or a soldier going into battle, my attention turned deeply within as I prepared for what was about to happen. Carol called it "going into the tunnel." It would start hours, sometimes days before a session.

The encounter with the ocean of suffering lasted fourteen sessions spread over two years of work. This work was coherent from beginning to end despite the fact that I stopped my sessions for six years in the middle of this series, for reasons I will explain in the next chapter. From the



perspective of the experiences themselves, this six-year interruption was a mere bump in the road that changed nothing. But in terms of calendar time, there was a year of the ocean of suffering before the six-year break and a year after it, each containing seven sessions.

I will follow this order in telling the story, dividing it into these two halves. I will further divide the first year's sessions into their cleansing phase and their ecstatic phase. Though this sounds complicated, it will simply be easier to tell the story this way. In this chapter, then, I will describe what happened inside the cleansing phase of the first year of the ocean of suffering, and in the next chapter, I will describe what happened inside the ecstatic phase of these same seven sessions. After that I will pick up the story on the other side of the six-year hiatus and describe where the ocean of suffering went from there.<sup>\*29</sup>

## The Ocean of Suffering

The suffering I'm going to describe was difficult to weather, but it took me in gradually and gave me time to adjust to it. It repeatedly took me to my breaking point, but the breaking points were skillfully plotted, controlled by something or someone I never saw but always felt. You can observe this incremental deepening in the details of the sessions that follow. I did not understand the reason for these ordeals going into them, but the experiences were so consistent that I felt a deep logic operating there. When the full explanation was given me by the 24th session, it all made sense.<sup>†30</sup>

The following experiences come from five sessions that took place in 1982 and 1983. During these same years, I earned tenure at my university and was awarded its Distinguished Professor Award for the first time. I mention this only to reinforce the point that even when one's sessions become very intense, they do not undermine our ability to function competently in the world if they are well managed.



### *Session 11*

*The electrical spasms were intense, shooting me across the mattress. The music pulled on my darker spaces. My psychological anguish grew until I found myself*

*trapped in a musical chamber of horrors. The tension was unbearable.*

*The music changed to tribal ritual chanting—complex breathing rhythms combined with shouts, grunts, and retching. As I let go to these sounds, I felt myself enter a primitive domain completely beyond any modern frame of reference. All familiar associations were suspended. Around me, through me, swirled fearful negative energies, elemental and barbaric. I was floating in a surging field of negative forces. I slowly became less frightened as there was less and less of “me” present to react to the experiences. As I dissolved into this field, I was emptied of all personal associations, hollow to anything but these ancient sounds, lost in another world, another time.*



## Session 12

*The anguish thickened into a terrible horror acted out around me in psychedelic overkill. At first I was just witnessing these events, but as I died my boundaries dilated and I was drawn into the mayhem. Then “I” was being killed, mauled, and maimed. The forms of the horror were so many that they can’t be described. Against the chants, anything was possible. Disembowelings by the score, the mauling of lives, deaths in the thousands. Swirling forms of horror so overlaid that distinct images do not stand out. As the horrors compounded themselves, I eventually lost all my bearings, all coherent sense of meaning. Everything was dismantled by the unimaginable brutalities. I felt so overwhelmed that I collapsed into a state of complete overload.*



## Session 13

*When it first began, I remembered the torture of the previous session—how deeply it had reached into my psyche, leaving no corner unexplored. Anything that could be used against me had been used. I felt the same thing beginning again, and I shuddered.*

*The horrors were more intense than the previous session, harder hitting and faster. They were so complex, multidimensional, and multi-thematic that I can barely describe them. It was war, savagery, destruction, killing, anguish. It felt distinctly European and premodern. Trying to describe it, I am reminded of Dante’s *Inferno*, but sped up incredibly fast and overlaid many times. It seemed to last hours. As the music switched to the Balinese “Monkey Chant,” everything intensified and went even further out of control. I was being overrun, assaulted, torn apart, and thrown aside thousands of times. There was nothing I could do, nothing any of us could do. There was no escape.*



## Session 14

*The horrors were relentless. Driving Indian rhythms hammering away at me endlessly. Terrible, terrible pain. I kept searching for something comparable to previous sessions where the pain at least had some vague semblance of form,*

*something I could see. But this time, the pain had no recognizable shape of any kind. It began as the pain of others, but experienced much closer than before. Soon, however, it became all mine.*

*The ordeal kept deepening. I would reach a breaking point and be shattered by the pain, resistance being impossible. Then the pain would slowly gather new momentum and plunge me into deeper agony, taking me beyond limits that just minutes before I had thought were impossible to exceed. A crescendo of torture would carry me to a new breaking point, I would collapse, and the process would repeat itself.*

*The music shifted to the powerful chants. I was in agony. The chanting surrounded me and pulled even more pain from me. It kept coming and coming. The pain was terrible. I lost track of it. I don't know what happened next. After an eternity, the pain somehow ended. Amid soft strains of slowly paced, gentle Indian stringed instruments, my pain lay down.*



## Session 15

*I don't know how to describe what I've been through today, the places I was in, the destruction I was part of, the searing pain and torment of thousands and thousands of beings, myself with them, tortured to their breaking points and then beyond, and beyond. Not individuals but waves of people. The tortures not specific but legion. Destruction and pain, destruction and pain. I did not want to believe that regions of such unspeakable horror existed, but they do.*

*Driving sitar and drums tearing me apart, plunging me into more and more primitive levels of anguish. Passing through previous levels, I eventually reached a level I can only liken to hell itself. Excruciating pain. Unspeakable horror beyond any imaginings. I was lost in a rampaging savagery that was without bounds. It was science fiction gone rabid. The world of the damned. The worst pictures of the world's religions showing the tortures of hell only touch the surface. And yet, the torment cleanses one's being. It tears every piece of flesh off your body until you've died a thousand times and can't die any more. Then you find ways to die some more.*



I know it is not easy to enter these experiences, even as a witness. If I have erred in bringing you here, I apologize. I show you these things not to ask for your mercy. I lived through these experiences, and I am well and strong. I share them with you to ask you to enter the mystery with me.

## **The Riddle of the Ocean of Suffering**

What is this domain I had entered? Between sessions 11 and 15, I was systematically immersed in a deepening landscape of collective violence and anguish, but what *is* this landscape? Where does it come from and what does it represent?

Let me first dispense with what I trust is an inadequate interpretation—that these experiences represent some repressed cruelty or rage hidden in my personal unconscious or perhaps are the psychological payback for deeds I have actually committed. To both these suggestions, I answer simply that I am neither this cruel nor this violent. I have never felt rage of this sort, and repression of this magnitude would surely leave traces. I have my faults, of course, but nothing that could account for suffering like this.

A more plausible interpretation comes from Stan Grof, who has seen similar patterns of collective suffering emerge in many psychedelic sessions he has supervised. He summarizes them as follows:

A subject can experience himself as thousands of soldiers who have died on the battlefields of the whole world from the beginning of time, as the tortured victims of the Spanish Inquisition, as prisoners of concentration camps, as patients dying of terminal diseases, as aging individuals who are decrepit and senile, as mothers and children dying during delivery, or as inmates maltreated in chronic wards of insane asylums. (Grof 1976, 116)

Grof's understanding of these episodes is that they are clusters of memories in the collective unconscious that get pulled into one's personal death-rebirth process at the perinatal level of consciousness. Because the perinatal dimension lies at the interface of personal and transpersonal consciousness, perinatal experience can weave together material from both the personal and the collective psyche. Grof believes that these episodes of collective suffering are essentially bleed-through from the collective unconscious because of their resonance to some aspect of personal ego-death. That is, he sees ego-death as being the core experience here, and these clusters of collective experience are drawn to this core because they parallel some aspect of ego-death. If this were an opera, ego-death would be singing lead and these collective experiences would be the chorus. [\\*31](#)

The collective psyche appears to organize its memories in ways that parallel how the personal unconscious organizes its memories. Grof has demonstrated that our personal unconscious organizes its memories into *clusters of experience* that come from different periods of our life but share a common emotional theme. As we saw in chapter 2, he calls these clusters of condensed experience COEX systems. The psychedelic experiences presented in this chapter suggest that the collective unconscious organizes its vast store of memories in a similar fashion. It appears to gather the memories of humanity into *giant memory clusters* that come from different people and different historical periods but share a common emotional theme. I call these collective memory clusters META-COEX systems. The structure of a META-COEX system parallels the structure of a personal COEX system, but it operates on a much larger scale and a different level of consciousness—the subtle level.

When I was going through these experiences, it meant a great deal to me to know that other explorers had undergone similar trials. It told me that whatever was taking place in my sessions was part of a larger pattern. Given the large database that Grof was basing his observations on, I initially adopted his interpretation of these episodes. It made intuitive sense to me that these patterns of resonance could be springing up between the personal and collective levels of the psyche.

My working assumption became that these collective ordeals represented a deepening of my personal ego-death, that they were a challenging phase of my *individual* spiritual journey, which I simply had to weather in order to be completely liberated. This assumption was reinforced by the fact that in-between my sessions, my ego, though softened, was still intact, with many of its failings and idiosyncrasies in place. If ego-death had already completed itself inside my sessions, I reasoned, shouldn't I be more liberated outside my sessions? The fact that I was not completely liberated in my day-to-day life suggested that there were still fragments of ego alive within me, potentially driving these ordeals. I assumed that when my ego-death process was complete, these collective ordeals would stop because there would no longer be a core of unfinished ego-death for them to attach to.

And yet, I continued to have reservations about this interpretation. These experiences were so extreme and so vast in scope that it was

difficult for me to see them as a secondary aspect of a more primary process, as being drawn into my sessions from the collective psyche through resonance to my personal ego-death. And while there were certain structural parallels to my earlier perinatal experiences, many components of that supposedly “core” dynamic were missing here. The fetal sensations that had been present in earlier sessions had disappeared, and the physical discharges were fading. Nor was I feeling the same intense existential angst I had felt in previous sessions. The challenge here lay simply in repeatedly opening to vast fields of human suffering and violence. This felt like a dynamic unto itself, not an echo of a dynamic.

## On the Eve of Stopping

I entered the last two sessions of this series knowing that I was about to stop my work for an unknown period of time. In the 16th session, something unexpected happened. When everything disintegrated into its chaotic flow, the pain escalated into a frenzy so extreme that it morphed into an orgy of bhaktian rapture. Just as the suffering reached a fevered pitch, the thought of the Divine flashed in my mind and I surrendered completely. Caught in surging elemental forces, I became a devotee singing to the Divine in ecstatic trance. He was vast and he played me like a trumpet. My consciousness was the instrument and my life the melody.<sup>[\\*32](#)</sup>

This eruption of bhaktian devotion caught me by surprise because it was completely different from my usual approach to spirituality, which has always been more mental in character. Of the four spiritual paths in Hinduism—*jnana* (knowledge), *karma* (service), *raja* (meditation), and *bhakti* (devotion)—bhakti is the path I have least identified with, and yet here it was.

In the 17th session, the consciousness behind my sessions seemed to shift its message in anticipation of the coming interruption. I have no doubt that this is what happened. In this session, the collective suffering returned in full force until it completely saturated my experience.

*The anguish that is always so hard to describe surrounded and saturated me. I was being relentlessly pursued. There was no escaping the torment. It followed me*

*everywhere, surrounding me completely. At one point I remember searching through all the pain looking for my death to orient to. All the anguish seemed meaningless without my death to give me my bearings. But there was no haven "I" could retreat into, not even the haven of my own death. The only "I" that existed was hundreds of being-fragments, and all of them were suffering. (S 17)*

This time, however, I was refusing to surrender to the pain and rejected everything that was happening to me. Eventually, I was backed up against a psychological wall and was told that if I persisted in rejecting the suffering, I would be turning my back on humanity, on life itself. To not care seemed to be the ultimate existential withdrawal from life. With multiple scenarios echoing this refrain, I was being confronted with an absolute choice of whether to open to this pain or not. At this point, my "No" changed to a "Yes." This transition felt like a conversion in the deepest religious sense.

*In the middle of terrible suffering I found myself saying, "Yes! I can make a difference. Yes! I accept responsibility." I was accepting responsibility for the anguish and for trying to make a difference in the lives surrounding me. This shift was fundamental. It reached to depths I cannot now fathom and impacted me in ways I cannot summarize. It seemed a free choice on the most basic of questions.*

*With this acceptance, the torment suddenly changed to positive themes. Themes of young children—happy excitement, delighted play, self-abandoned joy. Many scenarios of childhood wonder and adventure. This was the beginning of a "new way." It contrasted with the former negative way in every respect. It was simple instead of chaotic, shared instead of individual, fresh instead of repetitive. I felt cleansed and made new. (S 17)*

As I was stopping my sessions, a commitment to resume them at some point in the future had been solicited and was given. Whatever the ocean of suffering was, my work with it was not finished.

I did not see it then, but I see now that the vision of happy children in this session was the inverse of the vision of the killing of the children that had marked my entry into the ocean of suffering. The children's joy was the result of something that had taken place inside the ocean of suffering, even though that process was still incomplete. Instead of being violently killed, they were now beginning to inherit a positive life. It felt like I was touching something deep in humanity's future, that I was being reminded that this work was for generations yet to be born.

## FIVE

# Deep Time and the Soul

Sessions 11–17

*When a person claims to “remember the future,” should we quickly refer him or her to psychiatric care or respectfully honor the potential validity of experiential knowledge we still have no way of comprehending?*

WILLIAM RICHARDS, *SACRED KNOWLEDGE*

The ocean of suffering was a terrible ordeal to endure, but each time I emerged from it I entered a reality that was stunning and intoxicating—a domain where the rules of time had changed. When I returned to my ordinary consciousness after each of these sessions, I had to ask myself: “Are these experiences real? Did what I think just happened actually happen?” The answer was always the same: “Yes, this is real. This is true.” But how? Inside space-time, we divide our experience into past, present, and future. The past is memory, the present is real, the future is projection. Inside these seven sessions, however, past, present, and future merged into a different experience of time, into what I first called “whole time” and later “Deep Time.”

When I first entered Deep Time in the 11th session, the experiences were so foreign that I could not hold on to them after the session had ended. Experiences that had utterly transfixed me only hours before became just mists against the darkness. Because I had no reference point in my ordinary consciousness to anchor them, my mind simply swallowed them. Replaying the music the day after the session, I managed to pull



together a partial narrative from the pieces I had salvaged. In the months that followed, I recovered other pieces. Waking in the middle of the night or listening to spacious music, suddenly something would fall open in my mind and another piece of the session would appear, clear and intact. Each time I could not stop the tears. As the sessions continued and I entered this new landscape again and again, I became more familiar with it and was able to hold on to more of my experiences there. I learned how to stay awake in Deep Time.

What do I mean by Deep Time? I mean a dimension of reality in which the rules of linear time have been suspended, where one can experience different *spans of time* as simultaneously present. Past, present, and future existing concurrently within some larger temporal horizon. Deep Time is not timelessness or eternity; it is not transcending time altogether. That is a different experience. Nor is it time travel the way Hollywood likes to imagine it; it isn't zipping forward and backward in time through dazzling wormholes. What I'm describing is a shift into a different *order of time*. It is a transtemporal experience, a different way of being conscious with respect to time.

Though it took some getting used to, the experiences themselves were not confusing. On the contrary, they were exceptionally clear and consistent. Fantasy spins out alternate futures at whim. What I experienced was not fantasy. When I returned to Deep Time in these seven sessions, I kept returning to the same field of experience, a stable meta-reality that encompassed my entire life. This was "things as they are." This was reality expanded, known from a deeper perspective. This was real.

I understand how absurd this may sound to my scientifically trained colleagues or to anyone who has not personally experienced these states of awareness. If there is any constant in our lives, surely it's that we can experience only the present, that the future is closed to us and the past is a fading echo. I won't try to persuade the reader of the possibility of Deep Time by invoking complicated arguments for the permeability of time at the quantum level. Physicists may postulate the existence of particles that pop in and out of space-time from the zero point field, and relativity theorists may calculate what happens to time inside the fierce compression of black holes, but our everyday experience of time is so consistent that

the “arrow of time” is taken as a given in our universe. In any case, the pieces of data science has produced would not be sufficient to legitimize the radical shifts of temporal perspective that took place inside these sessions.

Rather than argue for the truth of these experiences on theoretical grounds, I will simply lay out my experiences and leave it to readers to make of them what they will. I should mention that these personal transtemporal experiences were the forerunner of even deeper excursions in time that followed in later years. From this point on, time became more porous in my sessions.

The philosopher in me says that it would be safer to speak only of different ways of *experiencing* time without suggesting that we can extrapolate from these experiences conclusions about how time actually behaves in the universe, as if this phenomenological bracketing would make these experiences more palatable to the modern mind.<sup>\*33</sup> The problem, however, is that this distinction tends to evaporate inside one’s sessions. When one is actually experiencing Deep Time, it is practically impossible not to conclude that you are experiencing something real taking place in the universe independent of your knowing it. When one is inside these different temporal envelopes, it is compellingly clear that the universe has different temporal modalities built into it, that there are different layers to *its* experience of time, however unorthodox this may sound to our educated ears. As a result of these experiences, I have come to believe that there are, in fact, many layers to the tissue of time in the cosmos. I don’t pretend to understand how this works. I only know on the basis of repeated experience that linear time is how time behaves inside space-time. As one moves to the “edges” of space-time, the rules of time change.

The names of the sessions addressed in this chapter (and the previous chapter) are:

- S 11 The Great Oak #1
- S 12 The Great Oak #2
- S 13 Hillside of Karma #1
- S 14 Hillside of Karma #2

- S 15 Descent into Hell
- S 16 Carol and I
- S 17 The Commitment of Yes

## **My Life as a Completed Whole**

Visionary experience always takes place in a context, so I want to mention that the following sessions took place during a challenging period in my life. Things were difficult at work as I was struggling to come to terms with a job that did not meet many of my professional expectations, and Carol and I were experiencing a stubborn pattern of conflict that couples therapy had not been able to resolve. It was a time of uncertainty, of questioning choices I had made and weighing my options. I was thirty-three years old.

It was at this juncture that these seven sessions gave me an experience of my life as a completed whole, as a totality from beginning to end.



### *Entering Deep Time (S 11)*

*As the fierce cleansing receded and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony began its majestic entrance, a vision of my life began to unfold. It was so vast in scope and depth that I could not have taken it in had I not been so thoroughly disassembled by the prior cleansing.*

*The initial vision was of deep space, of galaxies spinning in silent rotation, countless stars suspended in sweeping galactic arms—portraits of the different magnitudes of time the universe operates by. Moving toward them, I began to dilate, to become larger and more expansive. I was being absorbed into what I was approaching. This was an extraordinary sensation. It completely changed my mode of experience.*

*Today it was as though I was young and old at once. I was my entire life experience with time collapsed, as though someone had turned my life on end and looked down its length, like looking through a paper towel tube. Seen end to end, time disappeared and my soul appeared—the being beneath the stages of my life. Enduring relationships stood out in bold relief. Bonds with people, with ideas, with life tasks. People I had found and who had found me. Ideas that have circulated round me all my life, returning in different forms again and again. I was my past, present, and future—one—in a way that was certain to me, doubt not being possible.*

*Even more difficult to convey than the riddle of time is the extreme saturation of detail in this mode of experience, the extraordinary richness of layers upon layers of information. These details coalesced to form a "deep reading" of my life. The*

*authority of this reading was incontestable; its truth was obvious. It was as though all the evidence was present. This way of knowing was unlike anything I have ever experienced before. It was a knowing that was not linear but whole. Not a conclusion but a seeing-things-in-their-entirety. It was a depth of vision so much richer than ordinary vision that to call it a "vision" lies. It was more a "being tuned" than a seeing. It was saturated textures of experience from different periods of my life symphonically orchestrated.*

*In these experiences, I not only saw and observed my future life, I tasted it experientially. I became my older self and felt its texture. It was not being a specific age or being older in some vague, generalized sense. I was experiencing the distilled residue of my entire life experience condensed into Now. With another person, it was to be aware of and appreciate your full history together. It was to see your lives happening and having happened simultaneously. With myself, it was to feel my life's currents, to know its essential themes. It was experiencing the larger flow of my life with time deleted and historical settings collapsed into my "whole person."*

As these visions continued through the following year, each session built on the previous session. The visions were stable and systematically developed. Sequences were repeated, unfolding themselves in greater detail and with deepening emphasis. Sometimes I would see things I had seen in an earlier session but had not been able to fully remember. Now I was able to hold on to the experience more completely and absorb the teaching that came with it.

I note with interest that Carl Jung had a strikingly similar experience of time dilation in a series of ecstatic visionary experiences he had in 1944 when he was in the hospital recuperating from a heart attack. In his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he wrote:

I can describe the experience only as the ecstasy of a non-temporal state in which present, past, and future are one. Everything that happens in time had been brought together into a concrete whole. Nothing was distributed over time, nothing could be measured by temporal concepts. . . . One is interwoven into an indescribable whole and yet observes it with complete objectivity. (Jung [1969] 1989, 295–96)

## **The Great Oak and the Hillside of Karma**

The overarching vision that communicated this transtemporal distillation of my life was that of an oak tree. I have always loved trees. When I was growing up on the edge of a small town in Mississippi, the woods behind my home had been my playground and my refuge. Now I experienced my entire life as a huge oak tree.

*All my time-moments were embodied in its massive substance. Its twists and turns contained the details of my entire life—past, present, and future. Large branches were relationships and themes that had begun early and received a lot of energy, while the small twigs and leaves at its edges were my most recent life experience before death. (S 11)*

Saturating the oak were many experiences of family lineage, of children born and still to be conceived. I cannot describe how moving this particular piece was. It was to see one of my deepest dreams come true, a dream so deep that until now I had only been partially aware of its existence. It was as if the visions were saying to me, “*This* is your field of challenge; *this* is your karmic destiny. Everything you need for *your* development is here. Universal love for you begins with perfected fatherly love.”

In the sessions that followed, the vision of the oak tree expanded into a vision of trees growing side by side on a hillside. I called it the Hillside of Karma. This was a vision of our extended family. My wife’s sister and her husband had recently decided to move from another state to live near us. The bond between the sisters was very strong. Though this was a recent decision, I saw in these sessions that it was rooted in a deeper and older intentionality. We had been “planted” side by side many years before, but only now was that deeper intention beginning to manifest in space-time. There was destiny at work in our coming together.

*This was our hillside. These were the people; this was the place. The scene was clear; the relationships established. There remained only the deepening of experience in full integrity, strength, and slowly growing wisdom. (S 14)*

Through all these experiences, there flowed a deep sense that the circumstances of our lives were being shaped by forces beyond our immediate awareness. Our lives were “etched in the universe.” There were many messages about rootedness, bonding, and age.

*I experienced these people with a depth of perspective and appreciation that usually emerges only after a lifetime together. It was as though I was actually seeing what had been. My feelings for them had the texture of hindsight, of full overview. Looking backward from the future, I knew them and myself with deep insight, while looking forward, I was overwhelmed with the grace of our having come together. (S 14)*

Our intertwined destinies were part of a larger unfolding, and there was power in this unfolding. On a personal level, the message was, “Follow the natural slope of your life. Struggle is not necessary.” The circumstances of my life were being shaped by processes deeper than my conscious ego could track. My well-being lay in trusting these circumstances and responding to them as deeply as I could.

In one session, these insights unfolded into a more generalized teaching about karma.

*The primary lesson was karma, and karma was simply the force set in motion through countless choices that come to constitute history. History at any point in time has a momentum so large that it must complete itself into tomorrow. Karma was the force of this momentum through time—the momentum of individuals, of nations. Energy started must complete itself. What we gather to us must express itself over time. (S 15)*

As a point of history, our two families did live close to each other for many years in two different cities in Ohio. For eight of these years, our homes were actually side by side on the same street. Here we raised our children in a close-knit extended family, celebrating birthdays, holidays, and the passages of life. Strong bonds were forged that have continued to this day.

## **Rooted in Time**

In these seven sessions, I experienced my entire life distilled to its core. This does not mean that I saw every detail of my future. Indeed, some things have happened since then that I would have appreciated a little heads-up on. Instead, what I experienced was the core of the being I had become/am becoming in this incarnation. What I experienced convinced me that the circumstances of my life were filled with deliberate purpose

and intent. I came away with a deep sense of being rooted in meaningful work and important relationships.

*I feel that I finally understand what I am about and where I am in my life. I feel grounded in a definite place, with definite people, at an early stage of a rich life. I am also taking away patience for my incompleteness. Everything I was seeing would be mine, but I had to be patient. There was no need to fight the pace of my unfolding. (S11)*

These visions also contained many insights into the personalities of the family members who were gathering, but I will pass over these in silence because they are private matters that do not contribute to the larger story I am telling. I will mention only one of them because of its singular importance to me personally.

In a series of visions, I saw that the conflicts my wife and I had been having were rooted in a difference in our “soul age.” Soul age is simply a metaphor for spiritual development rooted in a reincarnational worldview. “Older souls” are seen as being more spiritually developed than “younger souls,” presumably from having lived more lifetimes on Earth. In my sessions, I saw that Carol was spiritually older than I was, with a heightened spiritual sensitivity and more developed capacity for contemplative practice. I saw myself as being younger, as coming more recently from lifetimes of middle age and only now moving into early wisdom. Carol already knew of things that I was just learning about.

When I shared these insights with Carol, she accepted them. They made sense of many of the patterns we had been experiencing in our relationship. When she and I opened to the perception that we were at different stages of our respective spiritual journeys, it shifted our conversation. Instead of trying to draw the other into our own experiential reality or meet in a middle that frustrated both of us, we began to think more creatively about how we might live constructively with our differences instead of fighting them. It did not magically resolve the tensions we were feeling, but it opened new possibilities.

The last two sessions in this series took me still deeper into my relationship with Carol and counseled me to hold on to that relationship. This surprised me because the tensions between us had grown so challenging that I honestly thought that we were headed toward divorce.

But the sessions advised me to stay put, and I took this advice to heart. I backed away from separation and gave myself to Carol once again. Together we searched for how we might live together as the unusual couple we were.

Seventeen years later, after twenty-four rich years together, Carol and I did decide to end our marriage. That painful decision never caused me to second-guess this earlier choice to stay put. I believe that this choice reflected my deepest truth at this particular time in my life, and I am grateful for the counsel I received in my sessions.

## **Reincarnation and the Soul**

*I am being given a new mythos in which to understand my life, replacing the mythos of family history psychodynamically construed. With this new mythos comes a deeper understanding of karma and a deeper sense of responsibility. (S 12)*

My notes from these sessions are filled with references to a “deeper intentionality,” to “causal forces arching through time” and “the given of our lives.” My understanding of life was being expanded and deepened. I was being given a new mythos for how life works. As a professor of religious studies, I recognized that this new mythos was actually an old mythos, though not one I knew much about at the time. It was the mythos of reincarnation and the soul. In the years that followed, the theme of reincarnation wove itself in and out of my sessions many times, both as a general principle and as personal memories of some of my former lives. Because of its recurring presence in my sessions, let me step to the side for a moment and say something about reincarnation here.

After years of study, I have come to accept reincarnation as a natural fact of life. I accept it not on the basis of faith but on the basis of strong empirical evidence. Fifty years ago, this evidence did not exist; today it does. The discovery of children from around the world who have active memories of their most recent former lives, memories that have been documented and verified through careful research, stands as one of the great achievements of our time. With decades of meticulous research, Ian Stevenson, the Carlson Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia from 1967 to 2001, has proven beyond a reasonable doubt, I think,



that reincarnation is simply true. Stevenson has had his critics, of course, but his work has held its own against them.<sup>\*34</sup>

Stevenson's research requires more than just making small adjustments to the edges of our thinking. It challenges our culture's core assumptions about how the world works. It challenges mainstream science's belief in reductive materialism that reduces mind to brain, making the survival of consciousness after the death of the brain impossible, and it challenges Christianity's belief that we live only once, followed by eternal judgment. Given the paradigm-breaking nature of Stevenson's work, it will likely be decades, perhaps even generations, before the evidence that he and his colleagues have collected fully registers in our culture. Like plate tectonics, reincarnation is an idea that is hard to see at first, but once seen changes everything.

After studying Stevenson's cases for many years and reading hundreds of past-life therapy cases published by reputable psychologists and psychiatrists,<sup>†35</sup> I have come to see reincarnation as a vital and elegant component of our self-evolving universe. It is something Nature is doing. For me, reincarnation is part of the genius of evolution, a higher octave of evolution and its cutting edge in human beings. In evolution, nature grows *whole species*; in reincarnation, nature has found a way of growing *individuals* within certain species. Evolution folds *collective learning* forward in time; reincarnation folds *individual learning* forward in time.

If we do not understand the cycle of rebirth, we chop our lives into bits and pieces and miss the larger picture of what's actually taking place. It would be like pulling one chapter out of a complex novel and trying to make sense of what's happening. Without the larger context, we simply can't grasp the deeper significance of events or the full consequences of the choices being made. As long as we insist on viewing ourselves as living on Earth only once, we make our lives completely inscrutable, subject either to arbitrary caprice or God's "unfathomable will." But when we begin to begin to understand the cycle of rebirth and observe the learning curves generated across history by the choices we make, our frame of reference expands. The stage of learning opens, responsibilities deepen, and the timeline of the Soul emerges. Only once we have made this transition can we begin to comprehend the true scale of our

participation in the universe. We are part of her evolutionary journey, not just for a few decades but for uncounted centuries.

This does not mean, of course, that we understand *how* reincarnation takes place or what the physics of rebirth is. We are still beginners here. At this point, we can't yet say what the Soul is or what it's made of, other than light. Functionally, the Soul is not a static or closed entity. We know it is a dynamic open system, always changing in time and always interconnected with other living systems. But this still leaves many important questions unanswered. When we can't yet explain how our present thoughts and feelings emerge moment to moment from or through our biological neural net, how much can we accurately say about the awareness that predates and postdates this body? We may be able to identify some of its capacities based on a careful examination of our deep memories, but describing how it actually comes and goes, how it interfaces with our biology and genetic makeup, and how it encodes its previous learning into this physical body-mind and leaves with its new learning intact, these details lie beyond our present grasp. I'm sure we will make progress on them in the future, but we will have to ask different questions before the breakthroughs we seek will occur. We will need to move beyond our current reductionist fixation on matter and shift to a more complex phenomenology of consciousness and a more subtle, multidimensional metaphysics.

However we eventually conceptualize the makeup of the Soul, the story of the Soul is in essence a story of individual consciousness—ultimately sourced in the Creative Intelligence of the cosmos—moving systematically back and forth between the physical universe and a surrounding meta-universe on a long journey of self-development. The pulse of the Soul is the pulse of reincarnation, our awareness narrowing at birth and expanding at death. Reincarnation is a dance in which our earthly lives emerge from and return to our Soul, the larger consciousness that preserves every thought, every tear, every joy we experience on Earth and in-between our earthly lives, folding all our experiences elegantly into its expanding radiance. Reincarnation gives individual consciousness an open-ended amount of time in which to learn from its mistakes and develop its innate capacities. Properly understood, reincarnation is a work of genius, as is everything else we see in our universe, from supernovas to

DNA. This is a vision of life in which we can measure ourselves against the stars and not be found lacking.

I did not understand any of this when I first had the experiences reported in this chapter. Though Ian Stevenson had convinced me that reincarnation was a fact of life, I quickly saw that his research did not contain an adequate vision of the complexities of the cycle of rebirth, nor did it explain how the system worked as a whole.<sup>\*36</sup> After going through these seven sessions, I began to read the extensive literature on reincarnation from contemporary and classical sources. It was then that I discovered the field of past-life therapy and the psychologists who were helping their patients heal wounds rooted in their deeper history. After studying this literature and Stevenson's research for six years, I wrote *Lifecycles*, in which I attempted to integrate the best objective research on reincarnation with teachings from the ancient wisdom traditions and to think through some of the larger implications of rebirth.

## **Stepping-Stones**

While the primary focus in the ecstatic portion of these seven sessions was experiencing the whole of my life, a deeper metaphysical bubbling was taking place around the edges. There, personal insights frequently escalated into metaphysical insights that seemed to be trying to convey a broader picture of how life worked. This picture came in bits and pieces that continued to accumulate for years. At these farther edges of my awareness, this larger landscape was often unclear. The experiences themselves were clear, but the patterns being formed by these experiences were not clear to me. It was as if a giant jigsaw puzzle was being dumped into my mind one section at a time, and I had to figure out how the pieces fit together.

This roll-off in comprehension reflects the fact that these experiences were coming from a deeper level of consciousness than the personal experiences previously described. I would place the experiences of my life as a completed whole at the psychic level of consciousness. In that time had become porous, but the experiences were still focused on my present life and people close to me. These other experiences appeared to be coming from the subtle level of consciousness. My consciousness had not

yet sufficiently stabilized at this level to fully take in this larger landscape.

I will give three short examples of these experiences. Each of them was followed in later sessions by deeper forms of similar experiences. Though less complete in themselves, these “first takes” were steppingstones to the more complete experiences that followed. This is how learning takes place in these states—layer by layer, piece by piece. You can stop anywhere you want and keep the treasures you’ve been given, but if you continue to press on, more will be given you.



### *Touching the Center of My Being (S 14)*

*In a powerful series of centering images, I felt myself being tuned to a center deep within myself. Geometric visions I'd had in earlier sessions returned and were reshaped. The rupturing of geometric quadrants signified that this was a living center. From this center, I knew myself. At this center, I was myself. I kept saying, "So that's what it is!" That's what we've lacked and absolutely had to have. That's what all the stories have been about.*

*I touched the center of my being and learned that I control the flow of its creative energy into my life. I felt that I was discovering something true about all human beings. The key insight was that we have the control valve in our hands. The world's craziness and my own were solved by touching our Source. So that's what it is! In some way this seemed to distill something about creating my experience in the world. As I opened this valve, my energy engaged the universe's energy and I was shown pieces of the universe's rich diversity. Complex patterns unfolded, showing me the interplay of various parts within the whole.*



### *The Jolts of Non-Being (S 15)*

*Flowing on the energy of the universe, suddenly everything was turned off and then on again. Everything that is, suddenly was not—POW—then was again. This happened repeatedly. The universe kept vanishing. The jolts were the winking out of Being into Non-Being.*

*In the cessation of the universe, all the world's striving, yearning, and suffering was suddenly thrown into a new perspective. This was the substance of God. The question is not "Why are we doing it?" The question is "Why is God doing it?" Why is God unfolding himself/herself/itself as the universe? What is it for?*

*In this burgeoning of life, God seemed to be knowing himself. "Either it's this teaming mass of life or it's this!"—POW—Nothingness. Either the One becoming our infinitely rich universe, or the Void.*

*Then "God" asked me, "Is it all for nothing? Have we not learned anything?" and he turned as if to ponder his failure. This shattered me and I wept. Non-Being and*

*Being were two different modes of God. In the choice of Being, there unfolded the entirety of life as it is, with all its mysteries, pains, and pleasures. It all seemed to be about learning. "Have we not learned anything?" I felt shattered by the vastness of God's adventure in knowing himself. All the galaxies had continued to turn while I was in hell today. Suns flared into supernovas, and all this was him. Nothing was not him. "Have we not learned anything?" I was silenced.*



## **Self-Generating Fields of Experience (S 16)**

*I became involved in a long series of lessons repeated from earlier sessions but now laid out more completely. I would be taken through a progression and then taken back through it several times, seeing it broken down into greater and greater detail. Though briefly told, it occupied a large block of time.*

*The essence of the teaching was this: We are self-generating fields of energy in a living universe. We generate energy by making choices, and the universe responds to this energy. Thus, in complex and subtle ways, we are always creating our own experience. I saw this feedback working on several levels simultaneously. Some cycles took minutes, some years, some lifetimes.*

*We control the flow of energy out from and back into our lives. What comes to us from without originates from within. The more one moves toward one's center and engages the deeper levels of one's conditioning, the more one becomes conscious of being the source of one's experience. If my energy is clear, my experience will be clear. Only by reaching one's core can one become completely unconditioned and free.*

## **Stopping My Sessions**

When you undertake a course of psychedelic practice, you can draw strength from your sessions even when they are taking you into challenging and difficult terrain. You develop an inner knowing that these experiences are authentic and the process trustworthy even though the larger landscape may be unclear to you. Your loved ones, however, do not have this inner reassurance. If they do not take up the psychedelic path themselves, they must take it on trust that these experiences are dependable and do not deceive.

It's not easy when your husband, whose foibles you know all too well, keeps plunging himself into extreme states of consciousness, to return with talk of transcending time and with penetrating insights into your relationship. What do you do when he immerses himself deeper and deeper into hell, only to be catapulted into a heaven even he does not fully comprehend? Working alone with only his books and his wits to guide

him, with no elders and no safety net, is it possible that these experiences might be doing him harm? Might they be harming those close to him?

My wife never felt a calling to enter the psychedelic path with me. Carol's natural way of being in the world was deeply contemplative and still is. She found everything she needed on her meditation cushion. So she never entered the kiva of psychedelic practice with me, never let me sit for her as she sat for me, and after four years she had had enough. There were more untamed insights emerging in my sessions than she was comfortable with. She was an assistant professor of clinical psychology at Case Western University Hospitals, and she wanted me to stop my psychedelic work. It came down to either I stop my sessions or our marriage was over. Because the sessions had counseled me to preserve our union, I felt that I had no choice but to do as she asked. So with the hell realms still churning inside me, with my mind still trying to digest Deep Time and the glimpses I had been given of the larger reality beyond the physical world, I stopped my sessions.

## **Addendum: Other Instances of Future-Seeing**

The claim that it is possible to experience one's future in psychedelic states of consciousness represents such a challenge to our thinking that I thought it might be helpful to look briefly at two other circumstances in which people appear to get glimpses into their future. The first is when people come close to dying (near-death experiences), and the second is past-life hypnotherapy. Though each of these may be controversial in their own right, they are a source of fascinating observations that, when combined with psychedelic experience, reinforce a sense of the possible that deserves our attention. They will also deepen the story of reincarnation begun here.

### ***Life Previews in Near-Death Experiences***

For many years, I taught courses at my university that included near-death experience research, and my favorite author for taking students into this field was Kenneth Ring. Ring spent his professional life in the Department of Psychology at the University of Connecticut, where he is now a

professor emeritus. He was the cofounder and past president of the International Association for Near-Death Studies and founding editor of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. Ken is also a beautiful writer and a good friend. His books chart the territory of near-death experience (NDE) research with great clarity and insight.<sup>\*37</sup>

Ring reports that a small number of people who have had deep NDEs report being shown the life that they *will live* if they choose to return from their NDE. Ring calls this a “personal flash-forward.” This usually takes place when they are experiencing their life review, an extremely detailed and vivid reliving of their entire life up to the present moment. In their case, however, their life review continues into a life *preview*. Ring presents several interesting cases in his book *Heading Toward Omega*.

One such case involves a woman who almost died from a torn cervix while giving birth to her youngest child in 1959. In the middle of her NDE, she was shown her future life if she continued on the path she was now on. In her life preview, she experienced herself as middle aged, living in a specific town, with her children grown. She said:

I was in a kitchen tossing a salad, dressed in a striped seersucker outfit. My hair had streaks of silver in it, my waist had thickened some, but I was still in good shape for an older woman. There was a strong feeling of peace of mind about my bearing, and I was in a joyful mood, laughing with my older daughter as we prepared dinner. The younger daughter (the newborn) had gone somewhere with some other children. My husband had just come out of the shower and was walking down a hallway wrapping a robe around him. He had put on more weight than I had and his hair was quite silver. Our son was mowing our lawn, but both offspring were only visiting. They didn't live with us.

She emphasized that this was not a vision but a vivid experience. She was especially struck by how sharp her senses were.

As I gained the knowledge of what our family would be like in the future, I could see, hear, and smell. Particularly striking was the

smell of the salad I was producing (cucumber) mingled with the smell of the evergreens growing around the house and the odor of freshly cut grass. Also I could detect my own cologne and soap from the shower my husband had vacated. (Ring 1984, 184–85)

She reported to Ring that many years after her NDE, the vision she had been given of her future did in fact come true just as she had seen it.

Ring's understanding of these "future memories" is that they are flashes of these individuals' *life scripts*, the probable outcome of the life trajectory they are presently on. (More on life scripts in a moment.) He sees these previews as presenting a conditional future because in some instances, individuals have been able to act on what they saw to change the outcome of future events. In one case, a woman who had seen herself struggling in a sinking car after an automobile accident was able to take steps to avoid this accident.<sup>\*38</sup> Ring is acutely aware of the problems involved in verifying these self-reports and discusses this at length. In rare cases, he says, circumstances do allow external corroboration of the person's inner experience.<sup>†39</sup>

### ***Past-Life Therapy and the Ring of Destiny***

Michael Newton was a traditional hypnotherapist specializing in behavior modification for various emotional disorders when a string of patients gradually drew him somewhere he didn't really want to go—into the world of past lives. Being a dedicated therapist, however, he followed his patients to the source of their pain, and this sometimes turned out to be a trauma that had taken place in a former life. From there he went on to learn the ins and outs of past-life therapy. It was in this context that he made a startling discovery. He discovered that under hypnosis his clients could remember not only their previous incarnations on Earth but also their experiences *in-between* their incarnations. His clients were actually reporting to him their experiences of the afterlife.

He began to systematically explore these afterlife memories, refining his methods through decades of trial and error. He found that his clients' descriptions of this domain were remarkably consistent and independent of their prior enculturation. Conservative Christians, secular scientists,



and atheists were all reporting the same thing—a spiritual world that had order, structure, and direction. Eventually, he wrote a series of books on what they were telling him and began training other therapists in what he called “spiritual regression.”\*40

The vision of the afterlife that emerges in Newton’s work is complex and nuanced. Trimming it down to its bare essentials, it looks something like this. After we die, our consciousness moves into a spiritual universe where our first task is to process our just-completed life, both our accomplishments and our failures. This self-examination takes place with the assistance of other beings, surrounded by love and complete acceptance, and without the protection of self-serving excuses or ego defenses. The process can be painful or blissful, depending on the caliber of the choices we made during our lifetime. The point is not to be judged and punished but to learn from our mistakes and our victories. After this period of debriefing, there is an extended period of restorative rest and renewed contact with our “soul family.” Our soul family is an inner circle of companions with whom we stay closely connected through all our incarnations on Earth. At this point, we know ourselves to be more than just our most recent incarnate personality. We are our Soul, the integrated totality of all our earthly lives.

In this spiritual universe, Souls exist in a wide variety of conditions that reflect their stage of development. All of these conditions are blissful compared with life on Earth and there is no hell. We may experience episodes of intense suffering during our debriefing as we experience the pain we caused others, but Newton reports that there is no eternal damnation in the afterlife and no pits of fire. Instead, there is accountability combined with the opportunity to continue learning and growing in a variety of settings. At all the levels of this spiritual universe, senior learners help junior learners. It is their work and their joy to do so.\*41

In the world that Newton is describing, life is a long spiral of learning. Each lifetime on Earth is balanced in the inter life with periods of rest and replenishing. When the time is right, the Soul begins the process of choosing its next incarnation, and this brings me to my reason for introducing Newton’s work here. Newton’s clients report that choosing an incarnation is something that is done with great care. Acting with the

assistance of our spiritual mentors and in concert with the Souls with whom we will share this incarnation, we consciously choose our next life on Earth. For this to be an informed choice, we must be able to see what these future lives will consist of, and this future-seeing takes place at what Newton calls the Ring of Destiny.

At the Ring of Destiny, we sample a preselected number of possible lives and explore the opportunities each offers us to grow and develop. We try on each life experientially, feeling into its strengths, weaknesses, and historical trajectory. Newton's clients report that we are not allowed to see everything about these lives, only their early years—usually between the ages of eight and twenty, when the first major forks in one's life begin to emerge. We are not shown the probable outcomes of these lives in detail, only enough to decide whether we want the challenges they would provide us.

The choices we make at the Ring of Destiny will become our earthly destiny—not a fixed destiny with a predetermined outcome but a destiny of structured possibilities. In choosing a life, we are choosing a *life script*, a set of circumstances and conditions that are defined but open-ended. Once we have made our choice, the knowledge we have acquired about our next incarnation is taken away from us through the imposition of a deliberate amnesia, because too much foreknowledge would undermine the learning exercise. What we retain is a felt sense of direction and purpose, an inner instinct that tells us when we are on or off course in our lives. In addition, markers are planted in our unconscious to help us recognize significant people and events when we encounter them on Earth. The bottom line is this: when we knew more than we know now, when future probabilities were clearer to us than they are now, we chose the life we are currently living.<sup>[\\*42](#)</sup>

I did not have Newton's books to help me understand my sessions in 1983. If I had, I might have speculated that when I entered Deep Time, I was experiencing the life script my Soul had chosen before I was born. In those seven sessions, time became porous in a way that echoes how Newton's subjects describe their experience at the Ring of Destiny. "*I not only saw and observed my life, I tasted it experientially. I became my older, fuller self and felt its structure.*" (S 11) Is this the same future-seeing that

takes place at the Ring of Destiny? I'm not sure. I see similarities and differences.

In my sessions, I opened to a deeper reality that felt responsible for creating the structure of my present life, and this is similar. On the other hand, I did not experience a probable future up to a certain point in my life but the distilled essence of my entire life, and this is different. My best guess is that the time dilation that Newton's subjects experienced at the Ring of Destiny and what I experienced in my sessions are overlapping phenomena, both of which suggest that in certain states of consciousness, time can become porous, allowing us to experience the future to some degree.

Before leaving this topic, let me raise one final question. If what we see of our future at the Ring of Destiny is blocked by amnesia when we are born, why was I allowed to experience what nature usually cloaks? I don't feel that I compromised myself by experiencing the condensed whole of my life, any more than people who experience a life preview during their NDE feel compromised. But why was this experience given me if the usual order of things is to keep this information hidden?

When all is said and done, I don't know the answer to this question. I can think of two possibilities. It may have been important for me to experience my life's underlying trajectory in order to ground me, given the extreme nature of the psychedelic journey that was just beginning. This interpretation makes sense to me. Alternatively, it may have simply been a by-product of the exceptionally powerful method I was using to explore consciousness, a method that would take me across the boundary of time frequently in the years ahead. This interpretation also makes sense to me. In the end, I don't know why I was allowed to experience what I did, but I did. Just as I have described it and then some.

# **Six-Year Interval**

## SIX

# Initiation into the Universe

Sessions 18–24

*More than any other of the human types concerned with the sacred, the shamanic personality journeys into the far regions of the cosmic mystery and brings back the vision and the power needed by the human community at the most elementary level. Not only is the shamanic personality emerging in our society, but also the shamanic dimension of the psyche itself.*

THOMAS BERRY, *THE DREAM OF THE EARTH*

From a psychological perspective, it was probably not wise for me to stop my sessions when I did. If you interrupt your psychedelic work in the middle of an extended death-rebirth process, your system strains for closure but you are denying it the opportunity and the energy to complete the cycle. By entering the ocean of suffering, I had started something I could not completely walk away from. As a result, when I stopped my sessions, there was a residual tension in my life that affected my daily equilibrium more than I had expected.

For the first twelve months, I lost contact with my ordinary personality. This sounds more dramatic than it actually was. My mind and my memories were intact and I was able to function competently in the world, but my familiar sense of myself disappeared. I felt like I was being myself from memory, like I was no longer living from my vital center.

After about a year, I began to feel my familiar self surface for a few hours here and there. After eighteen months, I was fully back.

Even then I had to manage my life carefully. Spiritual practices that I had done for years, I had to stop doing. Previously, meditation had always left me feeling relaxed and spacious, but now it undermined my equilibrium by making me more porous to my stormy insides and susceptible to their influence. In order to keep my life in balance, I had to thicken, not thin, the walls of my psyche. I began exercising more and eating a heavier diet. Putting on a little belly weight made me feel more grounded in the world. As the years passed, things got easier. It was as if the membrane of my mind grew gradually thicker, and I returned to my familiar experience of being “me.”

In the six years that I halted my sessions, I did many things. I published and moved up the academic ladder at my university. I finished two years of training at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, cleaning up this and that with one therapist and learning somatic approaches to healing with another. Carol and I completed our family, bringing two more wonderful children into the world. I read the past-life literature and spent three years exploring my own former lives through hypnotherapy, becoming intimately familiar with about a dozen of them. I published *Lifecycles* and met other authors in the field of reincarnation studies. I did a week-long Holotropic Breathwork intensive at the Omega Institute, where I met Stan and Christina Grof for the first time. After reading Robert Monroe’s book *Far Journeys*, I did a one-week training at the Monroe Institute in Virginia and began using his Hemi-Sync technology to explore states of consciousness that were gentler and nearer to hand than psychedelic states. I did many productive and worthwhile things, but underneath them all the psychedelic work kept calling me. It never left my awareness, and I spent many nights in my study pondering my sessions, waiting to resume this work. Finally, in the summer of 1990, it was time.

When I resumed my sessions, I felt solidly grounded in the world. My marriage was stronger, my career was going well, and my three children—now aged two through seven—were robust and happy (and loud). I didn’t know what to expect, but now, with Carol’s consent and support, I was ready to begin again. I was forty-one years old. The most intense decade of my life was about to begin.

The first year back was fierce. The ocean of suffering resumed *exactly* where it had stopped six years before without missing a beat. This fact deserves careful attention. In a different period of my life, with fresh expectations and under different astrological transits, the journey resumed exactly where it had stopped, demonstrating, I think, the precision and power of the intelligence guiding this exploration. From there the suffering escalated, repeatedly jumping its banks like a river in flood until it finally culminated seven sessions later in session 24.

This increase in the depth of cleansing was matched by a parallel increase in the depth of visionary splendor that opened during the ecstatic phase of these same seven sessions. Before the six-year hiatus, I had experienced the distillation of my entire life from beginning to end. After the hiatus, the platform of discovery shifted far beyond my personal reality. There was no explanation given for this shift; the sessions simply began at a different starting point. Now each time I came through the ocean of suffering, I was taken on a series of initiations into the universe and the Creative Intelligence behind the universe. I don't know why I was shown what I was shown, but the sequence was deliberate and well crafted. It felt like an infinite intelligence was educating me, reminding me of things forgotten long ago but now in need of being remembered.

In this chapter, I'm going to let the sessions largely speak for themselves and keep my comments as short as possible, taking only one excursion into theory at the end of the chapter. Rather than separate the purification portion of these sessions from the ecstatic portion, as I did in the previous pair of chapters, I'm going to present the sessions whole, as they actually occurred. This will show the rhythm of disclosure more clearly—that as the purification goes deeper in the first half of the sessions, the exploration of the universe goes deeper in the second half.

As I spiraled deeper session by session into what I perceived to be the mind of the universe, certain themes began to repeat themselves in progressively more complex forms. I've softened this repetition here but have not eliminated it entirely. The subtlety and complexity of this educational spiral was fascinating to observe. Each individual session was complete within itself, but the mosaic unfolding across multiple sessions was richer still. It was only when the entire sequence was finished that the full picture became clear.

In this chapter, I will present seven sessions trimmed to their essential components. The names I gave these sessions are:

- S 18 You and I Creating
- S 19 The Cosmic Tour
- S 20 The Council of Elders
- S 21 Dying into Oneness
- S 22–23 The Master Plan
- S 24 Healing the Collective Wound

I would place these experiences largely at the subtle level of consciousness, with Dying into Oneness touching causal consciousness.



## Session 18—You and I Creating

*This session began where the last session stopped six years ago. The most difficult aspect of it to describe is the pain/agony/frenzy. Terrible pain. Driving, explosive, convulsive horror. It was beyond anything I had experienced before, blending the feeling tones of primordial civilizations and galactic cataclysm, including all human history and going beyond human experience, encompassing experiential dimensions I am unfamiliar with. It was enormous in scope and complexity. It had little to do with my individual human history. I could have lived on Earth a hundred thousand years and not begun to have touched the range of pain I experienced today.*

*In the early session, I was seeing complex patterns of life that began to simplify themselves step-by-step into a cosmic duality that resembled spinning yin/yang energies. I was approaching and merging with a cosmic duality that seemed to encompass the entire physical universe. This universe was saturated with women and mothers. I kept seeing thousands of pieces of life (urban neighborhoods, backyards, side streets) that Chris did not particularly care about or even notice, but there were mothers around the world who did care about them and thus my present “I” cared deeply about them. The net effect was that I became a collective cosmic mother caring for the planet as it writhed in pain. Though the pain was terrible, I would not abandon it. It was my child.*

*I struggled desperately against the chaotic pain of existence. The more I struggled, the more ensnared I became. Everything around me was a swirling vortex. Death was everywhere. I kept trying to extricate myself so I could at least meet my death head-on, but I couldn’t. Instead, I kept seeing myself die in a thousand crowded, twisted, uncomfortable positions. No meaning, just supreme indifference. “My life will count for something!” I cried, but death kept dispatching me at whim. My deaths were not purposeful but mere accidents, the result of the universe’s carelessness. I was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time and*



couldn't get out of the way. If my death lacked meaning, my life lacked meaning. I kept trying to escape the horror of my insignificance and kept failing.

*I threw up, and in my violent retching I thought I was actually dying. I interpreted my sitter's maneuvering of my body as confirmation of this. I recovered a vague sense of where I was and what I was doing. It felt like I had begun something important but that it had gotten completely out of control, and now I was going to die as a result. I remembered kissing my children good-bye this morning and thought it would be absolutely horrible not to return to them at the end of the day.*

*I struggled with my death, surrounded by a vortex of horror that spread to the four corners of the universe. Psychological death and the specter of my biological death blended in the frenzy. Then suddenly, a shift took place in the swirling mayhem. Hundreds of small panels in my experience flipped over, like mini venetian blinds, showing me a completely different reality "underneath" this struggle. It was as if hundreds of feathers in a cloak of thousands were flashing bits and pieces of an alternative universe to me.*

*These flashes were showing me glimpses of ecstatic sweetness. Glimpses of everything I could want. It was the sweetest time of day. The sweetest time of life. The ecstasy of sex. Refreshing rest amidst exquisite gentleness. Shade under delicate leaves blowing softly in the wind. The sweetness of timing, of adjusting perfectly to the cycles that make up one's life. Images of bounty. Everything you could ever desire. But these glimpses kept disappearing into the struggle. Back and forth, back and forth.*

*Though I was instantly drawn to this sweetness, for some reason I kept turning away from it and choosing instead to return to the larger struggle. The sweetness was something I had known in the beginning, something I had always known, but it was far away from me now. I struggled desperately to get back to the world, even though this world was nothing but agony for me. I would not abandon it. It was mine. It was everything I cared about and worked for. Someone had to take care of it. It was the world loved by the mothers of the world. It was my world, and I refused to abandon my creation.*

*Over and over again, this dance repeated itself. Then in the shifting back and forth between the pain of life and the ecstasy of dreams fulfilled, something new began to unfold. I was being reminded of something. I was not being allowed to entertain any thoughts of being a victim because of the suffering. I was not being allowed to experience this agony in terms of any agency outside myself doing it "to" me. Something kept hushing me and brushing aside my perceptions. When all alternatives had finally been cleared away, there was a moment of exquisite encounter. A loving, invisible presence took my face in its hands, looked into my eyes and said:*

*"What you have been seeing in the ecstatic glimpses  
is not the origin of pleasure  
but the origin of existence itself."*

*With this insight, a bubble burst and a knowing swept through me. I was seeing what had created the physical universe and knew it to be my Essential Nature. This dimension of sweetness that could fulfill every wish was where existence itself came from. The words were:*

*"It is you and I creating, My Love."*

*All the suffering and ignorance  
is simply what has happened since we separated.  
All of it is part of you and I creating.  
Do you remember now?  
You and I decided to create  
for the sheer joy of it."*

*With this insight, an exquisite joy swept through me. I suddenly remembered what I was. At that moment, my identity was not Chris Bache but the Divine Feminine who had set out to create the physical universe and who was now being reunited with her Lover. Through these many glimpses, I had been patiently guided to rediscover my true nature and the purpose of my life. My nature was Consciousness and my work was Creation. All for joy.*

*The lesson here was to remember. Remember what I am. Remember what we are doing. Remember what our true nature is. And watch what we can do when we begin to create consciously instead of unconsciously. The essence of this lesson was to learn what could be accomplished when creation becomes a conscious process. We will be able to create anything we wish on Earth.*

## Comment

How do we reconcile the pain and suffering of physical existence with the Divine joy from which existence springs? Western religions have tended to solve this riddle with a theology of a Cosmic Fall followed by a redemptive Return to source. The physical world does not participate in this redemption but is abandoned when we return to Heaven. The theology of this session, however, is very different. Here the Divine is profoundly committed to creation. The stunning disclosure is that creation was a choice that I had in some way participated in, that all of us have participated in. Thus human suffering is not something being done *to* us. It is neither punishment nor accident. It is something that we voluntarily took on when we chose to participate in the co-creation of this universe, a process that is unfinished and incomplete.

On a sidenote, I've wondered sometimes whether pausing my sessions midcycle as I did may have actually contributed to the jump in the intensity of the ocean of suffering after my six-year break. When I stopped my sessions, it felt like I had left a storm churning inside me, successfully managed but always present beneath the surface of my life. Did the vortex I had set in motion continue to draw energy from the collective psyche even after I had stopped my sessions? Did the long pause add something

“extra” to the fury that unleashed itself when I resumed the work? I don’t know the answer to this question.



## Session 19—The Cosmic Tour

*After a long opening, darker experiences began to emerge, but I was able to remain physically open and let them come. Again there was the frenzied, chaotic, physical, psychological anguish that I cannot put into words. At several places, I found myself wondering what all this pain was about. I was open and letting it come through me, but where was it coming from? I could not tell, but it broadened and deepened for a long time.*

*My consciousness was expanding and opening to more and more suffering. Eventually, I had the sense that my being stretched from horizon to horizon as I experienced a suffering that involved tens of thousands of people. Because I had gone into this state more slowly this time, it was not as confusing as before. Then I caught a glimpse of something behind the field of suffering, something enormous and familiar from the previous session. I reached more deeply into the suffering and eventually broke through to this larger dimension.*

### The Circle of Learning

*In most of my sessions, I have simply been carried along from one transpersonal experience to another. Only once before have I had the experience of being able to consciously direct my experience. Now it was happening again. A circle opened around me and created a space that became an arena of dialogue between myself and a larger Consciousness. I discovered much to my surprise that this field was responsive to my thoughts. When I first discovered this, I had the ecstatic sensation of confronting an enormous Intelligence that included and surrounded my own. “That’s right,” it communicated to me. “That’s exactly what is happening.”*

*I began to ask it questions, and it answered by orchestrating my experience in the circle. It was an extremely subtle process, and the line between “my” consciousness and this larger Consciousness was often invisible to me. At times my reaction to an answer interacted with what I was being shown to sidetrack the lesson being given. I learned that I could stop these unwanted deviations by taking control of my thoughts. I could “clear the board” by stopping my reactions and waiting for the space I was in to clear. Once my mind was still, the lesson would continue.*

### The Cosmic Tree

*After some intervening experiences, I was brought to an encounter with a unified field underlying all physical existence. I was confronting an enormous field of blindingly bright, incredibly powerful energy. This energy was the single energy that composed all existence. All things that existed were but varied aspects of its comprehensive existence. Experiencing it was extremely intense and carried with it a sense of ultimate encounter.*

*The experience then changed into a moving experience of the Cosmic Tree. The energy became a massive tree of radiant energy suspended in space. Seeming larger than the largest galaxy, it consisted entirely of light. The core of the tree was lost in the brilliant display, but limbs and leaves were visible around its edges. I experienced myself as one of its leaves. The lives of my family and close friends were leaves clustered near me on a small branch. All our distinguishing characteristics, what made us the individuals we were, appeared from this perspective to be quite minor, almost arbitrary variations of this fundamental energy.*

*I was taken around the tree and shown how easy it was to move from one person's experience to another, and indeed it was ridiculously easy. Different lives around the globe were simply different experiences the tree was having. Choice governed all experience. Different beings who were all part of Being Itself had simply chosen these manifold experiences.*

*At this point, I WAS THE TREE. Not that I was having the full range of its experience, but I knew myself to be this single, encompassing Consciousness. I knew that Its identity was my true identity. Though I had taken monism to heart years before, I was now actually experiencing the seamless flow of consciousness into crystallizations of embodiment. I was experiencing how consciousness manifests itself in separate forms while remaining unified. "So that's how it works," I said to myself. The freedom was sheer bliss.*

*As I left the experience of the Cosmic Tree, the sensation of intense energy subsided and I found myself to be once again in conscious communication with this vast, surrounding Consciousness. My experiential field was extremely clear.*

## **The Cosmic Tour**

*For the next several hours, this Consciousness took me on an extraordinary tour of the universe. It was as though It wanted to show me Its work. It appeared to be the creator of our physical universe. It would take me somewhere or open me to some experience, and I would come to understand some aspect of the workings of the universe. Over and over again, I was overwhelmed at the magnitude, the subtlety, and the intelligence of what I was witnessing.*

*"That's incredible."*

*"I'm beginning to understand."*

*I was repeatedly left breathless by the beauty of the design I was seeing.*

*Sometimes I was so staggered by what I was seeing that I would stop and It had to come back for me. "Keep up! Keep up!" It said, taking delight in my awe. Sometimes I was not sure what I was seeing and It would do something and suddenly everything would become larger and I would understand. Then It would take me on to something else.*

*This tour was the most extraordinary journey of my life. The vistas of intelligence repeatedly swept me into cognitive ecstasy. The irony, however, is that except for the small pieces I shall describe below, I am unable to re-create the details of what I saw. I simply don't have enough Ph.D.s to fit the knowing I had there into my small Earth-bound mind. This does not lead me to question or doubt my experience. Even though I have lost large sections of the experience, I retain an unshakable*

epistemological certainty that this knowing was of a higher order of knowing than any I am capable of in my ordinary consciousness.<sup>\*43</sup>

At one point, I was taken through a complex labyrinth of churning forces until I emerged above the turbulence into a wonderfully spacious and calm experiential field. I was told that we had come through the emotions of human experience. They had a restless, gnawing quality to them and composed such a mass of tangled energy that I was not surprised that they could blot out this subtler domain of peace and tranquility.

My elevation into this field felt like remembering, as did all my experiences on this tour. I was reawakening to levels of reality that I had previously known but had forgotten. Over and over again, I was reawakening to a level of experience I had left behind long ago. Remembering. It was not about “dying” at all but waking up and remembering.

I was then lifted into another “higher” and “larger” experiential field and then another. With each transition, I entered a new level of quiet and bliss-filled peace. It was as though an amnesia lasting billions of years was being lifted from me layer by layer. The more I remembered, the larger I became. Wave after wave of awakening was pushing back the edges of my being. To remember more was to become more.

Finally, I was lifted into a particularly spacious and peaceful dimension. As I remembered this dimension, I was overcome by an overwhelming sense of homecoming and felt fully the tragedy of having forgotten this dimension for so long. I cannot describe how poignant this was. Being fully restored to this dimension would be worth any cost. I asked what had happened, and It explained that we had left time. Then It said, “We never intended so many to get caught in time.” It felt like time was simply one of the many creative experiments of the multidimensional universe I was being shown.

Though these experiences were extraordinary in their own right, the most poignant part of today’s session was not the dimensions of the universe I was witnessing but what my seeing them meant to the Creative Consciousness I was with. It seemed so pleased to have someone to show Its work to. I sensed that It had been waiting billions of years for embodied consciousness to evolve to the point where we could at last begin to see, to understand, and to appreciate what had been accomplished in our self-evolving universe. I felt the loneliness of this Intelligence, having created such a masterpiece and having no one to appreciate Its work, and I wept. I wept for its self-isolation and in awe of the profound love that had accepted this isolation as part of a larger plan. Behind creation lies a Love of extraordinary proportions. The Intelligence of the universe’s design is matched by the depth of Love that inspired it.

Somewhere in here, I realized that I was not going to be able to bring the knowledge I had gathered on this journey back with me. The Intelligence I was with also knew this, making our few hours of contact all the more precious to It. There was nothing I was going to be able to do with this knowledge except experience it now. My greatest service was simply to appreciate what I was seeing. It seemed important to mirror existence back to its Creator in loving appreciation.

Comment

After this session came a very different kind of session in which I was put through a training exercise that taught me how to receive the levels of experiential learning that were beginning to open in the sessions. The Council of Elders was my mind's way of giving form to an encounter with cosmic knowledge.



## Session 20—The Council of Elders

*In the early session, my body was being pushed to higher and higher levels of energy, making me nauseous and always on the edge of throwing up. The energy was enormous. I danced around the edges of the collective pain from previous sessions, but there was nothing new in it. I had already explored everything that was passing through me. And yet, after a while, I became caught up in it again. Things were moving very fast at this point. There was a raging pain, but it did not seem to be about me personally. I tried to understand how I might work with the pain, cooperate with it, but I could not see any way. I cast about for something resembling ego-death to yield to, but the concept was meaningless to me. By this time, I had very little sense of being a personal "me" at all.*

*After a period of time in this condition, I began to shift into positive transpersonal states. The transition was uneven, and I moved back and forth between the pain and transpersonal horizons several times before finally settling into a clear, spacious state. As I did, an interactive arena of dialogue with a Council of Elders opened around me. The music was the deep guttural chanting of the Tibetan monks of the Gyuto monastery. The head monk's powerful bass voice grabbed me and held me fast, completely stopping my thought process. A voice said, "Stop everything and pay attention! Pay attention and learn!" Class had resumed.*

*Today's session was a training exercise in learning how to learn in transpersonal states of awareness. It's one thing if you are content to remain passive in these states while exotic experiences simply flow through you, but it's another matter entirely if you want to become fully conscious at these levels. To do this, you have to learn how to stabilize your attention in order to experience completely what is happening. You must also learn how to keep your experience coherent with respect to levels of reality. My ability to do both had been improving, but now it appeared that I needed explicit training in this area.*

*The intelligence that brought our universe into existence is enormously sophisticated, its workings far beyond ordinary comprehension. If you want access to its knowledge, this intelligence has to teach you how to receive it. The Council of Elders were the guardians of the knowledge of what has been taking place in the universe for billions of years. Because I sought this knowledge, I was brought before the Council to receive it. This knowledge is not just given to you; you have to work for it. First you have to work to reach this level of awareness, and then you have to work to sustain the concentration necessary to receive the knowledge that is available here.*

*I was sitting with the Council at what felt to be the primal core of the universe, where the guardians conjure and make things happen. I did not see their specific*

*form, but I felt their presence strongly. A charged field of synchronicity surrounded me, blending music and experience into a single flow.*

*I wanted to know things. An idea of something I wanted to understand came into my mind, and immediately the Council knew it and accepted it as a formal request. The head of the Council bellowed a thundering chant—"He wants to know this." Then the others joined in and started an invocation. They chanted to gather power because you've got to gather the necessary power if you want to know certain things. You've got to say the mantra so many times. Even the Council of Elders had to gather power. I learned the hard way that I had to be prepared for what happened next.*

*When the knowledge that the Council unleashed came at me, it either sent me into cognitive ecstasy or it shattered me. If I was centered when the knowing hit me, it cascaded through me as an ecstatic orgy of insight. But if I had not controlled my thoughts and was not centered when it hit me, it completely shattered me, driving me beyond my capacity to maintain cognitive coherence. Both of these happened many times today.*

*The Council could focus my experience on different levels of reality, and sometimes the multiplicity of levels caused an almost comical confusion. Once, the Council was gathering power to give me the knowledge I had requested when suddenly a new question came to me, something that pertained to a different level of reality. The Council reacted in startled confusion and mild consternation. The change of focus would require them to shift their entire process. The head of the Council thundered a long solo note that brought everything to a standstill, then they decided to accept the new request and began a new invocation to gather the power necessary to generate access to this knowledge.*

*Sometimes the Council rejected my interruption. Once, I made the mistake of allowing myself to get distracted while the Elders were gathering power. Something grabbed me right down to my bones and said, "LISTEN! Will you grow up! Don't get distracted! PAY ATTENTION! All of these things have their place, but if you want to understand the structure of the universe, you've got to be able to take it on. You've got to be able to EXPERIENCE it."*

*Today the Council of Elders allowed me to experience many pieces of how the universe works. I could know anything I wanted if I could endure it, but to endure it I had to be able to "go flat out with existence"; that is, I had to be able to expand to the size of the reality I wished to have knowledge of. Being able to know the universe in this way answered a longing in me so deep that I knew it had been driving me for thousands of years.*

## Comment

The training given me in this session seems to have been productive, because in the next session everything shifted to a deeper register.



## Session 21—Dying into Oneness

*I was caught off guard by how terribly painful this session was. After all the previous sessions, I could not have imagined that there could be this much of a jump in suffering, but this session was many times more terrible than anything before.*

*It was not personal. My experiential boundaries stretched to include the entire human family and all human history, and this “I” was caught up in a horror that I am incapable of describing with any accuracy. It was a raging insanity, a surging kaleidoscopic field of chaos, pain, and destruction. It was as if the entire human race had gathered from all the corners of the globe and gone absolutely stark raving mad.*

*People were attacking each other with a rabid savagery, augmented by science fiction–like technology. There were many currents crossing and crisscrossing in front of me, each composed of thousands of people, some currents killing in multiple ways, some being killed, some fleeing in panic, others being rounded up, others witnessing and screaming in terror, others having their hearts broken by a species gone mad—and “I” was all their experiences. Floating through it were scenes of suffering caused by nature and human indifference. Thousands of starving children from around the globe, their bodies bloated in death, their eyes staring out blankly at a humanity that was killing them through systemic abuse and neglect. Lots of violence between men and women—rapes, beatings, intimidation, retaliation—cycles and cycles of destruction. The magnitude of the deaths and the insanity is impossible to describe.*

*What happened next emerged in the context of this larger field of agony. It was in one sense foreground against the backdrop of this horror, but in another sense it was not central at all. It is difficult to describe how one’s experience can be simultaneously so inclusive and so selectively focused.*

*At the center came forward the theme of sex. At first sex emerged in its pleasant form as mutual delight and erotic satisfaction, but soon it changed into its violent form, as attack, assault, injury, and hurt. The forces of sexual assault were building in the crisscrossing fields of humanity as well. I was facing these brutal forces, and then behind my back was a little girl. It was both an individual child about three years old and all the children of the world simultaneously.*

*I kept trying to protect this child, to hold back the attack that was trying to reach her through me. But the longer I held them in check the more powerful they became. “I” had become thousands of people. The horror was beyond anything I can describe. Glancing over my shoulder, I could feel the field of frightened innocence, but now there was another element added—a strain of mystical embrace. Superimposed on the child was the Primal Female, the Goddess herself. She beckoned me to embrace her, and I knew instinctively that there could be no greater sweetness than that found in her arms. In holding myself back from violent sexual assault, I was also holding myself back from the mystical embrace of the Goddess, but I would not bring myself to rape this child, no matter how sweet the promise of redemption.*

*The frenzy continued to build until eventually I began to turn. Still holding back the terrible onslaught, I was now facing my victim and being torn apart by the forces of passion on one side and protection on the other. My victim was at once this helpless little girl and the Primal Woman inviting me to a sexual embrace of cosmic proportions. No matter how hard I fought what was happening, I was being drawn to unleash the fury. In horror and blind thirst, I was turning to rape, to attack, to kill, and yet I continued to fight what was happening with every ounce of my strength. The*



*conflict drove me to deeper and deeper levels of intensity until suddenly something broke open inside me, and I came to the shattering realization that I was turning to rape and kill MYSELF.*

*The breakthrough was very multidimensional and confusing. The intensity of the struggle drove me through a breaking point where I suddenly confronted the reality that “I” was both the raping killer and the victim. In looking into my victim’s eyes, I discovered that I was looking into my own face. I sobbed and sobbed. “I’m doing it to myself!”*

*This was not a karmic inversion, a flip into a former life where victim and victimizer change places. Rather, it was a quantum jump to an experiential level that dissolved all dualities into a single, encompassing flow. My personal sense of “I” exploded into an innate Oneness that subsumed all people. It was collective in the sense of including all human experience, but utterly simple and undivided. I was one, aggressor and victim. I was both killer and killed. I was doing it to myself. Through all of history, I have been doing it to myself.*

*As this discovery was taking place at the center, it was also taking place in the crisscrossing fields that encompassed all humanity and all creation. All the unspeakable horrors that I had been experiencing were “Mine” in this larger sense. All the pain experienced in the violent creation of galaxies was caused by Me and felt by Me. The pain of human history was My pain. There were no victims. Nothing was outside of Me doing this to Me. I was responsible for everything that I was experiencing, for everything that had ever happened. I was looking into the face of My creation. I did this. I am doing this. I chose for all this to happen. I chose to create all these horrible, horrible worlds. But why?!*

## **The Universe**

*Then in the distance, I began to see something. It kept expanding, from our solar system to the galaxy to the cosmos itself. It was the physical universe and the underlying forces that built and sustain the universe. It was something both physical and archetypal. It was not a symbolic representation of the universe but the real thing. It was continuous with the universe I had experienced on the Cosmic Tour, but many times larger and more complex. It was beautiful beyond words and absolutely captivating.*

*As I expanded into what I was seeing, I was becoming larger. I learned by becoming what I was knowing. I discovered the universe not by knowing it from the outside but by tuning to that level of my being where I was that thing. All I can do at this point is to sketch the highlights of the experiences that followed, which will not do justice either to their cognitive structure or to their experiential intensity.*

*What stood out for me in the early stages was the interconnectedness of everything to form a seamless whole. The entire universe was an undivided, totally unified, organic whole. I saw various breakthroughs—quantum theory, Bell’s theorem, morphogenetic field theory, holographic theory, systems theory, the grand unified theory—as but the early phases of science’s discovery of this innate wholeness. I knew that these discoveries would continue to mount until it would become impossible for us not to see the universe for what it is: a single unified organism of extraordinary complexity and subtlety reflecting a vast Creative*

*Intelligence. The intelligence and love that was responsible for what I was seeing kept overwhelming me and filling me with reverential awe.*

*The unified field underlying physical existence completely dissolved all boundaries. As I moved deeper into it, all borders fell away; all appearances of division were ultimately illusory. No boundaries between incarnations, between human beings, between species, even between matter and spirit. The world of individuated existence was not collapsing into an amorphous mass, as it might sound, but rather was revealing itself to be an exquisitely diversified manifestation of a single entity.*

## **Dying into Oneness**

*As my experience of this seamless universe progressed, I came to discover that I was not exploring a universe “out there,” as I had in session 19, but a universe that “I” in some essential way already was. These experiences were leading me step-by-step into a deeper embrace of my own reality. I was exploring the universe as a dimension of my own existence, slowly remembering aspects of my being that I had lost contact with. This exploration seemed to answer a cosmic need not only to know but also to be known.*

*Initially, I was on a cosmic tour not unlike session 19 when I realized again that this larger field of consciousness that I was with (or in) had been waiting a long time to be recognized. Again I began to weep as I felt its heartfelt longing to be known. Then I asked something I had not asked before. I asked, “Who am I talking to?” With that question, my experiential field began to change, and I dropped into a new level of reality. It was as though I fell into a deeper operational level where I discovered that I was, in fact, with MYSELF. The creative impulse that had been “other” to me at the previous level was at this level Myself.*

*This mysterious progression repeated itself many times and in many variations. It continued for hours. I would be at one level of reality far beyond physical diversity, and as I sought to know this reality more deeply, I would experience a kind of dying, a falling away, and would slip into a new level where I would discover that this duality too was but another facet of Myself. Over and over again, in detailed progressions, I was led to the same fundamental encounter.*

*No matter how many times I died or how many different forms I was when I died, I kept being caught by this massive SOMETHING, this IT. I could not leave IT, could not escape IT, could not not be IT. No matter how many adventures I had been on, I had never stepped outside IT, never stopped being IT. There simply was no outside to My Being. There was no other in existence.*

*As I moved into these levels of increasing ontological simplicity, I entered a profound stillness that reawakened a distant, vague memory. “Where have I known this before?” By following this stillness, I was guided back to what seemed like a time before creation, back to the ontological fount of creation. In this stillness, I was “with Myself” in ways that I had been long ago, but not for billions of years. It was a time of reunion, a time of being whole after a terribly long separation.*

*From this extraordinary position, I began to actually be able to conceive of the possibility of the physical universe not having been created. The alternatives stood starkly before me. On one side was all the planning, all the work, all the confusion*

*and uncertainty, and especially all the terrible suffering that was so fresh in my mind from earlier in the session. On the other side was the profound stillness and richness that was my current state. Why do it? Why manifest the universe if at such a cost?*

*An answer rose that was the same as I had been given before, in session 15: "Have we not learned anything?" This time it carried overtones of: "Has it not been worthwhile? Has it not been an adventure? Look what would not exist if we had not chosen to create." This time I was not shattered, for the choice of creation seemed profoundly good. The thought that the entire physical universe might not have existed carried with it a terrible sadness. From this perspective, I was also able to feel that there was no fundamental flaw in the manifest order of creation. Despite all the suffering, everything was moving along fine—though it is profoundly unfinished.*

*I continued to ask my questions:*

*"What is happening here?"*

*"How does this work?"*

*"What has it been like for you?"*

*With each question, my experiential field changed, opening me to one cosmic process after another. I cannot describe these experiences adequately because the categories of thought derived from space-time do not lend themselves to remembering clearly or translating into words experiences of realities that lie outside space-time. Though my ordinary waking consciousness is being gradually changed by these experiences, it is still too cognitively restricted to be able to hold on to them in sufficient detail. What I experienced, however, repeatedly swept me into ecstasy.*

*"Amazing!"*

*"So that's how that works!"*

*"Oh, goodness!"*

*"How much do you want to see?" I was asked. "More!" I answered, and always more would unfold. It kept unfolding for hours.*

## Comment

This was an extremely intense session, both in its pain and its joy, with pieces that are difficult to interpret. The suffering escalated into a frenzied animal passion that destroys everything it touches. The conflict between this bloodlust and my desperate struggle to protect the child seems to have been a device used to drive the energy to enormous proportions, eventually shattering the fundamental dualism that had created the rage and hunger in the first place. The mystical embrace of the Primal Woman was an archetypal fragment, a symptom of the *hieros gamos*, the "divine marriage" that occurs when differentiated existence reunites with the bliss of primordial essence. When the final breakthrough took place, I felt an explosion of healing ripple through the entire human family.

In the Cosmic Tour, I had explored the universe as a reality outside myself; in this session, I explored the universe as a dimension of my own being. This shift reflects the broader transition that takes place as one moves from the subtle level of consciousness, with dualism intact, into nondual causal consciousness. The peace of returning to the Oneness that swallows all partitions awakened a seed of remembering that changed me deeply, not instantaneously, but slowly over many years.

For the sake of efficiency, I'm going to merge the next two sessions. These sessions continued the story of creation but now deepened it by taking me in two different directions. First, they took me back to what felt like the beginning of creation, where I experienced creation as an act of love between two Cosmic Beings. This was a completely unexpected cosmology for me. Then, they took me forward in time and gave me a vision of where creation is taking humanity. I know this sounds monstrously arrogant, like ego run amok, but this is simply what happened.

This is the first time that the theme of humanity's future entered my sessions, but it would not be the last. From this point on, the story of our collective evolution became a recurring theme in my work. Though I describe this story as a "master plan," I do not mean this in a heavy handed, dictated-destiny sense of the phrase. I am simply trying to give voice to an encounter with the deep intentionality expressing itself in the unfolding complexity of our universe. In time this story became the meta-framework of my entire psychedelic journey and my entire life. I will say more about this in chapter 9, "The Birth of the Future Human," but the story I will tell there began here, inside these two sessions.

My prayer at the beginning of my sessions had always been: "I surrender myself to whatever serves the common good. Whatever You need, I choose." The pain of the 21st session had been so severe, however, that this time my prayer was: "Please let the suffering end." But our conscious intentions do not guide these affairs. The pain did not end. It grew worse.



## *Sessions 22–23—The Master Plan*

*As the swirling currents of destruction and violence entered, I consciously opened to them, holding nothing in reserve. They carried me deeper and deeper into the peculiar logic of rivalries and wars, of violence and revenge, attack and counterattack. The violence escalated until it again breached historical boundaries, incorporating many historical periods simultaneously. Underneath all the different justifications given for specific wars was a common raging fury. As more layers and more epochs were added, I ceased to function as an individual person and became instead a field encompassing all the combatants. I was the field of which they were all parts. I was legion.*

*The suffering of the planet was enormous. It was the suffering of the species in specific historical configurations, massive but precise—the suffering of thousands of years of war, thousands of years of racial violence, and so on. This was a suffering that I was responsible for, not as an individual but as the unified consciousness of our species.*

*I could make a difference in the experience of this species. Would I choose to make a difference?*

*I could change things. How can I change things?*

*By focusing on the pain. By following the pain to its root.*

*Then death came to preoccupy my thoughts, death at many levels and in many forms. It became the background gestalt to everything that was happening. I felt myself dying as I slipped still deeper into the destructive flow. It was not a personal “I” that was dying at this point but something massive, something collective. This continued for perhaps an hour. I was lost in death for a long time.*

*The next thing I can reconstruct is that I was emerging on the “other side” of death. This involved a strange reversal of perspective. As I crossed into what lay beyond this collective suffering, I began to realize that instead of causing my death, this pain was now being used to drive me to this higher level of awareness, like waking a drunk by slapping him in the face. When I would begin to lose my focus at this deeper level, something would direct more waves of collective pain through me, more slaps, and I would get clearer, would see more, would know more. Over and over again, this happened, until eventually I was firmly established in this new reality.*

*I entered a spacious and quiet domain “beyond” and “above” the collective unconscious of humanity, beyond the species-mind. As I entered this domain, I was met by a large assembly of beings who appeared to have been called to participate in today’s events. They had the feeling tone of being master shamans. Under their watchful eye I was being escorted to an arena where a day of disclosure had been planned.*

*What “I” was at this point is difficult to describe. The hours of painful cleansing had already shattered my egoic reality and left me in an extremely porous transpersonal state. As we approached the arena, the procession was stopped at regular intervals and interrogated. In order to be allowed to continue, one had to demonstrate one’s knowledge of the workings of the universe. My work and my person were being scrutinized. I was surprised to find that I appeared to possess the required knowledge, as I was always passed along. This was a deeply moving experience. It felt like I was being initiated into a shamanic fellowship, that my entire life had been planned toward this end.*

*With each checkpoint, my experiential reality changed as deeper and deeper modes of archetypal experience of incalculable age and expanse opened. Eventually, space-time reality was left behind entirely, and I found myself alone in a condition that was seemingly without boundaries of either time or space, soaking in the bliss and clarity of transcendence.*

*I then learned that I was going to be shown a portion of the master plan for the human species. As preposterous as this suggestion may sound to our ordinary consciousness, in my current state, it seemed entirely feasible. I had no time to debate these matters, for suddenly something opened and I was drawn into a vast, concentrated stream underlying physical reality. This stream appeared to be the formative intent of the Creative Intelligence itself. I dissolved completely into this stream and became one with it. The following experiences emerged while I was in this condition.*

## **Cosmic Lovers**

*I was taken back to the beginning of creation and there experienced human evolution in the context of a larger cosmic process. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by the most extraordinary LOVE, a love unlike anything I had ever encountered before. It was as if a dam had burst and love was coming at me from every direction, so much love that I could barely take it in even in my expanded state. It was a romantic love, cosmic in scope and intensity. As I stabilized under this amorous assault, I began to remember a romance from deep within my history. An ancient love, a divine love of unbelievable proportions.*

*I was a Cosmic Being being loved by another Cosmic Being. Though at one level I had never been separated from my Lover, at another level we had been separated for billions of years, and my return was rekindling our ancient love.*

*Creation seemed to be a reality that had come forth from a dynamic relation between two Cosmic Beings who had themselves emerged from a Primal Unity. One being, who felt more like a "She," had plunged Herself into the task of creating space-time and the physical universe, knowing in advance that She would eventually lose Her self-awareness in this work and become unconscious of Her true nature for billions of years. The other being, who felt more like a "He," had remained fully conscious outside of space-time. The creating half had voluntarily submitted to this long and painful isolation in order to create the raw substance of the physical universe, which would in time become transparent to divine intention as matter evolved into increasing self-awareness. With this phase of the work now largely complete, the self-imposed exile was coming to an end, and the Lovers were at long last being reunited.*

*The magnitude of the Love that lies at the fount of the creation of our universe is beyond description. To awaken to this Love was to remember a primordial decision that I had somehow participated in. It was part of my spiritual genetic makeup, something I had inherited along with everything else that I had not understood about my life. Remembering choices made before matter and time even existed, I reconnected with the Divine Love that had inspired these choices. This experience shattered my heart, and I wept deeply.*

*I experienced all the suffering that humanity had endured through history as taking place inside this Cosmic Love. I realized that all the suffering inherent in*

*evolution was noble beyond words. It was all part of a cosmic plan that had been entered into freely by all the participants, however unconscious of this fact we have become along the way. The nobility of great suffering shouldered voluntarily in the name of Divine Love, suffering that would stretch across millions of years, suffering that would become so utterly inscrutable that it would be used as evidence that the universe was devoid of compassion, this was the nobility of humanity's gift to the Creator. All of the suffering that humanity had endured and would endure, especially the suffering of forgetfulness itself, was part of a consciously chosen creative process, a process that had not yet come to fruition.*

## **Our Collective Awakening**

*From here I pivoted to the second lesson of the day. The order and design of evolving life is not something that is imposed on it from without; it surges up from within life itself. It is something that lives in the fire of the atomic process and surges forward in all the micro and macro-jumps of evolution. It is a restless churning to become more that burns within life. In human beings, the focus of this churning is consciousness, and at this point I was immersed in the forces driving the evolution of human consciousness.*

*Out of the seething desires of history, out of the violent conflicts and the scheming of individuals and nations, there is now driving forward a new awareness in human consciousness. Its birth in us is no less difficult or violent than the birth of a new continent. It drives upward from the floor of our being, requiring a transposition of everything that has gone before to make room for its new organizational patterns.*

*The great difficulty I have is describing the enormity of what is being birthed. The true focus of this creative process is not individuals but all humanity. It is actually trying to awaken our entire species. What is emerging is a consciousness of unprecedented proportions, the entire human family integrated in a unified field of awareness. The species reconnected with its Fundamental Nature. Our thoughts tuned to Source Consciousness. This unified field did not suffocate our individuality but liberated it into new orders of self-expression.*

*Having moved beyond linear time into Deep Time, I experienced this collective awakening as both a projected destiny and a realized actuality. It was simultaneously something to be accomplished and something already accomplished. The scale of what I was witnessing took my breath away.*

## **Comment**

Because of the master story I had been given in these two sessions, I returned to the psychedelic arena three months later with a clearer sense of the landscape I was entering. Things were beginning to make more sense to me now: why my personal transformation had been supplanted by the work of collective transformation, why the killing of the children, why the ocean of suffering. Seeing that humanity was entering a critical phase of its evolutionary journey helped me understand why I had refused to

abandon creation in session 18 despite the pleasures available to me in spiritual reality. Having been reunited with the forces and intention of creation, I saw more clearly what was happening in history and the role I was being asked to play in this unfolding. All of this came to a head in the next session when the ocean of suffering reached its peak. Perhaps because the collective ordeal was coming to its culmination, this session began in the quiet beginnings of my life, as if to recapitulate and clarify the entire progression.



## Session 24—Healing the Collective Wound

*The session began slowly and smoothly with blissful mother/infant experiences. I was back with my mother as a newborn babe, experiencing the soothing bliss of being held at her breast. This feeling of closeness deepened and became more elemental, shifting from sleeping at her breast to being an embryo in her womb. It then deepened further to become the peace of spiritual existence before conception. In this pre-incarnated state, I was experiencing an extraordinary tranquility, a soothing bliss of wholeness that rested my soul. I was retracing my history, remembering where I had come from, where all of us have come from.*

*Then within this profound serenity and love, I began to experience pain. The pain deepened and broadened for a long time. As always, my capacity to experience pain built on the previous sessions. Its depth and scope were beyond description. Again it breached the boundaries of history, and I saw clearly that this type of suffering exists in some domain that gathers the experiences of humanity in some collective embrace. I had a clearer sense than in previous sessions that I was experiencing not multiple, discrete historical epochs so much as something that was “once removed” from actual experience. It was a gathering of the memories of human experience, a collective remembering. As before, there were millions of people involved and tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of years. The suffering was enormous. Any attempt to describe it would simply become a repetition of extremes.*

*Although the suffering was much worse than in previous sessions, there was also something new present. The pain had begun in love, and I was shown that the pain did not represent a rupturing of love but was itself an expression of this love. Being born into space-time, even the very birth of space-time itself, was an expression of unshakable love.*

*I began to sense that by consciously experiencing this pain as an expression of love, I could transform it. I began to feel that I was being used in some larger capacity to heal our species. Humanity had endured all this suffering without realizing why it had done so. By re-experiencing the memory of this pain knowing that it was part of a creative process rooted in cosmic love, my species was being healed in some way. I realized that the more pain I could take in, the more healing I could mediate. This discovery brought forth even deeper compassion for the countless beings I was experiencing myself to be. At this point, I began to embrace*



*the suffering, to actively seek it out, to take in as much of it as I could. Pain became my ally, my instrument of deliverance.*

*It is hard to describe how one can reach out and absorb suffering of this magnitude. It was as though I could open and take into my being the pain of whole groups of people, of whole collective endeavors, of wars and rebellions, of droughts and social upheavals. As I did, the sweep of the pain kept getting larger and larger, reaching deeper into human and prehuman history. The process kept accelerating until it reached an unbelievably frenzied pitch. Enormous energies were involved. Eventually, these energies reached such gigantic proportions that the sensation became one of frenzied power rather than pain. Pain was present, but “I” became larger than the pain. I had moved into a state of ecstatic power, feeding on the pain of the planet. This continued for a long, long time.*

*Eventually, I found myself slowly emerging from the swirling mayhem. Still surrounded by the fading chaos, I began to see a larger world beyond it. I began to recognize shapes and sense the atmosphere of transcendence. To enter this world again filled me with delight, exhausted relief, awe, wonder, and a poignant sense of homecoming. How good it felt to be back.*

*This world was ancient and archetypal. It had the feeling tone of being more inherently “alive” than space-time. To exist here was to be part of this aliveness. It was a domain populated by Massive Beings larger than any gods imagined on Earth. I saw powerful forces that I understood to be the forces driving physical existence, but their forms were felt more than seen. Visually, they resembled the majestic sweep of distant galaxies spinning through deep space, but this is simply the best my mind could do to give them form and scale.*

*Rather than letting me rest in this new domain, the energy generated by embracing the collective suffering continued to build to unbelievable extremes even here. The energy formed rivers of liquid fire—white-hot lava flows and exploding sun flares. Usually these currents surrounded me in displays of extraordinary power and beauty, but several times I was drawn into them. I was immersed in suns exploding into rivers of fire shooting into space. The liquid fire poured through me, completely consuming me and transporting me. There is no experiencing these things without being changed at the core.*

*After returning to my ordinary consciousness after the session, I have not been able to return to accepting the physical world as real in the same way as before. My experience of this other domain has now deepened to the point that it has become part of the fiber of my being. I now carry within me a visceral knowing that what appears here as solid is in fact an energy that is rooted in another reality. Everywhere around me I see stage, props, and actors.*

## **Expanding the Narrative—Who Is the Patient?**

I don't think these six sessions are well served by further commentary. Every time I attempt it, I find that my words dilute their message, so better to let them stand as they are. In the last section of this chapter, I want to pivot from experience to theory. Theory pales before experience

and can feel like a weak postscript, and it is, but in order for me to integrate my experiences, I had to understand them. This required that I expand my understanding of what is possible in these states and how the universe works in them.

### ***Individual Model***

When I began this work, I was thinking in terms of a model of transformation that held that the purpose of undergoing these exercises was to heal and enlighten the *individual*. When Grof discussed the therapeutic impact of psychedelic therapy, he always focused on how it affected the individual patient, and occasionally the patient's significant partner. When he reflected on how this therapeutic movement might influence the emerging global crisis, he did so in terms of the cumulative impact of healing large numbers of people one person at a time. Accordingly, when the ocean of suffering opened after what had appeared to be a solid ego-death in sessions 9 and 10, I interpreted it to mean that some stubborn remnant of my ego must have slipped through the therapeutic net and that my ego-death was unfinished. I thought that this collective suffering would eventually lead to a more complete ego-death.

Eventually, however, this interpretation was overwhelmed by the sheer intensity and quantity of the suffering involved. These episodes went on for too many years and were too extreme in their content for me to continue seeing them as collective experiences drawn in through resonance to the core of my unfinished ego-death. This eventually forced me to reassess the boundaries of this entire enterprise. The conclusion I came to, both intellectually and experientially, was that these collective episodes were *not* aimed primarily at the transformation of my personal consciousness. Instead, they were aimed at nothing less than the transformation of the collective psyche as a whole.

### ***Collective Model***

I wrote *Dark Night, Early Dawn* in part to answer the question: Why did death become as large as it did in my psychedelic journey? What is driving the healing process when it opens to such collective tracts? In that book, I abandoned the person-centered narrative I had been assuming and

adopted an expanded narrative. By integrating Rupert Sheldrake's concept of morphic fields into Grof's paradigm, the way opened to viewing these collective ordeals as part of a larger transformational process aimed at healing wounds still carried in the collective psyche. I argued that in highly energized psychedelic states, the collective unconscious is sometimes activated to such a degree or in such a manner that it triggers a *collective* healing process. Through some fractal flip or quantum entanglement I had not anticipated or even thought possible at the time, the "patient" in my sessions had shifted from being me to being some portion of humanity itself.

This interpretation proposes that the working of the collective psyche parallels the working of the personal psyche in key respects. It proposes that just as painful experiences can accumulate and block the healthy functioning of the individual, similar blockages can occur at the collective level. It suggests that the unresolved anguish of human history might still be active in the collective memory of our species, burdening its life just as our personal unresolved anguish burdens ours. Continuing the parallel, if the conscious engagement of unresolved pain can bring therapeutic relief at the personal level, the same may also occur at the species level. Normally, we would expect such healing to take the form of reform movements or cultural shifts in which large numbers of people confront and heal some painful legacy from our past. Within the context of LSD therapy, however, a new possibility seems to be emerging. In this setting, an individual seems to be able to tap into and directly facilitate a healing of some portion of the collective psyche. The process of engaging and healing a collective META-COEX system in a psychedelic session is essentially the same as engaging and healing a personal COEX system, but enacted on a much larger scale and a different level of consciousness. Grof has embraced this expansion of his paradigm.

I came to this conclusion only after great struggle. For years I kept trying to fit my psychedelic experiences into the model of individual transformation. Opening to a narrative of collective transformation felt monstrously arrogant. How can a single person impact something as large as the collective unconscious of our species? It felt like I was inflating my ego even to suggest the possibility, and yet this shift was demanded by the experiences themselves. Not only did the quantity of suffering shatter the myth of individual therapy, but the quality of suffering was demonstrating

that this was an inherently collective dynamic. Years later, after I had concluded my journey, I learned that Marie Louise von Franz, a life-long collaborator with Carl Jung, had come to a similar conclusion about the collective import of deep transformative work. She wrote:

Whenever an individual works on his own unconscious, he invisibly affects first the group and, if he goes even deeper, he affects the large national units or sometimes even all of humanity. Not only does he change and transform himself but he has an imperceptible impact on the unconscious psyche of many other people. (Von Franz 1985, 17; quoted in Nicol 2015, 14)

Moving to a model of collective transformation represented an enormous transition for me because with this pivot we are no longer speaking of an individual “having transpersonal experiences.” Here the individual dissolves into preexisting fields of collective consciousness. At this point, *it is these collective fields that become the “working unit” of experience in these sessions.* This requires a new way of thinking about what is taking place in our sessions and a new therapeutic calculus. In letting go of the person-centered narrative, I was surrendering to a universe whose workings were stranger and more complex than I had previously imagined.

### ***The Spiral of Death and Rebirth***

Let me now add one way in which my thinking has moved beyond *Dark Night, Early Dawn*. In that book, I attempted to integrate the narrative of collective healing into Grof’s model of consciousness by retaining the term *perinatal* for these collective ordeals and expanding the rationale for their appearance. Rather than let go of the perinatal vocabulary, as I probably should have, I bent over backward to stretch it by proposing that in some instances a person’s experience of the perinatal domain could “slant” toward the transpersonal side of the personal/ transpersonal interface. I also suggested that there were “two tiers” of death and rebirth intertwined in these collective ordeals, one aimed at personal ego-death and a second aimed at species ego-death.<sup>[\\*44](#)</sup>

At the present time, however, I have shifted to what I think is a simpler and more elegant way of understanding the ocean of suffering. I now see death and rebirth as a *cycle* that repeats many times as we move into progressively deeper levels of consciousness. Being an archetypal cycle, any single death-rebirth experience may incorporate material from multiple levels of consciousness. But looking back over the trajectory of all my sessions, I now recognize that the death-rebirth cycle was repeating itself in different forms at different levels of consciousness. The image below may help convey this point.

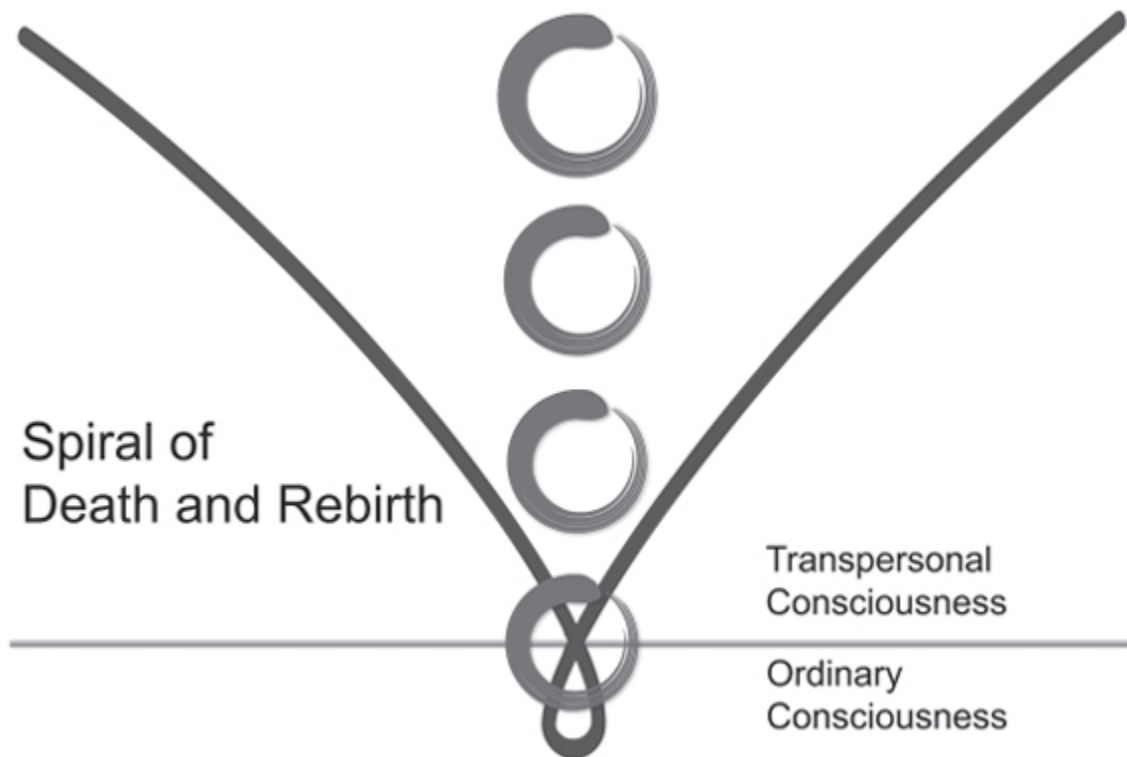


Fig. 2. Spiral of Death and Rebirth

(image by Jason Bache, Nerds Ltd.)

Below the horizontal line is ordinary consciousness in physical reality; above it is the vast territory of transpersonal consciousness. The drop at the bottom represents individual egoic consciousness. The lowest circle represents the first cycle of death and rebirth at the perinatal level of consciousness, where one transitions from physical consciousness to early transpersonal consciousness. The higher circles represent subsequent cycles of death and rebirth at progressively deeper levels of transpersonal

consciousness. Though I distinguish psychic, subtle, and causal levels of consciousness in this book, I do not have a personal stake in how many levels of consciousness there may be or how many times the wheel of death and rebirth may turn. This image is open at the top. It represents the *process* of progressive initiation, not a complete map of the territory one is being initiated into.

The essence of my revision of *Dark Night, Early Dawn*, then, is this. Rather than see the ocean of suffering as a protracted first turning of the wheel of death and rebirth at the perinatal level, I now see it as a *second turning* of that wheel. Coming after the ego-death that had taken place at the perinatal level of consciousness in sessions 9 and 10, the ocean of suffering is the second movement of a larger symphony, a movement taking place at the subtle level of consciousness, a movement whose dynamics are inherently *collective*, focused on a *collective* patient and aimed at a *collective* transformation. If the first turning of the wheel of death and rebirth culminates in individual ego-death, this second turning of the wheel aims at *species ego-death*—a transformation of the collective psyche that when fully realized will result in a profound shift in how our species experiences itself and the surrounding world.

In offering this assessment of my sessions, I am not suggesting that the bleed-through interpretation that Grof originally proposed for similar collective episodes is wrong, only that it applies in some circumstances and not others. It applies best, I think, when these collective elements show up in sessions where the individual is clearly engaged in a perinatal process with prominent fetal features. In these conditions, the principle of resonance may explain how clusters of transpersonal experiences of death and dying may be drawn into one's personal ego-death process. But in circumstances where one has already moved through the perinatal process and undergone a solid ego-death, I think we must expand our frame of reference to explain what is taking place when collective episodes like those in the ocean of suffering show up.

The proposal that death and rebirth takes place at multiple levels of consciousness falls within the broad framework of Grof's body of work, where he points to the numerous forms that death can take at transpersonal levels. In *The Ultimate Journey*, for example, he writes:

We may identify with our ancestors or people from different countries and historical periods who are dying or whose lives are threatened. Such sequences from the collective unconscious can sometimes be associated with a sense of personal remembering, which characterizes them as past incarnation memories. Death can even be experienced in full identification with an animal or a plant. Death is also powerfully represented in the collective unconscious as mythological motifs of death and rebirth and as various eschatological themes, including specific death gods and underworlds of various cultures, the archetype of Death, astral or bardo realms, the posthumous journey of the soul, and the abodes of the Beyond.<sup>\*45</sup> (Grof 2006, 309)

Furthermore, Grof supports restricting the term *perinatal* to death-rebirth experiences that have strong fetal components. In a personal exchange with me on this topic in October 25, 2006, he wrote:

I feel that for clarity, we should change the terminology and make it clear that the term perinatal should be used only for fetal experiences . . . and not for experiences of death and rebirth on higher levels of the transpersonal spectrum with no relation to biological birth.

I want to be careful not to overstate the therapeutic impact that one person's sessions may have on the collective psyche. How can we even begin to estimate such a thing? If I add up the total number of hours I spent in these states and multiply them by the number of people I subjectively felt myself to be, the total is a pittance compared with the total suffering humanity has endured. And yet, I don't think we should discount their therapeutic impact either. Every act of healing, large or small, contributes to healing the larger whole. My hope is that through our combined efforts on many fronts, we are helping the human family move closer to its collective transformation.

## **Why Did the Suffering End?**

Let me conclude this chapter by taking up a question that I asked in the closing pages of *Dark Night, Early Dawn*. If the individual and the species are as deeply interwoven in these sessions as I have suggested, why does the collective suffering end for an individual even though it continues for the species as a whole? If we can open to the suffering of others in our psychedelic sessions and impact that suffering to some degree, how does it happen that the individual ever completes his or her work at this level while the suffering of the species-mind continues?

I've thought about this a great deal because for me it's not just a theoretical question. The more deeply you have experienced merging with the species-mind and taking on its pain, the more pressing this question becomes. It may be that given the sheer magnitude of planetary suffering, any one person is only allowed to do so much. Perhaps some cosmic oversight simply says "That's enough!" and one is released from further obligation. Alternatively, it may be that we become more useful to the larger project of life by moving into levels of reality that lie beyond the species-mind. Personally, I think it's the latter, because of experiences I will share in chapter 8.

At this point, all I can say is that the collective ordeal did end for me and a new phase of the journey began. In this new phase, the enormous field of energy that had been activated and freed in healing the ocean of suffering began to be focused in a way that drove me through a new set of experiential boundaries. The wheel of initiation was about to take another turn.



## SEVEN

# The Greater Real of Archetypal Reality

Sessions 25–35

*Archetypes thus can be understood and described in many ways, and much of the history of Western thought has evolved and revolved around this very issue.*

RICHARD TARNAS, *COSMOS AND PSYCHE*

When the ocean of suffering reached its explosive culmination in the 24th session, I crossed into a reality that was ancient beyond reckoning. Even more striking than its age was the fact that it felt more “real” than physical reality. This was unnerving at first. We are not accustomed to thinking of reality as something that admits of degrees. Either something is real or it’s not real. And yet, each time I left my ordinary consciousness and entered this domain, I had the distinct sensation of moving from the less real to the more real. In one session I wrote, *“It jars my soul to realize how watered down reality is inside space-time.”* Like the prisoner freed from Plato’s cave, I had entered a deeper order of reality. I had entered the greater real of archetypal reality.

The next year and a half was a choppy and complex period. The cleansing continued to be fierce, so much so that at first I thought the ocean of suffering had not yet ended, but in time I came to recognize that something had changed. I was no longer being taken into vast tracts of human history. The ecstatic portions of these eleven sessions were also

complex. I was repeatedly entering what felt to be archetypal reality, but it was not the world of archetypes described by either Plato or Carl Jung, or it was and it wasn't. I saw parallels to the work of these thinkers in my experience but also differences. And there were many levels to this territory, some far removed from physical existence and some operating deep within it. Reality functioned differently in this domain, requiring new concepts and new ways of thinking. All these factors make the next eleven sessions hard to summarize.

As I was navigating this new territory, I was promoted to full professor at my university. What a strange, almost surreal juxtaposition of worlds. I wonder whether my colleagues would have supported my promotion had they known where I was spending my weekends.

I will not present whole sessions in this chapter as I did in the previous chapter, with one exception. These sessions were so complex that in order to convey their content effectively, I need to take them apart and put their pieces into a more coherent order. I will also trim away the detours, personal lessons, and repetitions that would complicate the main story that was unfolding. I don't mean to even out all the twists and turns and fashion a story that is smoother than the original sessions were, but I don't think it would be worthwhile to take the reader through all the ins and outs and uncertainties I struggled with at the time. That would be a winding road indeed. Instead, I will tell the story by weaving together segments from different sessions to illustrate the major themes and patterns that emerged over this next year and a half.

This strategy of lifting pieces of sessions out of their original context carries a certain risk, however—the risk of diluting the impact that whole sessions can have on us. Jumping from one segment to another can make the narrative begin to sound almost cavalier, like I am summarizing grandiose ideas instead of sharing life-changing experiences. The only way I know to avoid this risk is to ask the reader to put back what I am taking away, to remember that every segment comes from a long day in a long weekend. In this series, each session begins not at the foot of the mountain but at the base camp established in previous sessions. We are working at high altitudes here. At these altitudes, the extraordinary can begin to sound ordinary, but it isn't. I can't emphasize this too strongly.

What happened in the ocean of suffering became the energetic foundation for everything that followed.

I experienced archetypal reality to be a bridge between the physical universe and the source of existence. Being ontologically prior to space-time in the Great Chain of Being, it is the seed reality of space-time. Many spiritual traditions describe creation as a process that flows from a single source until it becomes the entire universe. In Taoism creation is said to flow from the Eternal Tao to the Ten Thousand Things, in Buddhism from the pregnant emptiness of *dharmakaya* to the pulsing complexity of *nirmanakaya*.<sup>\*46</sup> On its way to manifesting physical reality, this outpouring of creativity manifests many intermediate levels, and the archetypal domain is one of these levels. More precisely put, the archetypal domain is actually a *cluster of levels*.

I spent only eleven sessions exploring this territory, crossing it in very large steps. What follows, then, is not in any way a complete or adequate description of this complex realm. The names of the nine sessions that I will address in this chapter are:

- S 25 Grinding the Bones
- S 26 Archetypal Reality #2
- S 27 Archetypal Reality #3
- S 28 Archetypal Meltdown
- S 29 Cleansing #1
- S 30 Cleansing #2
- S 31 Cleansing #3
- S 32 Release
- S 33 A Flash of “God”

## **Entering Archetypal Reality**

When I first entered archetypal reality, my identity as a human being began to fall away from me. I found that we have a sense of being human that is more basic than our sense of being a specific human. It is a felt

sense of species identity that we share with all human beings beneath the details of our individual identity. In following the flow of existence back into archetypal reality, I had to cease to exist not only as a specific person but as a human being per se. This required a deeper surrender than ego-death. At first I struggled to hold on to my humanity for it had been the context for every experience I had ever had, but I could not stop what was happening. The pull was too strong. Eventually, I could no longer fit myself back into the form of *Homo sapiens*.

At this new level of consciousness, this larger “I” was being worked with to consolidate a platform of awareness that was “above” the field of human experience. The image that surfaced for this condition was the view of our planet from a space shuttle floating in high orbit above the Earth. This higher platform was a stable state of consciousness beyond the human species-mind. There I was being pumped with information about how reality functions at this level.

Being closer to the source of existence in the order of creation, this level of reality is much more energetically powerful than space-time. It operates at a higher “voltage,” so to speak. When I first broke through to this level in session 24, I had been plunged into its intense energy, which I experienced as a super-heated fire: *“The energy formed rivers of liquid fire—white-hot lava flows and exploding sun flares.”* In order to stabilize my awareness at this level, my system had to adjust to this intense energy. I had to literally become a being that could sustain these high levels of energy for hours at a time, otherwise my experiences there would be fragmented and I wouldn’t be able to remember them clearly. This represented a major challenge. The next session put me through an intense purification process that I now see was designed to help me make this transition. Anthropologists would call it an exercise in shamanic dismemberment. I called it: Grinding the Bones.



## Session 25

*I went through many cycles of pain and resolution and then became caught in an acoustic ritual that was restructuring me at the core. The Tibetan chanting in the music blended seamlessly with scenes of primal Africa. I saw visions of a circle of elders surrounded by a large gathering of African dancers moving in rhythmic cadence. I was inside the circle, sometimes alone and sometimes with other initiates. The chanting was a kind of shamanic initiation, a ritual of purification and*

*transformation. There was a violent quality to what was happening, as though I had volunteered for something that had gotten out of control. Nevertheless, I felt safe in the hands of these ancient ones even as they broke me down.*

*The elders grabbed me with their thundering song, held me fixed, and ground me up. For more than an hour and a half, the grinding continued without letup. Repeatedly the refrain: "This is a chanting that breaks bones." The powerful incantations were grinding me down to my bones and then grinding my bones to dust.*

*It felt like the singers were chanting human desire out of me. I moved through a wide range of human experiences, into the basic desires that fuel all human endeavors, and the chanting followed me, grinding these desires out of me. We swept through human experience, encountering and extinguishing the basic emotional attachments that drive life. Again and again I had the sense of: "You won't be able to go back to that after today."*

*In place of human desire, the chanting poured a raw energy into me, channeling it directly into my bones. For seemingly endless time, they chanted power into my bones. This was the most prominent feature of the session. They were breaking me down and placing a power into my bones through vibration. Like a battery being charged, I kept drinking the energy in. I could feel changes taking place deep inside me as I absorbed more and more of this power.*

*The chanters had a feeling tone about them that was both compassionate and merciless, deadly serious but humorous. Like village grandparents holding a child by the arm and switching him dispassionately, the elders beat the desires of human existence out of me. Too old and too filled with life experience to get overly involved with the young one's pain, they beat me soundly, watching me jump about with merciful humor. It was for his own good.*

*After the session, it took me longer than usual to regain the full use of my body.*

Even after this dismemberment and reconstruction, managing the intense energy of this domain continued to be a challenge. Stabilizing these energetic transitions from one platform of awareness to another takes practice and repetition.

What I experienced in this reality over the next ten sessions can be divided into two broad categories. The first set of experiences was more Platonic in nature and took place at what I would judge to be a higher subtle level. The second set was more Jungian in nature and took place at a lower subtle level. Both of these domains were archetypal but at different orders of scale. (For a short description of the concept of archetype and how I use this term, see the addendum at the end of this chapter, page 169.)

## **The Living Forces of Archetypal Reality**

When I entered the higher level of archetypal reality, my experience affirmed Plato's core insight that there is a reality behind the physical universe that structures and informs our existence here, but what I encountered there did not match his description of this reality. What I experienced were not Plato's eternal Ideas in the mind of an unchanging transcendent intelligence, but vast *living* dynamic forces embodying higher orders of intentionality and power and operating on a different order of time. It was like stepping off our feverishly spinning planet into the majestic arc of the Milky Way—all moving, all alive, but on different magnitudes of scale. Though these forces informed human experience, they were so far beyond humanity that even in my expanded state I could not grasp the full scope of their being. I could catch only fragments of their massive presence and hints of their influence.

In session 24, I had tried to describe these Massive Beings: *“Visually, they resembled the majestic sweep of distant galaxies spinning through deep space, but this is simply the best my mind could do to give them form and scale.”* Now in session 26, I tried again to describe what I encountered there, but once again I could not do justice to them.



## Session 26

*This was an extremely difficult session. It involved a quantum jump in level that was very challenging to navigate and makes summary difficult. Its foreignness leaves many of my experiences locked outside my current awareness. Only more sessions will expand the crack in the door.*

*In the early stages, there was the familiar chaos and frenzy. It built for a long time but was not particularly painful. Eventually, I found myself once again moving through swirling patterns to a level of reality that was archetypal. Its feeling tone was ancient, elemental, and extremely powerful.*

*My stay in this domain was long and complex but difficult to describe. Escalating power. Forms exploding into larger and larger patterns. Surging kaleidoscopic designs breaking into seemingly independent displays but coordinated by an invisible hand twisting the device. More patterns exploding to reveal the twisting hand more clearly, and here I encountered LIVING FORCES too different from me and too foreign to grasp accurately. I could only catch glimpses of their mode of being.*

*Ancient. Huge. Panoramic in scope. Celestial but facing Earth. Creating through humanity. Living through humanity. Satisfying themselves through humanity. I saw deeply into the fact that events in space-time echoed the intention of the Forces and*

*Beings of this dimension. It was they who were living and working through the collective patterns of history. It was they who were loving through the embrace of thousands of Romeos and Juliets across the planet.*

This vision of a deeper reality influencing humanity in profound but indeterminate ways was a sobering encounter, for we value our autonomy highly and like to see ourselves as free agents on the stage of history. Nevertheless, this core insight kept repeating itself through multiple sessions. Seeing this deeper reality did not make me feel compromised or paranoid. The majesty and scale of the intelligence I was witnessing was fascinating, and I felt no malicious or manipulative intent. I was simply seeing the truth of a complex reality that had always been.

Opening to this dimension of reality was demanding work. To allow myself to actually become part of this reality was extremely challenging, as seen in this excerpt from a few sessions later.

*After everything that I have been through in these sessions, I am amazed that there is anything that could scare me, but today there was. I was not frightened by the pain or the turmoil but by the sheer magnitude of what I was becoming. Everything was spinning madly, and I was being thrown into a reality that was so far beyond anything I had ever known that this panicked me. I knew that if I continued in this direction, the entire physical universe as I had known it would cease to exist as a reality for me. I was also scared by how easy it was becoming to enter God's experience. (S 29)*

## **The Tissue of Our Collective Being**

My encounter with the Living Forces of archetypal reality at the high subtle level seemed to awaken in me a capacity to experience the sinews of humanity's collective being at a lower subtle level. Or perhaps this is simply where I was directed next. I think that the most important insights I received in these eleven sessions came from this more Jungian level. More significant than my brief contact with the largely inscrutable powers of high archetypal reality, being immersed in the tissue of humanity's collective being showed me organic processes operating beneath the surface of our individual lives and weaving humanity into a larger whole. It was as though I was being taught to recognize the living tissue of our species. My experiences affirmed Jung's core insight of the existence of a collective unconscious, but I did not experience the archetypes that he

discusses, such as the mother, father, child, wise old man, trickster, or hero. I'm not suggesting these are not part of the collective psyche, just that they were not part of my experience of it.

As my awareness stabilized at this level, I repeatedly experienced humanity as a single organism with intelligent networks running through it. These collective networks or meta-functions did not cancel or negate our individual agency; they were simply how life worked at a deeper level.



## Session 27

*The sense of an ultimate confrontation between myself and God continued through much of the early session. I knew that I did not know myself, and I wanted to know what I was. It was with this desperate and complete resolve to know my essence that I began to penetrate through many levels of something. It felt like being dragged underwater on a rope with seaweed tearing across my face. I kept holding on to some inner focus that allowed me to drive through layers and layers of an almost viscous material that tore at me as I plowed through it.*

*Eventually, I began to pass into archetypal levels that were familiar from previous sessions, but rather than stopping at these levels I continued to drive through them. The energy in my body was enormous, and I threw up violently multiple times in quick succession. The sensation of driving through layers continued but was now interspersed with new complex experiences. In some of them, I was learning to see at a collective level.*

*I witnessed many patterns in society as a rippling of our species organism at a transindividual level. Instead of seeing society as an aggregate of individuals, I was being focused on a deeper level of the phenomenon. Like a scientist who can focus his or her microscope at different levels of a tissue, I could focus my vision at a deeper-than-individual level of society.*

*At this deeper level, collective patterns suddenly jumped into view. They had always been there but undetected because I had not been focused at this level. Now that I saw them, I was able to see how certain dynamics in society represent coordinated influences from deep within the collective unconscious. I saw patterns of change rippling through society as "archetypal" forces pushing up through the experience of the species as a whole.*

In session after session, I kept witnessing precise patterns of connectivity that weave our minds and even our bodies into larger wholes. In one session, I experienced our individual minds as nodes in the network of the species-mind, each of us fractally mirroring selective themes of this larger consciousness. I saw that healing the distortions that exist inside our individual minds has a ripple effect that contributes to the healing of the collective psyche as a whole. In another session, I saw that we all carry



within us pieces of the physical diseases of our time and that by healing our individual bodies we contribute energetically to healing the collective body of humanity in a larger time frame. The human body was literally learning how to be healthy in our changing environment.

In still another session, I saw something like the Ayurvedic *doshas* active in the body of our species. In Ayurvedic medicine, it is believed that health exists when there is a balance between three fundamental bodily energies or doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. In this session, I saw the doshas flowing not only within our individual bodies but also through the body of humanity as a whole.

*I was experiencing the organic complexity of the human species as a single organism, and the doshas appeared to be the sinews of this organism. The doshas were connective threads running through the entire species, “wiring” it together much as our neurological system wires our many cells into a single organism. I suspect that I was experiencing something larger and more complex than the doshas and that my mind interpreted these connective sinews in the terms it had available to it.*  
(S 30)

I believe I was given these experiences of our collective being in order to prepare me for the visions of the birth of the Future Human that would follow in later sessions. They gave me the working knowledge of how our species operates that I would need to comprehend and absorb these later visions.

## **A Note on the “Gods” of the Subtle Level**

While I experienced subtle level reality as being more real than space-time reality, I want to add that just because something manifests at the subtle level of consciousness does not mean that it is real in the deepest sense of the term. For example, when someone experiences a particular deity in their sessions exactly as it is described in a culture’s scriptural tradition—holding traditional ritual objects or wearing traditional regalia—I believe they are experiencing one of two things: either a collective thoughtform or a spiritual presence wearing the clothes of a collective thoughtform. Either way, both reflect the strong influence of the collective psyche, and this places the experience at the subtle level of consciousness.

A collective thoughtform is a living construct in the collective psyche that is generated, in this case, by millions of devotees focusing their prayerful intention on a specific deity over thousands of years. In my understanding, it is not that the ancient sages perfectly captured the true form of this celestial being, but rather that the description they gave this deity became the script that millions of believers then used in their devotions. Thoughts repeated frequently by large numbers of people and invested with deep emotions generate a kind of living imprint on the collective psyche, an imprint that can persist even after the culture that gave birth to it has perished.

I do not mean to trivialize such forms. Just the opposite. I think that collective thoughtforms are genuinely potent forces in the collective psyche. The gods we worship, including the secular gods of greed and power, become powerful currents in the collective unconscious. They may manifest in our sessions as powerful entities, but from a deeper perspective these entities are not ultimately real.

In my view, the gods depicted in our religious traditions, including the God of monotheism, are cultural approximations that fall far short of the reality they are attempting to represent. These forms fall away as deeper levels of reality continue to open. This applies to many archetypal phenomena, I think. When I eventually moved beyond the subtle level of consciousness in my sessions, I found myself moving beyond the images, stories, and beliefs that human history has imprinted on the collective psyche. The cultural forms we have worshiped and used to interpret life fell away like wardrobe falling off the shoulders of actors, and Nature stood naked before me once again, inviting me to see it afresh. All forms, even the glistening splendor of archetypal forms, are intermediaries to that which lies beyond form. As the author of the fourteenth-century Christian mystical treatise *The Cloud of Unknowing* reminds us, if we ever hope to glimpse the true nature of the Divine, we must unlearn everything that we have been taught about God.

## **Session 28**

The 28th session was a powerful session that I will present in full. It wove together the themes of both high archetypal reality and the tissue of our

collective being. Coming several sessions into this series, it was clearer than earlier sessions had been because by now I was learning my way about in this new territory. At the same time, it was a bit more complicated because it involved not one but two cycles of transformation. The first cycle carried me into high subtle level archetypal reality. The second cycle lifted me beyond this into causal reality, giving me a brief foretaste of things to come. Then it brought me back into space-time, but now experienced from a subtle level perspective.



## Session 28—Archetypal Meltdown

*As I expanded, I felt myself being dismantled, as if pieces of me were being torn away, and I had to repeatedly remind myself to let the process take me wherever it wanted. The field thickened and intensified for a long time. Again I had the sensation of driving through layers of thick emotional sheaths, burning them off. The process was being driven by incredibly powerful forces. I had no control over what was happening.*

*Eventually, I found myself moving through a particularly dense field that felt like the emotional sheath of the entire planet, the collective unconscious of the human species. Now I was above that field, at some higher archetypal level of reality. As many times before, I had the clear sensation that something was working with me to consolidate a clear position at this level so that I could receive instruction about how reality functions here. I felt myself to be “above the world,” in a region of intelligence that creates and sustains physical reality. I worked hard to establish greater clarity at this level by cooperating with the forces that surrounded and saturated me. Many insights came concerning the broad sweep of creation, how consciousness consolidates itself into matter deliberately and by stages.*

*The specific insights are less significant to me than the larger context of my condition. My experience was that the distance between the Consciousness that is the Source of all existence and our human consciousness is enormous, a vast sea with levels upon levels of intervening fields, and the lower fields are sourced in and emerge from the purposive intent of the higher fields. This was spellbinding to witness.*

### Archetypal Meltdown

*After some time at this level, things changed. Everything around me began to spin and become very confused. I grabbed on to some focus at the center of this cyclone and held on. I was not resisting the change, but was holding still so that the change could happen to me. It was like being in the center of a tornado, at the center of an exploding sun. The energy moving through me was enormous. The power of this archetypal meltdown was many times greater than the meltdown of the species field had been. I felt this explosive fire burning things out of me, melting me down.*

Suddenly, I realized that I was being taken into a different reality. The walls of the energy tornado were melting, and sparkling through on the other side was a completely new reality. Breaking through to this level carried with it a sense of supreme accomplishment. "I'm through," I said, "I'm through." In a way without precedent, I was through.

The most distinctive feature of this level was its brilliant Clarity. It was infinitely spacious, infinitely extended, saturated with intelligence, and clear. Clear beyond imagination. I never appreciated how much the collective psyche constitutes a constant background static to our minds. Here beyond that field, I experienced being conscious in a completely new way. I was clear. I was as I was meant to be. I opened myself and embraced this realm and was embraced by it. For a long time, I kept absorbing its soothing and healing energies. I cannot describe the enormous sense of relief and release. I was finally through.

The experiences that followed were active at many levels simultaneously. Material from my personal life, from the species-mind, the archetypal level, and this high spiritual level were all interwoven with an organic precision I cannot hope to reproduce. All I can do is identify specific themes, leaving out the resonant textures of the other levels that were moving in synchronized rhythm with these themes.

## **Interlaced Mind-Fields**

Having reached this region of incredible clarity, I was not carried deeper into the transcendental side of things but instead was directed back into space-time, but now experienced as the interplay of what might be called quantum mind-fields. I was experiencing interlaced mind-fields saturating physical systems and weaving them into larger wholes. This phase of the session opened with a particularly moving experience of collective healing.

I was on an African plain where hundreds of people were dancing in celebration. The lions were far away, there was no danger, and no one was hungry. The tribe had survived the rigors of another year, and they were dancing their thanks and their celebration of life. This was one of the most extraordinary experiences of the session. I was able to take in the experience of these many people whole. I was the tribal mind reveling in celebration.

Their infectious joy and dance-induced ecstasy blended them into a single field of celebration. They knew what was happening, and they kept giving themselves over to the process, letting it deepen until they were completely awash with the unifying joy. They were one with themselves, each other, and their environment. I had never experienced anything like this before, and it was profoundly moving. How impoverished we are who have lost these rituals that activate the deeper weave of our connectedness.\*47

My reference point for experiencing all this was an intelligence that saturated everything—the people, the animals, the fire, and the Earth itself. If I had to name it, I would call it Earth Consciousness. I discovered that not only did this celebratory dance heal the people—cleansing them of the pains of the year's losses and healing the friction of interpersonal conflicts—to my surprise, it also healed the Earth itself. I actually experienced a release of energy that healed the field of this region of the planet.

*In this context, I experienced a larger truth about collective intelligence that was repeated many times to make sure I understood the lesson. I saw that there were many discrete levels of consciousness operating in life. I was experiencing fields of consciousness running through and integrating physically discrete life-forms, and the tissue generated by these fields was differentiated but seamless. Many layers of intelligence were active simultaneously. Just as a human being shares his or her existence with many smaller biological life-forms whose lives are intertwined around our own, so at the mental level there were many larger life-forms around whom we are intertwined. In this setting, I experienced the following.*

*We usually assume that the thoughts rising within our individual awareness are “our” thoughts, our private creation. Yet now I saw that some of these thoughts are not “ours” at all in a strict sense, but the registering in our local awareness of a collective thought rising in the species-mind as a whole, a thought that had been initiated at a deeper, centralized level of intelligence.*

*On a smaller scale, sometimes thoughts arise within our mind from the proximate influence of specific people if their mental field is strong enough to make itself felt in our field. Unfamiliar thoughts pass through us, tugging at us, and we dismiss them as a passing mood or an idea that did not make much sense and let it go at that. We think our mind is bound by our physical senses, but it is not.*

*I experienced clearly that the individual and collective energy of everything that surrounds us creates a collective net of influences that flows through our conscious and unconscious awareness. Usually, we do not notice these subtle fields of influence, but in my current state I could clearly distinguish their distinct patterns of vibration. Together they formed the seamless tissue of Manifesting Intelligence.*

*These porous fields of energy are focused by our individual bodies, but they are not confined there. Any specific body-mind configuration lives for a time, but its field endures as a cell in still larger fields. My personal body-mind would end, but another would materialize to take up where it left off. In this way, my individual energy field would grow and evolve as the Soul-Field I am part of grows and evolves.*

*In addition, my life experience would become part of the collective field of my species. Every experience I have ever had, including all my session experiences, will become part of the collective learning of my people. It will become part of their collective memory. No absolute boundaries in either space or time. Only the blending of fields of energy with many levels of intelligence running through it all.*

*As part of this instruction, sessions dating back ten years were reviewed and placed in perspective. The purpose was to show me how the various pieces fit into this larger mosaic. Pieces that had been incomplete now appeared complete, and the whole cohered.*

## **The Cycle of Purification**

This was such a rich and illuminating session that what happened in the next three sessions caught me completely by surprise. This jarring sequence eventually led me to recognize a dynamic operating in the sessions that I had not fully grasped until now. Though I discovered this

dynamic at this particular stage, I eventually came to see that it is not a level-specific dynamic but one that repeats itself at multiple levels of consciousness, making it an important feature of psychedelic practice. This dynamic is the *cycle of purification*.

After the bliss of the 28th session, my next three sessions were filled with extreme nausea, sickness, and physical malaise. It went on for hours each session. Though these sessions were spread over several months, in their misery, they felt like a single session. When this cycle started, I was mystified that the visionary splendor of the 28th session would be followed by such gut-wrenching distress, but here I was, floating in a sea of riveting discomfort, forced to endure something that was extremely unpleasant but otherwise devoid of content. The energy was very high, causing me to throw up so many times that I ruptured blood vessels in my face.

In the fourth session in this series (S 32), the cleansing deepened. Now instead of being dissolved into acute physical distress, my awareness kept fragmenting again and again until I became completely and utterly Plural, which I capitalize to signal the distinctly archetypal quality of this experience. The more I became Many, the more confused things became. I kept surrendering to this fragmentation until eventually I found myself trapped in a world of utter chaos. My experience was completely inscrutable, without even the organization provided by suffering. Then the breakthrough occurred.

*Suddenly, or not so suddenly, I can't be sure, the tension of being stuck that had been building for four sessions shifted, and I began to sense an extraordinary feeling of release. I was not aware of anything that might explain this transition as my experiences were hopelessly chaotic and I could see no order in them whatsoever. All I know is that after months of being caught in a spiderweb of psychedelic chaos, of being unable to move, to comprehend, to think, or even to experience coherently, suddenly, I began to experience an extraordinary freedom. This freedom was delicious beyond description. Extraordinary relief and thanksgiving. For hours I soaked in this freedom that was surprisingly devoid of cognitive content. (S 32)*

When I tried to make sense of these experiences, I first applied Grof's perinatal theory to them, but while certain perinatal elements were present—nausea, a sense of entrapment, and release—many other elements were missing. There was no existential crisis, no confrontation with the

meaninglessness of existence, and no physical seizures—all of which had been present in earlier sessions. And while the chaos and loss of coherence were reminiscent of ego-death, experientially, this particular chaos cut much deeper and marked a more fundamental unraveling than the death of my personal ego.

Then, looking through my notes, I found the seed of a concept that had been introduced in the 28th session, which seemed to address this pattern of symptoms. There it was called the “cycle of healing,” but as my understanding of this cycle deepened in the years ahead, I began to call it the cycle of purification.

*The core of the cycle is this: increased awareness triggers the surfacing of toxins in the system that in turn precipitates a crisis of disease followed eventually by a higher level of health. This cycle operates at many levels—at the physical level, the psychological level, and even the historical level. (S 28)*

My first entry into the higher energy of archetypal reality (S 24) had been followed immediately by the purification of shamanic dismemberment in Grinding the Bones (S 25). Being emptied of the passions of human existence had been a form of purification that had helped my awareness stabilize beyond the species-mind. I think that something similar was happening inside these four sessions. I think that the purity and clarity of the state of causal consciousness I briefly entered in session 28 triggered a physical detoxification so intense that it lasted four sessions.

States of consciousness are also states of body. Higher states of consciousness demand higher functioning bodies. Causal consciousness is an exceptionally pure state of awareness. Entering this condition triggers a spontaneous purging of impurities from one’s body and mind. I don’t know what these impurities consist of, exactly. I see them as the biochemical correlates of our petty judgments, our lower sentiments, and our self-cherishing emotions—anything that distorts the unity that is emerging in our embodied awareness. Johannes Tauler, a student of Meister Eckhart and one of the great Rhineland mystics of the fourteenth century, spoke of the demands that spiritual realization makes on the body when he said in one of his sermons, “Believe me, children, one who would

know about these matters would often have to keep to his bed for his bodily frame could not support it.”<sup>\*48</sup>

In the years that followed, this pattern of breakthrough followed by detoxification repeated itself like clockwork in my sessions as the spiral of initiation continued to turn. I found that after each major breakthrough to a deeper level of consciousness, there was often a turgid “carrying out the garbage” quality to the sessions that followed, so much so that I came to dread the sessions that immediately followed a major breakthrough. An analogy from mining comes to mind. After an explosion opens a new vein of ore deep in the mountain, you still have to carry away the rocks to get complete access to its riches.

The cycle of purification is the combustion cycle of growth in sustained psychedelic work. The essence of the cycle is this. Being propelled into a deeper level of reality shifts one into a higher energetic state, and this higher energy “shakes loose” impurities from one’s mental, emotional, and physical being. In subsequent sessions, one’s system works to empty itself of these toxins as it continues to absorb the purity and intensity of this new energy. By sweeping out the old to make way for the new, eventually a clearer and stronger energetic platform is established on which future sessions will build.

Let me take this one step further. When this cycle of purification reaches particularly deep, it becomes a *cycle of death and rebirth*. I had originally thought that death and rebirth was a one-time event, but after going through this cycle multiple times at different levels of consciousness, I began to realize that in psychedelic sessions, “*death*” is *actually a very intense form of purification*.

After you have died and been reborn many times in your sessions, eventually the very concept of death begins to lose its meaning. You learn through repetition that at the deepest level of your being, it is impossible to die. The form that we are can be shattered, our reality can be repeatedly destroyed, but our innermost essence always reemerges. The phoenix always rises. When the process of purification reaches particularly deep, when it reaches so deep that it begins to dissolve the structure of our life as we have known it, it becomes *purification unto death*. When it empties us of all that we have known and all that we have been, a crisis is reached



where what we have been collapses and we are carried forward into a new level of reality.

This breakthrough is a genuine rebirth because at this new level “we” are no longer what we had been before. We have become a different *kind* of being with new capacities and access to new categories of experience. In this transition, there is continuity of awareness (the thread of memory) but a discontinuity of capacity (we can experience things we could not experience before). If after stabilizing at this new level we continue to drive forward, the combustion cycle of purification will begin again, and we will eventually enter a new cycle of death and rebirth as new levels of reality continue to open.

## **Reincarnation and Collective Purification**

I now want to put on the table one final insight that emerged during this period, but to do so will require a substantial expansion of our frame of reference. Here I want to expand the cycle of purification to include the entire human species functioning as a single organism. To make this transition, we need to return to the concept of reincarnation.

The literature on reincarnation almost always discusses rebirth from the perspective of the individual soul. Karma and rebirth are presented as the engine driving the soul’s individual evolution. Though we all incarnate, the dynamics of collective reincarnation are seldom discussed, except as they apply to small groups of people, such as lovers, friends and family, or people caught in some collective tragedy, such as a natural disaster. I include my own work in this assessment. In *Lifecycles*, I too kept the discussion of reincarnation focused at the level of the individual soul and one’s soul family. It’s not that this perspective is false, but given the breadth of the collective experiences reported in this chapter, it now appears to me to be incomplete.

To think of reincarnation exclusively in terms of the individual soul is to be caught in a kind of atomistic thinking characteristic of *psychic level* discourse, where one experiences the spiritual world as being composed of separate spiritual beings. It is not that this reality is false, but when consciousness opens to the *subtle level* of reality, the connective tissue of life begins to stand out more. At this deeper level, individual souls can

sometimes be experienced as cells in a larger *species soul*. These are not alternative truths but simultaneous truths reflecting different layers of the complex fabric of existence.

If humanity is as deeply interwoven and interconnected as the experiences presented here suggest, then we should not be surprised to discover that there is a *collective dynamic operating inside reincarnation itself*. My thinking began to shift in this direction when I had the following experience of collective karma in session 20.

*One vision made a particularly deep impression on me today. It was a vision of karma that de-emphasized the individual and emphasized the larger being that was evolving itself in the billions of karmic cycles unfolding simultaneously at any given moment in history. I was witnessing not the cycle of individual karma but much larger developmental cycles that emerge in history from all of our individual karmic patterns integrated into massive collective patterns within the species. I was witnessing Nature advance her own evolution through our many lives. The process was so beautiful and elegant that it impacted me deeply. The wisdom, intelligence, and love that created and orchestrated this vast mechanism of the perpetual growth of our species was astounding. (S 20)*

This early experience of the collective dynamics of karma deepened in the present series of sessions when the cycle of purification expanded to encompass the entire human species. Now I witnessed the dynamics of reincarnation operating inside humanity's evolution *as a species*. In the following session, the expansion of time and space was enormous, marking a particularly deep entry into subtle level reality.



## Session 29

*After hours of extremely high-energy purification, I began to experience physical existence as a unified field, as an unbroken tissue or matrix. Individual life-forms were crystallizations of this matrix. My very incarnation was a distillation of this living fabric. Both my virtues and my imperfections, my strengths and my weaknesses were part of its self-evolution.*

*In this context, I saw that the cycle of purification pertains not only to individuals but also to humankind as a whole as it reincarnates again and again through history. In order to evolve itself beyond its current level of development, the unified fabric of human consciousness was systematically cleansing itself of the legacy of its past through the coordinated reincarnation of billions of people who carried that legacy into their incarnations.*

*Experiencing human existence as a completely unified field made everything much easier to understand. The latticework of Mind that saturates and coordinates our individual lives has a logic to it that subsumes our individual perspectives. Today, physical reality was dissolving into its underlying matrix, and with it the reality of individual psyches disappeared. What I had previously conceptualized in atomistic terms as individual people choosing to reincarnate in order to clear their personal karmic patterns, I was now experiencing as a centralized decision to incarnate entire generations to cleanse the human mind-field of its collective karmic legacy. I saw no sustainable distinctions between individuals, only the web of life operating in an integrated, unified manner.*

*Our current historical period appeared to be one of collective detoxification and healing. The cultural gains we had made (around slavery, racism, gender discrimination, species-ism) were flushing to the surface toxins buried deep within the collective psyche. It was emphasized that this stage of detoxification would be followed by something new and exciting. The incarnating of these toxins was not simply about healing our past, it was also about laying the foundation for a new future for humanity.*

This visionary experience of the entire human species reincarnating with common purpose, taking on itself the burden of collective purification in order to advance a collective unfolding, opened a new world of understanding to me. It was my first experience of a theme that would be repeated and deepened in the years ahead. This shift of perspective from *individual* to *collective intention* in reincarnation radically expanded my understanding of the scale of intelligence operating in history.

With this transition, the final wall between our individual evolution and humanity's collective evolution came down. Individual karma and collective karma became completely transparent to each other. I saw that individuals and humanity were evolving together in an incredibly subtle and synergistic dance. This interplay of the individual and the species became the central theme of *Dark Night, Early Dawn*.

The visionary experiences reported in this chapter extend our line of sight so far beyond the physical horizon that I cannot provide any evidence to support them other than the possibility of their being replicated by other journeyers. It is experience, naked and undefended, and there it must rest. And yet, I wish I could reach into my heart and give the reader a taste of these experiences. To actually touch the intelligence of the universe operating at such great depth and breadth changes forever how you experience life.

## A Note on Learning How to Learn in Psychedelic States

One of the great challenges of entering intense psychedelic states of consciousness is learning how to learn from experiences that are breaking all the rules as they redefine the possible. In these states, our deepest instincts are often overturned and reversed. One learns to yield to, even welcome the offensive rather than pull back from it. Painful experiences can become something you seek out rather than avoid. The utterly bizarre can become the familiar so many times that you cannot anticipate what shape the next twist of learning will take. You may find yourself stuck in some endless repetitive maze where it is not clear what is happening, what you are doing to perpetuate this stalemate, or what you might do (or stop doing) to shift the situation. It may not even be clear whether this is a situation you can influence or whether it is something you simply must endure, as the following excerpt illustrates.

*No matter how hard I tried or how many different strategies I explored, I could not slip the experiential bonds that held me fast. My struggle lasted an excruciatingly long time. I tried active strategies and passive strategies. I experimented with a hundred forms of surrender. I looked for ways to “die,” searching out whatever that might mean in this context. My repeated failure gave me many opportunities to step back and reassess my situation. I reviewed everything that I had learned in previous sessions about navigating these impasses. I knew that death was but a metaphor for complete surrender. I knew that you sometimes had to make heroic choices before the walls would come tumbling down. I knew that sometimes you had to look repeatedly with no expectations to really see what was being shown you. I tried everything I could, but nothing worked. I stayed stuck in this spot, hovering between two worlds for what seemed like endless time. (S 26)*

The experiential contexts in which you are asked to learn are so extreme and so unprecedented that you must learn a new way of learning. Through practice, I am slowly finding how to work with these states, how to open to their distinctive possibilities, how to receive the radically unknown. I am learning to watch with reduced expectations, to step back and observe, to experiment, and to use synchronicities in the music. Above all, I am learning to bracket my assumptions. Bracketing one's assumptions is inherent in all learning, of course, but the difference with psychedelic states is the degree of bracketing required. Anything you

believe is true, you may discover is false. What is “unthinkable” may turn out to be completely natural. Anything you believe you are, you may discover you are not.

There is a distinctive feeling that accompanies this kind of radical learning. It is a flying-by-the-seat-of-your-pants, hair-on-fire spectacle of wonder. It is the wonder of coming to the brink of the known world and risking everything by plunging over the edge. To learn at this level is to fold back the covers of the universe. It is a completely intoxicating and never forgotten experience.

## **A Flash of “God”**

I would like to close this chapter with a final experience that took place near the end of this series of sessions and that pointed to where the sessions would be going next. Before doing so, however, I need to mark a change that has taken place in the cleansing portion of these sessions.

We have seen cleansing take many forms already. Early on, it was turning my personal identity inside out, then it was embracing the collective fury of the ocean of suffering followed by the fiery transition into archetypal reality. This was followed by shamanic dismemberment and then the nauseating detoxification triggered by first contact with causal consciousness. At every stage, I’ve tried to identify the logic behind the cleansing, to mark what is being emptied and why. Starting in session 32, a new form of cleansing entered the picture—a deep fragmenting into Many, leading to impenetrable chaos. This fragmentation into chaos continued for many sessions, indicating that something new had begun. Every surrender to the unknown involves an element of chaos, of course, but this was more than that. This marked a particularly deep undoing.

Rather than try to explain this particular form of cleansing now, I want to simply note it and reserve judgment on it until we see where it goes. As a general rule of thumb, you often cannot understand what is taking place in a session from the perspective of the level of consciousness you are in. It is only after you have transitioned to the next level of consciousness that the rationale behind a particular dynamic may become apparent. In these trials, we must trust the universe without understanding why things are

unfolding the way they are. Fortunately, the universe rewards our trust, as it did here.



## Session 33—A Flash of “God”

*The release in session 32 had been so profound that I did not know what to expect in today’s session. Even so, when the session opened, I was surprised to find myself slipping into the shadows of fragmentation again. Against the primal songs, I dissolved into an extremely unpleasant, dark chaos.*

*The core of my experience was that where there had previously been an ordered singularity, there was now only a hopelessly disordered Plurality. The chaos continued to deepen for a long time until I despaired of knowing where it would end or how it could ever resolve itself. I was pulled through so many breaking points that it seemed like this could go on forever. I had no bearings either of content or endurance. I have long pondered the many forms that death can take in these sessions, and today I register that, for me at least, chaos is a deeper layer of the unraveling than pain.*

*I was in the chaos, I was the chaos, when suddenly everything began to dissolve in a rainfall of brilliant, sparkling white light. The light was reverberating ecstasy, an indescribable joy. The transition was unstable, and soon I was again immersed in waves of confusion. From within this confusion, I remembered the experience of light and focused on it, and in this way eventually established myself in the light. Now I was light—actually, fully, and absolutely. To grasp the experience, you have only to grasp the experience of being light—to have the expanse, the depth, and the simultaneity of light. I did not stay in this condition long, but it was the pivot to a rich afternoon.*

*From this incredible day, there is one experience that stands out above all the others. Life was spread out in front of me in a captivating display of exquisite diversity, subtlety, and finesse. I was enjoying the splendor of life’s harmonious complexity when suddenly I experienced this same reality as a single, unified field. Unity hit me like a lightning bolt. The experience was so concentrated, so intense that it blasted me instantly beyond all previous frames of reference.*

*It withdrew as suddenly as it had come, leaving me stumbling about, picking up the pieces of my mind, trying to comprehend what had just happened. Making associations in the rapture left by its withdrawal, I knew that this had been an encounter with a reality that in previous centuries would have been labeled “God.” God is One. All is One. How naïve I have been. How completely unprepared for what lies ahead. I spent the remaining hours of the session digesting this experience, which could not have lasted more than one second.*

## **Addendum: Plato, Jung, and Archetypes**

The concept of archetypes has a long and complex history from the pre-Socratic philosophers to Carl Jung, a history that has been succinctly

summarized by Richard Tarnas in his extraordinary books *The Passion of the Western Mind* (1991) and *Cosmos and Psyche* (2006). Plato gave the concept its classical formulation. At the heart of his vision of reality is a transcendent intelligence that orders and informs all things. Archetypes are the timeless Universals or Forms within this intelligence that give the world its structure, the master blueprints of creation, as it were. Plato saw these Forms as being perfect, unchanging, and super-ordinate to matter.

In his early and middle years, Jung gave a more psychological reading to the archetypes, seeing them as inherited psychological structures within the collective unconscious, innate “dispositions to act” that precede and shape individual experience. He saw them as behavioral tendencies with pictorial counterparts, the dominants of the collective unconscious. In his later years, Jung stepped one step closer to Plato by extending his understanding of archetypes beyond the psychological domain. His study of synchronicity led him to see archetypes as principles operating not just in our minds but also in the larger sphere of nature itself, connecting our inner experience and outer circumstances in meaningful and striking ways.

When I use the term *archetypal*, I am borrowing from both these thinkers while at the same time qualifying their formulations. First, I use the term in a quasi-Platonic sense to point to a level of reality beyond space-time that informs and structures space-time. I say “quasi-Platonic” because I did not experience the “pure Forms” or “timeless Universals” that Plato describes. As I experienced it, the archetypal domain is a living reality that is always changing, though much more slowly and on a different order of time than physical reality.

Second, I use the term in a quasi-Jungian sense to describe patterns in the collective unconscious of humanity—patterns of collective memory, collective thought, collective learning, and even collective physiology. Like Jung, I understand the collective psyche to be the matrix within which our individual psyches operate, underpinning and influencing all our psychological, emotional, and mental processes. However, I see the collective psyche as being more dynamic than Jung did. I see it as itself learning and evolving over time, and therefore I see archetypes at this level as evolving over time. I also see them as more numerous than the relatively small handful of archetypes Jung analyzed.

In these respects, my view of the collective unconscious has been influenced by Rupert Sheldrake and his work on morphic fields and formative causation, which I have found to be deeply congruent with my psychedelic experience. From Sheldrake's perspective, the collective psyche, or species-mind, influences its individual members, as Jung suggests. But Sheldrake goes further than Jung in proposing that the collective psyche also receives and integrates the learning of its members. Sheldrake envisions a complex feedback loop operating between the species-mind and individuals that allows the species-mind to learn as its members learn. Collective learning progresses more slowly than individual learning, but when the species-mind eventually grasps a truth, the resulting shift ripples through the entire species resulting in faster learning curves.<sup>\*49</sup>

Going one step beyond Sheldrake, I see the species-mind as lying between two systems of consciousness. I believe it is open "from below" to the individual psyches of its members, as Sheldrake suggests, but I also see it as open "from above" to more inclusive fields of consciousness. It not only learns from its individual members, it is also informed by more encompassing levels of consciousness, as suggested by the sessions reported in this chapter. This throws new light on the problem of creativity, which is a problem that Sheldrake has acknowledged his theory cannot solve. As many highly creative people have reported, deep creativity is often experienced as an infusion from above, and I suspect that something like this takes place higher up the Great Chain of Being as well.



# EIGHT

## A Benediction of Blessings

Sessions 36–43

*This was Saccidananda,  
Being-Consciousness-Bliss,  
the Fertile Void,  
Mother of All Things,  
the Buddha Womb.*

SESSIONS 40

After eighteen months of exploring archetypal reality and the sinews of our collective being, the year that followed was one of extraordinary blessings. It was a veritable benediction of blessings. It drew to a head processes that had been building for years as I stepped into the Oneness of causal reality. In this respect, these next sessions represent something of a high point on the journey. Not an end point, but a piece of high ground that brought a new understanding and a deeper intimacy with life. This high ground then became the jumping off point into the final five years of the journey.

What follows are four of the eight sessions from this year. I've shortened them to focus on the essential elements. The second is the longest and most complex, and I will discuss it later in the chapter. Recall in these eight sessions was sometimes challenging, telling me that I was crossing a new threshold. With repetition I became more familiar with the

territory and absorbed its patterns and rules. The names I gave these sessions are:

- S 36 The Forest
- S 38 The Birth of the Diamond Soul
- S 40 Singing the Universe Away
- S 42 Jesus' Blood

Sharing these sessions has been harder than I expected, and it will likely get harder still in the chapters ahead. I am a private person by nature, and it is not easy for me to open to public scrutiny experiences of such deep and personal joy. It feels like I am letting the reader into my inner sanctum, into that place in each of our hearts where we store our most precious treasures. I release these sessions by reminding myself that what is important is not that I experienced these things but that they are available for all of us to experience.



## Session 36—The Forest

*This session represented a radical jump in experiential categories that was absolutely intoxicating. New experiences and a new way of thinking opened today.*

*The theme of the opening movement was: "If only you could see reality as it truly is!" Layer after layer was being pulled away as I moved beyond physical existence and the categories of physical existence. As in the past two sessions, there was no pain and no chaos, only a pervasive sense of disorientation. It felt as though I had actually taken a smaller dose of LSD. How could I be experiencing so many dramatic transitions and yet still be so centered? Assuming that the energy of today's session was as intense as previous sessions, where was this energy focused?*

*In pursuit of answers to these questions, I turned to address that small, stubborn remnant of unlovability I had been processing in the previous two sessions. I don't know how or why, but soon after focusing on this problem, it suddenly opened and everything changed. There was no explanation; no content emerged for me to examine. I simply moved quickly, quietly, effortlessly into a new reality. I entered a world that moved according to completely different patterns than any I have known before.*

*In this entire world, there were no separate "units," no "things." There was diversity and movement, color, shape, and form, but no isolation. Life here was not the assemblage of parts but the harmonious expression of a unified whole rippling through life, the way wind ripples through a wheat field. It was as though the wheat*

*knew there were no separate stalks but only one "wheat" coming into expression through millions of strands.*

*The vision that mediated this experience was that of a Forest—thousands of trees and grasses, hundreds of species rendered transparent to the universal energies of soil and sun moving through them. Diversity did not rupture oneness. Oneness expressed itself in diversity without itself falling into diversity. "If only you could see reality as it truly is." As I saw it today, reality was a fluid energy expressing itself in diversity. The trees were many, but there was a single life force that flowed through them all, ignoring completely whether they were pines, oaks, or maples. This underlying energy brings everything into existence, keeps everything alive, and reabsorbs everything at its end. It knows no divisions whatsoever. My usual divided reality was completely unreal. Division truly is an illusion.*

*The reality I was in preserved the forms of Earth. There was activity, process, movement, and people. Everything was as it normally is except that there was no "I" present anywhere, either in me or in any other. I kept thinking to myself, "Nothing has changed except that I'm not here. 'I' do not exist." What a cosmic joke! What a relief! What freedom! Here was my form, my processes, my distinctive patterns of awareness, but there was no "I" to be found. It was simply gone. Feeling but no feeler; thinking but no thinker. What quiet, expansive joy. It continued for hours.*

## **Collective Import**

*There was a second component here that is harder to acknowledge but just as real. I could feel that the spiritual opening taking place was not just a private experience but was also a collective experience that touched many lives. The sessions were being used to leverage something beyond my personal being. Every time I come up against the collective import of what I once viewed as my personal work, I draw back. I have to overcome great resistance to even admit the concept. "You inflate your significance," I say to myself. "Just another ego trip." And yet, my heart tells me this is not so.*

*In order to be true to my experience, my first loyalty is to record it as accurately as I can. If I do this, I record that this awakening to Oneness reached out and nourished an enormous field. Just as earlier sessions had pulled the toxins of suffering out of the collective field of humanity, now the experience of no-self was being infused into the collective field. To the extent that this took cognitive form at all, it took the form of becoming comfortable with the loss of boundaries. Surrendering the boundaries of race, of class, of nationality, of religion. Wherever we had drawn boundaries in history, there was fear. I seemed to be mediating a calming energy that encouraged the dissolving of these boundaries in the collective psyche. This went on for a long time as boundary after boundary kept falling away. Soothing energies moved through me into the human field, making it a bit easier for people to yield to the flow of historical events that were challenging the unreal divisions humanity had drawn.*

*On a more personal note, I record that the threads that were originally woven into my incarnation feel to be drawn from the collective psyche. How this works, I don't know. What is the measure of personal and collective? Where are the boundaries? I don't know. But from deep within these experiences, it sometimes feels that my entire person derives from the collective human field, like pinching a*

*tightly woven tablecloth and twisting it into a standing shape. It feels like the threads of my individual being are almost wholly exhausted in this collective cloth, that my person has been brought into existence as an instrument to rescue the whole.*

*In this condition, I ask: Is there anyone here beyond these collective threads? Are there no personal threads at all? Where is the individuality of my soul? Is there no true individuality? Will it come into view as my vision adjusts to this new reality? Have I simply lost my ability to see it as I enter the joy of this unified field?*

## Comment

Buddhism teaches that there are no separate things in existence, that all conditioned reality is characterized by *śūnyatā*, “emptiness” or “transparency.” As the Dalai Lama explains in *The Universe in a Single Atom*, “Things and events are ‘empty’ in that they can never possess any immutable essence, intrinsic reality or absolute ‘being’ that affords independence” (2005). Nothing holds its existence by itself but is always transparent to the underlying matrix of cause and effect. When one experiences emptiness, one experiences the complete absence of an independent self, not only in one’s own person but in all reality. In this session, I experienced emptiness and Oneness as two sides of the same coin. When we experience the universe as One, it is clear that independent, separate things do not exist. Conversely, when the separate self dissolves completely, the Oneness of life spontaneously rises in our awareness.

At the end of chapter 6, I asked: If a person can take on the suffering of others at the subtle level of consciousness and relieve that suffering to some degree, why does the suffering ever cease for an individual while it still continues for the species-mind as a whole? This session answers this question. The work of draining poisons out of the collective psyche from “below” is followed by pouring blessings into it from “above.” When we move into levels of reality beyond the species-mind, we do not abandon humanity, but rather we become more useful to humanity by acting on it from a higher position.



## ***Session 38—The Birth of the Diamond Soul***

*The Tibetan chanting carried me into a deeply chaotic state that was very disorienting. I was not experiencing pain, only confusion and chaos, and then fear, though I could not find anything to be afraid of. The confusion seemed to be reaching deeper and deeper into me, leaving less of “me” to orient to. The power of the*

*thundering chants was dissolving me, breaking me into incoherent pieces. I kept choosing to open to the process, letting it draw from me whatever it would.*

*After what felt like hours of this, I began to feel exhausted and completely spent. Now there was a panic growing in the chaos as my feelings shifted from stoic endurance to exhausted desperation. "I can't take much more of this. Please stop. Please let me go." I was completely and utterly overwhelmed by these voices that were dissolving me with their thundering cadence. I could not remember anything that had happened in any previous session. I was completely incoherent. Once desperate to escape the chanting, now I was simply thundering vibration itself. And the chanting continued on and on.*<sup>\*50</sup>

*From somewhere the sense eventually came that it was time to move on, and I signaled this to my sitter. I was so disoriented, however, that I had absolutely no idea what should happen next. Then the spacious music of Paul Winter came on. In response to its soothing rhythms, my shattered mind began to move again. It slowly curved back in around the edges, coaxing me into motion with comforting strokes of intimacy. It felt to me as if I were a standing dead man, as if I had died and not even had the decency to fall down. The meaninglessness of the category of death cascaded through me, and I laughed.*

## *Paradise*

*From the middle of a profound emptiness, I began to stir. Against complete darkness, I felt myself to be the silhouette of a human being, completely empty within. The figure began to move, and as I did a world of color sprang into existence around me. It was the world of nature, of trees, birds, grasses, and flowers. As I moved within this familiar-looking world, suddenly I began to experience it in an entirely new manner that was completely and utterly intoxicating.*

*I was experiencing its many pieces all at once. Birds flying between trees and the trees themselves were not separate things but flowing strands in a single field. These strands were sparkling white and glistening with a diamond-bright luminosity. My previous experience of nature had been so diluted and diminished. I had been able to experience only one piece of it at a time. Now I was experiencing the ecstatic wholeness of it. Not an amorphous wholeness that blurred the distinctions between things but a brilliantly clear wholeness that preserved and delighted in the distinctions. I was not swept into this world quickly but entered it step-by-step, maintaining a clear perception of events and reveling in the ever-widening circles of experience that were opening to me. What exquisite ecstasy!*

*As I began to move about, I suddenly found that I had abilities completely beyond any I had ever imagined. Capacities that I never dreamed possible were now part of my spontaneous nature. I was like a kid in heaven's candy store. It took me awhile to realize what was happening. These new abilities were actually new ways of being conscious. I was suddenly able to experience textures of reality, modalities of existence that had been completely unavailable to me seconds before, that I had never touched in any previous session. Any lingering unfulfilled dreams or aspirations from my present earthly life suddenly fell away from me as irrelevant. The deepest leftover longings of my heart simply dropped away in the face of the simplest, most elementary mode of just being conscious at this new level.*

*As I moved through this reality, new constellations of experience kept opening to me, and each carried with it a different form of ecstasy. I cannot describe these experiences because they correspond to nothing in space-time. Possibilities were opening faster than I could keep track of. I knew that I was just scratching the surface of this realm and that it would take eons for me to understand and tap its full potential. I felt like a child, deliriously happy to have been given more blessings than I could ever have imagined.*

## **The Diamond Soul**

*The jump in experience from chaos to Paradise was in time followed by still another jump that was even larger than the first. The insights and experiences that follow derive from a different order of reality altogether, and words will be even less satisfactory to give a sense of their proportion or impact.*

*The falling away of the concerns of my present historical personality carried with it a sense of regathering the energies of my life. It was as though I was regathering energies that had been strewn over centuries of time through many incarnations. As I did this, I became step-by-step what I had been before I had incarnated in space-time, but at the same time I also focused and clarified what had been accomplished by entering space-time. So there was both the sense of return, with a profound resonance of homecoming, and also the sense of realization of accomplishment, of seeing clearly what had been the purpose of the entire exercise.*

*Once the first transition beyond my present historical personality was made, it became easier to regather other layers of energy. I felt that these other layers pertained to other lifetimes, but I could not see specific details. As I regathered wave upon wave of energy, I rose to quieter and quieter levels of existence and into deeper intimacy with an Intelligence that spoke with the authority of "God." Whatever its ultimate status in the cosmic matrix, it profoundly engulfed my minuscule awareness.*

*As I ascended through these levels, many teachings from years of sessions returned and organized themselves into profound experiential exercises. The pieces of the puzzle were coming together, carrying me into an extremely concentrated distillation of experiential instruction. Many of the components of this teaching were familiar from previous sessions, but today they were demonstrated to me with devastating power and impact. I will first describe the conceptual content of the teaching and then the experiential aspects.*

## **The Teaching**

*Reduced to its essence the teaching was this: Matter is the canvas that mind paints upon. It has no capacity to act apart from the animating presence of consciousness and is responsive to the direction of consciousness. Therefore, whatever our experience is in space-time, we must have the courage to sit still and face the fact that we are experiencing nothing but the manifestation of our own consciousness. No matter how terrible the pain, no matter how horrendous the injustice or inscrutable the logic, our experience in space-time is the direct expression of our consciousness in a higher order of reality.\*[51](#)*

*If we do not face this terrible fact, we fail to understand the most basic fact of life. Matter is the canvas on which we practice and refine the art of creating. It is the notebook in which we draw sketches and explore possibilities. If our experience in this life is convoluted and torn by conflicting forces, it was transparently obvious that this was caused by the carryover of exercises from previous lifetimes in space-time. The experience of matter is extremely intense and leaves a powerful impression on the mind. If we go to see a frightening movie, later when we are home safe in our beds, we may have nightmares. Likewise, the impressions physical existence makes on our consciousness carry themselves over into other incarnations. It is as if we have tried to sketch too many drawings on the same page and the pictures interfere with each other. "What we are is the result of everything we have ever thought," says the Dhammapada. And yet, there is a method to this madness, a direction to our experimentation.*

*We move into space-time to experiment with our creative abilities. But the intensity of space-time experience is such that we tend to get caught in the echoes of our experience. Home safe in our cosmic beds after death, we get caught by our dreams and return again and again to Earth, weaving new layers into the dream. Eventually, however, the time comes when we begin to collect the tangled threads of our physical experiences. Lifetime by lifetime, we rewind the threads of our dreaming and regather the energy of all our human exercises.*

*As I rewound the threads of my existence, I began to experience more clearly what the entire exercise of reincarnation had been about. It had not been about what happened in any individual lifetime. It had been about learning how to control the powers of creativity that were my innate nature. We were, in effect, learning how to be gods, learning how to create.*

*The fact that matter follows mind implies the ability to control one's physical experience through the power of consciousness. This cannot be done at the level of the ego but requires the coherent integration of all the lives one has lived. Beginning to access these former lives first brings forward their unresolved fragments, causing their unfinished karma to manifest in our life. Eventually, however, these fragments are healed and the threads are rewound. As this happens, we become more internally coherent, and our physical existence begins to become more transparent to choices originating in our Soul and the deeper fields that our Soul is part of. To begin to be able to consciously direct our experience inside space-time instead of being unconsciously dragged around by our past represented a major accomplishment.*

*This step, however, was quickly superseded by yet another realization. To be able to control one's physical existence was a good thing, but to learn that physical existence itself served the purpose of developing and refining our creative ability, this was a development whose significance radically transcended any physical lifetime. This was what the exercise of space-time was all about. The goal seemed to be about becoming a fully conscious creative being.*

## **The Experience**

*These discoveries were not just an intellectual exercise as I have described them here but a series of profound experiential realizations. Regathering the energy of my former lives led to the conscious control of my physical existence. My historical*

existence became transparent to my Soul's conscious intent, with fewer complications arising from the shadows cast by pockets of unresolved karma. When I moved into the next level and discovered that the deeper purpose of the exercise was controlled creativity itself, a brilliant, diamond-like light broke forth from my chest.

I now understand why it is called *Diamond Consciousness*. Truly, our experience of physical light is but a metaphor for the intensity and brilliance of this energy. It had the characteristics of brilliant light, of sparkling luminosity, but also perfectly aligned density. It was extremely concentrated, like a laser, yet at the same time completely transparent. It was perfectly focused power. I suddenly knew that all my experiences in space-time over all these centuries served the cultivation of this *Diamond Energy*. This is what I am here for, what we are all here for, to learn how to consciously control this extraordinary power.

Let me backtrack to another layer of the experience. As I was re-assimilating my lives and ascending through various levels, I was also entering into intimate dialogue with a Presence that addressed me. It communed with me and "spoke" to me in messages that were only sometimes put into words. It was explaining to me what I was experiencing not so much with words but with direct illumination.

When I reached the point of *Diamond Light*, I was lifted beyond physical existence and beyond the bardo echoes of physical existence. It felt like I had re-assimilated all my incarnations on Earth, that I had brought back into one all my experiences in duality. From this point, which carried the flavor of both before and after physical existence, the Presence illumined for me the human project. With the deepest, most tender words of a divine parent, It said:

**"Go and create, My Children."**

It was setting us loose in a cosmos that contained many realms. The one I had just reemerged from was only one among many universes, some of which were physical, others not. We were small aspects of this Being, truly Its children, of the same type, only smaller in size and capacity.

Having just returned from a sojourn of countless years in space-time, I knew that our creative capacity was enormous. I knew, too, that our capacity for creating destruction and pain was also enormous. And yet, this Being was setting us free, placing absolutely no limits on our creative choices. Our absolute freedom seemed as precious to It as our creative ability. No limit was placed on our learning. "Go and create, My Children." How generous and terrible the conditions. How immeasurable the wisdom behind the exercise.

I was different from my surrounding environment, and the difference was the Light that was shining from me. It was what I now was—a defined speck of infinitely dense, infinitely transparent *Diamond Light*. This is what I had entered space-time to actualize. I could feel many universes around me to explore and grow in. I felt the truth of the ancient mandalas that depict multiple universes all overseen by a cadre of divinities, each focused in a different project. These too were about expanding and refining one's potential, about becoming more through the disciplined exercise of awareness.

"Go and create, My Children." The opportunities were infinite. I felt myself returning to a condition of undivided wholeness within myself. Regathering aspects that seemed to derive from some of these other realms, I rose through level after



level until I felt myself to be alone with the Source of my existence, suspended between worlds. The warmth of this reunion soaked me to the bone. The peace cannot be described.

There is nothing more I can say at this point except to note that the experience was both personal and collective. It felt like some enormous ball of intertwined threads that did not begin or end in my private life was dissolving into this Light. The threads that were originally twisted into my being derived in large measure from the collective, and therefore as this tangled knot dissolved into the Light, the luminosity flowed into the field of the species-mind, spreading itself deep into the fiber of the collective unconscious of my people.

## Comment

I will discuss this session later in the chapter, but here I want to point out that there is a certain tension between this session's experience of a true individuality emerging through reincarnation and the experience in session 36 of a nondual consciousness that sees no separate self anywhere in the world. My sessions embrace this tension. Their consistent vision is that this emerging Diamond Soul is completely compatible with emptiness. This post-egoic individuality is not a static, independent, or closed entity but *"open on all sides."* It lives in continuous exchange with the world.\*[52](#)



## Session 40—Singing the Universe Away

*The categories of this session were without precedent and seemed to represent almost a completely different genus of experience. My summary, therefore, will not adequately reflect the strangeness of today's experiences, and my pitiful summary stops far short of full disclosure.*

*The music was from the Bulgarian Women's Choir—"Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares." Early on there was a sense of a theme: "Today we work on reconciliation with the feminine." This involved many facets—my present life and former lives, human women and archetypal feminine forces. A variety of disruptions between myself and the feminine forces of life were being elicited and worked with. The sharp singing drew from me many unpleasant experiences of intrusive women, all smeared together. These experiences deepened and changed as the singing took me deeper into a strange state. In time the unpleasantness faded and was replaced by fascination, then by complete absorption.*

*Eventually, the theme of my death emerged amid the strangeness. It seemed somehow appropriate that after all the masculine pain I had endured in these sessions—wars, torture, physical violence—today my death was being elicited by women. Complete inversion (again). The theme of death continued to deepen until I realized that I was beginning to die. It seemed to move slowly and to take a long time. I knew that I was being consumed by a process that would leave absolutely no residue. I had just enough composure to know what was happening and to yield to*

*the process. I don't know if I could have resisted it if I tried, but I did not try. It felt unlike anything I had ever experienced before. Death was simply there, gnawing away at my being.*

*I did not die precipitously or with a sense of culmination as I had expected, but instead simply slipped smoothly at one point through a definitive transition into a new state. It was so easy. The transformation, though not dramatic, was profound. The death state was expansive and beatific. I had many visions of deep space filled with ethereal light. I was so grateful to be dead, and this gratefulness and expansiveness formed the backdrop to everything that followed.*

*My state is difficult to describe because it was so novel to me. I was not in the intense ecstasy of heavenly paradise as in session 38, nor was I absorbed in the image-filled cosmological vistas of earlier sessions. Today was simply death as I have never known death. Death moved me into a condition marked simply by unbounded expansiveness and ecstatic appreciation. I was so grateful to be where I was, so grateful to have died. The singing carried me deeper and deeper into this reality. It was as though I was listening to the voice of God singing me into her universe.*

*I stayed in this reality for hours. I cannot describe what I experienced here beyond the most superficial remnants. It is trivial, for example, to observe that this universe has many levels, but I experienced movement through many levels that felt archetypal and then beyond archetypal.*

*Then something happened that stunned and transfixed me. I was following the singing when suddenly the entire universe began to disappear. The singing simply erased the universe in a few deft strokes, smoothly and effortlessly dissolving it. I didn't know where I was. I was in a domain that was entirely devoid of content save for faint traces of the singing in the background. I was self-aware, but at the same time my awareness seemed to be infinite. The bliss caught me and held me transfixed for a long time, though the category of "time" had ceased to exist.*

*I intuitively knew that the singing had been guiding me here all day, that this was my destination. This was Saccida-nanda, Being Consciousness-Bliss, the Fertile Void, Mother of All Things, the Buddha Womb. I was stunned and eternally grateful.*

*In time the Void-Beyond yielded and content-filled experience returned, but the echoes and bliss of the Formless saturated everything that followed. For a long time, I lay quietly, completely enraptured with the singing of these wonderful women whose voices had become the voice of God singing the universe away. Content returned, but I cannot describe much more than its flavor. It was celebratory, appreciative, extremely clear, and feminine.*

*In the end, what stands out from today is this: death, great gratitude, extraordinary clarity, and, most strongly, the dissolving of the universe and the voices that sang it away.*

## Comment

In Hinduism, Saccidānanda is the name given the experience of ultimate reality. The word is composed of three roots that communicate the essence of the experience: *Sat-chit-ananda*—infinite being, infinite awareness, and

infinite bliss. In Buddhism, the Buddha Womb refers to the infinite source of all existence. As Anne Klein describes it in her book *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen*, the Buddha Womb is the infinite expanse from which all existence arises. She quotes the great eighth-century Tibetan sage Padmasambhava who said:

*This is the basis of all coming and going  
The place of arising of all existents,  
The womb of the mother consort.*<sup>\*53</sup>

This experience of the Void-Beyond was foreshadowed by an earlier experience of the Void that had taken place two years before in session 23, the session that contained the first vision of the master plan for humanity. It would have disrupted the flow of the narrative to have included it in that discussion, so I add it here as a supplement to this session.



## *The Void (S 23)*

*During the historical overview when I was being shown glimpses of the larger evolutionary plan for humanity, something happened that was intended to help me put what I was experiencing into perspective.*

*I was in a condition of consciousness that might best be described as “ancient.” Surveying what had been unfolding through billions of years of evolution and what would be emerging in humanity’s future, I was not so much in the material domain as in a domain that was responsible for generating material reality. Matter always exists at a specific time, but I was encompassing many time-moments simultaneously and so was stretched across time. The experience carried with it a sense of being “time-filled” or “ancient.”*

*In the middle of this grand tour, it was as if something said, “Just to put this into perspective,” and then the most extraordinary thing happened. The physical universe began to be folded up and put away. It was as simple as that, like one puts away Christmas decorations after the holidays. The physical universe, planets surging with vitality, whole galaxies teeming with life, started to be folded up and slipped into a background of total EMPTINESS. I immediately recognized that this was the Primal Void. I was being shown that matter and time are not ultimately real, that they emerge from and are at every moment sustained by something that is more real, something completely without form.*

*As the universe got smaller with each fold, I could feel billions of life-forms being slipped into the folds of the Void, and a protest rose within me. I did not want to let go of all this exquisitely beautiful form, everything that had been so painstakingly crafted through billions of years of evolution. Indeed, it was my love for the physical universe*

*that seemed to precipitate this extreme lesson—as if to break the spell that physical creation had on me, seen as I had seen it in the broad sweep of its evolutionary glory. My protests changed nothing, however, and the universe’s bursting vitality became fainter with each fold.*

*As the universe continued to shrink, my experience began to shift to what was swallowing it. What had been background was becoming foreground and capturing my attention. It was SILENCE like I had never experienced silence before. It was STILLNESS more still than I had ever known. And most strange of all, I experienced its emergence as a REMEMBERING. I was remembering something that it seemed I had lost contact with billions of years ago. The shock of remembering something so ancient left me stunned. In one second, it completely transformed my sense of what I was. Our memories define the boundaries of our being. In one sudden movement, I was remembering a sea of Infinite Formlessness that was the source of all Form, including my own form, and I knew that this was what “I” at root was.*

*The physical universe did not disappear entirely. At one point, the folding was simply stopped, and I am left wondering what would have happened if it had been allowed to continue. Just this partial disappearance into the Void, however, was sufficient to break the spell of matter and leave me awash with feelings of paradoxical fullness.*

Two months after session 40 and the formless bliss of Saccidānanda, a different manifestation of Oneness emerged in session 42—the warm embrace of Cosmic Love.



## Session 42—Jesus’ Blood

*As I again entered into the singing of “Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares,” its tightly packed harmonies shifted me as before into an intense condition of plurality. This time I flowed with the experience, allowing myself to become Many instead of simply being me. This continued for a long time, taking me through many places that are not important to me now. Eventually, I asked for the music to be changed, and “Jesus’ Blood Never Failed Me Yet” came on.<sup>\*54</sup> Over the next several hours, this repetitive hymn to humanity carried me into one of the most satisfying experiences I have ever had in a session.*

*In the midst of the powerful currents of plurality, I began to experience a white Light, first around the edges, then moving to the center. Gradually, the currents of plurality dissolved into the Light. The experience of being Many became an experience of being seamlessly extended throughout the Light, and I felt waves of gratitude wash through me. I was so deeply grateful to be where I was. How kind was the universe. How insignificant my death. In fact, the very category of “death” had been abandoned as inappropriate. From where I presently stood, the ego of separate existence felt like a foolish burden I was glad to have dropped off. How impoverished its capacity for experience. How narrow its vision. Enough of that; let me play in the Fields of the Lord.*

*I remember listening to the bum's frail voice singing his faith in God. As I listened, his voice opened me to humanity and suddenly I was one with us all, starting with the lost and poor, with the cast aside and overlooked. The warm currents of the uplifting refrain carried all of us into the Light as everything took on the inner radiance of that Eternal Light, becoming transparent to that reality. I was all of humanity and all of humanity was the Light. In this Light, I moved like a current in the ocean, both all and yet with my own distinctive pattern.*

*So spacious, so free. In becoming simple, my experience began to open. Though I was an individual, by becoming "uncomplicated" I suddenly reached across unimaginable distances, opened to unimaginable depths. Breadth and depth were distinctly different dimensions of the experience, each with its own characteristics.*

*BREADTH opened me to the world of humanity; it carried me beyond my individual experience into an underlying flow of collective human experience. Here, I and the many became one. DEPTH opened me to something entirely different. Through this mode of awareness, alternative universes came into view, alternative levels of reality underpinning the physical universe became present.*

*I cannot emphasize too strongly how experiential these changes were. The richness of these modes of experience took my breath away. Having lost my boundaries, I spread out into this field of experience like ripples spreading across a lake, like sound spreading through air. The resonant textures of the music vibrated through me, and I seemed to be more like vibration than anything else—definitely present in one "place" but open on all sides.*

## **Divine Love**

*For hours I bathed in this state of grace. Then I began to experience something new. An overwhelming Love surrounded me and moved through me in a tangible embrace.*

*When I first began to feel the edges of this Love, I became conscious of how little love like this I had known as a child. As this came more clearly into view, I felt the contrast between the enormous pain I had taken on in the sessions and the absence of unqualified love in my early life. The disparity between what I had done for others and what had not been done for me came sharply into focus. I looked deeply into this paradox, trying to fathom its harsh edges, and as I did I saw that the absence of deep love in my early life had been necessary to seed the pain that would drive me so relentlessly in my life. I saw that my desire to end the pain in my personal life had been what had motivated me to end the pain in the lives of others.*

*As I felt the poignancy of this simple fact, suddenly something opened and I felt a Deep Love, a Cosmic Love that had preceded my incarnation. A Presence reminded me of the love that had driven me to take this incarnation. In this Presence, I remembered a choice I had made, and as I did I was swept into a cosmic embrace. I was held there and caressed. Never have I known love like this. It spilled through me, filling every crevice, melting every ache. I wept as the Love soaked deeper and deeper into me, warming places cold for so many years.*

*The Presence somehow communicated a knowing to me that said, in effect, "Did you think that we would ask you to do this unattended, that love was not waiting*

*for you?" And now my entire life was encased in love, and the absence of love was only a temporary condition required to restore a larger flow of love in my species, a flow that was now running freely.*

*I wept soft tears. I wept on being restored to this primal condition. I wept on being brought home again. I was loved after all. I was loved and we were One. Never would we be separated again.*

## Comment

The connection between the blessings I received in these four sessions and my earlier work in the ocean of suffering was made explicit in the next session. In doing so, it affirmed the ancient teaching that everything we do for others eventually comes back to us in one form or another because life is one at its core. Once we experience the grace of this return, it generates an unusual feeling of gratitude for having been allowed to suffer on behalf of others.

*I saw that there was a direct correlation between the scope of the pain cleansed in the ocean of suffering and the magnitude of the Light that is beginning to explode inside me now. By immersing myself in the collective fabric of humanity, by taking on its pain and drawing its poison out of the human system, my being is now beginning to spontaneously manifest the higher energy that is emerging in history. Today I sensed that this Light will be coming into me over many sessions still to come but that it is somehow already present, already "won" through that cleansing. Something that is waiting for me when I die is beginning to work its way into my embodied consciousness on Earth. I feel so deeply grateful to have been given the opportunity to take on as much suffering as I have. (S 43)<sup>\*55</sup>*

On a separate matter, I can now bring closure to a question I left open in chapter 7. In session 33, the experience of dissolving into Many had generated a crisis of disorientation and chaos. Now in session 42, I am flowing with this experience more easily, indicating that this particular boundary has been successfully navigated. Becoming Many at the archetypal level appears to have been a final stepping-stone into causal Oneness, part of a systematic exercise of expansion from being small (the egoic self), to being archetypally Many, to being All That Is.

## Reflections

Taken together, these four sessions felt like the closing of a circle. They gave me a feeling of deep completion, a sense of inheriting blessings for work done. I had given something to the universe that was mine to give, and now the universe had given me back more treasures than I could hold. I felt completely and utterly satisfied.

As I write this account many years later, the larger arc of my sessions up to this point feels clear to me. Two years of intense physical and psychological purification had ended in my ego being turned inside out and broken open. Then the deeper work had begun, the work chosen by my soul before I was born. I stayed in the ocean of suffering for two years, draining rage and violence out of the collective human psyche. For this I received two gifts: experiencing the whole of my life from beginning to end and then being taken deep into the splendor of our universe. When the ocean of suffering ended, I was catapulted for a year and a half into archetypal reality and the collective fields of humanity. And now the blessings of Oneness, the Diamond Soul, the Fertile Void, and Cosmic Love.

The poetry of these four sessions makes further commentary unnecessary and perhaps even unwelcomed. Experience always trumps intellectual analysis, and my comments always feel like downshifting to a lower gear. And yet, I have always felt a responsibility to not just have these experiences but to do my best to make sense of them. The most meaningful parts may need no analysis at all, but other parts may be helped by being examined and clarified. This is especially true for the concept of the Diamond Soul, which will play a significant role in the coming chapters. I think this may also be a good place to address something I've not spoken of yet—how my sessions were touching the lives of my students, who knew nothing of my psychedelic practice. So in these brief reflections I will address three topics:

1. Dying and Causal Oneness
2. The Living Classroom
3. The Birth of the Diamond Soul

### ***1. Dying and Causal Oneness***

The experience of dying has changed in these four sessions in ways that throw an interesting light on the nature of causal reality. Dying has changed in three ways. First, in some sessions it appears to be getting easier to die.

*There was no explanation; no content emerged for me to examine. I simply moved quickly, quietly, effortlessly into a new reality. (S 36)*

*I did not die precipitously or with a sense of culmination as I had expected, but instead simply slipped smoothly at one point through a definitive transition into a new state. It was so easy. (S 40)*

Second, dying has somehow become a new experience: *“It felt unlike anything I had ever experienced before” (S 40)*. This was such a striking sensation that after the session I questioned how this could possibly be true. After going through so many deaths, how can dying become something genuinely new? And third, in one session even the very concept of death is discarded as no longer relevant: *“How insignificant my death. In fact, the very category of “death” had been abandoned as inappropriate” (S 42)*. A fundamental concept I have been using to interpret these experiences seems to be dissolving, but why?

The experience of dying is changing, I think, because in these sessions I was entering causal reality and causal reality operates by different rules than other levels of reality. At the causal level, the world moves as One. In the transparent Forest, in the sparkling luminosity of extra-samsaric reality, in the formless bliss of Saccidānanda, in the warm embrace of Cosmic Love, the world reveals its indissoluble Oneness. At this level of consciousness, the world is ever whole within itself, and the logic of wholeness is different from the logic of a world in pieces, even the large pieces of subtle level reality.

When dying has this distinctly effortless quality, it is as though effort would contradict the very truth of the reality one is entering. Causal Oneness has an *already-present* quality and an *all-at-once* quality. Oneness at this level is not something one enters by degrees, but rather it arises whole and complete. When duality is being dissolved this deeply, effort is extinguished because effort implies separation. Because there is no separation in Oneness, there can be no effort. One simply tumbles into



it. Similarly, death disappears as an interpretive category because in Oneness we discover that there never have been any separate parts to life in the first place, so there can be no death of a part. Here only illusion dies. In this way, dying becomes a new experience, unlike anything experienced before.

Causal Oneness transposes all our assumptions: *“If only you could see reality as it truly is!”* (S 36). It is so different from anything we have previously known that it catches us by surprise: *“What a cosmic joke!”* And my response to this joke?

*I was so grateful to be dead, . . . stunned and eternally grateful. (S 40)*

*I wept on being restored to this primal condition. I wept on being brought home again. I was loved after all. I was loved and we were One. (S 42)*

Once we have returned to Oneness, it would be nice if all the transitions from this point on would be easy, but this was not my experience. Sometimes death was easy in future sessions, but sometimes the cleansing became fierce once again. Even after I transitioned into causal Oneness, episodes of intense deconstructing returned. This raises the question of whether Oneness is the final destination of this spiritual journey.

I mention this because I think many of us, myself included, have had a tendency to see Oneness as the *summum bonum*, “the greatest good,” that answers all our existential questions. This makes it tempting to see Oneness as marking the end of our spiritual journey. My experience, however, has been that while Oneness does resolve perhaps our deepest existential questions, it is not the end of the adventure. As profound as Oneness is, it does not exhaust all the cosmological truths waiting for us, and so the adventure continues.

Oneness is a core truth of life, a foundational truth, but if we press Oneness, we discover that there are many levels to it, many permutations of the seamless condition. I must twist language to convey my experience that there are degrees of Oneness, orders of magnitude within Oneness. And then there are the worlds beyond space-time that we glimpse through the portal of Oneness: *“DEPTH opened me to something entirely*

*different. Through this mode of awareness, alternative universes came into view, alternative levels of reality underpinning the physical universe became present.” (S 42)*

Oneness is a good place to stop one’s journey if one chooses to do so, for here the fragmentation of life is healed and we rest in the “true condition.” Here we learn that the essence of the individual is the essence of the Totality, that Atman is Brahman. Here we learn that all beings are empty of self-existence, that we all rise and fall together in the infinite field of the Creative Intelligence. But if we press on, if we seek to know Brahman even more intimately, we will undergo more periodic meltdowns as we are drawn even deeper into the infinite beauty and grandeur of the cosmos.

## ***2. The Living Classroom***

The experiences reported in this book took place in the privacy of my home, but there was a second side to this story that took place at my university. In this section, I’d like to briefly describe a series of experiences that surfaced in my classroom while I was doing my psychedelic work. It took me years to understand these experiences and to comprehend their full implications. They became such a significant part of my teaching experience that I eventually wrote a small book about them. I hope this short introduction will encourage readers to read that more complete treatment. This is the backstory to *The Living Classroom* (2008).

For obvious legal reasons, I never spoke to my students about my psychedelic practice. Even when I taught courses in transpersonal psychology that included psychedelic research, I never let them know that I was doing this work myself. For my own protection, I built a firewall between my professional life and my personal life in this area. And yet, despite this tight compartmentalization, nature did not honor the boundaries I had so carefully drawn. As if confirming the truth of the open boundaries of consciousness, the effects of my psychedelic practice began to spill over and touch the lives of some of my students. It was as though by entering into conscious communion with the deeper fabric of life, the threads of that fabric were being activated in the physical world around me. In fact, this is exactly what happened.

About five years into my teaching and four years into my psychedelic work, students began to quietly come up to me after class and tell me that an example I had used in my lecture that day was identical to something that had just happened to them personally. In my experience, I was simply pulling these examples out of thin air to illustrate some point I was making, but in their experience, I was describing their life in precise detail. At first this struck me as just an odd coincidence, but the trickle of such reports continued to grow. The fit between lecture and life was so precise and repeated itself so many times that eventually I had no choice but to recognize that something more than chance was operating here. My mind and my students' minds were becoming porous to each other. Without my intending it, without my even knowing when it was happening, my unconscious seemed to be tapping into some field of information that held their life experience.

When students hear their recent experience coming back at them in a lecture, it snaps them to attention. Safely buried in the back of the room, anonymous in the crowd, suddenly their lives are exposed, their hearts pierced by words that seem aimed directly at them. Given such a personalized invitation, how could they not get more deeply involved in the course?

This pattern continued to grow stronger through the years. As I entered progressively deeper levels of consciousness in my psychedelic work, not only did these synchronicities become more frequent, they also began targeting increasingly sensitive areas in my students' lives. It was as though a radar had been activated that was zeroing in on some part of their life that was hurting or constricted. Sometimes it lanced a private pain that had been festering inside them for years or triggered an insight that they desperately needed. It was as though their souls were slipping messages to me, telling me where they were hiding, where they were hurting, and most importantly, what they needed to take the next step in their development.

Students taking my courses during these years often found themselves undergoing life-changing transformations without any encouragement from me to do so, as though the very act of our coming together in class was giving them added leverage in their lives. Some chose to end bad marriages or to heal wounded ones. (Thirty percent of the students at my university are older, nontraditional students.) Others left careers they had

outgrown but were still holding on to, while still others began to confront their addictions. In one case, a woman began to spontaneously recover memories of childhood sexual abuse. While the activation these students experienced was sometimes quite powerful, there were no casualties and many positive breakthroughs. On the rare occasion that a student's self-transformation became particularly turbulent, I referred them to a gifted therapist in the area with whom they could process what was emerging in a safe setting.

While these kinds of responses might be expected in certain types of courses, such as a counseling course, this was not the case for the kinds of courses I was teaching, which were Introduction to World Religions, Religion and the Earth, Psychology of Religion, Transpersonal Studies, and Buddhism. It was not the content of the course that seemed to be driving these effects but something deeper. What was triggering these effects was not what I was *doing* but what I had *become* through my psychedelic practice. Because of this work, my core energy was changing. A field of energy moving through me or around me was growing stronger, causing a spontaneous *energetic resonance* to spring up between me and my students underneath the exchange of ideas in the classroom.

Some of my students also started having unusually deep experiences of some of the concepts I was presenting in class. As I was simply going about my work describing the perennial truths of the world's religions, some students began to have powerful spiritual openings around these truths, such as impermanence, interdependence, oneness, no-self, and the divine within. Insights long dormant in their unconscious suddenly sprang to life. Symptoms of chakra opening and kundalini arousal began to manifest in the room. Students felt their energy spontaneously shifting to higher centers of awareness, though they often did not have the vocabulary to describe it this way. It was as though they were being activated by more than just the verbal presentation of ideas, as though they were being touched by the actual *experience* of these realities that now lived in me to some degree because of my psychedelic practice.

As my students came to me with these reports and I saw how deeply they were being affected by this mysterious alchemy that had opened between us, I was more than a little shaken myself. Neither of us had solicited this connection, yet here it was. Did I need to protect them from

what was happening? Obviously, this was not what they had signed up for when they signed up for my course, not consciously anyway. How does one ensure informed consent when the dynamics are so involuntary? Those who don't know me may suspect that these things were happening because I had crossed the line between education and persuasion, but I assure you that this is not the case, and my department chair will back me up on this. It was not a misplaced missionary zeal that was triggering these events but something much more subtle and difficult to comprehend.

These synchronicities and activations became such a prominent part of my experience in the classroom that I was forced to pay them close attention. I began to track what was happening in my classes and to watch for signs of student activation. The only control I had over the situation was to shut down access to this inner information, but I could not do this without cutting myself off from my own creativity. I was still pondering these things in late 1994 when one session suddenly illumined everything that had been taking place in my classes over the past ten years. In one swift download, this single session (S 49) reframed my entire understanding of teaching by showing me how the connective tissue of consciousness works in group settings. Years of observations came together in a moment of stunning clarity and insight that illumined everything I have been describing here and more.

The experiences my students were having were demonstrating a simple truth about consciousness, namely, that consciousness is an open field and within this field, states of consciousness are contagious. My personal efforts to realize deeper states of awareness had changed something in me that caused my person to begin functioning as a kind of lightning rod, triggering sparks of a similar awakening among those around me who were receptive to this influence. This was due not to any calculated effort on my part but simply to the seamless and coherent nature of consciousness itself. Like ripples spreading across water, this is an utterly natural effect. When one person begins to throw off layers of their psychological conditioning and awakes to clearer, more expansive states of awareness, surrounding people will necessarily be affected. Our spiritual ecology simply does not permit private awakening. *The ecology of consciousness is an inherently collective ecology.*

Session 49 also showed me a second principle at work in my classroom. It showed me that fields of consciousness emerge in groups that reflect the intention and activity of that group. The better focused the group's intention and the longer such activity goes on, the stronger these fields will become. Doctors working with patients activate healing fields; coaches activate human performance fields. Because I was an educator, the fields that were emerging in my classroom were *learning fields*, fields that reflected the cumulative efforts of hundreds of students studying the same ideas with me semester after semester. As these learning fields grew stronger through the years, they began to accelerate and deepen the learning of students. My students were being activated not just by resonance to my individual energy but also by the contagious energy of these *course fields* that were growing stronger by year.

With this download, I entered a new pedagogical reality. I stopped teaching within an "atomistic" psychological paradigm that sees only separate minds operating in the classroom and began teaching within a "quantum" paradigm that honors the innate connectivity of consciousness and the existence of localized fields of learning. To teach in a world where minds are separate at one level and entangled at another calls for a new pedagogy, a truly integral pedagogy that places new demands on the instructor and opens new possibilities for accelerated learning. After experimenting and developing this new pedagogy for a number of years, I wrote *The Living Classroom*, filled with personal examples, scientific research, and practical advice for educators. For me, the most beautiful parts of this book are the personal stories written by the students themselves, which make up the last third of the book.<sup>\*56</sup>

It's important to emphasize that what I'm describing here has nothing inherently to do with psychedelics. *The Living Classroom* does not even mention psychedelics. My psychedelic practice was simply the trigger that exposed and activated these natural dynamics of consciousness in my particular setting. I believe that *any* spiritual practice that has the capacity to reach deeply into the collective psyche will activate these same responses in people around us. Indeed, the distributed impact of one's spiritual practice has long been recognized in our contemplative traditions. The only thing that is novel here is its unexpected appearance in the secular classroom.

That said, the experiences my students were having demonstrate that it is not just we who are touched by our psychedelic practice but potentially anyone in our social network, especially when we are centered in our work in the world. This is due simply to the nature of consciousness itself. *To fully integrate our psychedelic experiences, therefore, we must support those around us who are being indirectly activated by our work.* I don't think we need to be afraid of the rings of influence that spread out around us from this work. We need to be careful, of course, and to act responsibly and compassionately at all times, but I think we can trust that we are where we are supposed to be, doing what we are supposed to be doing, and so are they.

### ***3. The Birth of the Diamond Soul***

Session 38 was a structurally complex and deeply moving session for me. I kept returning to it through the years, reading it again and again, intuitively sensing its importance and trying to absorb the experiences it unleashed in me. I had published *Lifecycles* several years before and so was familiar with the ins and outs of reincarnation theory and the logistics of soul development. I had done some past-life therapy myself and had a working knowledge of a number of my former lives. This session went further, however. It took me into what happens when the long course of reincarnation comes to fruition and showed me what the purpose of the entire exercise is.

As a student of religion, I have read many attempts to say what the purpose of reincarnation is, but unfortunately I find that they seldom satisfy. The visions are often too small and the horizons too near. They may capture some aspect of the journey but fail to do justice to other aspects and thus end up underestimating the journey as a whole. Even when the vision includes enlightenment, this by itself does not explain the full arc of human development, especially when we are told that as soon as we have realized this goal, the “plan” is for us to leave the physical universe behind. After 5.8 million years of walking upright, 2.5 million years of using tools, 200,000 years of thinking with our larger brain, and 5,000 years of writing, as soon as we have developed sufficient mental focus to follow awareness beneath our personal consciousness and discover the deeper consciousness in which we are one with all existence,

*then* we can leave physical reality behind? *That's* what it's all been about? Though I understand the noble intent of this view, I don't believe it is an adequate vision of life.

The vision of reincarnation that emerged in the 38th session is different from the classical Eastern view. The setting for this teaching was carefully constructed. The first cycle of death and rebirth had brought me into a paradise so unspeakably beautiful that it instantly extinguished all my leftover earthly desires. This was a richer heaven than any I had ever imagined. If I had to speculate, I would guess that I had entered what Buddhists call a "deity realm," a level of postmortem existence at the outer edges of the bardo. I cannot imagine anything less doing justice to the ecstasy I felt there. I would have been completely happy to stay where I was, but this was to be a teaching session. After a short period of time in this paradise, I was taken even deeper into spiritual reality, "*beyond the bardo echoes of physical existence.*" From this position outside *samsara* (cyclic existence), in the still and quiet of transcendence, the teaching described in the account unfolded.

In earlier sessions, I had been taken beyond linear time and given an experience of my present life as a completed whole. Now eleven years later, I was taken into a deeper condition in which all my earthly lives were rewound one by one, like winding kite string around a spool, until I exploded in a burst of light, fusing all the strands into one and giving birth to what I have come to call the *Diamond Soul*. It was both me and more than I have ever been. Composed of many lifetimes, it was more than the sum of all their years. In coming together, a burst of energy was generated that fused all these centuries of experience into a single being. I was an individual but an individual beyond any frame of reference I had previously known. I was "*a defined speck of infinitely dense, infinitely transparent Diamond Light.*"

Our mystical traditions tell us that we are made of the stuff of God, that Atman is Brahman, and my sessions affirm this truth. But something special happens to this Atman-essence inside the incubator of the physical universe beyond just waking up to itself. In repeatedly entering and leaving physical reality, in the firing and cooling of awareness, in the constant folding and refolding of human experience, something new is being forged—not simply adding new layers one by one but eventually



*fusing all these layers into a new form of life.* Our Essential Nature not changed but actualized into a higher expression.

In chapter 1, I criticized the up-and-out cosmologies of the religions of the Axial Age, which place the final goal of life in some off-planet heavenly paradise. Among these traditions, the Asian religions have taught that reincarnation culminates in a spiritual awakening that frees us from the cycle of rebirth and physical existence. In Hinduism, this awakening is called *moksha*, “escape,” for through it one escapes samsara and returns to Brahman. In Buddhism, *nirvana* (enlightenment with a body) is followed at death by the higher state of *parinirvana* (final enlightenment without a body). Even the Bodhisattvas who commit themselves out of compassion to returning to Earth after their enlightenment are ultimately seeking to liberate all sentient beings into parinirvana, thus emptying the planet.

When I wrote *Lifecycles*, I was still under the influence of these cosmologies, and therefore the story of reincarnation I told there culminated in transcendence. I now see it as incomplete for this very reason. To take the story only to transcendence is to stop midway on the circle. *Lifecycles* captures the truth of karma and rebirth, which is no small thing, but it misses the larger picture. I did not see then what has become glaringly obvious to me now, that all up-and-out cosmologies fail to grasp the true purpose of physical existence and therefore misconceive what the goal of reincarnation truly is. The physical universe is not a punishment or trap into which we have fallen and from which we must be saved. It is not a spiritual wasteland we should escape from as quickly as possible. The purpose of rebirth is not to spiritually awaken and then leave the universe. The purpose is to awaken and become a conscious player in its continuing growth and transformation.

Session 38 does not say this explicitly, but because of experiences I will share in the next chapter, I am convinced that the birth of the Diamond Soul is not an event that marks our graduation *from* the physical universe but an evolutionary transition taking place *inside* the physical universe. Furthermore, it is a transformation of not just individuals but ultimately of our entire species. Through all the millennia that we have been taking on and working with this human form, growing its extraordinary capacities, nature has been bringing humanity toward this evolutionary crescendo. The powers of creativity that terra-formed this

planet, that brought forth life here and then self-aware life, is now in the process of taking our reincarnating species across a new threshold. In giving birth to the Diamond Soul, nature is not abandoning our planet; it is beginning a new chapter in its long evolutionary story. What is the purpose of reincarnation? The purpose, I think, is to awaken and create heaven on Earth. *“The entire exercise of reincarnation had been about . . . learning how to control the powers of creativity that were my innate nature. We were, in effect, learning how to be gods, learning how to create.”* (S 38)

As we begin to grasp the true scale of nature’s intent, we must revise many of our previous assumptions about reincarnation. In the classic up-and-out model of rebirth, for example, it is often said that it is a “law” of reincarnation that we are not allowed to remember our former lives when we are born. This amnesia is essential because if we were able to remember our former lives, it would overwhelm our earthly identity. Our present life would become unmanageable if we remembered everything we had ever been and done in our previous lifetimes. Numerous Hollywood movies have played with this theme. But this way of thinking is too small and fails to grasp the fact that reincarnation is an *evolutionary driver* whose effects accumulate not only in spiritual reality but inside space-time as well.

Rather than see this amnesia as a permanent feature of the human condition, I think we should see it as a temporary pattern that characterizes a certain stage of human evolution, admittedly a long stage but ultimately a stage. As we continue to grow and evolve through an openended number of lifetimes, this pattern is subject to change. It may be natural given our present level of psycho-spiritual development to forget our deeper history at birth and remember it only when we die, but this does not mean it must always be so. In fact, given the relentless accumulation of capacities that reincarnation empowers, I think it is inevitable that sooner or later this memory boundary will be breached. This does not necessarily mean remembering all the details of our former lives—what need do we have of old addresses?—and it certainly doesn’t mean struggling under the burden of identity overload. It means bringing the core learning of all those lifetimes into a coherent and integrated synthesis.

Michael Newton and other past-life therapists have provided evidence that this integrated synthesis of all our lives already exists in the bardo, for it is the identity his clients assume when they relive going through their death in a previous life. As the rhythm of rebirth continues without pause millennium after millennium, it would seem to be only a matter of time before this larger consciousness will awaken inside our life on Earth. Perhaps slowly in small increments, perhaps suddenly in large jumps, our felt sense of identity will inevitably shift from ego to Soul. I believe that the awakening of the Diamond Soul on Earth is the natural and inevitable consequence of the relentless cycle of rebirth as we integrate more and more experience in the vessel of our precious human body. Sooner or later, the constant cycling back and forth between spirit and matter will take us across this threshold, and the Soul will ignite on Earth. It took thousands of centuries to form this Soul; embodying it may happen much more quickly.

On a personal note, the fact that I experienced the birth of my Diamond Soul inside session 38 does not mean that my Soul is now fully and permanently awake in my daily life. I wish it were, but it isn't. This raises a larger question about the psychedelic process, namely: What is the value of having visionary experiences in which one may touch a reality that is true but that one cannot keep on returning to ordinary consciousness? One may keep it in the sense of remembering it, but one cannot keep it in the sense of fully actualizing it here and now in one's present life. *What is the value of true but temporary knowledge?*

I have asked myself this question many times over the years, responding differently at different stages of my journey, sometimes cursing the day I started this work but more often on my knees in gratitude. It is a pressing question, especially if one works with high doses of a powerful psychedelic like LSD, for this protocol unleashes more extreme experiences than when lower doses or milder psychedelics are used. For the time being, let me say just this.

I believe that what I experienced in session 38 was the true birth of my integrated Soul, however incompletely actualized this consciousness may be in my present life. The paradox is that something can be fully actualized in the psychedelic state and at the same time be incompletely realized inside the demanding conditions of space-time. Indeed,

*navigating these different levels of actualization is a tricky part of working with these states.* (If I could, I would underline this sentence several times.) It's all too easy to get carried away and think that more has been permanently accomplished in these hours than actually has been. But if we stay grounded in the reality of our incompleteness, a deeper dialectic begins to unfold.

The birth of my Diamond Soul in session 38 gave me a foretaste of what I am in the process of becoming, and I believe this foretaste is helping me realize this destiny in my life. If held properly, these experiences begin to function as “strange attractors,” pulling us toward our future through the increased awareness they bring. We may not be able to fully actualize these experiences immediately after a session has ended, but they bend the trajectory of our lives. In showing us what we are becoming, they help us become that very thing.

I may not be able to hold Diamond Soul consciousness as an abiding awareness every hour of every day, but there are moments—moments when it is as though the swirl of history stops, and I feel myself standing eternal upon the Earth. In these moments, I *know* I have breathed this air before and will breathe it again after this body falls, and in this knowing, time seems to pause. It is as though the centuries already lived congeal and my eyes become suddenly ancient, liberated from the specifics of him or her. I am suddenly *here* in a new way, grounded in an awareness that is personal but unlocked, ancient repetition culminating in stunning freshness. With this comes an exquisite intimacy with life, a Oneness that dissolves all boundaries, and in this wholeness there is peace, joy, and fascination.

In the final analysis, I think that whether we remain inside the physical universe after waking up spiritually or leave it behind are not mutually exclusive options but simultaneous possibilities. If we were to achieve enlightenment and leave space-time for one hundred thousand years and then return, we would find the universe continuing to patiently grow her children through the steady and relentless accumulation of experience in rebirth. If we leave again, this time for a million years, upon our return we would find the same thing—Nature growing humanity into ever richer forms. In such a universe, how could life not eventually produce fully awakened Souls on Earth? Not just a few here and there, but everyone

everywhere. An entire species that through its hard labor has given birth to its next self-expression—a fully conscious Soul, green to its roots, feet firmly planted on the Earth but now transparent to the Creative Intelligence that everywhere presses in upon it. This is the vision of history I now turn to explore.

# NINE

## The Birth of the Future Human

Sessions 22–55

*We are now experiencing a moment of significance far beyond what any of us can imagine. . . . The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human.*

THOMAS BERRY, THE GREAT WORK

When the shell of the private mind dissolves in psychedelic practice, experience opens to a landscape so vast it's hard to find the right words to describe it—the Mind of the Universe, the Cosmic Mind, the Great Expanse. One falls into it, explodes into it, melts into it, sometimes cataclysmically, sometimes so gently it feels like the most natural thing in the world. We are not in control of these expeditions. We show up, do the work, and make our requests, but in this collaboration a larger intelligence sets the course. What we experience seems to be a combination of what the universe wants us to know and what we are capable of knowing. If we drop into this ocean too quickly, we will lose our bearings and won't be able to bring back much of value. But if we use these hours conscientiously, this intelligence will take us in and teach us. Here all instruction is by initiation. We learn by becoming. The lessons are repeated again and again until our grasp of the material is secure, then new layers are added until the fuller picture emerges.

I review these things to prepare for where we go next. When I began this journey in 1979, I never imagined that what follows here would become part of its story. Now, however, I think this may be the most

important chapter of this book, for it speaks of our children and our children's children as far as we can see. It speaks of a crossroads humanity is coming to and of powerful forces taking us into a future that will change us at the deepest levels of our being.

Public awareness has changed dramatically in the twenty years since I first wrote about these matters in *Dark Night, Early Dawn*. Denials still abound, but every year more of us are admitting the frightening truth that we have driven our planet into a state of such overload that humanity is now hovering on the edge of an abyss. Everyone knows the list of challenges we are facing: expanding world population, unchecked industrial pollution, escalating climate disruption, rising sea levels, collapsing water tables, increasing drought, soil erosion, species extinction, fished-out oceans, shrinking nonrenewable resources, unstable interlocked national economies, cities and nations going bankrupt, extreme economic inequality, unprecedented refugee migrations, stockpiled weapons we dare not use, and no end in sight. Subtract a few, add a few; cumulatively, the list is overwhelming.

Beginning with *The Limits to Growth* by Donella Meadows and her team in 1972, a stream of books have analyzed our global trajectory. They've crunched the numbers, identified the variables, and projected the outcomes with relentless logic and increasing precision. Since the Union of Concerned Scientists published their "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity" in 1992, the debate has evolved from *whether* a global systems crisis will take place, to how *soon* it will take place, to what can we do to *prevent* it from taking place, to what we will have to do to *recover* from it after it has taken place. The growing consensus appears to be that we have postponed taking action too many times on too many fronts to avoid an imminent crash of catastrophic proportions. The discussion is now shifting to the question of adaptation and resilience. How will humanity respond to this global crisis: politically, economically, militarily, technologically, culturally, and existentially?

This brings me to the crux of this chapter. While the threat of a global crisis has grown decade by decade, the vision of our future that has repeatedly come through my sessions is that humanity is rapidly approaching a breakthrough of evolutionary proportions. Despite the fact that we have repeatedly failed to heed the ecological warnings and rein in

our rapacious greed and Earth-damaging policies, their message has been one of promise and hope. More than hope, a message of emerging greatness. This is not because I have trapped myself in a New Age “solar spirituality” that refuses to look darkness in the face. I trust it is clear by now that I am no stranger to darkness. Rather, the solution to this paradox lies in penetrating to the essence of this global crisis and understanding what it represents at the deepest level.

The core vision of our future that has emerged in my sessions is that humanity is coming into a time of Great Awakening, a profound shift in the fundamental condition of the human psyche. But for there to be a Great Awakening, there must first take place a Great Death. We must be emptied of the old before the new can emerge. I have come to believe that the twenty-first century will be such a time. It will begin the *dark night of our collective soul*, a time of emptying, of intense anguish, of loss of control and breakdown. A global purification unto death that will last generations. But through this hard labor, we will give birth to something extraordinary. More than just a new civilization, what is emerging is nothing less than a new order of human being. I believe that through the global systems crisis, our planet is giving birth to the Future Human.

I know it sounds arrogant to speak on such a scale, but I must if I am to describe the visions that repeatedly came through my sessions. Ego-death destroys the existential isolation and constant self-referencing that organizes our ordinary experience of the world. When the partitions of personal consciousness are surrendered, our experience spontaneously opens to the larger rhythms of life that we are part of. One portion of these rhythms is the collective psyche of our species. At the subtle level of consciousness, we can dissolve into the human species-mind so deeply that the beginnings and endings of our personal life become insignificant. When the “small-self” opens to the “species-self” this completely, it is only natural that insights into humanity’s larger developmental trajectory sometimes emerge in our awareness. We would be surprised if this did not happen.

When these visions began in 1991, I knew next to nothing about the emerging global systems crisis and did not spend much time thinking about the future of humanity at all. Nevertheless, the transformation of humanity kept showing up in my sessions, growing deeper over time, with



new layers added as I could absorb them. These visions coalesced to form a coherent narrative about our future and the forces shaping this future. It was almost as though the transformation of humanity as a whole was the only thing the Creative Intelligence really cared about. Everything else—my life, our lives, everything we were struggling with in history—was part of this larger project. It was the context that framed all our endeavors. It was the work of the hour. In response to these visions, I began to do my ecological homework.<sup>\*57</sup>

As I turn to share the visions of our collective future that were given to me, my thoughts turn to Black Elk, the Oglala Lakota holy man. Black Elk was just nine years old when he collapsed into the visionary state. As he lay near death for twelve days, the thunder beings of the west took him and gave him a vision that foretold the destiny of his people. At a time when the old ways of life were fragmenting for the Lakota nation and its future was uncertain, the Grandfathers gave this vision to a child. Black Elk was so shaken by the experience that he hid his vision for years. I sometimes feel like that nine-year-old boy must have felt. I am sixty-eight years old as I write this, and I still feel overwhelmed at times by the visions of our future that were poured into me in my sessions. In these matters, the individual is nothing, the vision is everything.

These visions were not given to me all at once as they were for Black Elk but came in bits and pieces over many years. I'm going to present this visionary sequence in three parts—two in this chapter and a third in a later chapter. The first part is a series of visions I received between 1991 and 1994 inside the sessions already presented in the three preceding chapters. Rather than present these visions in a piecemeal fashion there, I have lifted them out of their original setting and gathered them here, editing them only as necessary to bring them together. I have grouped these visions into six segments that I am calling the Visions of Awakening. These were the six overlapping themes that emerged over nine sessions during this four-year period. The second part of the story is a single session that took place a year and a half later, in 1995. The Great Awakening session (S 55) carried me deep into the future and plunged me into the heart of the collective death and rebirth humanity is coming into. The third and final part came in 1998, near the end of my journey. I will present it in chapter 11, "Final Vision."

## The Visions of Awakening

The Visions of Awakening are drawn from the following sessions:

- S 22 Master Plan #1
- S 23 Master Plan #2
- S24 Healing the Collective Wound
- S 28 Archetypal Meltdown
- S 29 Cleansing #1
- S 31 Cleansing #3
- S 39 Future of Humanity
- S 43 Expansions and Elaborations
- S 47 Chopped into Light

In creating this compilation, I have trimmed away the intense trials that opened the door to these visions and will simply ask the reader to hold them in the context of the sessions already presented. This visionary sequence began as the ocean of suffering was coming to its conclusion. It was fueled by entering first the fires of hell and then the fires of archetypal initiation. It is difficult to overstate the price one pays for such initiations. My early excursions into personal Deep Time seemed to pave the way for these later excursions into collective Deep Time.

This series of visions began with the vision of the master plan presented in chapter 6. Because this original vision established the context for all the visions that followed, it feels important to include it here, so I have reproduced it below in a shortened form. This vision showed me that everything that lies ahead for humanity is taking place in the context of Divine Love. However difficult things may get in the coming years, we are not being punished nor have we failed in some great undertaking. Rather, each one of us has chosen to participate in this collective transformation in service of Divine Love.



*When I moved beyond the cleansing portion of the session, I was met by a large assembly of beings who appeared to have been called to participate in today's events. They had the feeling tone of being master shamans. Under their watchful eye, I was escorted to an arena where a day of disclosure had been planned. Eventually, space-time reality was left behind entirely, and I found myself alone in a condition that was seemingly without boundaries of either time or space, soaking in the bliss and clarity of transcendence.*

*I then learned that I was going to be shown a portion of the master plan for the human species. As preposterous as this suggestion may sound to our ordinary consciousness, in my current state it seemed entirely feasible. I had no time to debate these matters, for suddenly, something opened and I was drawn into a vast, concentrated stream underlying physical reality, and this stream appeared to be the formative intent of the Creative Intelligence itself. I dissolved completely into this stream and became one with it. The following experiences emerged while I was in this condition.*

## **Vision 1—Divine Love**

*I was taken back to the beginning of creation and there experienced human evolution in the context of a larger cosmic agenda. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by the most extraordinary LOVE. It was as if a dam had burst and Love was coming at me from every direction, so much Love that I could barely take it in, even in my expanded state. . . . To awaken to this Love was to remember a primordial decision that I had somehow participated in. Remembering choices made before matter and time existed, I reconnected with the Divine Love that had inspired these choices. This experience shattered my heart, and I wept deeply.*

*I experienced all the suffering that humanity had endured throughout history as taking place inside this Love. I realized that all the suffering inherent in evolution was noble beyond words. It was all part of a cosmic plan that had been entered into freely by all the participants, however unconscious of this fact we have become along the way. The nobility of great suffering voluntarily shouldered in the name of Divine Love, suffering that would stretch across millions of years, suffering that would become so inscrutable that it would be used as evidence that the universe was devoid of compassion, this was the nobility of humanity's gift to the Creator. All of the suffering that humanity had endured and will endure, especially the suffering of forgetfulness itself, was part of a consciously chosen creative process, a process that had not yet come to full fruition.*

## **Vision 2—All Humanity**

*The order and design of evolving life is not something that is imposed on it from without; it bubbles and surges up from within life itself. It is something that lives in the fire of the atomic process and surges forward in all the micro and macro-jumps of evolution. It is a restless churning to become more that burns within life. In human beings, the focus of this churning is consciousness, and I was immersed in the forces driving the evolution of human consciousness forward.*

*Out of the seething desires of history, out of the violent conflicts and the scheming of individuals and nations, there was now driving forward a new*

awareness in human consciousness. Its birth in us is no less difficult or violent than the birth of a new continent. It drives upward from the floor of our being, requiring a transposition of everything that has gone before to make room for its new organizational patterns.

The great difficulty I have is describing the enormity of what is being birthed. The true focus of this creative process is not individuals but all humanity. It is actually trying to awaken the entire species. What is emerging is a consciousness of unprecedented proportions, the entire human family integrated in a unified field of awareness. The species reconnected with its Fundamental Nature. Our thoughts tuned to Source Consciousness. This unified field did not suffocate our individuality but liberated it into new orders of self-expression. Having moved beyond linear time into Deep Time, I experienced this collective awakening both as a projected destiny and a realized actuality. It was simultaneously something to be accomplished and something already accomplished. The scale of what I was witnessing took my breath away.

### **Vision 3—Guiding Intelligence**

I saw humanity climbing out of a steep valley, and just ahead on the other side of the mountain was a brilliant, sun-drenched world that was about to break over us. The time frame was enormous. After millions of years of struggle and ascent, we were poised on the brink of a sunrise that would forever change the conditions of life on this planet. All current structures would quickly become irrelevant. All truths would quickly be rendered passé. Truly, a new epoch was dawning. The lives of everyone living in this pivotal time in history were helping to bring this global shift about.

As I witnessed this scene, I saw that though we did not know the deep future at a personal level, there was a more encompassing level of consciousness that could see it very clearly. This was a deeply moving and clarifying experience for me. Just as we ask our children to do all sorts of difficult tasks that they do not understand but we know will be important to their future, there was likewise a “parental intelligence” that had set a task for humanity knowing what was just around the corner for it. Individually, we humans could not see what was coming and so did not understand why things were the way they were. Yet isolated from the future, the present makes absolutely no sense. To be ignorant of what is being built would be to be functionally blind, and our species is not blind. There is an intelligence within it, guiding it, an intelligence that knows the future and is preparing us for it as systematically as we prepare our homes for the change of seasons.

From this perspective, I saw that our culture’s scientific knowledge about the origin of life was deeply incomplete in two respects. First, our understanding of the mechanisms of evolution is still rudimentary, and second, we have been basing our interpretations on what has emerged just up to this point in time, ignoring the fact that we have seen only the early acts of a much longer play. Imagine someone from antiquity who is completely ignorant of cars observing the early stations of an automobile assembly line and trying to comprehend what is being built. We simply see too little to guess what is coming and therefore do not properly understand what has gone before. The depth of our ignorance is shown in our conviction that the universe is assembling itself by accident. In being given glimpses of our future, in touching the edges of the Creator’s intent, I saw that evolution was indeed no

*accident but a creative act of supreme brilliance and that humanity is being taken across a threshold that will change it forever.*

*At this point, I could not see the specifics of what the future held for us. What I experienced instead was overwhelming Light and Bliss. Though these may sound disappointingly vague, they revealed more to me than details ever could. I knew that the brilliant Light was the radiance of enlightenment and the Bliss was the joy of liberation. The human species was poised on the brink of a profound spiritual awakening.*

## **Vision 4—Our Species as a Single Being**

*I was taken deeper into the unified field of existence and experienced the dynamics of humanity's awakening as movements being initiated and orchestrated by a single, integrating intelligence. Previously, my frame of reference for understanding these processes had been individual human beings, and the theme of individual evolution is the skillful exercise of free will over many lifetimes. Now I was being drawn into a superordinate level of reality that exposed a deeper organizational pattern.*

*From this perspective, I experienced the evolution of our species as the systematic growth of a single organism, a unified being that all of us were part of. The subtlety of the cooperation of the parts with the whole was extraordinary. Nothing in our theological or philosophical systems does justice to the facts. To experience the incredible diversity of our species as a single unified field made many events clearer. New patterns sprang into view, and the patterns made transparent sense.*

*At one point, my vision zeroed in on this process so deeply that the "units" of individual lives disappeared completely. At this level, human lives were simply crystallizations of patterns of a fluid energy that made up our species being. Individuals were "forms" that drew together portions of this energy into somewhat fixed and firm configurations. In themselves these forms were not solid. They simply drew to a head energy existing in the species field.*

*What I then saw was that the unified field of humanity was moving decisively and precipitously to become more aware of itself. Whereas previously it had existed as an extended fabric largely unconscious of itself, now it was waking itself up. Visually, this took the form of energy coming together in swift, contractive spasms that created bright flashes of awareness. I repeatedly saw extended webs of energy suddenly contract and explode in brilliant flashes. In the past, these flashes had been swallowed by the inertia of the collective psyche and not endured long. Now, however, the flashes were beginning to hold their own and to connect with other flashes occurring around the planet.*

## **Vision 5—Collective Purification**

*When an organism is called on from within to become more conscious, it must first cleanse itself of the psychological by-products of living at its lower level of awareness. It must bring forward the residue of its past and purge that residue from its system in order to lay the foundation for a more refined level of operation. Our*

*species was doing this in a wholesale manner and with great determination by crystallizing within itself generations that embodied its toxic legacy.*

*What I had previously seen as individuals reincarnating in order to clear their individual karma, I now experienced as a highly centralized decision made by the Human Mind-Field to cleanse itself of its karmic legacy in order to prepare humanity for what is coming. It was the coordinated exercise of the self-evolution of the species as a whole. At a deeper level, it was the deliberate movement of the Divine evolving itself through the experience of our species. All our individual histories were expressions of this Being's larger history; our individual struggles were aspects of its larger struggle. The process was so beautiful and elegant that it swept me into deep ecstasy, taking me almost beyond my ability to maintain coherent awareness. It was not a vision but an experience of the reality itself.*

*One of the things that stood out for me in these experiences was the sense that the present form of humanity is transitional. Like transitional forms that a species moves through in an evolutionary pivot, we are a transitional form. We are cells in a superorganism intent on rapid change. Our very constitution, the form of our species, is a stage in a longer evolutionary journey.*

*I saw that the generations born in our period of history had been deliberately configured to precipitate an intense cycle of collective purification. The poisons of humanity's past were being brought to the surface in us, and by transforming these poisons in our individual lives, we were making it possible for divine awareness to enter more deeply into future generations. We had volunteered for this role for both our personal good and the collective good. I saw that this century formed a watershed into which the karmic streams of history were flowing and that as this process came to fruition, the future condition of our species would be beyond anything we might project from our current state of fragmentation. The future would not look like the present. Our future form would not look like our present form.*

*It is difficult to describe the jarring combination of emotions these insights stirred in me. On the one hand, I was deeply disturbed by the decisive and almost impersonal manner in which this transition was being enacted. To experience multiple generations of human beings as expressions of a larger evolutionary pivot was devastating. The entire process had the ruthlessness of Kali the destroyer, mercilessly cutting away the old to make way for the new. On the other hand, I also felt an exquisite tenderness coming from the Creator, who experienced with us every pain we had taken upon ourselves. Humans were so precious to the Creator that not a single ounce of pain, not a single tear was wasted. The depth of that divine care so moved me that no sacrifice seemed too large or unreasonable.*

## ***Vision 6—The Future Human***

*At one point, I was given a brief experience of the Future Human we are becoming. It was as though I had been carried into the distant future and allowed to try on for size what will be the abiding state of humanity at that time. What a magnificent being! Just touching it filled me with rapture, calm, and sheer delight. It felt clear, warm, and whole. There was an abiding sense of Oneness that went deeper than just the feeling of being interconnected. It was a feeling of being truly One underneath the diversity of life. Such expansiveness, such breadth of being! It was fully embodied spiritual realization, the tantric awakening of our entire species, Spirit and Matter in*

*perfect balance. This penetrating glimpse transfixed me. Its beauty, grandeur, and simplicity pierced my heart. This awakening poured a delicious and healing nectar into me, a balm for all my kind.*

*There is a social awakening coming, a time when we will have dropped our attempt to live in the closed cells of our past and will actualize the truth of our inclusive nature. Everything we are currently undergoing both privately and collectively is paving the way for this future. Though we may not personally live to see this awakening realized, I saw that we would participate in it through our future incarnations. We were doing this for God, for others, and for ourselves. On a longer time horizon, the awareness that was emerging on our planet seemed destined to eventually extend beyond our solar system. Earth seemed to be a hothouse, growing a capacity for conscious creation that would in time be exported to other systems in the galaxy.*

*The net result of all these experiences was to focus me on the question, "How can the entire species be awakened? What will it actually take for the whole of humanity to make this quantum jump in awareness?" Though I had seen that this awakening was our immediate task, I had not been shown how it would be accomplished.*



Taken together, these six visions gave me the basic framework of the deep transition taking place beneath the surface of history. They helped me understand the scale of the enterprise that humanity has undertaken and what the goal truly is. Experiencing the Creative Intelligence operating inside this transition made me feel grounded in the genius of our universe. Experiencing the complex reincarnational dynamics surrounding this pivot both inspired and humbled me. And yet, nowhere in these visions had I been shown *how* this collective transformation would actually take place. This critical piece of the puzzle was missing, and I had no idea how Nature was going to pull this off.

## **The Great Awakening**

Then in December of 1995, as my family and I were preparing for the Christmas holidays, a particularly powerful session carried me into the heart of our coming transformation. To present this session, I have to jump ahead in the timeline of my journey because the Great Awakening session took place in the middle of the Diamond Luminosity sessions, which I haven't described yet. I had entered the Diamond Luminosity twice

already, in sessions 45 and 50, and would enter it twice more in sessions 60 and 66. Then, in the middle of this sequence, just when I was expecting to be taken back into the Diamond Luminosity, session 55 took me instead into the global death and rebirth of humanity. This striking placement underscores the significance of this encounter.

Session 55 built on the collective and transtemporal experiences of earlier sessions, as though these had been training exercises preparing me for this seminal visionary download. The collective convulsions I entered in this session appeared to be driven by a global ecological crisis, but I was not given any details about how or when this crisis would take place. Instead, this session showed me the *fact* of a global crisis, it took me inside the *collective psyche's experience* of this crisis, and it showed me some of the *mechanisms of collective awakening* that will be activated by this crisis.



## Session 55—The Great Awakening

*I spent the first portion of the session working on a very painful relationship in my childhood. It seemed like the work was endless, that I would never get to the bottom of the disturbance. Then after two very difficult hours, what I had been processing suddenly broke apart. Something that had been experientially real suddenly became as brittle as painted glass and shattered. It was as if the issue I had been processing reached its perfect pitch, then shattered into hundreds of shards of glass. A voice said, "Enough of that," and it was finished. There was no gradual transition, just a sudden, abrupt shift from something artificial to something profoundly real.*

*I entered this reality exhausted from the healing work, but my fatigue quickly disappeared as the shattered glass fell away. Now I was suddenly awake within a different reality, operational within a different sphere altogether. As I try to describe what happened next, I flounder for words. Something unprecedented took place today. Whole new categories of experience opened, new modalities of awareness. It will take me years to fully assimilate this experience.*

*There was nothing personal about the state I was in, not even the residual personal of individual ecstatic awakening. Instead, there was a wholeness about it that was specieswide; its movement was the movement of my species. This movement was itself part of the movement of the Divine-in-time, so from another perspective the experience was of being drawn into the inner workings of the Divine's-experience-as-this-species in the larger sweep of its evolution. As often happens, experience preceded understanding. I simply began to experience new things, and only slowly did I get my bearings on what it was I was experiencing.*

*I began to experience states of arousal, anxiety, crisis, breakthrough, and new beginning—but as a species, not as an individual person. I began to realize that "in me" were the experiences of countless human beings. The levels of arousal I was*



*experiencing were ascending waves within the collective unconscious, and these waves were building up and breaking within me! It was like being able to experience a thunderstorm in its totality, with every drop registering individually and the patterns of the storm as a whole simultaneously.*

*In time I began to realize that I was experiencing what the human species will experience as historical events unfold over the next several decades, perhaps the next hundred years. In earlier sessions, I had glimpsed the historic transition humanity is making. Today I was taken inside this transition and given the experience of it from deep within the collective psyche of our species, framed within the surrounding consciousness of the Creative Intelligence. When these developments take place, people will think they are being overtaken by events outside themselves, but in fact these events are being driven by the Creative Intelligence drawing forth from within itself new capacities that will be specieswide. I came away from the session exhausted from the knowledge of what lies ahead, exhausted from having experienced the fear that humanity will feel as our world crumbles around us, and exhilarated by the new forms that are emerging.*

## **The Core Scenario**

*In a field of relative calm, a small anxiety began to grow. Slowly, people were looking up and becoming alarmed. Like people living on an island who gradually become aware that a hurricane is overtaking them, humanity was gradually waking up in alarm to events that had overtaken them. Conditions got worse and worse. People became more and more frightened as the danger increased, forcing them to let go of their assumptions at deeper levels. There was less and less for people to hold on to, fewer givens that they could assume—how they would live, where they would live, what they would do for a living, how society was organized, what could be possessed. The world as they knew it was falling apart.*

*Decades were compressed into minutes, and I felt the people's fear deepen as they lost more and more of what they considered the normal and necessary structures of their world. Step-by-step, events were forcing a rapid reassessment of everything in their lives. The events that had overtaken Earth were of such scope that no one could insulate themselves from them. The level of alarm grew in the species field until eventually everyone was forced into the melting pot of mere survival. We were all in this together. Families were torn apart—parents from their children and children from each other. Life as we had known it was shattered at the core. We were reduced to simply trying to survive.*

*For a time, it looked as though we would all be killed, but just when the storm was at its peak, the worst of it passed and the danger slowly subsided. Though many had died, many were still alive. As the survivors began to find each other, new social units began to form. Parents and children from different families joined to form new types of families. Everywhere new social institutions sprang into being that reflected our new reality—new ways of thinking, new values that we had discovered within ourselves during the crisis. Every aspect of our lives was marked by new priorities, new perceptions of the good, new truths. These new social forms reflected new states of awareness that seemed to spread through the survivors like a positive contagion. These new social forms then fed back into the system to elicit still newer states of awareness in people, and the cycle of creativity between the individual and the group spiraled.*

*The whole system was becoming alive at new levels, and this aliveness was expressing itself in previously impossible ways. It was as if the eco-crisis had triggered the myelination of nerve cells in our species-brain, allowing new and deeper levels of self-awareness to spring into being. Repeatedly, there was the message: "These things will happen faster than anyone can anticipate because of the hyper-arousal of the species-mind." Thousands of fractal images drove this lesson home again and again. "Faster than anyone can anticipate." The pace of the past was irrelevant to the pace of the future.*

## **The Mechanism of Our Collective Awakening**

*There was an important aspect of this sequence that focused on the actual mechanisms that lay behind this transition. The key was understanding that this global crisis will be so severe that it will impact not only individuals but also the collective unconscious of humanity itself. The suffering generated by the eco-crisis was so widespread, so deep, and so sustained that the field of the species-mind was being driven into higher and higher levels of arousal. Eventually, the species mind moved into such a highly energized state that it began to function differently. I experienced these changes in terms of the concepts of superconductivity and nonlinear systems. I have only a limited understanding of these scientific concepts, but they seemed to apply both literally and metaphorically to the workings of the collective psyche. I experienced them more deeply than I was able to fully grasp cognitively, but the intuitive taking in was exceptionally clear and well defined.*

*What was emphasized was: (1) the hyperconnectivity of the species field and (2) the unprecedented speed with which changes can take place in this field under nonlinear conditions. Over and over again, I saw these features operating in our future. When fields are put under extreme pressure, small changes can produce disproportionately large effects. Systems that were previously isolated can suddenly begin interacting with each other, activating a latent connectivity in the field. I saw that what was true for physical fields was also true for psychological fields.*

*The speed with which new formations were emerging in the collective psyche reflected the superconductivity of nonlinear systems. These new forms were not just temporary fluctuations but became permanent psychological structures marking the next stage in humanity's long journey of self-activated awareness.*

*The entire process seemed to be driven by strange attractors that were rapidly drawing the system into new patterns of self-configuration. The time of rebuilding was suffused with an inner luminosity that signaled a profound awakening within the human heart. It was not the overwhelming brilliance of Diamond Luminosity that shines forth in individual awakening, but a softer luminosity that reflected the same reality more gently present and more evenly distributed throughout the entire species. The whole of humanity was going to go through a death-rebirth process, and the substance of awakening for the group was the same as for the individual, though realized more slowly and in smaller increments. The core of this awakening was the experience of Oneness.*

*One scenario put the matter in theological terms. We are entering a period of grace in which the sins of the past can be set aside en masse. We do not have to expiate them linearly but can surrender them whole if we will but open ourselves to the forces that are moving powerfully in the present to re-create our lives. In a blend*

*of Western and Eastern mythologies, I saw present generations carrying the full karmic burden of our prior evolutionary limits. I saw that the entire system was poised for a profound revision of those limits and that we who are part of this transition can actually free humanity from its past by responding to the challenges of this radical transition. Collective karma is being cleared exponentially. The time of great purification is a time of great grace.*

*History is intensifying. Feedback loops are accelerating. Time is becoming concentrated. Developments are unfolding exponentially. The past is rapidly catching up with us; debts put off for generations are coming due; a new beginning approaches. The ecological crisis will precipitate a death-rebirth confrontation that will shatter our psycho-spiritual isolation, both individually and societally, and bring forward an awakening of common ground within us. I saw that once we made this painful transition, we would discover that all was gain. Nothing essential had been lost. We will look with amazement at the depth of ignorance that had set us on this course of self-decimation, and we will not long for that past at all. All is gain, all is gain.*

*I am exhausted from this experience. I feel like I carry humanity's future inside me as a public secret. I look on my people and am filled with compassion at the fate that awaits them and respect for their courage. I want so deeply to help them through what approaches. I am exploded by time and have nowhere to stand but where I am.*

It took me more than a year to recover from this session. For months I walked around the city where I live feeling like someone walking around Hiroshima a week before the bomb was dropped, with unbidden knowledge of what lies ahead and profound respect for all the participants. It was terrible to experience humanity's coming collapse but redemptive to experience the rebirth that followed. Since that session, I have never doubted the larger arc of our evolutionary journey, even as I mourn its casualties.

This vision showed me what the previous visions had not shown me—that humanity's transformation will come about through terrible suffering. This suffering will be driven by a global systems crisis triggered by a global ecological crisis. Our species will change when our collective pain simply becomes unbearable any longer. In this, session 55 echoes the conclusion reached by Duane Elgin in *Awakening Earth*, where he wrote:

It is the immense suffering of millions—even billions—of precious human beings coupled with the widespread destruction of many other life-forms that will burn through our complacency and isolation. Needless suffering is the psychological and psychic fire that can awaken our compassion and fuse individuals,

communities, and nations into a cohesive and consciously organized global civilization. (Elgin 1993, 121)

While the suffering that is coming will be terrible to endure, this session showed me that humanity will come through this crisis, not intact but changed for the better. In the context of the earlier visions of awakening, it affirmed that through this ordeal we are giving birth not just to a new period of history but to a new form of human being. As the years have passed and I have watched the shadows of history deepen, I find that this promise means more and more to me. Without a vision of where nature is taking us, without understanding the higher good that our collective suffering is bringing forward in history, we might drown in the sorrow that lies ahead. And we must not drown.

## **The Nonlinear Dynamics of Awakening**

For psychedelics to have their deepest impact on our culture, it is not sufficient for us to simply record the powerful experiences they unleash. We must also ground these experiences in critical discourse and place them in dialogue with other fields of learning where possible. For this reason, when I presented this session in *Dark Night, Early Dawn*, I unpacked its assertions about the role the collective psyche will play in humanity's awakening as carefully and systematically as I could. These assertions are:

1. That the species-mind is a unified psychic field,
2. That this field will be driven into a nonlinear or "far-from-equilibrium" state by the extreme suffering generated by the global ecological crisis, and
3. That in this hyperaroused state, the species-mind will exhibit some of the same nonlinear capacities that scientists have observed in physical systems when they are driven into the nonlinear state, namely, the capacity for rapidly accelerated change, heightened creativity, and higher self-organization.

I created an interpretive framework that wove together Donella Meadows's research on global trends, Rupert Sheldrake's morphic field theory, chaos theory, Peter Russell's global brain theory, Ilya Prigogine's Nobel Prize-winning research on dissipative structures, Kenneth Ring's observations from near-death studies, and Richard Tarnas's analysis of the intellectual and cultural crises building in the twentieth century. I used this framework to ground the core assertions of this vision: that under the pressure of the extreme conditions of our future, the human psyche will come alive at new levels, that something like psychological phase-locking will take place, that the interconnections between people previously too subtle to be detected will become obvious, and that all of this will take place much faster than anyone could have predicted.<sup>\*58</sup>

I continue to believe that in order to understand how we will make this historic transition in as little time as we have, it is vital to understand the structural role that the collective psyche will play in it, but I will not reproduce these arguments here. Instead, I simply point to them for those who may wish to explore these issues further.

I do, however, want to underscore again the deep correspondence between the vision of humanity's awakening presented here and Richard Tarnas's powerful analysis of the trajectory of Western intellectual history in *The Passion of the Western Mind*. In the epilogue of that book, Tarnas presents the bold thesis that the human species as a whole is undergoing the same death-rebirth process that individuals undergo in Grof's psychedelic therapy, but on a much larger scale. Drawing on his deep knowledge of Grof's work and his comprehensive grasp of Western history, Tarnas illumines the archetypal sequence that he believes underlies the intellectual and cultural crises building in the modern era. The basic arc of this trajectory is one in which consciousness emerges within a primal, undifferentiated unity, undergoes a process of self-empowering individuation, and then undergoes a death of identity that leads to a reawakening to the original cosmic matrix, but now experienced on a new level that preserves the achievement of the entire trajectory. He demonstrates that when the history of Western thought is viewed in its entirety, one begins to see that the West has been on this journey of transformation for thousands of years and that it is presently entering the critical death-rebirth phase of this transition on all levels—intellectual,

social, political, economic, spiritual, and ecological. The power of Tarnas's argument lies in the compelling way he integrates so many aspects of our history around this thesis. For this, one must turn to the epilogue itself and to the subsequent analysis he presents in *Cosmos and Psyche*.

More than twenty years have passed since I had this vision of humanity's collective awakening. During these years, the unraveling of our planet has continued to accelerate. Global climate disruption has moved from being a scientific hypothesis to a Pentagon planning priority. The ice caps are melting faster than anyone predicted, and we continue to register one hottest year on record after another. Record-breaking hurricanes continue to savage our southern and eastern coasts, while in the West an unprecedented number of forest fires tear through the drought-parched hillsides. Meanwhile, our reefs continue to die, species perish, commodities shrink, and twenty-six people own as much of the planet's wealth as half of the world's population combined.<sup>\*59</sup> The 2018 report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made it brutally clear that these trends are rapidly taking us into an agonizing future, a future previewed with devastating honesty in David Wallace-Wells's *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019).

In a time of such growing instability, when the old certainties are beginning to fall away, it is understandable that people would be drawn to political leaders who promise to take us back to a more familiar and stable time. In 2016, the United States elected a president who denies the scientific consensus on global climate change, reasserts the old divisions of religion and race, and seeks to wall out the world. But denial will not hold back the oceans, and religious and racial stereotypes lead to Auschwitz and Dachau. In the end, this path will only accelerate our collective unraveling.

Despite the continuing deterioration of our ecological and social fabric, we have not yet come to the tipping point that Paul Gilding forecasts in *The Great Disturbance*.

Then there will be a tipping point when denial ends and the reality that we face a global, civilization-threatening risk will become accepted wisdom, virtually overnight. At that point, we will respond dramatically and with extraordinary speed and focus.

We may not have reached this threshold, but we soon will. Gilding continues:

It is not hard to imagine what a serious collapse inducing global crisis would look like if you put together the trends we've been discussing. A global famine that sees a billion people or more starving to death; a series of wars raging in the Middle East and elsewhere over water; armed conflict between China, India, and Pakistan over millions of refugees from political breakdown and food shortages; the drowning of people and nations in low-lying islands in storm surges; the global insurance industry going into insolvency in the face of a series of climate disasters and the run-on effects in the banking industry with uninsured assets being used as debt collateral; the collapse of global share markets when the risks of all these things are priced into share portfolios. (Gilding 2011, 106, 108)

It is when these events or events like them dismantle our world that the vision of the Great Awakening in session 55 will be put to the test. It is then that we will learn whether the field of the species-mind will become so hyperaroused by our collective suffering that it will begin to function in a nonlinear manner. If this happens, it will mark a new dawn for humanity. From *Dark Night, Early Dawn*:

As the inherent wholeness of existence becomes a living experience for more and more persons, individuals will find themselves empowered by new orders of creativity that could not have been anticipated as long as we were trapped within the narrow confines of an atomistic, self-referential mode of consciousness. As the encompassing fields of mind become stronger, synergy and synchronicity will increase. The Sacred Mind will spring alive inside the human family in ways that seem impossible from our current fragmented condition. However difficult the journey, who could not feel uplifted by the privilege of being part of such an undertaking? The pain of this labor should not be feared but used

creatively. We are building a new world for our grandchildren, indeed, a new species. (Bache 2000, 254–56)

## **What Form Will the Future Human Take?**

If history or nature or the Creative Intelligence of the universe is giving birth to a new form of human consciousness on this planet, the next question becomes, What form will this Future Human take? What will our evolutionary future self look like? To address this question, I want to connect the vision of the Great Awakening presented here with the vision of the birth of the Diamond Soul presented in the previous chapter. There is such a striking convergence of themes in these two visions that the longer I have held them both in my awareness, the more I have come to see them as deeply intertwined. I offer the following thoughts as a brief explanation for why I believe the form that the Future Human will take will be the Diamond Soul.

The vision of the Diamond Soul is a vision that sees the cycle of reincarnation coming to a crescendo that lifts the human experience to a higher register. Just as “young souls” become “old souls,” old souls will become “complete souls.” When our former lives are integrated and fused into a single consciousness, an explosion in our self-awareness takes place. The shell of the ego pops, and we no longer experience ourselves as being simply hundred-year-old beings but as hundred-thousand-year-old beings. When we look out on the world, we feel our connection with countless people formed over countless lifetimes. We see the Earth as our home for a thousand incarnations. In short, we know ourselves to be incarnating Souls.

In the Great Awakening narrative, we see a parallel story unfolding. In this narrative, the intelligence of the universe is working systematically to bring our entire species into a new chapter of its life: *“The entire human family integrated in a unified field of awareness. The species reconnected with its Fundamental Nature. Our thoughts tuned to Source Consciousness.”* After an arduous process of shedding our past, a quickening of the human spirit takes place, marked by *“new*



*ways of thinking, new values . . . new priorities, new perceptions of the good, new truths.”*

The parallels between these narratives are so numerous that I have come to view them as being synergistically linked. That is, I believe that the global systems crisis taking place in the world *outside* us is deeply connected to the evolutionary metamorphosis taking place *inside* us. As our planet struggles to become more integrated geopolitically, we are struggling to become more integrated psycho-spiritually. As our nations confront the consequences of our political and cultural divisions, we are confronting these same divisions carried in the memory of our former lives. As Earth struggles to become one planet, we are struggling to become one Soul. I believe that these processes are deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Several observations point in this direction.

First, as we think about the challenges we will be facing in years ahead, we should remember that the global systems crisis will not be happening to human beings as we traditionally think of them but to Souls. That is, from a reincarnational perspective, human beings are not simply hundred-year-old beings; they are Souls who carry potentially thousands of years of experience inside themselves. From this perspective, each of us is carrying many lifetimes of learning wrapped around our core. As the great unraveling hits, therefore, it will be Souls who will be experiencing it and choosing how to respond to it. When this long and sustained crisis puts enormous pressure on our social institutions to change and adapt, it will also put pressure on our individual psyches to change and adapt. Could this unprecedented pressure trigger a shedding of our psychological past and the emergence of Soul awareness faster than history alone might lead us to expect?

Next point: Our divided and damaged world was created by a species operating out of the egoic level of awareness. For all its many virtues and strengths, the ego is a fragmented consciousness isolated from the underlying fabric of life that binds us together. Albert Einstein famously said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.” I personally believe that the problems coming at us are too large to be solved by egoic awareness, even well-intentioned, collectively organized egoic awareness. There is a structural relationship between the self-interest and shortsightedness that has created this crisis and the nature

of the ego itself. I do not believe that we can grow the planet into a greater whole as long as we remain psychologically fragmented ourselves. If the private ego remains in control of our lives, we will remain a divided people, and if that happens we will likely perish. The ego of the private self built our divided world and is being consumed by the fires that are consuming this world.

In order to solve this impending crisis, we desperately need to grow up as a species, to shift from what Duane Elgin calls our adolescent self to our adult self. From a reincarnational perspective, “growing up” means owning and integrating the larger consciousness that has been gestating within us for thousands of years. Owning it, seeing the world through its eyes, and letting its accumulated wisdom shape our choices. The Soul lives in history differently than the ego. In order to solve this crisis, we need to adopt the long-term perspective that is natural to the Soul. The Soul *knows* that its relationship with this planet extends beyond the limits of its present life. It *knows* that the Earth we leave behind is the Earth we will inherit in our next incarnation. It knows this and it acts accordingly.

Next point: Because of reincarnation, each of us carries the world’s diversity inside ourselves. This simple fact may help us when we have to make the hard choices that will determine the future of this planet. In a world of shrinking resources, the argument to narrow our loyalties to “us and ours” is already being pressed. This has always been the ego’s strategy, to divide the world between the deserving and the undeserving based on some measure, be it nation, religion, race, or class. But inside our *lived* experience as reincarnating beings, each of us carries memories of having been these “others.” At some point in our long history, we have probably been every race, every religion, every nationality and class. We have been rich and poor, male and female, immigrant and native. This residual memory works to expand our feelings of empathy and responsibility to others. When push comes to shove, this inner history may help us make the courageous choices of inclusion that will save humanity and the other species that share this planet with us. Or looking at it the other way around, as we rise above our narrow self-interests and make the political and moral choices that will create a world that works for all, it may draw the awareness of our incarnational history forward in our awareness. We may literally *enact the Soul* into our conscious awareness through the political and social decisions we make in the years ahead.

And finally, one last point. When we come through this collective labor, we will discover that 95 percent of the work of creating this Future Human was already accomplished before our labor began. The birth of the Future Human is the culmination of a gestational process that has been underway for hundreds of thousands of years. Through the systematic expansion and integration of our human capacity lifetime after lifetime, we have been growing toward this historic breakthrough. Gestation is long and slow, but birth is sudden and quick. Our planet is going into labor and will soon give us no choice but to deliver our deeper self into history. The form of our future is implicit in our past. The Future Human *is* the Diamond Soul.

### **Another Voice: Bede Griffiths**

There is nothing about the vision of history presented in this chapter that is unique to psychedelics. It has been surfacing among indigenous peoples and contemplatives for many years. Let me bring this chapter to a close by sharing a poignant exchange between Bede Griffiths and Andrew Harvey about our moment in history. Bede Griffiths was the deeply loved and respected Benedictine monk who spent much of his life living in ashrams in southern India, cultivating a deep integration of Christian and Hindu spirituality. Harvey was visiting him in 1992 in connection with a documentary that was being made about his life. This exchange took place a year before Griffiths died. He was eighty-six years old.

Bede paused suddenly . . . and then said, quietly and intensely, “You know, of course, Andrew, that we are now in the hour of God.”

Although it was a warm, fragrant morning, I shivered.

“When you say ‘hour of God,’ what do you mean?”

“I mean that the whole human race has now come to the moment when everything is at stake, when a vast shift of consciousness will have to take place on a massive scale in all societies and religions for the world to survive. Unless human life becomes centered on the awareness of a transcendent reality that

embraces all humanity and the whole universe and at the same time transcends our present level of life and consciousness, there is little hope for us.”

His calm, measured, aristocratic voice made his words all the more arresting. Bede coughed and gazed at his fine, strong, bony hands.

“Very few people dare to face how extreme and decisive the situation has now become. Very few people are prepared to look without illusion at our time and see it for what it is—a crucifixion on a worldwide scale of everything humanity has expected or trusted or believed in every level and in every arena.”

I had never, in all the many hours we had spent together, heard him speak so nakedly and darkly about the future of the world, and I knew him well enough already to know that he never said anything without deep purpose.

We sat together in silence, absorbing the pain and challenge of his words. Then I asked, “Do you think humanity can get through?”

“Of course,” he said immediately, his voice strong, “but it will cost everything. Just as Jesus had to go through death into the new world of the Resurrection, so millions of us will have to go through a death to the past and to all old ways of being and doing if we are going to be brought by the grace of God into the truth of a real new age.”

Bede paused again, turning his head to look at me directly.

“I know for certain only two things about the time we are about to enter. The first is that it will see on every level a ruthless battle between those forces that want to keep humanity enslaved to the past—and these include religious fundamentalism, nationalism, materialism, and corporate greed—and those forces that will awaken in response to a hunger for a new way of living and of doing everything. The second thing I know—and I know this from my own inmost experience—is that God will shower help, grace, and protection on all those who sincerely want to change and are brave enough to risk the great adventure of transformation.”

Very softly, Bede added, “God, I believe, wants a new world and a new humanity to be born from what is about to unfold.” (Harvey 2005)

# TEN

## Diamond Luminosity

Sessions 44–69

*How can something so crystal clear,  
so devoid of earthly form,  
evoke tears of homecoming?*

SESSION 45

Light has always been recognized as a signature of the Divine. It is a universal constant in our spiritual traditions—a vast radiance fusing all knowledge, love, and power. Mystics attest to it; those who have nearly died attest to it. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that when our psychedelic journey takes us deep into the universe, the Light is waiting for us.

The following account comes from Walter Pahnke, a loved and respected figure in the early psychedelic community, most famous for conducting the Good Friday Experiment at Harvard University in 1962. What is particularly striking about this experience is that it took place during Pahnke's first LSD session. It must have been an extraordinary day.

The most impressive and intense part of this experience was the **WHITE LIGHT** of absolute purity and cleanness. It was like a glowing and sparkling flame of incandescent whiteness and beauty, but not really a flame—more like a gleaming white hot ingot, yet much bigger and vaster than a mere ingot. The associated feelings

were those of *absolute* AWE, REVERENCE, AND SACREDNESS. Just before this experience I had the feeling of going deep within myself to the Self stripped bare of all pretense and falseness. This was the point where a man could stand firm with absolute integrity—something more important than mere physical life. The white light experience was of *supreme* importance—absolutely self-validating and something worth staking your life on and putting your trust in. The white light itself was so penetrating and intense that it was not possible to look directly at it. It was not in the room with me, but we were both somewhere else—and my body was left far behind. (Quoted in Richards 2016, 74)

Like Pahnke, many journeyers have reported being flooded with a supernatural radiance after going through ego-death. As one moves into still deeper levels of transpersonal experience, one encounters fields nested within fields of light. Each step beyond matter, beyond the soul, beyond the collective psyche, and beyond archetypal reality takes us deeper into a living ecology of light. Eventually, one discovers that the entire universe floats in an Ocean of Radiance.

In my experience, there are many gradations of light. As one moves deeper into transcendence, the quality of light changes. It becomes clearer, more intense, and more luminous, calling for a new vocabulary of light. Light becomes LIGHT. Clarity becomes Hyper-Clarity. When I speak in this chapter of the Diamond Luminosity or the Diamond Light, I am not using a colorful metaphor to describe the light. I am attempting to describe a particular quality of light, a singularly intense dimension of light.

We have seen light show up in many sessions already. It appeared in the Cosmic Tree composed entirely of light and later in the Archetypal Meltdown, where I entered a “*brilliant Clarity.*” It surfaced in A Flash of “God” when everything dissolved “*in a rainfall of brilliant, sparkling white light,*” in Singing the Universe Away with its visions of “*deep space filled with ethereal light,*” and in Jesus’ Blood where “*everything took on the inner radiance of that Eternal Light.*” All these, it turns out, were precursors to the Diamond Luminosity that emerged in these next four years.

After the year of the Benediction of Blessings, I had no idea where the sessions would go next. I felt completely satisfied and richly rewarded for work already done. I had explored the universe, been taken deep into Oneness, and been drenched in cosmic love. What more could one ask for?

Given the deep peace of these blessings, I had expected that the ordeal of dying might stop now. After such deep transcendence of duality and immersion in universal love, I thought that surely the transition into transpersonal reality would stabilize and become easier. And it would have, I think, *if* I had stayed within the levels of reality I had been initiated into thus far. But for better or for worse, the method of exploration I had adopted was so powerful that it kept pushing me beyond my experiential edges. Without fully realizing the consequences of what I was doing, I kept stoking the fires of transformation and new vistas of reality kept opening to me. I did not appreciate then what I have come to understand now—that dying is part of an endless cycle of discovery and that it will keep returning again and again as long as one keeps challenging the limits of one's experience. I had expected closure. What I received instead was the infinite depth of the Beloved.

The Diamond Light that exploded from my chest in session 38 was the forerunner of what emerged in full splendor now. After going through yet one more intense cycle of death and rebirth, I was taken into a brilliantly clear, supremely luminous radiance. Buddhism calls this radiance *dharmakaya*—the Clear Light of Absolute Reality.<sup>\*60</sup> I call it the domain of Diamond Luminosity. This Luminosity captivated me so completely that it extinguished any interest in continuing to explore the other levels of existence that had previously fascinated me. This was a different order of reality altogether. Its clarity was so overwhelming, its energy so pure that returning to it became my sole focus in future sessions.

Over the next four years and twenty-six sessions, the gates to this reality opened four times, and just four times. The names I gave these four sessions are:

- S 45 The Death State
- S 50 Diamond Luminosity
- S 60 Universal Field of Light



This chapter tells the story of what happened in these four sessions. It is the story of entering the Diamond Light and of the intense purification that took place as this Diamond Light began to work its way more deeply into my physical being. The first two of these sessions focused on entering the Diamond Luminosity at successively deeper levels, the second two on absorbing the Diamond Luminosity into my mind and body. Into this narrative, I will weave two other pieces. The first is a set of new insights into the psychedelic process that emerged at this time. The second is the story of how I came to integrate Vajrayana Buddhist practice into my psychedelic practice and why.

Twenty-six sessions are a lot of sessions, double the number covered in any previous chapter and more than a third of the total sessions undertaken. Obviously, there was a great deal taking place in these sessions, far more than I can do justice to here. The Great Awakening session took place in the middle of this sequence, and there were a number of “teaching sessions” scattered throughout, but the most important dynamic of these four years was the rhythmic cycle of entering the Diamond Luminosity and the Diamond Luminosity entering me. These four days were the deepest, richest, and most precious gifts of my entire journey. They are the true diamonds from heaven. In order to concentrate on this core process, I’m going to trim away sessions that, while interesting in their own right, would take us away from this central narrative. Before I do, however, let me say this about them.

After subtracting the half dozen or so sessions that were spent digesting the Diamond Luminosity and Great Awakening sessions, the strongest pattern in the remaining sessions was a series of personal healings. Pains from my childhood were systematically brought forward and resolved in a decisive and efficient manner. At first I thought this was odd, coming after years of working at the collective level to heal the species-mind. I thought that personal healing would normally have taken place before collective healing, and it took me awhile to understand why things were unfolding in this reverse order. I did not get the sense that it was because I had simply jumped over these personal issues because of the high doses I was working with, though the work would surely have

unfolded differently had I been working with lower doses. There was something different going on.

Eventually, I learned that this sequence of events was not accidental but part of a life script fashioned before I was born. I mention this because I think it may also be true for others who have incarnated at this demanding time in history. It was my personal wounding in life, modest though it was, that had allowed me to connect with the wounds of humanity in the ocean of suffering. My personal pain had anchored one side of an energetic bridge between my individual psyche and the collective psyche, a bridge that had allowed something operating through me to drain destructive energies out of the species-mind. Had my personal wounds been healed first, the anchor on my end would have been missing and the bridge to the collective psyche might not have been formed. This would have compromised the larger system's ability to accomplish the intended collective healing. Now that my part in this collective healing was finished, it was as though the anchor of my personal pain was no longer needed and was now being pulled up by its roots.

I am not going to spend time on these personal healings beyond those included in the four sessions presented. It's not that I am ashamed or embarrassed by my personal issues. There was no great trauma here, simply the wounds of growing up with parents of mixed capacities. I hold them back because in addition to honoring the privacy of the other parties involved, the details of my personal healing are not really important to the primary theme of this chapter and I don't want them to become a distraction. Everyone has a personal story, everyone carries some personal pain, but as we will see, the details of our personal story fall away as almost irrelevant when one enters the Diamond Light.

One last point before we begin. It was during this late phase of the journey that I learned that there are many *degrees of dying* in a psychedelic session and that the deepest breakthroughs tend to follow the deepest deaths. With this discovery, death became my closest ally in the work. What had begun in the early sessions as confronting my shadow morphed into a discipline of actively embracing death in whatever form it presented itself. Far from being something to be feared, death became something I sought out, repeatedly plunging myself into its purifying fire. This is a strange thing to say, I know, but other psychedelic journeyers will

understand. I was not a glutton for pain; rather, I was a glutton for what lies on the other side of pain.

What follows is a very intimate story, as all love stories are. Though it is my story, it is more than this. The Diamond Light is our common heritage. It is the reality we all come from and to which we all return. It is the Source of existence, the Intelligence of the universe, the Essential Nature of everything that exists. It is what we in essence are.

The breakthrough to the Diamond Luminosity in session 45 was preceded by a very intense purification process in session 44. Together these two sessions formed two halves of a single death-rebirth process, and so I will present them together.



## **Session 44—The Crystal of Death**

*After a long introduction that yielded many insights into various family relationships, the theme of fear returned from the previous session and began to unfold itself powerfully and tenaciously. I yielded and followed. So much fear. Where was it coming from? What lay behind it? Very few images came to give the fear any specific shape or form, and I had to work to keep myself open to it.*

*As things continued, I began to sense a fear of dying. I became people who were dying, and they were afraid of the pain, of the unknown, of separation from loved ones. Fear and death intertwined in countless variations. A small part of me recognized the symptoms of engaging a META-COEX system, sensed that this was part of some death-rebirth cycle, but soon all this was swallowed by death. Dying swallowed even fear. Everything was death. Death and dying. I was dying. The parameters of this dying exceeded anything I had previously known. How can dying reach such proportions?*

*Somewhere in here, I realized that there were many degrees of dying. I had died much already in the sessions. Now I was being invited to die even more. I could choose to die as much or as little as I wanted today.*

*I found myself suspended in a crystal of light. The bottom of the crystal was pointed and clear; the top was tinged with red and disappeared into radiating bands of shining light. My arms were stretched out from my body at 90 degrees in complete surrender, and I could choose how much I would die, how much I would allow myself to be dissolved into the light that was beaming through me. I could feel the extraordinary diversity of experience available to me as light. In the light, as light, infinite experience was possible. To surrender myself to this mode of experience would be to surrender all localized, individualized experience.*

*In this transfixed condition, I began to consciously choose death. I chose to open myself layer by layer to deeper currents of light. I could feel it reaching into me, changing me, transmuting me into something different. With my feet held firmly in the point of the crystal, my upper torso dissolved into pure light. I moved in light. I was light. It was joyous; a completely different world, a completely different reality. It was*

*different from previous sessions. Though less saturated by ecstasy, it was more ethereal. Though I was less far out in the transpersonal universe, ego was more thoroughly erased.*

*After a relatively short time in this blissful reality, I was returned to the currents of fear. I can't say what directed me back there or why. Fear was simply present again, so I dove into it seeking to get to its core. This time the fear was many times greater than before. It had many more layers to it, many more variations. Inwardly, I shuddered as wave after wave of fear coursed through me. Again I sought for explanations, but there were none. Fragments from my present life swirled in symphony with fragments from former lives and lives that seemed to come from the collective psyche.*

*From one perspective, I was melting a collective META-COEX of fear in the species-mind. From another perspective, I was engaged in shamanic combat with demons of fear, but what strange combat this was. Here one "conquers" by surrendering, by making oneself vulnerable to what surrounds you. I kept holding still and opening, taking into myself whatever presented itself in my experience, opening to wave after wave of fear, always searching for some sign of its origin but finding none.*

*Then something shifted. In the midst of the collective mayhem, a more personal theme arose. Fear merged with feelings of helplessness. Early infantile experiences of helplessness merged with memories of being a soldier dying alone on a battlefield after the battle had ended. A soldier's dying gasp blended with an infant's vulnerable cry. No comrades anywhere, no help. I was alone. Somewhere in history, aloneness, helplessness, and fear had fused in me. Now the pieces were finally coming out and separating.*

*I stayed with the experience of helplessness for a long time. It played and played for hours of clock time and centuries of session time. After giving up all hope of ever reaching the bottom of it, it finally and undramatically released me. Something had played itself out, and I was free. It was late in the session, and I was bone-weary tired. As I began to move about mentally, I found myself in a world shimmering around the edges with light, but I was too exhausted and it was too late in the day to do more than briefly touch this domain.*

(One month later.)



## **Session 45—The Death State**

*Today is a day I have waited many years for. How can I express my gratitude to every person and circumstance that made today possible? How can I say thank you enough?*

*After a long period of opening, I found myself repeatedly saying, "I have earned the right to die." Far from fearing death, I was seeking it out, demanding that death come to me. I was deflecting half-measures and insisting on my right to a complete and final death. I had done my work; I had earned the right to die, and I was calling on this right. My litany focused me, carrying me deeper and deeper to a point of complete concentration.*

*From this position of absolute focus, I began to die. Oh, what sweet death! I began to savor what was happening. What I had previously feared now opened as incredible sweetness. How wonderful to experience death! What a surprising reversal! Thank you, thank you.*

*Upon dying, I moved into an ecstatic mode of experience that was different from anything I have previously known; the entire flow of the experience was different. Light-filled, yes; a universe composed of nothing but light. But what stood out for me is something I have difficulty finding words for. It was as if I had moved inside the inner flow of God's being, as if my life was now bending and flowing through a being of infinite dimensions. There was nothing amorphous or fuzzy about the experience; on the contrary, it was extraordinarily clear and precise. The boundaries of this clarity exceeded anything I had previously known.*

## **The Life Circle**

*Apparently, one death was not enough to get the job done in my case. I found myself standing in the middle of a circle of spinning bands of colorful energy that held my entire life. All my time-moments were present in them. I fell into this circle, touching some part of my life, but as soon as I did, it "died out from under me" and I instantly found myself in the luminous death-state beyond individual identity. Then I would be returned to the center of the circle and the process would repeat itself, now falling in a different direction and touching a different area of my life. Over and over again, I went through this process of "dying in all directions," driving home the point that there was nothing unfinished here. Wherever I turned, there was no resistance, only effortless death and incredible sweetness.*

## **The Death State**

*The repetition kept expanding the scope of the transition, taking me deeper and deeper into ecstasy until eventually there was no center to return to, only the pure, seamless condition of the death state. What strange language to describe our true nature.*

*The Death State.*

*Incredibly clear.*

*Luminous beyond measure.*

*Incredible age.*

*A seamless intelligence running not above but inside existence.*

*Reaching out and moving into larger wholes of experience.*

*Ecologies of experience encompassing thousands, perhaps millions of beings.*

*Human-experience folded into Earth-experience.*

*Just touches, tastes.*

*Ecstatic reverence for the integrated movement of life throughout the universe.*

*For hours I was carried along the currents of this condition. About this state, one says either too little or too much. The price of saying nothing is to risk forgetting the subtler textures of the experience, yet to speak creates the illusion that words are adequate and they are not. Even after fifteen years, today was so unlike any previous mode of experience that language truly fails. Silent appreciation seems the best recourse, combined with ceaseless prayers of thanksgiving.*

*How can something so crystal clear,  
so devoid of earthly form,  
evoke tears of homecoming?  
What are we that such imprisoned splendor,  
once released, floods us with rivers of gratitude?  
Whom shall we thank for what we are?  
Where do I direct my deep appreciation?  
There is no one place,  
so I send my prayer into the seamless fabric of existence,  
left and right, high and low,  
in infinite dimensions all around.*

*My attempts to describe the experience keep breaking down,  
and I end up repeating the same words over and over.  
I was home  
and free  
and Light.*

*There is nothing more I can say.*

## **The Hunger to Return**

Once one has entered the Diamond Luminosity, the hunger to return to it is overwhelming. Nothing else feels worth pursuing. The joys that previous sessions had opened to me paled by comparison. How does one describe the freedom of *becoming* Light, of eclipsing so radically the limitations of space and time? The poetry of Rumi and Hafiz took on new significance for me, for I had become a hopeless lover of the divine condition.

The drama of the lover seeking his Beloved played itself out powerfully in the next session, which I called Stormy Mountain. In this

session, I spent hours moving in and out of different states of awareness, but they didn't go anywhere. There were mild episodes of toxic draining that did not build and fleeting experiences of unitive consciousness that kept dissolving into the flow. No decisive line of experience was opening, and I was getting increasingly frustrated. If serious cleansing was not emerging as a focus, why wasn't the luminous death state showing itself? Though I had tried to surrender all expectations before the session, the truth was that I had a deep need to return to the Diamond Light.

In an attempt to trigger a way through this impasse, I asked that "Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares" be put on, the powerful music that had accompanied me into the death state in session 45 and had erased the physical universe in session 40. As soon as it came on, however, I was thrown into convulsions and vomited violently. The disparity in energy between where I had been with this music in those earlier sessions and where I was today was so great that it was more than my body could manage. Today I was locked in a cheap imitation of that beautiful ecstasy, imprisoned in a distant echo of its true splendor.

The pain and disappointment of being trapped in realities so far from my Beloved were terrible, but eventually I made peace with my condition.

*After some time, I found myself standing on the side of a mountain. It was night; there was a storm beating down, a driving rain, but I was able to see the stars overhead. The music of the "Voix Bulgares" became my song to my Beloved. These women who had previously been the voice of God singing me into transcendence became my voice as I sang to my Beloved from outside the gates. I knew that my Beloved was present; I knew that it was my Essential Nature. I had known it once and would know it again. Though I was helplessly trapped on Earth, I sang to the heavens, knowing it could hear me.*

*I sang the love song of our past embrace.*

*I sang what we had done in promise of what we would do again.*

*I sang my eternal love and my promise to return.*

*As I sang song after song of the music that is now etched in my soul, the pain began to ease. Though I continued to be locked out of paradise, I eventually made peace with my*

*situation. This brief interruption changed nothing. I would return. We would be one again. (S 46)*

## **New Insights into the Psychedelic Process**

After my first entry into the Diamond Luminosity, I repeatedly had the sense of “starting over again” in my sessions. The death state was not an end but a new beginning, and it would take time to adjust to this new reality. Not surprisingly, the next sessions were filled with episodes of intense purification and clearing old karmic patterns. As the work continued, a series of new insights into the psychedelic process emerged.

First, I began to get a clear sense that these luminous states of awareness were being fed to me slowly and in a controlled manner, almost like an IV drip. No matter how often I begged to be exploded into transcendence, some larger consciousness was deliberately not allowing this to happen. It took years before I understood what I think was behind this restraint.

An invisible presence seemed to be *protecting my individuality* even while repeatedly taking that individuality to its breaking point. Too much awareness too fast would overwhelm the center of integration required to grow an awareness that was building *inside* space-time. I slowly came to realize that something was intentionally guiding the integration of these extreme states of consciousness into my embodied awareness, even if the pace of that integration frustrated me terribly. The work was not simply about going out and experiencing new dimensions of spiritual reality but bringing that awareness back and stabilizing it here on Earth. A cognitively overwhelming rapture, though wonderful in the short term, would accomplish nothing productive in the long term. I was being fed these states as quickly as I could manage them, but managing them required more cleansing and more detoxification.

Second, I began to realize that my system was *accumulating and storing energy* across multiple sessions, even though these sessions were sometimes months apart. I had watched as each session began more or less where the previous session had stopped, so I knew that they were tightly interwoven thematically, but I had assumed that each session stood on its own feet energetically, that the energetic output of each session was



separate and independent. Now I began to realize that there was an energetic momentum building across the sessions. My system was somehow storing energy activated in multiple sessions and then using that stored energy to generate these massive periodic breakthroughs. This was a sobering discovery as it changed my calculation of the true cost of each breakthrough. Each new initiation into a deeper level of reality was being underwritten not by hours but by months and even years of work.

And last, a shift took place in the *structural flow* of my experience in these sessions. In earlier sessions such as the Cosmic Tour or entering archetypal reality, my subjective experience had been one of expanding outward as I explored vast cosmological landscapes. Now in this series of sessions, the flow of experience was reversing itself. I repeatedly experienced myself being at the center of an enormous field of energy and light that I had gained access to through my work in the ocean of suffering, but now this field was being drawn back into me. When this happened, the energy would become extremely concentrated and explode me into an even brighter level of light. In my notes, I wrote:

*I keep experiencing something like a reaching out and drawing in of this field, consolidating it, concentrating it, and stabilizing it within the center that "I" represent. Instead of being allowed to flow out into the myriad worlds that exist at this level, I am being concentrated and taken through some metamorphosis that is taking me into an entirely new level of reality. (S 48)*

This was a new form of the death-rebirth process. Huge fields of experience from previous sessions were being concentrated in these exercises. It felt like all my previous psychedelic experiences were being consumed in them, taking me into a reality that was once again more "real" than these previous levels had been and that operated by different rules.

Eventually, the intelligence guiding my sessions took me back into the Diamond Luminosity in the 50th session. This was to be my deepest immersion into the Diamond Light of my entire journey. Because the cleansing portion of this session touches on my relationship with my father, I want to mention that the picture it gives of him is far from complete. I'll say more about this after the session.



## Session 50—Diamond Luminosity

*As the session opened, I followed a thread of distress until it unfolded into an outpouring of helplessness. I began to relive old experiences of helplessness. I found myself in my childhood—living with parents who lacked a deep understanding of me, helpless before my father’s early death, helpless in a home missing sufficient nurturance.*

*I moved deeper into my experience of being a child in my father’s house. I felt into what our relationship had been and what it had not been, and a deep sadness moved through me. From my experience of being a father myself, I reviewed my dad’s life with me and was swept away by the tragedy of how little we had actually shared. I felt his presence in the background of my life as a powerful force that gave it structure and safety, that pushed me to work hard, to fulfill my responsibilities and accomplish great things. But it was also a powerful presence that I was careful not to anger. The most poignant part was discovering how restricted our contact had been, how few opportunities his natural way of being in the world had created for us to meet. He was so focused on his work and away from home so often. There was so much potential for us, but it ran through his fingers. I wept deeply, waves of sadness pushing up through me for what had not been. I then focused on my mom and a similar pattern presented itself—all the externals taken care of but my heart sealed away in a small chamber.*

*Together my parents had shaped my fundamental sense of who and what I was. From my mom, I relived over and over never feeling quite good enough. From my dad, I had internalized a subtle Depression Era worry about financial security and professional accomplishment. From both sides, I was never made to feel that I was fine, safe, and sufficient just as I am. My childhood played itself out in a hundred scenes, and underneath them all I felt my solitude. Even as a child, I was trying to make my way through life on my own. There was no real help from my family, no deep bonding with my brothers and sister. The greatest sadness of all was that I did not realize how distorted my isolation was. It was all I had known. I wept for all the years of unnecessary pain.*

### **Deeper Prebirth Level**

*Beneath this there unfolded a deeper level that intermittently carried me into a strange and particularly intense domain. Here the theme of “no help” carried me back before my birth, into a world of expanded time and expanded associations, a much more saturated reality than my present life.*

*I experienced being a grown man dying in battle, a man trapped and beaten down by life, crying out for help and finding none. A very old pain, a great pain. “I could not save them. I could not stop the advance. . . . My men My people.” An overwhelming wave of invaders. Hopeless anguish at the injustice of it all. More than just a former life, it felt in places like a collective memory culled from many lives and compressed. It was very old, very layered, and very dense.*

*In this second reality, I was going through a meltdown around the theme of “no help.” I was “before God,” experiencing an absolute desperation one can only experience before one’s Creator. “Help me! Help me!” I moaned. To cry out for help*

here was to cry out from the center of my being. To be turned down here was to be turned down irrevocably and forever. I cried out before God and before all. I begged for help, but none came. Instead, this distinctive pain kept flowing out of me, like draining a lanced boil.

I moved back and forth between my childhood and this prebirth domain and then saw that my entire life as Chris Bache had been designed to crystallize these deeper poisons inside space-time. Back and forth, back and forth. The energy of the prebirth domain was many times greater than my current incarnation. Whenever I moved into that reality, my experience became much more intense and kaleidoscopic, a giant whirlpool spinning around me in perfectly balanced rotation.

At one point, I found myself reliving what felt like a very old choice repeated in many lifetimes. I was experiencing complete helplessness, vulnerability, and isolation, and I felt myself choose anger as a way of coping. I had responded to the injury of helplessness with anger. Back and forth I moved between the two as I explored anger's safety and heat. Anger had given me strength; it had allowed me to move; it had held back the pain. Now these connections were being undone.

I began to sense that I was "consuming my incarnation" in this exercise. Spanning both present and past lifetimes, this meltdown seemed to be consuming the seeds of my present life. It felt like the deepest roots of my historical existence were being unearthed and dissolved. What had been done was now being undone; what I had been was being re-assimilated.

It felt as though my entire life had been voluntarily chosen rather than karmically necessitated. Could this be true? The wounding that I had received from my parents seemed to be part of a larger plan to anchor me in the collective psyche in a way that had fashioned me into a conduit for drawing specific poisons out of the species-mind. Now that this task was finished, the sessions were drawing up my incarnation by its roots and dissolving the personal pain that had sewn me into these historical currents. If I had uprooted my personal pain before now, I could not have accomplished my life's work. I did not know where this process was going or how it would end.

There was only the personal tragedy of my life unfolding in an endless spiral. I don't know if it eventually exhausted itself or if there is still more pain to unearth. All I know is that after a very long time, I found myself in a different reality. There was no pronounced transition, no noticeable death or dying. I was completely exhausted from the pain, absolutely spent. The transition was gradual. Slowly, I began to realize that I was existing in a different reality.

## **Diamond Luminosity**

I began to stir, and as I did, the slightest movement of my mind triggered waves of ecstasy. The Light I had entered in session 45 was back and with it the ecstasy and weightlessness of transcendence. I had repeatedly begged to be restored to this domain, but except for the briefest of tastes had been kept outside the gates. Now through some inscrutable design, I was carried back and deposited in this world.

The Light was not outside me or surrounding me or even concentrated as a flow inside me. Rather, I was completely dissolved into the Light. I was inside the Light and the Light was inside me; it was as though there were only the thinnest distinction

*between “me” and the Light. I had only the vaguest suggestion of boundaries. To the extent that I could see myself at all, I looked like sparkling diamond dust.*

*I began to uncurl myself slowly, like a freshly hatched butterfly stretching its wings, and my slightest movements sent waves of joy coursing through me. The ecstasy was almost more than I could manage. I dared not move quickly, for if I did the bliss overwhelmed me. As I realized what was happening, my heart began to sing, but ever so gently. Like a patient long ill climbing carefully out of his sickbed, I moved slowly and carefully into this world that was both familiar and new to me. I was back! Very slowly, I stretched myself into the Light.*

*At this point, words fail because the usual distinctions do not apply. The dualism between “me” and “the Light,” between agent and environment, no longer holds. If I say “I moved into the Light” or “The Light received me and drew me out,” this is true, but it masks the deeper experience. The deeper experience was unfolding myself into Myself, into my own reality.*

*I stretched myself out very slowly to explore the reaches of my new being, and it was all Light. The most difficult thing to describe is the extraordinary CLARITY.*

*I was Light.*

*This world was Light,  
and Light knows no boundaries.*

*As my experience of being Light deepened, my boundaries expanded.*

*As I became larger, I also became clearer.*

*As the clarity deepened,*

*I was lifted beyond the patterns that make up my historical existence.*

*The desires that had formed the currents of my historical life*

*were taken back into their nuclear forms,*

*expressing themselves at these extraphysical levels.*

*Small historical concerns were exchanged for cosmic patterns*

*Such joy,*

*and the joy came not from the content of the experiences*

*but from the mode of consciousness itself.*

*CLARITY.*

*SHINING, LUMINOUS, TRANSPARENT CLARITY.*

*EXQUISITE JOY.*

*DIAMOND LUMINOSITY.*

## ***In and Out of Space-Time***

*In this diaphanous state of luminous peace, I found myself at one point being moved back toward my earthly identity. I felt my familiar world slowly congeal around me, phantasms of duality hiding the clarity of Oneness. Back and forth I moved, from*

*Clarity into the conditions of historical existence and back again into Clarity. The world of form was congealing around me and then falling away repeatedly. I was being focused in and out of space-time.*

*I could not sustain the full Clarity of Diamond Luminosity inside the conditions of my historical existence for very long. I could hold it for a short while but then would get distracted by the seeming realities I was part of. Soon I had fallen overboard and was adrift in a sea of impressions. Then, just as I had adjusted to the “normal” conditions of my earthly life, the shapes would fall away and I would be restored by stages to my original, pristine condition. Such joy to be restored; such sadness to lose this Clarity.*

## ***Beyond the Diamond Luminosity***

*Of all the many wonderful experiences from today, there is one that stands out above all others, but I can only convey a small suggestion of its true dimensions.*

*It was late in the session. I was in a state of exceptional Clarity, floating tranquilly in a peace that lay far beyond historical existence. Suddenly, everything pivoted 90 degrees, and a huge gap opened to reveal entire worlds beyond the world I was in. Shining through them was the most sublime, exquisite LIGHT that was as far beyond the Diamond Light as the Diamond Light is beyond space-time. This ABSOLUTE LIGHT hit me like a bolt of lightning. It completely transfixed me and left me stunned in rapture. Such splendor! An exponential increase in clarity. I cannot describe the effect touching such HYPER-CLARITY had on me. In only seconds, it completely redefined my life’s agenda. The progressive realization is endless. Any cost, any cost!*

## **Comment**

This last experience lasted only seconds, but it completely changed my understanding of existence. Now I understood that no matter how deeply I entered the Divine Cosmos, there would always be deeper dimensions still. There is no end to this journey. This represented such a profound shift in my thinking that it first jarred me to the bone and then relaxed me into infinite wonder.

Like many of us, I had always operated under the assumption that there was a final endpoint to this journey, an absolute destination that we could eventually reach. Some have spoken of Oneness with God or absorption into the Supracosmic Void as such an endpoint. I had tasted both, but in doing so I had learned that there are many permutations and degrees of Divine Oneness and even degrees of Formlessness, though it may sound like a contradiction in terms to say so. The continual unfolding of new experiential horizons in my sessions kept moving the goalposts back, but

it had not dissolved my expectation that there was a final stopping point to this journey.

When the Diamond Luminosity first opened, it had carried such a powerful sense of completion and homecoming that I thought I had finally found what I was looking for. I could not imagine anything more fulfilling or complete than the Pure Light of Diamond Luminosity. And indeed, I did find my personal stopping point here. But at the very moment of reaching this pinnacle, this session showed me that there are dimensions of existence beyond even this. I saw that there are more dimensions of Light than I will ever be able to explore in this lifetime, even using this powerful method. There is simply not enough time, and I do not have enough strength to touch them all. We are truly children waking in the arms of an infinite cosmos.

And this is why I would be gentler with myself were I starting this journey over again. The goal of this work, I have learned, is not to achieve some final condition or reach the end of this infinity. I think the goal of deep work is to make ourselves transparent to this infinity, to let as much of it into our earthly lives as we can skillfully manage, and to be patient with the rest. For this, a gentler path works well. I have more respect now for the slow but steady pace of our self-evolution.

Let me add a note here about my father because I could not bear to send into the world such an incomplete portrait of the man I loved so deeply. When we engage a COEX system of painful memories in a session, it temporarily becomes our entire reality. In reliving what went wrong in a relationship, we temporarily lose touch with what went right until the catharsis has run its course and the pain has been re-assimilated. Then the whole picture comes back into view. As a result, what this session shows of my father is true, but it is an incomplete truth.

My dad was a robust and powerful man who loved his family deeply, and we felt his love. Born in Mississippi in 1916, he was a self-made man who lived the Horatio Alger myth. When he was eleven years old, his father died suddenly from pneumonia on the eve of the Great Depression, and his life became financially hard. After two years of high school, he went to work to help support his mother and sister, at one point selling candy bars to corner markets from the trunk of their car. He entered the Army Air Corps during World War II, flew bombers, and came back a

major with the Distinguished Flying Cross and the respect and loyalty of his men. Despite never going to college, he became a high-ranking executive in the Army Corp of Engineers, where he was nationally recognized for his administrative expertise. My father designed and built our family home, choosing an African American for his head carpenter, which was an unusual thing to do in Mississippi in 1956. He loved the outdoors and seemed happiest there. My best memories of my dad are hunting and fishing with him. Yes, he had a temper, but his virtues far outweighed his shortcomings. What you see in this session is the ache of someone who wanted more of his father, not less. He died of congestive heart failure when he was fifty years old, two weeks before I entered college.

## **Vajrayana Buddhist Practice**

We are now in the middle of this four-year period, with two sessions presented and two remaining. At this point, I want to step back and drop another layer into the story. I want to describe a change that took place in how I conducted my sessions during these four years. To describe this change and what it meant, I have to explain how entering these intense states of consciousness was affecting my body. This will involve taking a bit of a detour from the main story, but a detour that will deepen the plot.

On the morning of my first entry into the Diamond Luminosity, Carol offered to do a Tibetan practice for me that she had recently learned called Chöd. Chöd means “cutting.” It is a Vajrayana Buddhist practice for removing obstacles and cutting through ego. Its lineage traces back to Machig Labdrön, a revered female practitioner from eleventh-century Tibet. Carol had received the practice from her teacher, Lama Tsultrim Allione, who had received it from her teacher, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche. I quickly accepted her invitation because it felt timely. The previous session had finished well, and today felt like it would be a good day. So on this particular morning, we started the day with Carol doing Chöd over me for forty minutes, and then we began the session.

By this time, I was a seasoned journeyer. I knew how my system responded to LSD, and I had a solid sense of the size and shape of my

psychedelic window. On this day, however, my window opened wider and stayed open longer than it ever had before. In my session notes, I wrote:

*Today it was as though my surrounding field had been pulled back by an unseen force, as if it had been cleansed before I got there so that when I arrived my experience opened farther and stayed open longer than it normally does. There was a quantum jump in spaciousness and clarity, and though there have been quantum jumps before, this one felt different. It felt as though several layers of density had been cleared away for me. When I extended myself into this new surround, my experience met with less resistance. It flowed more smoothly, reached farther horizons, and stayed open longer. (S 45)*

This change was so palpable that immediately after the session I decided to learn Chöd myself. Two months later, I received the practice from Lama Tsultrim, and it became a regular part of my spiritual practice. Since that day, I have never done a psychedelic session without doing Chöd first.

This is the beginning of a longer story of my following Carol into Vajrayana Buddhism and the many retreats we took together at Tara Mandala, a Buddhist retreat center in Colorado founded by Lama Tsultrim. Carol joined its board, and Tara Mandala became part of our family as we spent many summer retreats there. I had taught courses in Buddhism for years and knew its philosophy well, but this was practice not theory, so I learned the core practices of Vajrayana. After Chöd there were purification practices, deity practices, guru yoga practices, and contemplation practices. In short, I learned to pray in the language of the *dakinis* (female meditational deities). I learned to respect the concentrated power of mantras and to use creative visualization to open inner doors. With a sensitivity developed in my psychedelic sessions, I could feel the powerful fields that surrounded these ancient practices from countless Buddhists having done them through history.

So it was that during the last five years of my psychedelic journey, when the work was entering its most intense phase, I integrated Vajrayana practice into my psychedelic practice. I had always been a meditator, but this represented a more formal commitment to a specific lineage of dharma transmission. I was comfortable with most of Buddhist thought—not the patriarchy—and many of its teachings had been confirmed in my sessions. Vajrayana Buddhism is sometimes described as a synthesis of the sage tradition of Indian Buddhism and the shamanic Bon tradition



indigenous to Tibet. Shamanism, therefore, is built into its very fabric. Perhaps this is why combining Vajrayana practice with my psychedelic practice always felt natural to me.

From session 45 on, I wove Vajrayana practice into my psychedelic practice. I also wove my psychedelic practice into my Vajrayana practice by drawing on my memories of transcendence to deepen various visualization and contemplation practices. It was always a two-way street for me, but here my focus is on what Vajrayana gave my psychedelic practice, and this story centers on energy. I have already described the energetic aspects of psychedelic work, how each deeper level of reality operates at a higher level of energy. Now I want to describe how immersing myself in these fields of energy was impacting me after each session.

My experience has been that once I make solid contact with a given level of transpersonal reality in a session, I continue to have a living connection with that reality even after the session ends. It is as though when a strong and stable window into the universe opens, after it closes a small filament continues to connect me to this level and a trickle of its energy flows into me through this filament. Just a trickle, but trickles add up. The more time I spend at a given level of reality, the stronger the filament becomes and the greater the trickle of energy.

As my practice deepened through the years and I made stable contact with more and more levels of spiritual reality, it felt like multiple strands of energy were formed, connecting me permanently to all these levels. Through these strands, different shades of energy flowed into my body and mind every day. During my years of active practice, this was a very tangible sensation. After stopping my sessions in 1999, this flow slowly subsided, but it has never stopped.

This energy nourished me spiritually and helped me grow into the being I was becoming, but it also became something of a problem. My sessions were so intense that eventually my system was having difficulty managing all this “extra” energy. In deep psychedelic sessions, you open yourself to enormous tidal waves of energy. They carry you into vast energetic landscapes that are fascinating to experience, but after the session ends it can leave your subtle energy system feeling stretched and achy. This short-term effect usually fades within a few days, but the longer

and the more deeply you work with psychedelics, the more significant this trickle effect becomes. What do you do with all this energy that is continuously flowing into you in-between your sessions, that pulses in your heart and beams from your skull? Now that you are no longer in the visionary state and your system has shrunk back to its “normal” shape and size, how do you integrate the new energetic being you are slowly becoming?

I found that doing Chöd and other Vajrayana practices not only helped me enter and exit deep states of consciousness on the day of a session, they also helped me manage this flow of energy after a session by giving it a place to run. For years the pattern had been that this energy would build up inside my body, making me periodically very uncomfortable. There was the headache (an aching of the Ajna chakra or “third eye”) that lasted on and off for three years and the hearing hypersensitivity that for a time made me uncomfortable even being in the same room with a refrigerator compressor running. (Medical examinations found nothing wrong or out of the ordinary.) When I started doing the Vajrayana practices, these symptoms of energy overload subsided. These ancient rituals connected me to the universe in a way that allowed this energy to run more freely. They allowed my system to ventilate between sessions. Singing these prayers tuned my “body, speech, and mind” to the universe in a way that allowed the energy flowing inside me to merge with a greater surround. It was as if these practices gave me a way of communing with the universe that was midway between my earthly reality and my session reality. When I danced with the dakinis, I felt relaxed, cleansed, and exercised. My energy began to run cooler, and I was able to breathe more comfortably in my skin.

I understand the debate among Buddhist practitioners over psychedelics and the reservations some teachers have about them as agents of spiritual transformation.<sup>[\\*61](#)</sup> And yet, personally, I never felt a contradiction between my Buddhist practice and my psychedelic practice. A difference in emphasis, method, and even goals, perhaps, but no contradiction in core values. I do not believe that the Buddhist prohibition against “taking drugs that cloud the mind” applies to psychedelic substances *when they are used therapeutically*, because in these circumstances they do not cloud the mind. Just the opposite, they

hypersensitize the mind, and by skillfully focusing this hypersensitivity, we can bring the poisons and toxins of our mind to the surface and remove them. I think Chögyam Trungpa was correct when he described LSD as a kind of “super-samsara.” LSD amplifies the samsaric tendencies of our mind and invites a confrontation with these tendencies that, if handled well, supports the liberation of the mind. Though my psychedelic journey became a cosmological exploration that reached beyond liberation, it always felt congruent with liberation.

Though I did not pay it much attention at the time, it feels perhaps significant to me now that Vajrayana practice entered my life on the same day that the Diamond Luminosity opened for the first time. I don't think that Chöd, or Buddhism for that matter, steered my experience in this direction. I think that the trajectory that took me into the Diamond Luminosity was established in the years that led up to this breakthrough. Even so, it was a blessing when these two came together in my life. Vajrayana practice worked well with my psychedelic practice, both in opening the psychedelic window and in reinforcing the result. Vajrayana means the “Diamond Way,” and it was in the *sutras* (scriptures) and *termas* (hidden teachings) of Tibet that I found the clearest exposition of the Diamond Luminosity I had entered. I know that light is discussed in many spiritual traditions, and I'm sure I could find parallels between my experience of this light and their teachings, but it was my karma to find what I needed in Vajrayana, and I am grateful to Carol for bringing me into this lineage.

## The Pivot

After the 50th session, the sessions pivoted from taking me deeper into the Diamond Luminosity to integrating the Luminosity more deeply into my earthly being. This shift occurred not because I sought it but because something larger than me orchestrated it. I only figured out what was happening after the fact.

The theme of integrating the Light had never been entirely absent, of course. Though I had not recognized it at the time, the exercise of being focused in and out of space-time in the 50th session was a training exercise in integrating the Light. It was an early attempt to teach me how

to sustain Diamond Consciousness inside the conditions of my physical existence. I failed terribly at it, but it was a start. The theme of integration had also shown up in a vivid way in the 47th session.

*I was in a field of light familiar from previous sessions. The intense Tahitian singing was chopping up the light, breaking it into small pieces, like a chef chopping up vegetables. It was also chopping up the remaining fragments of my personality into a fine dust and mixing it with the brilliant white light in order to make my being more compatible with the light. Deep levels of my inner being were being reconfigured to better reflect within me the celestial realities I had previously explored "outside" me.*  
(S 47)

After the encounter with the ABSOLUTE LIGHT in session 50, everything pivoted more strongly in the direction of integration. Instead of my being taken deeper into the Diamond Light, the Diamond Light began to crunch itself more deeply into my physical and psychological being. It felt like the Light was restructuring me at a physiological level, actually remaking my biology and my subtle energy system. This required more exercises of purification and more releasing of old patterns.

As we have seen, each breakthrough to a deeper level of reality shakes loose impurities from one's system that must be removed if progress is to continue, and this is especially true for the Diamond Luminosity. After the 45th session, it had taken four sessions of intense purification before the doors to the Diamond Light opened again. Now the same pattern repeated itself. After the glorious 50th session, the opening line of the 51st session was, *"Today was spent entirely in the mud."*

The personal healings that took place during this four-year period were part of this internalization process. If the Light is going to enter and stabilize inside our incarnate being, it must first heal that being. To become fully one with All That Is, we must become one with ourselves. The experience of cosmic Oneness forces to the surface all injuries to the self. Wherever we have been cramped or constricted by life in any of our incarnations, we are healed so that the Light can enter our hearts and minds more completely and flow more freely to the hearts and minds of those around us.

On a sidenote, one session from this period showed me that even hell itself serves the purpose of healing the Soul and reintegrating it into the

Divine Light.



## *Heaven and Hell (S 57)*

*A bell tolling in the music became a death knell tolling my execution. The entire experience was crystal clear and matter-of-fact. I knew what was happening, and there was nothing I could do or wished to do to stop it. I watched with fascination as I was slowly and decisively executed. With each sounding of the bell, a huge scythe cut through my standing form, slicing so finely that my body parts were left standing. As the bell tolled, the scythe cut lower and lower, and my being was effortlessly cut to pieces. When it was over, I was completely dead, but now alive in a new way. I had entered extra-samsaric reality, far beyond cyclic existence. There, new vistas of understanding suddenly opened to me. Wherever I directed my thoughts, new panoramas of insight tumbled into my mind.*

*In one scenario, I came to understand heaven and hell in a new way. In a striking reversal of perspective, I saw that hell was not the opposite of heaven, as is usually taught, but the guardian companion of divine realization. I saw that in the afterlife, "hell" is actually a state of deep purification entered into only by those who are deeply committed to their spiritual development, for there are slower paths available for the less spiritually ambitious. The experience of hell is created when our flawed and imperfect personal history is brought into contact with our luminous Divine Nature and held there, allowing the power of our Divine Nature to purify and heal our historical limitations. In the afterlife, all suffering serves bliss. Only when hell's work is finished can we possibly begin to appreciate its mercy.\*[62](#)*

The significance of this pivot toward integration was not clear to me when I was having these experiences. It was only later, when I was digesting my journey as a whole with the help of insights given me in my last two sessions, that I began to understand the significance of this shift. The many cleansings and healings that I underwent after the 45th and 50th sessions seemed to make possible a more *embodied* experience of Diamond Consciousness in the 60th and 66th sessions.

The 60th session began by deepening my healing with my father, which I've shortened here, and then took me into an experience of the Diamond Luminosity that was intimately woven into my earthly existence. Without anything being said, it was coaching me on how to absorb the Light into my everyday life.



## *Session 60—Universal Field of Light*

*In the beginning of the session, I could smell the odor of tobacco that surrounded my dad when I was young and could almost taste the distinctive flavor of his Southern brand of cigarettes, Picayune. I could feel the prickly bristles of his unshaven face when I hugged him. The tactile features of the experience were so detailed that they signaled a deep encounter with my dad. I was drawn into our history together and again experienced its limits and frustrations, continuing the insights of the 50th session. Though not as emotionally poignant as that session, the regression was deep and detailed.*

*This continued for a long time, physical sensations blending with emotional textures, drawing me into deeper and deeper levels of our relationship. Then, after a long time, everything suddenly changed. As has sometimes happened before, my personal drama did not yield gradually to another reality, but fell away all at once. Now, however, I caught the significance of the suddenness of this transition. It signified that the domain I was entering was not in any way an extension of or continuation of my earthly experience. I could not reach this new domain by refining, extending, or mending these other experiences. Instead, the whole of my historical existence fell away from me suddenly, as a single piece.*

*In this context, I saw clearly that the details of my particular history were not important. Everyone has a personal history, some more pleasant than others, some more problematic. But however complex our karmic history, however pleasant or unpleasant our life has been is irrelevant to the common fact that all forms of personal history lie on top of this deeper order of reality that was now breaking through. The irrelevance of the details of personal history was a startling realization. At this level, the details didn't matter.*

## **The Life Circle**

*When my relationship with my father fell away, I entered an expansive, ecstatic field of energy and Light. Just as in the 45th session, I found myself standing in the middle of a colorful spinning circle of holographic images that held the details of my entire life. Once again I fell into this circle, touching a part of my life, and as I did it "died out from under me," leaving me in the luminous death state beyond individual identity. Then I would be returned to the center of the circle, my life would reconstitute itself around me, and the process would repeat itself, driving home the same lesson as before, that my death process was complete, that there was no area of my life holding on. Now, however, there was an additional message woven into this exercise, a new lesson added to what had been communicated before.*

*The repeated dissolving of my life into the Light was demonstrating to me that in this transition the outer form of one's life remains intact, but inwardly the life being lived is the field of Light itself. The outer form of my life was becoming transparent to a different order of reality. Emptied of personal content, I became transparent to a fluid Light that permeates all reality. Once this lesson had been conveyed, I then entered and stayed in the luminous state for a long time, soaking in its spacious Clarity.*

## **Displaced from the Present**

*After a period of time in this transcendental ecstasy, I was drawn back into the form of my everyday life, but now there was a thin film separating me from my experience. I had the distinct sensation of being “once removed” from the flow of my own experience, as though I was getting it all secondhand. I was slightly displaced from the present moment, getting all my experience just after the fact. My experience was also slightly out of focus; everything was slightly smeared spatially and temporally.*

*At first this subtle distortion was just irritating, but it became increasingly troublesome. No matter how hard I tried, I could not “get back into” my experience. I was being excluded from the full immediacy of my own life. It was as if I were a ghost unable to climb back into my life. Experiences that had previously been joyful were being spoiled by this slight displacement that took the edge off of life. I was trapped in a pervasive distortion that could not be solved by having one type of experience rather than another but only by shifting into a different mode of experience altogether.*

*Then suddenly, I broke through into an incredibly sharp, intense, and bright mode of experience. I was back inside Chris Bache’s immediate experience, but now in a much more intense and luminous form of that experience. I then realized that the displacement from immediacy I had been experiencing was in fact my normal way of existing in the world! The crystal-like clarity of the death state was illuminating a pervasive distortion inherent in my everyday consciousness. The concentrated immediacy of this laser-like clarity made my usual mode of experience intolerably dull. Ordinary mind is so diluted compared with this.*

*All my life I thought I had been conscious, but now I saw that I had been only half conscious, trapped in a permanent fuzzy haze, like a near-sighted man without glasses. The entire remainder of the session was spent in this state of Hyper-Clarity-Focused-in-the-Here-and Now. No transpersonal exotica, just hyper-luminosity focused in my immediate experience. This was embodied Diamond Consciousness.*

## **Luminous Clarity**

*I was greatly relieved when I first made the transition back into the Luminous Clarity, and relief turned into gratitude when I realized that I was going to be allowed to stay in this condition. The gratitude deepened into ecstasy as minutes turned into hours and the state did not close.*

*Visually, the state of Hyper-Clarity registered as a clear field of Light extending about half an inch around my body. It was as though my body were glowing and this luminous sheath was a visible reflection of the ecstatic illumination I was experiencing within. Wherever I went (mentally), whatever I did, this diamond-like glow went with me.*

*Then occasionally, a much deeper experience of the Light opened. When this happened, I stepped beyond my individual field of illumination into a Universal Field of Light. To experience the first was wonderful, but to open to the second was my deepest dream come true. I moved back and forth between these two conditions several times, coming into the Universal Field from several different life situations, almost, it seemed, from several different lifetimes. From wherever I entered, what I entered was always the same—an exquisite, seamless Field of Light.*

*Soon thereafter some last membrane dissolved and I moved in, through, and as Light. The Light completely saturated my life. There were no limits to its expanse and no piece of life inside me or outside me it did not embrace. The experience was like being a fish swimming in the ocean, but here the ocean was an Ocean of Light. The Light penetrated every cell of my being and all the earthly forms around me. We all breathed this Light. We are this Light. All our experience is seamless Light. Joy of wonder. Constant prayers of thanksgiving and gratitude.*

The sessions that followed this Light-soaked session continued to scour my insides. As the Light worked its way deeper into my earthly being, any behavior that was blocking its entrance was exposed and addressed. One session brought forward what is perhaps my deepest personal fear—the fear of being seen and found lacking. Someone looks at you, sees who and what you are, and is disappointed. You see it in their eyes and in their fallen face, and there is nothing you can do to change it. When this wound was taken back to its source and healed, the session shifted into an ecstatic experience of the perfection of Being in the midst of ever-incomplete Becoming. Another session mercilessly exposed the inconsistency of my working so hard to cultivate celestial purity inside my sessions while continuing to soil my consciousness by watching “bardo-television” in-between them. More work to do there. A third session pressed deeply into a lingering personal need I was holding around physical passion. It showed me that the radiant bliss of “immeasurable impartiality” lies beyond all self-reference and beyond all personal hopes and fears, including this one. Letting go of my fears had been easy enough, but surrendering this particular hope was poignantly difficult for me. The best I could do was turn it over to the infinite wisdom of my Beloved.

## **The Transparency of Embodied Presence**

In the beginning of this book, I said that there were two basic trajectories in my psychedelic work. The first was spiritual awakening, and the second was cosmic exploration. While I never let go of personal liberation as my baseline objective, the work of collective liberation and the adventure of exploring the cosmos had come to dominate my sessions. Now in these late sessions, the arc of the work seemed to be curving back around to the original goal of spiritual awakening.



After all the adventures I had been on exploring different levels of reality, the sessions were now getting simpler and simpler. It was as if after dissolving into the deep structure of archetypal reality and the radical simplicity of primordial wholeness, there was nowhere else for me to go except where I already was. After taking me into the Diamond Luminosity and then showing me the infinite depth of the cosmos, the consciousness guiding my sessions now appeared to be bringing me back into my present life and something approximating classical spiritual realization. In one session, I wrote:

*The sessions are getting harder to describe not because of their exotic qualities but because of their very mundaneness. In striking contrast to my earlier sessions, the frame of reference for my present experience is my immediate life. My personal life is being turned inside out and refashioned. Pieces of my past are being systematically brought forward and emptied, like taking bottles down from a shelf and pouring them out. Now, however, when each bottle is drained, I do not dissolve into the otherworldly diamond radiance of dharmakaya but into the mundane world of my historical existence rendered transparent in śūnyatā [emptiness]. The ecstasy of transcending space-time appears to be yielding to the transparency of embodied Presence inside space-time. Where is this process leading? (S 65)*

Before presenting the last of the Diamond Luminosity sessions, let me give one example of this grounding-in-the-present that took place outside these four sessions. In this session, I was taken into a striking experience of emptiness inside my university classroom. It felt like the experience of śūnyatā was being driven into the very center of my life, planting itself where I spend so many hours every day.



### ***Teaching without Selves Present (S 63)***

*My boundaries having been shattered in the cleansing portion of the session, my experience now poured beyond its customary edges and flowed into the people I saw around me (in my mind's eye). What was striking was how concrete and "close at hand" the experience was. Everyone maintained their distinctive characteristics, and yet as we came into contact with each other, our minds flowed together as currents in the Ocean of Mind.*

*The people became my students in my current Buddhism class. At this point, my awareness was not tied to my personal body but ran unimpeded in and out of their lives and even included details of the history of the room we met in. The lively dance of blending then reached deeper to dissolve the last remnant of selfhood. The last vestige of I-ness dissolved into the sheer immediacy of living experience. Now I experienced the contact of minds in teaching as a process completely devoid of any*

*selves whatsoever. There was no self in me teaching and no selves in the students learning. There was only the immediacy of the experience of contact, a pure stream of awareness that flowed unimpeded when we gathered.*

*Temporarily freed of the lazy habit of thinking in terms of selves, the sheer immediacy of awareness bored into me. Here again was both an insight driven home and a practice given me to anchor this insight in my daily life. The essence of this practice was this: to remember and make real to myself that there are no selves encountering each other in my classroom. The coming together of two streams of awareness creates a spark of experience that is a primary reality, not a secondary reality derived from selves. Repeatedly, it was emphasized: there is nothing other than the immediate flow of experience. The flow of “shared” experience possesses the same absolute reality as the flow of “private” experience.*

*For these brief hours, I understood what it means to be awake in the immediacy of present experience. This was worlds away from transpersonal exotica, from the ecstasy of archetypal reality or the diaphanous subtlety of the species-mind. It was stepping into an ever-disappearing present whose transparency melts the walls between hearts and opens experience to the creative influx of the universe.*

I have used the language of Buddhism to frame the experience of Diamond Luminosity, and I will continue to do so for this last session as well. The term Buddhists use for the Pure Awareness that is one’s Essential Nature is “Nature of Mind,” what some religious traditions would call one’s Divine Nature.



## **Session 66—Nature of Mind**

*What happened in the first half of the session is something familiar to me by now but still hard to describe. The best description I can give of it is that I engage and cleanse my life. It feels as though I grab some aspect of my life and then wrestle with it. I don’t struggle against it but simply won’t let it go. I take a posture of focused surrender, allowing myself to experience whatever arises, and a discomfort begins to flow. It feels as though a thread is being pulled that unravels my person from inside out.*

*The process requires a great deal of concentration. Like riding a bucking horse, you can get thrown off, as I was several times today. When I was thrown off, I landed in a condition of transpersonal spaciousness but without the Hyper-Clarity of Diamond Luminosity that means so much to me. I knew that I could only reach this clarity by returning to the peculiar field that has no name and no form other than being a current of psycho-physical discomfort. You do not want to go past this field; you want to stay in it until everything falls apart of its own accord and there is only Light. So I kept searching for inner discomfort, and whenever I found some, I stayed with it until it dissolved around me. An hour passed in this work, a very long hour.*

*My strongest sense from my recent sessions is that all psychedelic practice is in essence purification. Where one arrives at the end is exactly where one is at the beginning, but in the beginning the pristine nature of one’s Original Mind is obscured*

*by distortions and distractions. At this point, the only thing that happens in a session that is of lasting value to me is removing these distortions, and thus I focus exclusively on the cleansing—staying with it as long as possible, returning to it as often as possible, and taking it as deeply as possible.*

## **One with My Brothers**

*Eventually, I found myself being lifted beyond the cleansing to a point of reconciliation. I experienced community as I have not known it in this lifetime. At one point, I had the experience of being completely “one with my brothers,” triumphant together in some great undertaking. I have known personal victory before, but this was the victory of a community, an experience of complete solidarity with men. And it felt distinctly like reconciliation with men. Residual traces of feeling inferior to or excluded from the comradeship of men had been completely re-assimilated. I felt a wonderful feeling of prideful inclusion in the company of men—all of us skilled, accomplished, and serving the collective good.*

## **The Future Human**

*These feelings of peace and harmony then jumped the banks of time, and for a few minutes I was lifted again into the broader arc of our evolutionary destiny. I felt the larger plan for humanity, beyond the coming darkness into the joy that follows. The entire context of human experience had shifted. In place of existential isolation, competition, and conflict, there was now a profound sense of inclusion and harmony. A psycho-social equality saturated everything. The magnitude of the shift is still difficult for me to fathom. A new order had truly emerged in creation.*

## **The Nature of Mind**

*Then different music was put on, and I was surprised to find myself returning to the discomfort zone. I immediately pivoted and refocused on the task of purification. More cycles of intense cleansing came and went. Eventually, I began to experience the same “dislocation from experience” that I had experienced in Session 60. Today it was particularly acute. I was separated from my experience and unable to realign myself with the immediacy of present reality. No matter how hard I tried, I could not bring myself back into the present moment but remained stuck in the subtle echoes of my experience. I was deep in this process when the final breakthrough took place.*

*After many cycles of cleansing and struggle, my teacher, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, suddenly appeared.<sup>\*63</sup> I saw his face and felt his presence strongly. Then without anything being said, he introduced me to the Nature of Mind. Instantly and without transition of any kind, my mind opened into pure, boundless clarity. Absolutely without content, it was both the context and the content of all thoughts and sensations.*

*When my mind opened to itself, I was stunned. This was different from the ecstatic clarity of dharmakaya. This was clarity-in-the-body, absolutely contentless. It was the container of all experience. As the condition persisted, my shock turned to amazement and then to giddy joy. I felt various thoughts and sensations arise and*

*disappear into the spacious clarity, not affecting it in the least. My mind began to move faster and to range more broadly, and the spacious clarity was not affected. This was the fundamental condition of my existence, the essence of my being. I was so grateful. Tears of joy. Tears of gratitude. Such blessing to discover this inside my very existence, like finding diamonds inside the pockets of old jeans.*

*I stayed in this condition for a long time. No matter how many twists and turns my mind took, it was impossible to step outside this condition. I felt the wild ecstatic joy of deliverance from partiality. In this breathtaking clarity was possible an exquisite intimacy with others, with myself, and with time, all three emerging at different points.*

*With others it was the intimacy that melted separation and spilled over into unspeakable care and compassion.*

*With myself it was the intimacy of resting in my own being.*

*With time it was the intimacy of living fully in the present moment, all future moments becoming simply repetitions of the invitation being extended in the present.*

*I cannot begin to describe my gratitude. Thank you. Thank you.*

# ELEVEN

## Final Vision

Sessions 70–73

*When a vision comes from the thunder beings of the  
west,  
it comes with terror like a thunderstorm;  
but when the storm of vision has passed,  
the world is greener and happier;  
for wherever the truth of vision comes upon the world,  
it is like a rain.*

BLACK ELK, BLACK ELK *SPEAKS*

I was never in control of what happened in my sessions. I found early on that I could set all the intentions I wanted, but when one is working with doses of LSD this high, it makes little difference. From the very beginning, a larger intelligence had been in control of my sessions. I learned that the best thing I could do was simply get out of the way and let it take me where it wanted me to go. And so it was for my last sessions. The same intelligence that had guided me all these years choreographed the ending of our time together before I even knew we were parting.

It had been a long journey, filled with more blessings than I had dreamed possible. But it had also been a harder journey than I had expected. As I approached my fiftieth year on this Earth, I was beginning to wonder how much longer I could keep this up. To be able to enter the condition I cared most deeply about only four times in twenty-six sessions

had given me deep pause. Years of work for hours of communion is a steep price to pay for these diamonds. Even so, I wasn't ready to let the sessions go. I was still driven by the wonder of where they would take me next and what they would teach me. But a deeper wisdom was about to prevail.

In this chapter, I will share three of the four sessions from the last year of my journey. The names of these sessions are:

- S 70 The Final Vision
- S 72 The Fruits of My Labors
- S 73 Diamond Vision

The last two sessions were one long farewell. I call them the “goodbye sessions.” In them the Creative Intelligence brought our work to a close and gave me one last round of personal instructions before sending me on my way. But before this sweet parting, there was one more serious piece of work to do.

The 70th session was an extremely demanding session, more demanding than I would have thought possible at this late stage of the journey. My best take on it is that the fierce strip-down it put me through was necessary to move me into the radically expanded time horizon that opened. In this session, the universe took me deeper into Deep Time than it had ever taken me before. Building on earlier sessions, it gave me one last set of teachings surrounding the Future Human. This was the final installment of the master story of humanity, the capstone to everything that had come before. It was the last great vision of my journey.



## **Session 70—The Final Vision**

*Today's session was so deep that in the middle of it I thought it would take a small book to describe it. New categories of experience opened, new gestalts. Once again I find myself at my edges, trying to describe realities that lie beyond my reckoning.*

*For a long time after the opening preliminaries, my existence was being challenged and I was being psychologically dismembered. Familiar with this drill by now, I opened and did not resist what was happening. When I saw that the process was becoming difficult, I was pleased because the deeper the cleansing, the more productive the session. My existence was being peeled away layer by layer. Sometimes the layers came off gently; sometimes it was like tearing bark off a*

sapling. Sometimes something inside me would clutch at being asked to surrender a particularly meaningful part of my life, something deeply assumed, then I would loosen my grip and this “something” would fall away and the process would continue.

*I kept surrendering to the process, but it never stopped. It passed levels I had known before but pressed on. I kept surrendering, but here and there I began to feel afraid. It was not that there was an “I,” Chris Bache, who was afraid, for Chris Bache was already in pieces by now, but something underneath my usual identity was beginning to protest.*

*The process was cutting too deep.*

*What was happening?*

*I didn’t understand what was happening or why.*

*A deeper existential fear rose.*

*Where was I?*

*Where was this going?*

*My sanity was at risk.*

*I kept waiting for the relief that comes after a major breakthrough, but today the breakthroughs were not followed by release, only more stripping away.*

*It was relentless.*

*The fear rose but did not overwhelm me. Part of me saw it and understood just enough to know that I could still choose how to meet what was happening. At a critical juncture, I made a conscious choice to surrender even more completely to this process, to let it take me deeper into this new territory than I had ever been taken before.*

*When I surrendered, the falling apart did not release me, as I had hoped, but instead escalated beyond measure. It reached levels of intensity beyond any understanding I can bring to it. Forces were activated that were completely new to me, even after sixty-nine sessions. Once I surrendered to the fear, it faded and was not a significant factor from that point on. The fear had simply been a boundary membrane.*

*In the chaos of sound, in the driving cadence of disciplined confusion, I was falling apart.\*64 Whole parts not only of my personal being but of reality as I had known it were falling away suddenly and dramatically, as when large pieces of a glacier suddenly break off and fall into the sea. Over and over again, parts of my life fell away, then parts of life itself fell away. I was repeatedly losing all frames of reference and had just enough coherence left to recognize this fact and surrender to it again and again, plunging ever further into unknown territory. I don’t know how to describe this territory beyond repeating the phrase “falling away.” Being dismembered not of limb but of reality, every part of my world being ripped asunder, tossed aside. Plunging deeper and deeper into chaos.*

*Eventually, after a very long time, I began to realize that the process had completed itself. Sometimes these things end dramatically with a strong signature. At other times, when the cleansing is particularly deep, as it was today, when it feels*

*as though you have accomplished several sessions of work in a single session, it leaves you too shattered for such flourishes. After such a cleansing, there is a feeling that comes, a feeling of exhausted closure. Whatever it is that you were working on or that was working on you has run its course. You have taken it to the very bottom, and it is no more.*

*Completely without any reference point, I turned to explore where I was. As in other recent sessions, I felt myself to be in my familiar world. I did not feel removed from the physical world but very much part of it. I was aware of my surroundings in the room and of my existence in these surroundings. At the same time, in my inner vision I was also seeing a lush, verdant forest with clouds moving overhead, sun streaking through and lighting up the leaves dancing in the wind. These two realities occupied the same space without complication despite their different orders of scale.*

*Everything was looking quite ordinary when suddenly, without the slightest effort or movement on my part, I experienced both this forest and my immediate surroundings completely differently. The forms of the forest became fluid, and everything began to shimmer and move. Time opened, and I began to experience the physical world as the rising and falling of life-forms. Another way of saying this is that time began to accelerate. First months, then years passed in seconds. This was not a hallucination but a deep excursion into how time is known in a deeper part of the universe.*

*I experienced the entire world as a throbbing, dynamic, living whole that was throwing up generation after generation of living beings and then reabsorbing them into itself, like waves washing up on a beach. The time expansion was enormous. In the few seconds that it takes a wave to crest and fall upon a shore, I witnessed an entire generation of human beings be born, live their entire lives, and pass away, their lives reabsorbed into the Totality, their energy forms re-assimilated and folded into the next wave as it crashed onto the shore. Generation after generation of reincarnating beings.*

*This was a devastating and transcendent experience simultaneously. There was no questioning or doubting what was happening. This was not a symbolic or imaginary representation of life but the real thing—life experienced from a different temporal and spatial vantage point. Reality opened, and the world of individual reference points dissolved into the larger rhythms of the Life-That-Lives-Through-Us.*

*If I had not been prepared for this experience by many previous encounters, it would have absolutely destroyed me. To experience from the inside the LARGER LIFE composed of all our individual lives but so far beyond them as to dwarf them in every imaginable way, to witness ten generations of human beings pass in but a minute on a Sunday afternoon, this would have shattered me had there been anything left of “me” to shatter, but after all these years there was nothing left, and so I saw life as it is.*

*What I was seeing and experiencing was samsara in the raw—the entire physical universe as a restless surging field of short-lived life-forms. Like the forest that lives through the constant turnover of trees rising and falling, everything in our universe is constantly turning over. Everything is temporary. Everything rises and falls over and over again. An endless succession of “births” followed by “deaths,” endings blending into beginnings, nothing wasted, everything conserved. Roots completely entangled. No private lives, no private intentionality. Everything linked in*



*time and space. A single living flow that exists at a deeper order of reality than our individual lives.*

*The Ocean of Existence that the temporary forms of life were rising out of and falling back into was an Ocean of Light. This Light did not overwhelm and blot out the physical universe as it had in some previous sessions. Rather, today I was watching Light manifest as physical existence. The physical world was arising from Light and returning to Light in a constant motion within multiple time frames simultaneously, some lasting seconds, some lasting centuries. From within every frame of reference possible, I saw the world as it is:*

*Light manifesting as Matter,  
Dharmakaya manifesting as Nirmanakaya,  
Heaven giving birth to Earth continuously.*

*It was exquisitely beautiful to witness. Against this vast background, the following three experiences emerged.*

## ***Built for Speed***

*First, there was the final installment of the master story of humanity, a coda to everything that had been given before.*

*Underneath the rising and falling of the short-lived life-forms of physical existence were deeper FORMS that caught and structured the entire process. I experienced these FORMS to be like a riverbed through which the river of life flows in its short and turbulent cycles. This was the dominant metaphor for the process. A riverbed holds and channels the water that flows through it. In a similar manner, these FORMS channeled the life energy that flowed through them. Short-lived mini-forms (human lives) received their structure and direction from these larger FORMS. The theme of this entire sequence was: "The constantly changing manifestations of life arise on top of FORMS that change more slowly." My focus was on the FORM that was the channel for the human race, the FORM of Homo sapiens.\*65*

*My earlier visions of humanity's future and the Great Awakening were affirmed and commented on in a matter-of-fact way. Everything seen in previous sessions was corroborated, and now one final piece was being added. This piece moved me deeply. It felt extremely important, as though it were a vital missing piece from what I had seen before.*

*The missing piece was appreciating how dynamic a species we are in the larger arc of time. The constant turnover of reincarnating generations carried great significance. From my expanded time horizon, I saw that historians and theologians have taught us to think far too statically about "human nature." The constant turnover of reincarnating generations combined with the continuous accumulation of experience at this deeper centralized level means that we are carrying our collective past within us in a state of dynamic flux. Our entire history is alive within our living FORM and subject to rapid change under the right conditions.*

*We are an especially dynamic species precisely because each generation is so relatively short-lived while our learning as a species accumulates continuously at*

deeper levels, resulting in periodic shifts in our underlying FORM. In this two-level dynamic process, our species seemed to be designed for rapid transformation.

The Great Awakening that is coming is a shift in the FORM of our species, in our underlying architecture. It is the fact that we carry our psychological past in our present FORM that will allow us to transcend this past quickly IF our attention is deeply aroused. The burden of history felt comparatively light to such a being.

The net result is that human beings are built for speed. We are traveling through history with much lighter packs on our backs than traditionally thought. The failure to see this comes from the habit of thinking within too small a time frame. When we expand our time horizon even slightly to one hundred thousand years, humanity seems built for accelerated change.

What was playing itself out against the vision of the forest was also registering in my immediate surroundings. What I saw operating for the larger whole I also saw operating in my own life. I too was a transient form. Everyone and everything around me was a transient form. Our collective lives focused a life process that stretched seamlessly through time and space with not a single thread of separation anywhere.

## The Diamond Maker

At one point, I saw all humanity constantly dissolving into what looked like a tangled swamp representing the constant digesting and redigesting of human experience that is the topsoil of the reincarnation process. I then saw brilliant sparks of Diamond Light shooting from the planet into deep space. I was witnessing the birth of a brilliant Individuality from this swamp. Not an egoic individuality but something larger and brighter. In the constant churning of space-time experience, life was growing an exquisite Soul-Individuality that continues beyond any frame of reference we can presently imagine, capable of integrating larger and larger fields of experience. I was witnessing the birth of Diamond Souls. The universe is a Diamond Maker!

We have tried to understand ourselves within a time frame that has been far too narrow. Nature's true time frame boggles the mind, exploding all our frames of reference. Life is a farmer growing sparks of Diamond Consciousness, and it makes little difference to It if it takes a million or a billion years for these sparks to emerge from the evolutionary cauldron It has created.

Out of all the body parts of our many historical lives, an Individuality is emerging that possesses sufficient strength to maintain continuity of awareness through the rollover of its physical forms in reincarnation. In the truest sense, there is no enduring individuality present until this point in the evolutionary process. Only at this point is the fragmentation created by repeatedly entering and leaving space-time reversed. Here, the mini-individualities of our small lives become integrated into a Soul-Individuality spanning vast stretches of time.

One sign of this emerging Soul-Individuality is that people begin to invest themselves in projects that cannot be fully realized in one lifetime. People become more "real" the more they invest themselves in projects that reach beyond the limits of their present lifetime. The love that stretches beyond death, giving one's life that others may live, throwing one's entire being into an endeavor that will take generations to complete—all these were symptoms of the Soul emerging in history. As individuals become more conscious, relationships begin to emerge that endure

*from life to life. People wake in the company of other people. I saw that this was true for specific people in my life.*

## **The Future Human**

*The time frame within which all this was taking place was staggering. In a final and deeply moving portion of the session, I entered humanity's deep future again and spent time with the FORM of the being we are becoming—the Future Human. What a splendid creature! What grace and nobility! It was such a privilege to experience this being and so helpful as we enter the difficult years ahead. The people need a vision of what we are becoming, of the extraordinary beauty that is emerging from our tangled past.*

*I saw the Future Human standing up, and this seemed significant. Against a background of many seated Buddhas, this being was standing upright. The significance of the posture seemed to lie in its dynamism and its commitment to Earth. This was Enlightened-Humanity-in-Action. All of our knowledge, all our historical accomplishments were preserved and brought forward in enlightened activity. This penetrating glimpse transfixed me. Its beauty, grandeur, and simplicity pierced my heart. It poured a delicious nectar into me and through me into humanity.*

## **Comment**

I spent the entire next session digesting this experience, absorbing its teaching and recuperating from the enormous time expansion. This vision deserves extended discussion, but every time I attempt it, I find that my words sputter and fall short. Now I am thinking within linear time, but this vision comes from a much deeper dimension of time. Better, I think, to leave it alone and let it speak directly to your heart as it did to mine. I will add only one thing.

It is often said that our future is open-ended with no certain outcome and that therefore nothing less than our maximum effort is required now and in the days ahead. I share this belief. And yet, this vision comes from a deeper place, and it says this: We *will* realize our destiny. The historical crisis we are entering is the labor that *will* give birth to the being that has been gestating inside us for countless generations. The Diamond Soul *will* be born in history. We *will* awaken, and when we do, we will see the universe for what it truly is. She is the Body of God, the Great Mother, the Diamond Maker. With this, everything begins anew.

## **The Good-Bye Sessions**

Once this final vision had been delivered and absorbed, the sessions pivoted to closure. Session 72 was spent reviewing my entire psychedelic odyssey. I was shown its major turning points and how all the pieces fit together. All the dots were being connected. Experiences from many years back were brought forward and framed in the context of the now completed whole. It felt like my entire life's work was being examined and put into perspective. There was a celebratory "job well done" quality to the day. I have not tried to reproduce all the details of this overview, but it's worth noting that some of the structural organization I have given this book came from this session. My short write-up will only hint at the detail of this review and what it meant to me.



## *Session 72—The Fruits of My Labors*

*I started the session with a memory of the Diamond Light of Pure Clarity. I felt how true it is that spending seconds in that pristine state undoes countless centuries of wandering lost in samsara. It felt as though all my psychedelic sessions had been one long Ngöndro preparing me for entry into this reality. I recalled the many rigidities and fixations in me that had been broken down on this journey and knew that there was no shortcutting the lengthy purification required for awakening.*

*Aligned with my true intent, I began the session clearly focused on the task of returning to the Diamond Luminosity. Nothing in the intermediate realms mattered to me in the least. After a relatively short time, I began to lose my edges as transcendence opened. At first I tried to resist, to seek out more impurities to draw from my system, but there was nothing problematic to work on and no stopping the process. So I opened. How such an intense meltdown as Session 70 can be followed by such a relatively tame session as this one escapes me, but I followed.*

*Today turned out to be not a day of new revelations but a day spent digesting everything that has taken place on my entire journey. Lessons previously absorbed were assembled to form a patchwork of deeper understanding. The basic tenor of everything was joyful celebration. I was told to sit back and absorb the "fruits of my labors." The focus today was on inheriting the progressive manifestation of work already done.*

*There was a distinctly physical quality to today's session. I was basking in a luminous warmth that saturated me. It felt like I was integrating in my body states that I had previously known in subtle realms far removed from physical reality. I recalled earlier years and the intense physical purifications that my body had endured as it followed me into exceptionally pure states of being. Today it accommodated this refined energy with visceral delight. There was nothing I needed to do for this to happen; it was all being done for me, to me. All I had to do was relax and let it take place.*

*The overarching trajectory of my work was reviewed with a commentary that put various pieces into perspective. This "taking in" played itself out on a scale that*

was both close at hand and farreaching. The following scenario, already glimpsed in previous sessions, was reviewed and affirmed in a matter-of-fact way. I had incarnated with the task of draining from the collective psyche some of the karmic poisons of our turbulent history in order to assist the transformation humanity is undergoing. The strengths and pains of my childhood had been deliberately chosen as part of this project. Once this task had been accomplished, two things had been taking place.

First, I had been drawn into deeper orders of reality, first the universe, then archetypal reality and causal Oneness, and eventually the Diamond Luminosity. These initiations were the direct consequence of the collective healing work, the karmic reward if you will. The magnitude of the energy involved in this exchange is still difficult for me to fathom. The Diamond Luminosity was initially far removed from my historical existence. There was some sort of “distance” between my embodied consciousness and this brilliant clarity. The second thing that had been happening was that this distance was being dissolved as the Light entered and transformed my incarnate being—“dissolving the shell.” Today was simply a continuation of this process, and it carried a momentum that had been building for years.

Experiences from earlier sessions were replayed and pieced together around this larger story. The killing of the children in session 10—a wake-up call to remind me of my soul’s purpose. The struggle on the eve of stopping my work in session 17—a push for a commitment to resume my work later in order to fulfill this purpose.

“I was accepting responsibility for the anguish and for trying to make a difference in the lives surrounding me. This shift was fundamental. It reached to depths I cannot now fathom and impacted me in ways I cannot summarize. It seemed a free choice on the most basic of questions.” (S 17)

The deep sense of having accomplished my life’s purpose eight years later when the collective pain was finally cleared in session 24. Other insights that had filtered in around the edges through the years were affirmed. The awareness that there was nothing that could prevent me from inheriting the Diamond Luminosity when I died, that there was nothing further I needed to do in this incarnation to secure it. The sense of starting over in this life, of beginning my “next life” in my forties, the stress of combining two lives in one incarnation, the complex logic of accelerated growth. All of these were now accepted as obvious.

Against this given, my more recent sessions were reviewed, again in a matter-of-fact way. The luminosity of the “heavenly domain” was working its way down the fountain of existence. All dualities of place, of Pure Land and samsara, were dissolving into the utter simplicity of the progressive uncovering of Innate Mind, the long evolutionary adventure of drawing the Formless into Form and eventually complete liberation. All the work was done. Now it is all blessings as the two accumulations of merit and wisdom work their magic and soften my stubborn heart. There was nothing I needed to do but open and let things take their natural course. “Open and receive. Open and receive.”

## *Nirvana in Every Second*

*The most powerful piece of the session came late in the day. I was in an exceptionally clear state of awareness, poised in the here and now. The world was arising and passing away around me when suddenly I was drawn into a state in which I came to understand the meaning of the statement:*

*“If you are paying complete attention, everything is nirvana, but if you lose your attention even for a second, samsara begins all over again.”*

*Could it really be as simple as this, that the difference between nirvana and samsara is entirely a matter of the quality and precision of one’s attention? How is this possible? And yet, here it was.*

*There is a space that is always open in the middle of every moment, every action. Here it was. Unmistakable. Complete freedom in the midst of action. How does one move into it? There is a posture of inner attention that brings freedom and bliss. In which the world moves effortlessly as One. If dropped for an instant, the world falls into its familiar pieces and samsara resumes. A taste. Another lesson to use in daily training.*

The next session felt like the second half of the same farewell. The last session of my journey began by taking me into the Light and then added four experiences, each steeped in my psychedelic history and each pregnant with personal significance. Better, perhaps, to say something about these experiences before presenting the session rather than after.

*The Sounds of Humanity’s Awakening* seemed designed to make sure that I hold on to the true meaning of the convulsive period of history we are entering and not succumb to the stories of catastrophe that will be rampant when these events take place. Though I say in the session that this vision is too jarring to ever share with others, I have obviously changed my mind on this. I decided that it is not my place to hold back what was given to me or judge what people can or cannot take in.

*Transparent to the Divine* harkened back to the experience of the Life Circle in the 60th session. It gave me a deeper experience of the same dynamic, as though it wanted to make sure that I understood what would be happening to me in the years to come.

*The Womb of Creation* placed the master story of human evolution into a larger cosmological context. It was as though the consciousness guiding my sessions wanted to lift my line of sight to a broader horizon at the end of the journey and give me a higher vantage point from which to view everything taking place on our planet in order to

remind me that as meaningful and beautiful as the entire evolutionary project is, it is but one drop in the infinite ocean of being.

*Diamond Vision* added one final brush stroke to the portrait of the Future Human. It showed me that the evolutionary pivot we are making will register not only in our hearts and minds, it will register even in our senses. This was such a deep gift that the session bears its name.



## Session 73—Diamond Vision

After what seemed like a very long time but which was only an hour of clock time, the background static disturbance I had been experiencing suddenly gave way to the Light. The shimmering Luminosity was simply present and took me in.

The entire rest of the session was spent in the Light, absorbing it and processing it in ways that seemed largely without project or intent except for the experiences recorded below. It was simply there to be enjoyed and soaked in. It saturated me at all levels—physically, emotionally, and mentally. Not as intense as in some sessions, less overwhelming, less bliss generating, but nearer, closer at hand, more easily accessed. I clumsily describe these things without understanding the significance of my distinctions. Within this free-flowing absorption, the following four experiences stand out.

### *The Sounds of Humanity's Awakening*

A song came on that was a complex mix of music and sounds of social chaos. My mind took these sounds and amplified them a hundredfold. Suddenly, I was experiencing scenes of widespread human calamity—buildings on fire, explosions, people dying, deep social chaos. The strange thing, however, was that I was experiencing all of this taking place inside the vast ecstasy of Light. I kept experiencing waves of profound social disruption not as a tragedy but as the birth of something beautiful. Over and over again, I experienced events that would normally have moved me to tears here move me into deep bliss. These sounds of pain were the sounds of humanity's birth. There was nothing but bliss for me in these sounds.

This was a deeply moving but also a deeply problematic experience for me. It reinforced the Great Awakening session by giving me absolutely no place from which to experience humanity's suffering except sheer joy, but this represented such a jarring reversal of my normal perspective that it seems horrific. In the normal world, it sounds pathological to speak of human suffering as a great blessing, but this experience came from a perspective far beyond space-time. It was to see the coming collapse for what it truly is—the occasion of humanity's awakening. Rooted in this reality, there was absolutely no room for anything but joy for me in this transition. This made me want to find other examples where nature extracts great good from apparent tragedy, sacrificing one part of itself in order to bring forth something new and beautiful. It seemed important to grasp this principle as humanity approaches the hour of its great sacrifice.

*The cost of accepting this vision is a deepening of my isolation. I can never share this vision with others, for who could possibly understand it except someone who has gone through the fires of hell and experienced the rebirth that follows? I am doomed to keep it to myself.*

## *Transparent to the Divine*

*As I was drawn more deeply into the Light, the sounds of discord faded and my experience progressively shifted until I eventually moved into a beautiful mode of experience that is challenging to describe.*

*I experienced myself as being me, surrounded by the people and activities of my familiar world, and yet I had become completely hollow, emptied of all personal content, and in the end transparent to a fluid, golden Intelligence that permeated all reality and was flowing through me into whoever or whatever was in front of me. The image that stood out in my mind to frame this was the Sun-Neptune square in my natal chart. It was as if my individuality (Sun) had yielded completely to the Divine (Neptune) and had become transparent to its vast energies.*

*I became completely transparent to the Divine, dissolved into its purposeful action. I repeatedly had the experience of being me, of living in my world and doing the things I usually do, especially teaching, but beneath this veneer, the substance of "me" had been emptied out and now there flowed this golden, fluid energy that surrounds and saturates everything.*

*Is this where it's all heading? Is this what happens as absorbing the Light deepens? A deeper Intelligence takes over and pursues its goals through us? Or is "takes over" too strong a word? Such delicious surrender, such spacious ease.*

## *The Womb of Creation*

*Sometime after this, I was spun for a brief time into a particularly deep state in which I appeared to move outside the envelope of space-time altogether. The experience was hard to hold on to, but I have retained the pieces.*

*For a brief period, I was lifted outside the entire project of evolution and experienced all of space-time from an infinitely larger horizon. This horizon was saturated with layers and layers of the Brilliant Luminosity, and I sensed its intent. Space-time appeared as a dark oblong sphere within the Luminosity, and it was covered with lines that resembled the computer graphing of a topological shape, conveying the sense that space-time itself was a created, designed reality.*

*From within a horizon of seemingly billions of years past and future, I experienced how methodically the Light has been working to slowly animate its self-creation, infusing pieces of its brilliance inside space-time. I saw that whatever was emerging in humanity's near future was simply one step in a progression that would continue for countless eons of time. This brief taste of the scope of the divine project confirmed and shattered my perceptions simultaneously. The scale of wherever I was at that moment dwarfed the entire history of Earth.*

*Something about this experience seemed to give me permission to leave space-time behind when I die and not return, relieving me of the guilt I have felt for choosing this option.*



## ***Diamond Vision***

*I have saved for the end the most powerful experience of the day. This was the last gift of my twenty-year journey.*

*It was late in the session, perhaps five hours in. I was lying down, eyeshades off, absorbed in a free-flowing stream of awareness. Suddenly, my vision changed. Without warning, I realized that I was seeing in a completely new manner.*

*I was seeing things with a sparkling clarity and brilliant detail that was unlike anything I had ever known before. The sun was streaming into the room, and I was seeing everything with a brilliantly clear, laser-like ultra-intensity. Seeing with Diamond Clarity every detail, every nuance, every inflection. I looked at my hands and saw without the slightest effort the shadows inside every pore, the furrows of flesh between the pores, the glistening hairs, the thousand details that shape the whole, the thousand brilliant orbs of dust floating in the air giving three dimensional depth to the space surrounding my hands. And CLEAR, so incredibly clear that it took my breath away and even now brings tears to my eyes. My hands were so clear they seemed to be shining from within.*

*I recognized what was happening. The Diamond Clarity that I had previously experienced in the subtle domains of transpersonal reality had now penetrated even my physical senses. Everywhere I get hints of the larger progression. The Light has been working its way deeper into my embodied being, deconstructing my psychological conditioning, my subtle energy system, and now even my physical perception. This was Diamond Vision. It was as if I was truly seeing for the first time in my life, as if what had passed as seeing before was simply a crude approximation of the real thing. How could I have ever accepted that gauzy curtain as real seeing?*

*After ten minutes, this transfixing clarity disappeared. Now when I looked at my hands, I saw them as I usually see them, and they looked dull by comparison. This was not a dimming distortion but my ordinary vision, intact and perfectly focused. How could I lose this luminous sight? How is it possible to see so clearly one minute and so opaquely the next?*

*It was then that I understood the significance of this transient blessing. I had been seeing through the eyes of the Future Human. This luminous sight will one day be humanity's natural way of seeing! All human beings will one day see as I have seen this afternoon. Perception is not simply a mechanical process. Our senses now are but partial approximations of what they are in the process of becoming. As our consciousness grows stronger over time, the entire baseline of human experience is slowly changing. We are still in the early stages of what humanity is becoming. What a splendid being nature is building.*

## **Why I Stopped My Sessions**

I had not seen the end of my sessions coming, but as soon as this session was over, I knew it was time for me to stop. This was not a calculated decision; I just knew that I had come to a stopping point. Though I would do light journey work of one form or another in the years ahead, my time

for working with high doses of LSD was over. There were two reasons behind this decision. One was pain; the other was heartache.

I stopped my sessions, first, because I was experiencing a chronic pain in my subtle energy system. There was so much energy moving through me in the weeks and months following each session that I was always uncomfortable. The Vajrayana practices had helped, but even they could not keep up with the increased flow of energy entering me in these last years. Despite all the precautions I had taken, despite all the yoga and meditation, and despite the purifications that had taken place inside the sessions themselves, this problem wasn't going away. It was getting worse.

In these last years, when my body recongealed around my mind after a session, it felt like wrapping heavy damp clothes around a bright light bulb. My *prana* or *ch'i* was running so strongly that my meridian system was having a hard time managing the energy. My heart, brow, and crown chakras pulsed with energy all the time. I felt a continuous pressure in my head that I could sometimes moderate through meditation but only temporarily. After the 70th session, there had been a throbbing vibration in my chest that continued for weeks. After it faded during my waking hours, it continued to surface at night for months, sometimes waking me from a deep sleep.

In earlier years, I had thought that these energy problems were a sign that my ego-death was incomplete. I thought that if I could just undergo a "complete ego-death" they would clear up. Eventually, however, I realized that they were being caused not from dying too little but from dying too much. With each round of death and rebirth, I was being plunged deeper into the furnace of creation. Though I could accommodate this energy well enough in the short term, my body was having increasing difficulty managing it in the long term. My system was simply running too hot. Eventually, I realized that I had to stop plunging myself into the fire of Pure Radiance, no matter how much I longed to be there. I had to let my system cool down. I had to let my physical being integrate more completely what it had already received. William Blake wrote, "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough." My body was telling me that seventy-three high-dose sessions was more than enough.

The second and more important reason I stopped my sessions was that I could no longer bear the heartache of separating from my Beloved after a session ended. It simply became too painful for me to come back from being dissolved so deeply into the crystalline body of God. This is where the cruelty of the temporary nature of the psychedelic path cut deepest for me. If I had touched the Divine only once or twice, perhaps it would have been different. Perhaps then the joy of embrace would have carried everything along and the memory would have been sufficient. But my Beloved had taken me into her so deeply so many times that I could no longer bear the pain of being separated from her at the end of the day. Better not to enter again than to enter and have to leave.

A third reason for ending my sessions entered my awareness only months after I had stopped them. Once the Diamond Luminosity had begun its systematic entrance into my physical being, everything in the sessions had pivoted. After spending years exploring the universe, everything in my sessions had begun to get simpler and simpler. I was being repeatedly guided to the immediate present, to the here and now, to my physical life. I began to realize that for this integration process to complete itself, I had to *not* amplify my consciousness. Any amplification of my natural awareness would disturb the conditions necessary for something to take place that was trying to take place. I had to be still and let it come to me.

If it were left up to me, I don't think I would have had the patience to wait for this blessing. I would have continued to bend the membrane of my consciousness and run out to meet it. But the consequences of doing so now were too painful, both in my body and in my heart. Whatever came next in my life, I had to stop the sessions. Eventually, I made a pact with my Beloved. I begged Her to never take me into Her again so deeply until I could stay with Her forever. With this bargain, my journey truly did come to an end, not to be resumed until I die.

## TWELVE

# Coming off the Mountain

*We sometimes view our path as including two major journeys—ascend and descent—a journey toward enlightenment and a journey toward becoming a complete human being. The journey of ascent is a matter of realizing one dimension after another, all the way to the absolute dimension. The path of descent is actually a matter of integrating our lives into our realization.*

A. H. ALMAAS, *RUNAWAY REALIZATION*

What are we that we are capable of such deep excursions into the universe? Who designed this exquisite creature capable of navigating these extreme swings of consciousness? Shattering our earthly identity, our awareness expands until we become a different kind of being for eight hours at a time. A being who can do things “we” could never do, know things “we” could never know. A being who breathes time, who dances in the stratosphere of planetary consciousness, who dissolves into the One that cradles all.

And just when we have reached our furthest expansion, the second miracle happens. Consciousness slowly contracts, restoring us gently to our normal shape and size. The doors we had flung open close one by one as we say our good-byes. In the waning hours, we make mental notes to help us remember every kiss, every secret exchanged, every nuance of life unfiltered by space and time. We linger in the rumpled sheets where fierce passion showed us what more is possible, what needs doing, what lies

ahead. Basking in the afterglow, we tuck it all away for tomorrow's dawn in this extraordinary and mysterious life.

I think we are still in the early stages of understanding how entering these extreme states of consciousness is affecting us. We are only beginning to learn how to absorb the possibilities they unleash. As long as our sessions stay close to the shoreline of the known world, uncovering the pains of our past, we have therapeutic models for how to work with them. Travel a bit further out to experience the intelligence running through all existence or the continuity of life after death, and still we have spiritual models for absorbing these blessings. But when our journeys take us great distances from the known world, when we enter the truly deep waters of the cosmos, how are these adventures being integrated by us then? What does "integration" even mean in this context?

How does a finite being exquisitely tuned to the conditions of space-time digest our forays into the Infinite? How does a time-bound being absorb excursions into Deep Time? What is the residual impact of merging with all of existence after we have returned to being just one among many? How does our day-to-day self manage such extreme fluctuations of the membrane of consciousness, not once or twice but forty, fifty, sixty times? I am asking more questions than I have answers for. My life has become a living experiment in these matters with the outcome still being determined.

Shortly after my journey ended, Spirit said to me in my morning meditation, "Twenty years in, twenty years out," meaning that it would take twenty years for me to absorb my twenty-year journey. At the time, I took comfort in this and thought to myself, "Sounds about right." Now that I'm drawing close to this twenty-year mark, however, I'm beginning to think that this estimate was far too optimistic. It feels like it will take more than one lifetime for me to fully digest all the experiences I've been given, that they have changed not just my present life but the entire trajectory of my Soul's evolution.

In this chapter, I will not offer any summary reflections on my journey or its implications. The sessions speak for themselves, and any attempt to compress them into a conclusion would fall short. Instead, I would like to share some challenges I faced coming off the psychedelic mountain and say something about where this journey has brought me today. Before I do,

however, I need to speak to an event that took place in my personal life shortly after my journey ended.

Within a year of stopping my sessions, Carol and I decided to end our marriage. Just when my psychedelic journey had come to a peaceful conclusion and *Dark Night, Early Dawn* was about to be published, stresses that had been present in our relationship for years reached a critical point and ended our long partnership. We had been married for twenty-four years. A divorce is a very personal and private matter. I bring mine into this story only because it is impossible to discuss these post-session years without at least mentioning it.

My divorce changed the entire landscape of my life, but in all my sessions I never saw it coming. In the early sessions when I had experienced my life as a completed whole, this important turning point had been kept hidden from me. In all the years I spent exploring Deep Time, this significant piece of my personal future was never shown me, even in my last session. Why was this? Did the medicine fail me? Was the failing mine, was I off my true course in life? I don't think either of these was the case. I don't believe that the intelligence I experienced in my sessions could possibly have "missed" such an important event in my life, especially since it had analyzed Carol's and my relationship several times through the years. If my sessions didn't show me our separation, I believe there was a reason for this silence.

I think that my sessions did not let me see my divorce because there are some decisions we must make on our own at the level of the incarnate self if we are to confront specific challenges embedded in our life script. These hard choices have to be made without the help of outside guidance if we are to truly internalize the lessons before us and make them part of our earthly wisdom. Without going into the details, I believe that the decision to end my marriage represented such a learning for me. I think that the awareness of my divorce was kept from me in order to allow me to come to this learning in my own way and in my own time. I was not given outside counsel because this was something I had to do by myself in order to reverse a deeply embedded karmic pattern in my personal history.

I want to say clearly that my psychedelic work was not the source of the problems that led to Carol's and my separation. Carol supported my psychedelic practice in these last ten years as I supported her Vajrayana

practice, and this mutual support was a given in our partnership. If anything, my sessions deepened our marriage and extended its life. I also don't think there is any special significance in the fact that we separated shortly after I stopped my sessions. The things that pulled us apart simply came to a head at this time.

I won't say more about my divorce except that it was extremely painful for my family. The critical week when things were coming to a head, a powerful thunderstorm tore through our neighborhood and ripped a large healthy tree in our backyard in half. Two days later, a second storm came through and tore another huge branch off the same tree. This is what our separation felt like, like being ripped down the center.

It took a long time for me to find my footing in this new landscape and to help my children find theirs, but as time went on things slowly got better. When we separated, Carol wanted to move to Santa Fe to be closer to Tara Mandala, so we moved our family center there and I visited as often as I could. One by one, our children graduated from college and made their way into the world. In time we both remarried, and our family circle expanded. Carol continued her Buddhist training and later completed her three-year solitary retreat under the supervision of her teacher, Tulku Sang Ngag Rinpoche. I published *Dark Night, Early Dawn*, which brought me to the Institute of Noetic Sciences in California, where I worked for two years as director of transformative learning, meeting many dedicated people in the consciousness community. After that I returned to Ohio to resume my academic life, and Christina Hardy, whom I met at the California Institute of Integral Studies, came with me. Three years later, we were married. Life has moved on. Each time our new family gathers for special events and holidays, we add a new chapter to our story.

## **The Deep Sadness**

Overall, I think I did a good job of integrating my sessions as I went along. I recorded them faithfully, spent many hours pondering their meaning, followed the personal guidance they gave me, and tried to incorporate their teachings into my life. Because of this, I thought that stopping my sessions would be a fairly straightforward process. I thought that I could simply step away and would be nourished by the many gifts I had been

given in these twenty years. It turns out that this was only half right. I learned that integrating an entire journey is different from integrating individual sessions. Because I had pressed my journey as long and hard as I did, coming off the psychedelic mountain turned out to be a challenging undertaking in its own right. In this respect, my personal story is a cautionary tale. It is not simply a story of the hero's journey told by Joseph Campbell where the hero returns triumphant with gifts to share. It is partly this, but it is also the story of an explorer wounded by the sheer beauty of what he found and then wounded again by having to keep his journey hidden for so long.

After stopping my sessions, it took about five years for my subtle energy system to calm down and find its new equilibrium. The quantity of energy flowing through my body slowly subsided, and as it did I became more comfortable living in my skin again. During this cooling off period, I began to notice that the synchronicities with my students that I described in *The Living Classroom* were happening less frequently, underscoring the role that sheer energy plays in accessing these ever-present fields of information. During the peak years, I had sometimes felt like a lightning rod, triggering insights and openings around me over which I had little control. Now I found that I had to cooperate with this process for these connections to manifest. The lightning still strikes and arrows still hit unseen targets, but today it has become a subtler dance.

The more important transition took place at a deeper level. As the years passed, I found myself entering a deep sadness. The divorce brought its own sadness, of course, but this was something deeper. There was joy in my life, especially the joy of my children and my relationship with Christina, but my enthusiasm for life itself was fading. I began to feel marooned, separated from my Beloved by the very conditions of my existence. Once you have known the joy of becoming Light, of dissolving into the crystalline body of the Divine, life on Earth can begin to feel dried up. Eventually, I reached a point where I realized I was just waiting to die. I was doing my work, taking care of my family, and giving my lectures, but in my heart of hearts I was waiting to die so that I could return to my Beloved. I was suffering from the loss of communion with the Divine.

I knew that others had gone through what I was going through, that I was not alone in this. I understood the dark night of the soul that mystics



endure. I knew that people who have had deep near-death experiences sometimes feel a similar estrangement from life. While their family and friends rejoice at having them “back from the dead,” they quietly pine for the celestial beauty they touched but had to leave. Carl Jung experienced this alienation after his near-death experience in 1944. “Now I must go back to this drab world,” he wrote in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. “Now comes the gray world with its boxes!”<sup>\*66</sup> I knew exactly what he meant.

Jung’s melancholy lasted six months, but mine grew deeper as the years continued. I had entered the Divine Expanse so many times, been taken so deeply into its beauty that my wound was particularly deep. This is not a wound that is easily understood by those who have not experienced it. How can you be wounded by having too much God? It sounds like a contradiction in terms. Surely more of God is always better. We want to believe that it is so, that something must have gone wrong elsewhere. But no, it was precisely this. I was heartsick at the loss of intimate communion with my Beloved, adrift in the knowledge that I would never know the joy of dissolving this completely into the Divine again until I died.

I had only myself to blame for my condition. Without calculating the cost, I had plunged myself repeatedly into the cosmic fire, begging for the experiences I had been given. In my meditation the universe said to me, “Self-inflicted wounds, my son. That’s all. Self-inflicted wounds.” It reassured me that things would work out. It also told me that there is the “dying of seeing” and the “dying of keeping.” I had done the dying of seeing in my sessions. Now it was time to do the dying of keeping.

I was in a strange condition. Everything I had learned on my psychedelic journey was now part of my being, giving me an inner calm and confidence in the innate wisdom of life. Because of my sessions, I could see the beauty and grandeur of our living universe. I saw human beings everywhere challenging themselves to become more, their former lives bubbling up inside the talents and foibles they took for granted. I knew their suffering would be healed in the bliss that follows each death and in their Soul’s unquenchable passion for continued self-transformation. I felt the pulse of our collective heart as we struggled with our past to give birth to our future self. I could see the genius of the

Creative Intelligence manifesting everywhere around me, and yet I no longer wanted to be here.

I knew that the universe was my Beloved's body, that it was impossible to ever step away from her. I knew that I was every moment immersed in her, that she was the root and flower of my existence. But this knowledge did not spare me the pain of being separated from the full intensity of her presence. I knew that there were great beings who were capable of living continuously in divine awareness, but I also knew this was beyond my present capacity. It would take lifetimes of spiritual practice for me to be able to abide continuously in the awareness I held most dear, and I could not even imagine what that would look like. How can one live day to day in that supremely luminous condition? I was not interested in a little enlightenment. I wanted to dissolve again into the crystalline radiance of Diamond Luminosity.

From time to time, I did light session work with psilocybin mushrooms and ayahuasca. These medicines helped me absorb the fields of knowledge and energy that now surrounded me because of my LSD work. They gave me contact with the universe that was lighter than my LSD sessions, but these too were temporary and did not satisfy my longing. In the end, I grew impatient with the coming and going of the temporary path.

As the years passed, I began to realize that I had to come to terms with my condition. Living one's life waiting to die is not a good way to live, and I knew it was not the way this work was supposed to end. Everything about my life was screaming "failure to integrate," but because I had taken so much care to integrate each session, it was not clear to me where my failure lay. Even so, I began to recognize that I must have made a mistake somewhere, and I turned to find it.

Despite my best efforts to stay grounded in my journey, despite all the spiritual practice I had done, all the reflection and writing, somewhere along the way I had lost a critical balance between transcendence and immanence, between going beyond the physical universe and living in it. Ironically, I had replicated within myself the very failing I had criticized in the religions of the Axial Age. I had become so enraptured with the world beyond space-time that I lost my footing inside space-time. I had

pushed so deeply into the Great Expanse that I was suffering not from too much God, because all is God, but from too much transcendence.

What a delicate balancing act. A little transcendence is a good thing. It is healing, reassuring, and illuminating. It can remind us who and what we are. It can teach us what we are doing here and what “here” is. But if we drink too deeply from the well of transcendence, it can undermine our sense of belonging to the Earth, and this is an equally important truth. Most of the spiritual seekers I knew wanted more transcendence in their lives; I was recovering from too much transcendence. Deep transcendence is not something you can give back once you’ve known it. You can’t give back your experience of Divine Light. You must find a way to live with its beauty for the rest of your life.

All of this came crashing into me in the years after I stopped my sessions. As long as I was returning periodically to this deeper reality, the depth of my imbalance had not fully registered. I had been protected from it, buffered from it by the steady rhythm of my return. It was only after I stopped my sessions that the full brunt of my imbalance hit me. It was only then that I realized how transcendently overextended I had become, despite my best intentions.

I think it’s safe to say that the trials I’m describing don’t show up in therapeutic protocols where the psychedelic is gentler, like psilocybin, or the sessions fewer. There is a self-limiting quality when we use these medicines in ways that leave the frame of our earthly life more intact. It is when the stronger psychedelics are used with greater daring that this particular challenge emerges. The joy of plunging deep into the Divine is also the pain of plunging deep, a pain born not of failure but of success.

It took me about ten years to get fully grounded in life again. I did so by grabbing my life firmly, partly by action and partly by sheer commitment. I tempered my memories of transcendence by embracing the immanent Divine more deeply. I made a conscious choice to live where I was, as I was. I renewed my meditation practice—not to change what will happen to me when I die, for that victory is won, nor to try to reach these distant shores in this lifetime. I practice to sing to my Beloved, to become a better vessel of her creation in my remaining years on this Earth.

I don’t know whether I would have made it completely off the mountain were it not for Christina’s love. A journeyer herself, she

understood the challenge I was facing. She held me in the years of sadness, believed in me when I doubted myself, and soothed me when wholeness seemed so far away. I owe her more than I can repay. A lover of the Earth and daughter of the stars, she never tires of mapping the variety the Infinite pours into each of our lives, uncovering the potent destinies hidden in our astrological charts.

As part of my descent, I had to confront an overattachment to marijuana that I had developed during these years. By softening my boundaries, marijuana allowed me to float a little above the Earth and not come completely off the mountain. It eased my heartache, but it did not solve the deeper problem. I had to break my attachment to it and allow myself to become fully consolidated inside my physical body if the Divine I had experienced in my sessions was ever going to fully awaken inside my life. So I did.

Integrating the transcendent Divine and the immanent Divine is a work still in progress for me. The longing to return has not disappeared, but it has become manageable. If the cost of having had these experiences is being haunted by their beauty for the rest of my life, better this than not to have had them at all, for that would be an unthinkable loss. That would be to wander in the shadows filled with questions and doubts.

## **The Sickness of Silence**

This brings me to the second challenge I faced coming off the mountain. Part of my sadness was caused not by separating from divine communion but by not being allowed to speak about this communion to others, by living in the silence imposed on me by my psychedelic-phobic culture. The burden of this silence weighed on my entire journey, but it became particularly difficult as the journey was nearing its end and after its conclusion.

When I began my unsanctioned experiment, I knew that the price of this undertaking would be my silence, and I paid this price willingly because it was the only way I could do this work. But I did not appreciate then how oppressive this silence would become or its deeper cost. I did not foresee the harm I would be doing myself by splitting myself in half in this way. When you divide yourself to live in your culture, when you can

say this to one but not to another, you make compromises on the outside of your life that begin to work their way into your insides. Chronic holding back creates cracks with uncertain consequences. In the end, the secrecy that made it possible for me to do this work also made it impossible for me to fully integrate it into my life.

In traditional cultures, when someone returns from a vision quest, the first thing they do is share their vision with the elders of their community. They do this, first, to receive their counsel on what the vision means and, second, because their vision does not belong to them alone. Deep visions are not private matters. They are not meant solely for our personal edification. In deep visions, the universe is speaking to us and to our community. We are the carrier of the vision, the first of its many recipients. How different this is from the world I lived in.

Because of my culture's restrictive laws around psychedelics, I could not bring my visionary experiences back into my world. I integrated my sessions as best I could, but my integration, like the work itself, was private and surreptitious. Though I kept myself whole in my personal life, I was not allowed to be whole in my public life, and if you are not whole in your public life, can you ever be truly whole? How can transcendence and immanence find their proper balance in such compromised circumstances?

Integration is not just a psychological process; it is also a social process. When you do deep psychedelic work in a culture that is hostile to psychedelics or even just naïve about them, you inevitably separate yourself from your friends and neighbors. Because it is not possible to share this important part of your life with them, your relationships grow thinner. You can enter into their world, but they cannot enter into yours. Even if they are open to the psychedelic conversation, unless they have been psychedelically initiated themselves, the discussion soon falters. It's no one's fault, but as a result of this invisible boundary, you become less authentic in their presence, less your full self. Again Carl Jung spoke for me when he wrote, "Loneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself, or from holding certain views which others find inadmissible."<sup>67</sup> Of the many things I had anticipated in undertaking this journey, the personal cost of this loneliness was the most unexpected.

I was not part of a psychedelic subculture in Ohio, and so my isolation deepened as my psychedelic practice deepened. I felt it in all my relationships, but it became particularly acute in my professional life. I am a natural-born teacher. Every bone in my body wants to learn new things and share this learning with others. And yet, at my university I had to keep silent about the most philosophically significant experiences of my life. To know firsthand the truths that psychedelic exploration can reveal but not be able to share them with my students and colleagues became increasingly painful to me. Because my journey lasted so many years and went so deep, I knew that to truly share its insights I would have to start at the beginning and take them in layer by layer, but this was simply not possible in my circumstances. In order to keep the job I loved, I had to postpone telling this story for so many years that it eventually made me sick inside. Living in a psychedelic closet is just as damaging to your soul as living in any other closet where you are forced to hide the truth of your being.

I walked a careful line at my university. I was able to teach courses on psychedelic research and this helped some, but I also had to keep a personal distance from the subject matter as I did. In my courses on psychology of religion and transpersonal studies, I lectured on Grof's research, but I never let my students know that I was doing this work myself. In my Buddhism course, I discussed emptiness and nonduality with my students, drawing from my psychedelic experience to bring these concepts to life for them, but I never owned that experience. As a result, I did not own myself in my teaching. In fact, I repeatedly disowned myself, pretending to be something other than what I was.

At a university you teach your discipline, of course; you do not teach yourself. There is a line one doesn't cross, and it's a good line. If you bring too much of yourself into the classroom, it can quickly become burdensome to your students. It compromises the freedom they need to engage and digest new ideas. But to bring nothing of yourself can starve a course of relevance and grounding. It's like teaching a course on poetry but never being allowed to say that you write poetry yourself, or a course on painting and pretending that you never pick up a paintbrush. There is a time and place for such sharing, but in my world there was never a time and never a place. Everything had to be done indirectly and covertly, never

openly and honestly. Truth diluted in this way is truth compromised, and what honor is there in this?

The imperative to keep silent about what I had learned in my sessions became a battle that played itself out in my body. In my classes, students would sometimes ask me a question that I could speak to only because of my psychedelic experience, but for the same reason I could not say out loud what I knew. In response to their question, an answer would immediately rise in me, but I would have to check myself to keep the conversation within the bounds of “appropriate” discussion. This conflict was particularly difficult when I could see that their question was coming from a deep place in their life, that they were truly searching for an answer and the answer mattered. In these situations, I would sometimes lose control of my voice for a split second. I would experience a catch in my throat, an involuntary spasm that came out as a little bark. It was embarrassing. I had to apologize and make excuses. The tension between what I had the capacity to say and what I was allowed to say was strangling me.

Living within this silence was difficult, but I am not a victim in any of this. I take responsibility for the choices I made and, at a deeper level, for the circumstances of my life, and this introduces a new layer to the story. In the course of my self-exploration, I learned that I had brought a fear of speaking my truth into this life from other lifetimes. In these earlier incarnations, I had paid a severe price for speaking out against the religious and political authorities of the day. Speaking publicly or making art that challenged conventional faith had led to my torture and execution. In other lifetimes, I had surrendered my personal truth in order to survive and had lived a suffocating life as a result. My Soul carried these wounds into my present life. In this lifetime, being an unorthodox thinker in a conservative setting, gathering forbidden knowledge with illegal substances, and being a public lecturer with secrets he dare not share were all part of a karmic script designed to help me confront and heal these past wounds. So while this culturally enjoined silence was painful for me to navigate, it was also the crucible in which I have worked to regain my personal power. Not a loud power, but the steady power of holding one’s convictions in the face of strong opposition.

Every time I have found the courage to take a stand on issues I believe in despite the resistance of my peers, life has rewarded me. My first book on reincarnation could have been a career killer for a young academic, but instead *Lifecycles* was translated into five languages and became a staple in my courses. *Dark Night, Early Dawn* posed a greater threat because there I began to own my psychedelic history, but it too has only rewarded me. In addition to bringing me to the Institute of Noetic Sciences, it brought me to the California Institute of Integral Studies where I became an adjunct faculty member in the department of Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness. Teaching in this progressive setting allowed me to engage graduate students eager for the psychedelic conversation, many of whom were psychedelically initiated themselves. After I returned to Ohio, my university even gave me its Distinguished Professor Award for publishing *Dark Night, Early Dawn*—an indication, perhaps, that our overworked colleagues seldom actually read the books they are responsible for evaluating!

The opportunity to share with others what I have learned in my sessions has been the missing piece in my integration process. My deep sadness was caused not just by the loss of communion but also by having no community with whom to share my experiences and receive their experiences in return. Now that I am beyond the statute of limitations for my psychedelic “crimes,” owning this hidden side of my life has been part of my personal path to becoming whole upon the Earth once again.

## **Entering the Sweet Valley**

This book will be published twenty years after I ended my journey. It has been a long road coming off the psychedelic mountain. Perhaps this is another indication that one should not do what I did. Perhaps the wiser course is always to open more gently, to take in less but keep more, to be patient with smaller steps into infinity. But I have made it down the mountain at last and have finally entered the sweet valley of my life.

An interviewer once asked me what was the most important thing I learned from all my sessions. Under the pressure of having to come up with an answer on the spot, I offered her a list and invited her to take her pick.



That the universe is the manifest body of a Divine Being of unimaginable intelligence, compassion, clarity, and power, that we are all aspects of this Being, never separated from it for a moment, that we are growing ever more aware of this connection, that physical reality emerges out of Light and returns to Light continuously, that Light is our essential nature and our destiny, that all life moves as One, that reincarnation is true, that there is a deep logic and significance to the circumstances of our lives, that everything we do contributes to the evolution of the whole, that our awareness continues in an ocean of time and a sea of bliss when we die, that we are loved beyond measure and that humanity is driving towards an evolutionary breakthrough that will change us and life on this planet at the deepest level. (Bache 2017)

It takes time to integrate such experiences and make them truly one's own. Time and sharing. In his beautiful book on near-death experiences, *Consciousness Beyond Life*, Pim van Lommel describes the challenges that people face as they attempt to integrate their experience of transcendence into their daily lives. There he writes, "The process of integration cannot get under way properly until the experience can be shared."<sup>\*68</sup> This is true for deep psychedelic experience as well. In my case at least, there was a level of integration that took place before sharing my story with others and a deeper level that has opened as I have been writing this book.

As I have been working on *LSD and the Mind of the Universe*, my absorption of my psychedelic experiences has deepened in unexpected ways. They are beginning to live in me differently than before and I in them. It feels like my session memories have come together to form a greater living whole and that the inside and outside of my life are moving toward a new synthesis. There is a saying from the Navajo: "When you put a thing in order, and give it a name, and you are all in accord, it becomes."<sup>†69</sup> By telling my story, by giving it a name and owning my experience, something new has been set in motion. A new peace has settled over me. At first this peace eased my existential loneliness and made the loss of communion more bearable, but then it deepened further. As I was finishing the book and beginning to speak about it publicly, a new spiritual transparency began to open in my life. It sometimes feels as

though the Beloved is not waiting for me to die but is coming for me here. Where this will lead, I don't know. It is still unfolding, taking me to new places, but surely this is the work of integration—to own, internalize, and manifest your experiences as deeply as you can. To let them flow through you and shape your presence on this Earth.

By writing and speaking from my true center, I have finally entered the sweet valley where I can be my full and complete self, knowing what I know and what I don't know, able to speak freely about what I've seen, with all my shortcomings and failings visible. For me, the sweet valley is a time of balancing—balancing my memories of dissolving into the mind and heart of the universe with standing on our rich Earth, balancing Deep Time with the present, balancing self and surround. Slowly, I am beginning to understand what Spirit meant by the dying of keeping. It is the repeated surrender to the Infinite here and now, moment by moment, in the ever-changing circumstances of my life. With patience and practice, it may one day be as the great Indian saint Śrī Ānandamayī Mā says:

*Then comes a time  
when the Beloved does not leave one anymore;  
wherever one may go, He is ever by one's side  
and His presence constantly felt. . . .  
Trees, flowers, the water, and the land,  
everything is the Beloved, and only He.*<sup>[\\*70](#)</sup>

# APPENDIX I

## What Dies and Is Reborn?

My psychedelic journey generated a repeating cycle of death and rebirth that systematically initiated me into progressively deeper levels of consciousness. This generates a thought-provoking question: What exactly is dying and being reborn in this spiral of initiation? There is often an acute sensation of dying at the deeper levels, but what does this sensation attach to? Is it simply ego dying over and over again, or is there something more going on? I want to briefly propose four overlapping answers to this question.

### 1. The Ego

In the early stages of the journey, what is dying is our physical identity, the body-mind ego. What is dying is the bundle of habits, beliefs, and aptitudes created by our earthly history. We must let go of everything our physical existence has told us that we are in order to enter what lies beyond physical existence. But in later sessions, after ego has surrendered its grip on our consciousness, what exactly is dying then?

### 2. The Species Ego

When the wheel of death and rebirth is turning at the subtle level of consciousness where the deaths are largely collective, what is dying, I think, is some portion of the *species ego*. If the patient in these sessions expands beyond the personal psyche to the collective psyche, then what is being engaged, healed, and eventually transcended is some matrix of

memories held in the collective unconscious that contributes to our historical self-identity as a species. Though we participate in these deaths and feel them acutely, what “we” are at this stage has shifted. In these sessions, we are no longer our private self but have expanded to encompass some aspect of the species-mind.

The pulse of the life one is living in these hours is the pulse of human history. The COEX systems that are resolving themselves in these exercises are not personal complexes but META-COEX systems within the collective unconscious. The intelligence that initiates and guides this collective rebirth is not the individual’s higher self but something like the higher self of the human species, the archetypal intelligence that connects us to the Creative Intelligence of the universe.

Given the therapeutic nature of my work in the ocean of suffering, my description of species ego-death in *Dark Night, Early Dawn* and in this book has tilted in the direction of releasing the trauma of pain and violence, but many of the META-COEX systems that shape our collective identity do not involve acute suffering. Many are simply culturally engrained habits that constrict our sense of what we are and who we can be. A piece of the species ego dies, for example, whenever we have a deep experience of transcending cultural prohibitions or conventional thinking. Opening to ecstatic transpersonal landscapes can help dissolve collective belief systems that are constricting our felt sense of connection to each other and the universe. The liberation of our species has many moving parts.

But after our work at the collective level has run its course and reached its conclusion, what is dying when the spiral of death and rebirth continues to turn? As broad a reality as the species ego is, in the end it is a human-centric phenomenon. In the context of the vast cosmos, our species consciousness is a relatively small thing. Sooner or later, transpersonal experience outgrows these human proportions, and we must look for larger explanations of what is dying in these later sessions.

### **3. The Shamanic Persona**

To make sense of what took place in my sessions at this juncture, I have introduced the concept of the *shamanic persona*.<sup>\*71</sup> I think all psychedelic

journeyers have had the experience that after a session has ended, we sometimes cannot remember all the experiences and insights we had during the session. And yet, when we reenter the psychedelic state in our next session, this “missing knowledge” is present once again, waiting for us. Something in our psyche has remembered our experience at a level deeper than our egoic awareness. Similarly, when our sessions get underway, we often have a sense of resuming our “psychedelic identity,” a stable transpersonal identity that is familiar to us from our previous sessions and deeper than our egoic identity. When we enter the psychedelic state, we “walk with the old ones” once again.

I want to suggest that in the repeated opening and closing of consciousness in our sessions, a semiautonomous, state-specific consciousness is formed that retains and integrates all our psychedelic experiences, including those that our egoic self cannot retain. This consciousness not only remembers our experiences, it also preserves the knowledge and capacities we acquired in them. I call this psychedelically generated self-awareness the shamanic persona. The shamanic persona reflects the natural aggregating function of life. Life remembers and holds on to its experience at all levels, as Rupert Sheldrake and Ervin Laszlo have argued.<sup>\*72</sup> The shamanic persona can be thought of as a state-specific alter ego. In calling this entity the shamanic *persona*, I am not suggesting that it has a masking function but am simply drawing attention to the fact that it is a living identity that changes as our psychedelic experience deepens. It could also be called the *shamanic self*.<sup>†73</sup>

The more transpersonal experience we have accumulated in our sessions, the stronger our shamanic self will be. If our psychedelic experiences have been chaotic and fragmented, our shamanic self will be weaker. If our experiences have been well focused and clear, it will be stronger and more stable. The more successfully we have integrated our psychedelic experiences into our conscious awareness, the “closer” and more familiar our shamanic self will feel to our ordinary sense of self. It will feel more like “us,” a natural extension of our earthly identity. Conversely, the less well integrated our experiences have been—either because of poor session management or because the content of a session was particularly deep—the more “distant” and “other” our shamanic self will feel to us.

Because the shamanic persona is a synthesis of a specific set of experiences, it is a specific entity with a specific identity. It is not an archetype. It is the living memory of our unique psychedelic history, and as such it has built into it the character and limitations of that history. A shamanic persona that embodies stabilized psychic level experience, for example, is a very different entity than a shamanic persona that embodies stabilized subtle level experience or causal level experience. By “stabilized experience,” I mean that we have entered a certain level of consciousness often enough that we have acclimated to the territory and learned the terrain. Our psycho-physical system has undergone the necessary purifications and adaptations for us to maintain coherent awareness and good recall at this level.

I think that the concept of the shamanic persona adds a third layer to the answer of what is dying and being reborn in this continuing cycle of death and rebirth. When our consciousness begins to open to levels of awareness that are deeper than the levels we have previously experienced, our entire psychedelic history must yield to this new territory. Just as our Earth identity dies in ego-death, our accumulated psychedelic knowledge *and the self-identity based on that knowledge* must surrender and die before a still deeper mode of transpersonal awareness can fully emerge in our sessions. In essence, then, what I think is dying in these later openings is our shamanic persona, the living memory of our psychedelic history. Though the death of the shamanic persona may feel like a personal death, it is not the ego that is dying here but a deeper identity that has been birthed *inside* our sessions. It is a hybrid identity that is both personal and transpersonal, with many transpersonal experiences woven into it.

In a sustained psychedelic regimen, our shamanic persona may die and be reborn multiple times as new levels of reality continue to open. After ego-death, a shamanic persona emerges as the living integration of our early transpersonal experiences. As our experience continues to deepen in subsequent sessions, that first shamanic persona will eventually have to surrender and die, giving birth to a second shamanic persona that will integrate our new transpersonal experiences. This second persona will retain the memories and knowledge of the first persona and add to it the new knowledge and capacities gained at this second level. If we continue to push the boundaries of experience, sooner or later this second shamanic

persona will also have to surrender in order for a still deeper dimension of consciousness to open and become fully operational.

This pattern of successive deaths and rebirths is the natural rhythm of all identities that emerge on the psychedelic path. The *essence* of these identities, like all identities in the world of samsara, is the Absolute, but the *form* these identities take reflects the changing depth and breadth of our experience. Eventually, one simply becomes comfortable with the fluid nature of all points of reference within our vast, self-aware universe.

#### **4. A Dimension of the Cosmos**

Let me now suggest a fourth answer to the question of what is dying and being reborn in our sessions by drawing on the concepts of the psychic, subtle, and causal levels of experience.

The threads of experience that make up the shamanic persona at the psychic level of consciousness will tend to be personal and soul-centered in nature, as we saw in chapter 5, “Deep Time and the Soul.” At the low subtle level where collective patterns begin to predominate, the threads become increasingly collective and specieswide. At higher subtle levels where the currents of experience are more archetypal, the threads of the shamanic persona become correspondingly archetypal. If we continue this progression into causal levels of consciousness, the threads of experience become so universal in scope that the category of the shamanic persona becomes too small to adequately describe what is dying and being reborn in these meltdowns.

For me, the category of the shamanic persona is always tinged with selfhood; it is an extension and expansion of my individual identity. As such, it is too small an entity to describe the experiential quality of these later deaths, at least as I have experienced them. It may still apply, but by itself it is an incomplete description. Clearly, we’re marking stages on a continuum here, but eventually it feels necessary to try to conceptualize these advanced transitions within a larger frame of reference. But here the clear road runs out, and things become more uncertain. At this point, I can only share intuitions I’ve formed over the years.

How does one describe the larger arc of life that sparks in these advanced meltdowns? How much can we truly know about the role these mega-deaths may play in the deeper web of life? What need do such deep levels of reality have of “rebirth” at all? I don’t know the final answer to these questions, but I believe we should begin by viewing everything that takes place in our psychedelic practice from the perspective of the Great Chain of Being as a whole.

Let me start with an observation I made in the closing pages of *Dark Night, Early Dawn*:

To use Ken Wilber’s vocabulary, if we are a holon functioning as a part within a series of ever-enlarging wholes, then the death-rebirth dynamic may have different functions for different levels of reality, all of which are being realized *simultaneously*. From the perspective of the smaller holon, for example, the effect of death-rebirth may be liberation into that which is larger, while the effect of the *same* transition from the perspective of the larger holon may be to allow it greater access to and integration with the smaller field. An event that functions as spiritual “ascent” from below may simultaneously function as “descent” from above. (Bache 2000, 298)

This insight invites us to think about the dynamics of death and rebirth more multidimensionally. It is an insight that generalizes across multiple levels of reality. At the subtle level of consciousness, for example, death and rebirth may open a portal that serves not only to drain destructive energies *out of* the species-mind but also to infuse healing energies *into* the species-mind from a higher source, as the sessions reported in chapter 8 demonstrate. At still deeper levels, such portals may allow any number of transcendental blessings to be infused directly into lower orders of existence. The question then becomes: How does the addition of this principle of *infusion from above* influence the question of how we might understand what is dying and being reborn at these deep levels of psychedelic experience?

Let me draw upon Sri Aurobindo’s involutory/evolutionary cosmology here because it resonates strongly with the cosmology that



emerges in psychedelic work, as Stan Grof has demonstrated in his beautiful book *The Cosmic Game*. According to Sri Aurobindo, in the cascading involution of the Divine, many levels of existence are manifested. While these levels may be porous from “above,” they are less porous from “below.” Like looking through a series of one-way mirrors, the Divine looking “down” sees everything It has become, but looking “up” from lower levels, the Divine sees less.<sup>\*74</sup> When we who are below manage either by hard labor or by grace to access some of these higher levels, a special magic sometimes takes place.

Assume for the moment that through the fiery exercises of psychedelic exploration we have managed to stabilize experience at the high subtle level of consciousness. In order to reach this level, what “we” are has changed. We are no longer our private selves but have temporarily become some aspect of subtle level reality. Inside our sessions, we live as a life-form that breathes this rarified air. When through further exercises a doorway opens to still deeper levels of consciousness at the causal level, my experience has been that it allows a *cosmic communion* to take place between the causal and subtle realms. Deep communes with deep. Bringing different levels of spiritual reality into conscious communion with each other, even if for only a few hours, seems to nourish and bring joy to the weave of existence as the “below” remembers the “above” and the blessings of “above” pour more freely into the “below.” What is taking place is a cosmic dance between deep levels of the divine fabric. It is God communing with God, nourishing Its self-manifesting, self-emergent being in ways we may glimpse but perhaps never fully comprehend.

What dies and is reborn, then, in these advanced cycles of death and rebirth? Beyond the ego, beyond the species ego, beyond the shamanic persona, what “dies,” I think, is something of truly cosmic proportions. Something deep in the fabric of the universe surrenders and in that surrender is nourished from above. Some dimension of existence extraordinarily vast awakens more completely to Itself, and much to our surprise, the Divine appears to genuinely appreciate our collaboration in facilitating this communion.

## APPENDIX II

# Pushing the Limits of Astrological Correspondence

Stanislav Grof and Richard Tarnas have proposed the bold hypothesis that there is a correspondence between people's experiences in deep nonordinary states of consciousness and the rhythms of our solar system. Grof writes:

This work has shown that astrology, particularly the study of planetary transits, can predict and illuminate both the archetypal content of nonordinary states of consciousness and the timing of when particular states are most likely to occur. (Grof 2009, 51)

I embrace this proposal, and yet I also wonder whether there are limiting conditions that apply. Do the astrological correlations that hold for the early stages of our psychedelic journey hold as strongly for its later stages, after one has moved through the perinatal process and beyond ego-death? Our planetary transits reflect the moment of our birth and are therefore part of the matrix of space-time. When our sessions are repeatedly taking us beyond space-time and beyond even archetypal reality itself, does this planetary correspondence fade? Is there a roll-off effect as we move into progressively deeper states of consciousness? Or is it the case that as long as we have a body here on Earth, our entrance into *any* state of consciousness, no matter how expansive or far removed from physical reality, will always move in rhythm with the pulse of our personal and global transits? I consider this an open question.

To encourage this inquiry, I provide my birth information and the dates of all my sessions below. Because I have presented only some of these sessions in this volume, emphasizing the breakthrough sessions more than the intermediate sessions where much processing is done, this may not be sufficient to allow any definitive conclusions to be reached, but I hope it will contribute to the discussion of this thought-provoking issue.

## **Birth Information for Christopher Bache**

*July 4, 1949, 10:46 a.m., Vicksburg, Mississippi*

### **Crossing the Boundary of Birth and Death**

1. November 24, 1979
2. December 18, 1979 3.
3. May 17, 1980
4. July 1, 1980
5. December 13, 1980
6. February 27, 1981
7. 7. July 3, 1981
8. September 5, 1981
9. September 26, 1981
10. May 21, 1982

### **The Ocean of Suffering & Deep Time and the Soul**

11. August 4, 1982
12. December 28, 1982
13. February 26, 1983 14.
14. March 25, 1983 15.
15. April 29, 1983
16. July 29, 1983
17. September 3, 1983

## **Initiation into the Universe**

18. July 14, 1990
19. July 29, 1990
20. August 11, 1990
21. January 13, 1991
22. February 17, 1991
23. April 27, 1991
24. July 24, 1991

## **The Greater Real of Archetypal Reality**

25. August 4, 1991
26. October 20, 1991
27. December 8, 1991
28. February 28, 1992 29.
29. March 29, 1992
30. April 5, 1992
31. May 2, 1992
32. June 15, 1992 33.
33. July 18, 1992
34. January 2, 1993
35. January 16, 1993

## **A Benediction of Blessings**

36. February 20, 1993
37. April 3, 1993 38.
38. May 7, 1993 39.
39. June 27, 1993

40. August 6, 1993
41. August 30, 1993
42. October 1, 1993
43. December 11, 1993

### **The Birth of the Future Human<sup>\*75</sup>**

22. February 17, 1991
23. April 27, 1991
24. July 24, 1991
28. February 28, 1992
29. March 29, 1992
31. May 2, 1992
39. June 27, 1993
43. December 11, 1993
47. July 15, 1994
55. December 15, 1995

### **Diamond Luminosity**

44. January 15, 1994
45. February 18, 1994
46. June 10, 1994
47. July 15, 1994
48. August 7, 1994
49. October 7, 1994
50. January 13, 1995
51. March 24, 1995
52. June 2, 1995
53. Fall 1995 (exact date not recorded)
54. November 3, 1995

55. December 15, 1995
56. January 26, 1996
57. February 9, 1996
58. 58. March 6, 1996
59. March 20, 1996
60. April 21, 1996
61. June 15, 1996
62. September 6, 1996
63. October 25, 1996
64. January 12, 1997
65. May 15, 1997
66. June 20, 1997
67. August 2, 1997
68. December 27, 1997
69. January 10, 1998

## **Final Vision**

70. May 16, 1998
71. June 13, 1998
72. October 16, 1998
73. February 13, 1999

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## Footnotes

- [\\*1](#) Grof describes LSD as a “powerful, unspecific amplifier of the biochemical and neuro-physical process in the brain. It seems to create a situation of general undifferentiated activation that facilitates the emergence of unconscious material” (1980, 52).
- [\\*2](#) My manual for conducting my psychedelic sessions was Grof’s *LSD Psychotherapy* (1980). Three excellent recent books on psychedelic therapy, its history, and its renaissance are: *Allies for Awakening* by Ralph Metzner (2015), *Sacred Knowledge* by William Richards (2016), and *How to Change Your Mind* by Michael Pollan (2018).
- [\\*3](#) I describe this new philosophical method in *Dark Night, Early Dawn* (2000, chapter 1).
- [\\*4](#) See *The Long Trip* by Paul Devereau (1997), *Sacred Vine of Spirits: Ayahuasca*, edited by Ralph Metzner (1997), *Seeking the Sacred with Psychoactive Substances*, edited by J. Harold Ellens (2014), *Entheogens and the Future of Religion* by Robert Forte (1997), and *Cleansing the Doors of Perception* by Huston Smith (2000).
- [† 5](#) When Aldous Huxley published his account of his first peyote experience in 1954, *The Doors of Perception*, it triggered a heated debate among theologians that lasted fifteen years. The deep similarity of psychedelic “highs” to mystical “highs” led some to celebrate the mind-openers as initiating a new era of spirituality, while others criticized what they saw as the sleight of hand of “instant mysticism.” Its critics claimed that “chemical mysticism” was a false shortcut to enlightenment, an attempt to make an end run around serious spiritual practice and get spirituality on the cheap. Huston Smith took a mediating position, recognizing the genuine mystical character of certain psychedelic experiences but questioning their relevance to long-term spiritual development because they did not seem to have the



staying power of the experiences elicited by more traditional methods.

This debate eventually ended in a standoff in the late 1960s for several reasons, the most important of which was that it became clear that we did not understand either psychedelics or mysticism well enough to decide the questions being asked. Then psychedelics were made illegal in 1970, rendering the entire issue moot. The echoes of this debate continue to surface in works like *Zig Zag Zen*, edited by Badiner and Grey (2002), a discussion between Buddhists and psychedelists on the spiritual merits and demerits of psychedelics.

What is striking about this early debate from today's perspective is that it addressed only experiences of tripping and not the therapeutic use of psychedelics. It therefore did not address the painful side of the psychedelic process, the confrontation with one's psychological blocks that regularly occurs in therapeutic settings. As a result, it has largely been rendered obsolete by the work of psychedelic therapists. William Richards's book *Sacred Knowledge* (2016) beautifully illustrates the deeply spiritual character of psychedelic experiences that sometimes emerge in therapeutic contexts.

On this early debate see: Huxley (1954), Zaehner (1959), Clark (1964; 1969), Havens (1964), Pahnke and Richards (1966), and Smith (1964; 1967). For an assessment of this debate, see Bache (1991).

[\\*6](#) Grof, *Realms of the Human Unconscious* (1976, 20–25). In *LSD Psychotherapy*, Grof lists the dose range for psychedelic therapy somewhat higher, at 300–1,500 mcg (1980, 31–38).

[\\*7](#) Metzner (2015, 73–86). Shulgin and Shulgin (1991; 1997) and Trachsel (2011) concur with Metzner in giving the effective dose range of LSD as 20–200 mcg. Ott (1993) gives a higher dose range of 50–500 mcg. In the *Handbook for the Therapeutic Use of Lysergic Acid Diethylamide-25: Individual and Group Procedures* (1959), Blewett and Chwelos also give a higher dose range of 300–600 mcg.

[†8](#) See Stolaroff's essay "Are Psychedelics Useful in the Practice of Buddhism?" (1999), where he discusses the advantages of integrating low doses of LSD (25–50 mcg) into one's sitting practice.

[\\*9](#) In my experience, working systematically with high doses of LSD does not lead to spiritual bypassing, that is, to bypassing or avoiding

unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks. Though one may push through the psychodynamic layer of consciousness in the early stages, repeatedly entering the psychedelic state draws our unfinished business into our sessions sooner or later. This is a salient difference between psychedelic therapy, where the sessions are few in number, and psychedelic exploration, where the sessions are many. For more on this, see chapter 10.

[†10](#) On screening criteria, see Grof 1980, 163–66; Johnson, Richards, and Griffiths, 2008, 608–9; and Carhart-Harris et al. 2016, 1381. I don't think this protocol would be appropriate, for example, for anyone with a history of trauma or abuse as its disruptive power may reactivate old wounds in ways that would be counterproductive.

[\\*11](#) Alverga 1999, xxxi.

[†12](#) Though I will sometimes speak of this reality as the Divine and use personal language for it, I am not in fact a theist. In my hands, “Divine” does not reduce to the God of our monotheistic traditions. My metaphysical commitments run in the direction of monism and panentheism. My God is the Cosmos. I see all reality, both physical and spiritual reality, as the manifestation of a single intelligence and power whose nature is beyond our capacity to fully fathom but not beyond our capacity to experience to some degree.

[\\*13](#) Grof 2009; 2012.

[\\*14](#) Stace 1960, 78–80.

[\\*15](#) I have learned a great deal about the participatory dynamics of transpersonal experience from my friend and colleague at the California Institute of Integral Studies, Jorge Ferrer, who has argued persuasively in *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory* (2002) and a series of articles that all spiritual experience is participatory: “The participatory approach presents an enactive understanding of the sacred that conceives spiritual phenomena, experiences, and insights as *cocreated events*” (Ferrer 2011b, 2; see also Ferrer 2011a, Ferrer 2013, Ferrer and Sherman 2008).

[†16](#) 5-MeO-DMT is a psychedelic of the tryptamine class that is four to six times more powerful than DMT. It can be found in a wide variety of trees and shrubs in Central and South America and in the milky white venom of the *Bufo alvarius* toad native to the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. When smoked, its effects are felt within 30 seconds, peak for 1–15 minutes, and last up to half an hour. When taken as a snuff, it has a longer acting window (Oroc 2009; St John 2015; Metzner, 2015).

[\\*17](#) This echoes Rick Strassman’s observation that the intense but short-acting DMT experience did not in general produce a long-lasting impact on his subjects (2001, 266–77).

[†18](#) In *LSD Psychotherapy*, Grof describes some of these variables: “In order to understand the nature of the LSD reaction in all its complexity, we have to discuss not only the actual pharmacological effect of the drug, but also the most important extra pharmacological factors—the role of the personality of the subject, his or her emotional condition and current life situation, the personality of the guide or therapist, the nature of the relationship between the subject and the guide, and an entire complex of additional factors usually referred to as set and setting” (1980, 48).

[\\*19](#) See also Wilber 1995. Wilber’s model has enjoyed wide circulation, but it has also drawn criticism. In *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory* (2002), Ferrer presents a critique of perennialist accounts of spirituality and criticizes Wilber’s approach in particular as being rigid, hierarchical, and unduly privileging nondual spiritual realization as the ultimate summit of spiritual development.

[†20](#) Grof discusses these levels of consciousness in many places, starting with *Beyond the Brain* (1985) but most fully in *Psychology of the Future* (2000).

[†21](#) I experienced nondual consciousness to be an inherent feature of causal consciousness and therefore do not address it as a separate state of consciousness.

[\\*22](#) Aurobindo 1987, 211.

[\\*23](#) The term Axial Age comes from the German philosopher Karl Jaspers to identify the period from the eighth to the third century BCE during which the major world religions of today emerged.

[\\*24](#) Alverga 1999, 166–67.

[\\*25](#) Huxley 1977, 188, footnote.

[†26](#) Walsh and Grob 2005, 228.

[\\*27](#) *Realms of the Human Unconscious*, 1976, 95–153; *LSD Psychotherapy*, 1980, 71–87; *The Adventure of Self-Discovery*, 1988, 98–127; *Psychology of the Future*, 2000, 29–56.

[\\*28](#) Bache 2000, 52–58. On the emergence of the perinatal domain in nonpsychedelic contexts, see Bache 1981; 1985; 1991; 1994; 1996.

[\\*29](#) In earlier publications, I gave a longer time frame for the ocean of suffering (2014; 2015). In writing this book, however, I have come to recognize certain structural differences in sessions that I had previously grouped together. I believe, therefore, that the narrower window given here is more accurate.

[†30](#) By now I had shifted to using music from distant cultures for the cleansing portion of the sessions, especially indigenous chanting. I found that these intense ceremonial cadences and unfamiliar tonalities encouraged a deeper opening than Western classical music.

[\\*31](#) Grof's interpretation assumes that the collective unconscious of our species preserves the memories of human beings throughout history. I share this belief, as do many transpersonal thinkers. Rupert Sheldrake has collected evidence for this hypothesis in his study of morphic resonance and formative causation (1981; 1988; 1991). Ervin Laszlo has gone further to propose that the entire universe consciously remembers its experience (2004; 2009; 2014; 2016).

[\\*32](#) Grof has observed this paradoxical flip of extreme pain into ecstasy in sessions he has supervised (1985, 311–13). This was the only time it happened in my sessions.

[\\*33](#) Bracketing (*epoché*) is the act of suspending all judgments about the natural world and focusing on the analysis of experience itself. It is a

form of phenomenological reduction promoted by Edmund Husserl ([1931] 2013) and other phenomenologists to “see things as they are.”

[\\*34](#) Stevenson 1974a; 1974b; 1975–1983; 1987; 1997. On Stevenson’s critics, see Edwards, 1986–1987; 1996. On the rebuttal of his critics, see Almeder 1992 and Tucker 2008.

[†35](#) Cranston and Williams 1984; Fiore 1978; Lucas 1993; Netherton and Paul 1978; Ten Dam 1990; Wambach 1978; 1979; Weiss 1996; Whitton and Fisher 1986; Woolger 1988. For more cases, see Bowman 1997; 2001; Leininger, Leininger, and Gross 2009; Snow 1999.

[\\*36](#) I address the limitations of Stevenson’s worldview and the constrictive nature of his data in *Dark Night, Early Dawn* (2000), chapter 2, “Beyond Reincarnation.”

[\\*37](#) Ring 1980; 1984, and Ring and Valarino 1998.

[\\*38](#) Ring 1984, 187–89.

[†39](#) See the fascinating case of Belle in Ring 1984, 190–92.

[\\*40](#) Newton 1995; 2000; 2009.

[\\*41](#) There is a certain tension between Newton’s description of the afterlife and my description of the META-COEX systems of rage and suffering that I experienced operating in the species-mind. In general, META-COEX systems do not show up on Newton’s radar, or more precisely, on his clients’ radar. The world his clients report is a world of discrete Souls. In this respect, their description of the afterlife seems to reflect the pointillist perspective of lower transpersonal states of consciousness. The collective sinews that emerge in higher states of awareness represent a deeper pattern in the web of life. Soul consciousness and species consciousness operate at different levels of reality. These are not mutually exclusive truths but simultaneous truths. When we grasp this fact, the tension disappears.

[\\*42](#) According to Newton and other past-life therapists, only a portion of the Soul’s energy and knowledge incarnates in any one lifetime. The larger share remains outside space-time, assisting the present incarnation.

[\\*43](#) The theory of intelligent design, marred by its clunky theism, does not begin to describe the subtlety of the genius of our self-emergent universe. I have often wished that I had advanced training in physics and astronomy, for then I might have been able to retain more of what I was shown in this and other sessions. The content was not inherently ineffable, but it was extraordinarily sophisticated and technical.

[\\*44](#) Bache 2000, 86–94.

[\\*45](#) *Bardo* is a Tibetan term that refers to the “intermediate states” one enters between one’s incarnations on Earth. Buddhism divides the postmortem domain into six levels, ranging from the low hell realms to the high deity realms, each with many subdivisions. In *Far Journeys*, Robert Monroe describes the bardo as having hundreds of levels.

[\\*46](#) In Mahayana Buddhism, *dharmakaya* is the source and essence of the universe, beyond existence and nonexistence. *Nirmanakaya* is the manifest physical universe; it is you and me and everything that exists. For more on this distinction, see chapter 10.

[\\*47](#) I don’t know why Africa played such a prominent role in this session. I have used African music in my sessions before, but not in this particular session.

[\\*48](#) Quoted in Underhill [1911] 1961, 61.

[\\*49](#) 1981; 1988; 1991.

[\\*50](#) This loss of one’s session memory, which holds and integrates all one’s prior session experiences, represents a different and deeper form of death than ego-death. In appendix I, I refer to it as the death of the shamanic persona.

[\\*51](#) By “our consciousness” I do not mean just our personal consciousness; I also mean the collective consciousness of our species, which defines the limits within which our personal consciousness operates.

[\\*52](#) See *Dark Night, Early Dawn*, chapter 9, “The Fate of Individuality” (Bache 2000), and “Reincarnation and the Akashic-Field: A Dialogue with Ervin Laszlo” (Bache 2006).

[\\*53](#) Klein 1995, 177.

[\\*54](#) “Jesus’ Blood Never Failed Me Yet” by Garvin Bryars.

[\\*55](#) The sixteenth-century Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross once expressed a similar sentiment: “Invested with an invincible courage, filled with an impassioned desire to suffer for its God, the soul then is seized with a strange torment—that of not being allowed to suffer enough” (*Oeuvres*, ii, quoted in James [1902] 2002, 320).

[\\*56](#) For a short summary of the themes of *The Living Classroom*, see Bache 2011; 2012.

[\\*57](#) The following sources are listed in the order in which the authors started publishing books in this field: Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, and Jorgen Randers 1972; 1992; 2004, Peter Russell [1983] 1995; [1992] 2009, Thomas Berry 1988; 1999, Joanna Macy 1991; 2014, Richard Tarnas 1991; 2006, Duane Elgin 1993; 2001, Paul Hawken 1993; 2007, Ervin Laszlo 1994; 2010, David Korten [1995] 2001; 2006, Barbara Marx Hubbard 1998; 2001, Jean Houston 2004, Jared Diamond 2005, Charles Eisenstein 2007, Paul Gilding 2011, Anne Baring 2013, David Wallace-Wells 2019.

[\\*58](#) Though he does not address the collective unconscious, the strategic futurist Richard David Hames emphasizes the role that nonlinear change will play in this historic transition: “As climate change takes hold, altering major patterns of human activity in any number of predictable and unforeseen ways, the need to comprehend the nonlinear nature of change in complex systems becomes crucial. Nonlinear change, undisciplined and wildly unsettling, is disconcerting precisely because we cannot be certain of anything anymore. [T]he changes we are beginning to encounter are likely to be increasingly abrupt, erratic and massively disruptive” (Hames 2010).

[\\*59](#) Elliot 2019.

[\\*60](#) Mahayana Buddhism teaches that there are three *kayas*, or modes of existence—*dharmakaya*, *sambhogakaya*, and *nirmanakaya*. These terms carry different meanings in different contexts. In the context of cosmology, *dharmakaya* is the Clear Light of Absolute Reality, the

essence and source of the universe, beyond existence and nonexistence. *Sambhogakaya* is the Body of Bliss, an intermediate domain sometimes associated with the highest deity realm. *Nirmanakaya* is the Manifest Body of existence; it is you and me and the entire physical universe.

[\\*61](#) Badiner and Grey 2002; Osto 2016.

[\\*62](#) For more on what hell is and isn't, see *Dark Night, Early Dawn*, chapter 4, "Solving the Riddle of Heaven's Fire" (Bache 2000).

[\\*63](#) *Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche (1938–2018) was a Dzogchen master who is considered the mindstream emanation of Adzom Drugpa (1842–1924) and Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (1594–1651). Was Norbu Rinpoche actually present with me this day, or did some larger consciousness clothe itself in my history with Rinpoche in order to give me this transmission? I don't know. Whatever the vehicle, the transmission was genuine. It was every grace I could have wished to receive from my teacher.*

[\\*64](#) The music was an intense track titled "Anger" from Ryuichi Sakamoto's album *Discord*, which I had looped to repeat.

[\\*65](#) These FORMS seemed to function something like Rupert Sheldrake's morphic fields. They gathered the learning of generations into a living blueprint of the species, a blueprint that changes and grows as the species learns.

[\\*66](#) Jung [1961] 1989, 293, 295.

[\\*67](#) [1961] 1989, 282–83.

[\\*68](#) Lommel 2010, 51.

[†69](#) Waters 1970.

[\\*70](#) Lipski 2007:118.

[\\*71](#) Bache 2014; 2015.

[\\*72](#) Sheldrake 1981; 1988; 1991, and Laszlo 1995; 2003; 2004; 2014.



[†73](#) Ego-state psychology has demonstrated that this compartmentalizing of experience is a common feature of our psychological makeup. Many areas of our inner life have this encapsulated, semiautonomous quality. In drawing this parallel with ego states, however, I want to add one qualification. Ego-state psychology tends to see ego states as created in reaction to trauma. The shamanic persona, however, is born from a surplus of blessings, from the broadening of our experiential horizons in psychedelic states of consciousness. On ego-state psychology, see Emmerson (2007), Rowan (1990), Watkins (1987), and Zinser (2011).

[\\*74](#) Grof 1998; Aurobindo 1987; Satprem 1993.

[\\*75](#) The sessions listed here do not follow the linear sequence shown in the other chapters because in this chapter I am gathering together pieces of sessions distributed over a five year period. The actual chronological sequence of the sessions, therefore, moves from Chapter 8, “A Benediction of Blessings,” to Chapter 10, “Diamond Luminosity”

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