

## Chapter Three

### Sojourns in Cosmic Consciousness

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- The Cosmic Adventures of Robert A. Monroe
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If I say, "I'm New Age," does it mean I'm seeking a deeper planetary awareness, the emergence of a holistically oriented world, and a compassionate, empowering attitude toward others? Or does it mean I'm interested in tarot cards, aura balancing, channeling, crystals, past lives, and a narcissistic pursuit of magical powers?

--David Spangler (New Age lecturer and author)

You are bushwhacking through consciousness, and you will come to a place where the vistas are grand and you have completely new options about where to go both on and off this planet.

--Barbara Marciniak (channeler of aliens)

I asked these spirit figures if I was seeing *them* or if I was seeing what was in my own brain. They answered, "Both."

--Eileen Garrett (psychic reader)

*If* Out of Body Experiences are "real," *if* the things Mr. Monroe describes cannot be dismissed as an interesting kind of fantasy or dream, our world view is going to change radically. And uncomfortably.

--Charles T. Tart (psychologist)

A new age began for me one cold morning in 1962, during a "time of power," when the sun was trapped behind the used car lots and apartment buildings to my right. The sky was overcast. My tawny Desert Boots padded softly through the grime and desolation of Livernois Avenue in Detroit, as I grumbled toward the lecture hall where, the moment the bell rang, a cheery bald little man would start filling blackboard after blackboard with organic chemistry equations. I slogged through a world of numbers and formulas in order to marvel at the complex symmetries of the human body's molecular rhythms as they appeared on paper. If you wanted to glimpse those symmetries, you had to pay the price. I figured that was what life was about, paying the price. Truth to tell, there were a lot of prices I had not paid. The guilt these debts spawned billowed about my stooped form like a raucous crowd of crows.

That world "stopped" for good thirty-four years ago without the slightest warning. Suddenly I *saw* that I was walking about two inches off the ground, still on Livernois, but in a world that was luminous with meaning. Nothing in my visual field gleamed or glowed that winter morning, but a tremendous weight fell off me -- a weight I had hardly known could be released. As soon as I knew I had no need of it, it was gone. My life was between me and God and bore no requirement that I conform to others' expectations for what I did with it.

Life became simpler and more joyful, and has remained so.

Sometimes these things happen to an unconscious fool who is stumbling in the wrong direction without knowing it. Sometimes it takes seven years of standing at the gate, begging the prayers of everyone who passes through. There is no telling what will cause a big enough gap in our stream of consciousness, or when it will happen. In fact, however, I had been meditating daily for the past six years at the time of that monumental event; and it had produced other, smaller gaps.

The meditation I had learned boiled down to placing myself in the presence of God and just staying there, doing whatever I was moved to do for fifteen minutes. I was always at a loss standing before God, knowing only that my thoughts should not be too idle. It had to be a time that was different. I could share my anxieties with God and ask Him to give me the strength to live up to some of my obligations. I could discuss my latest notions about what to do with my life. It seemed pretty inconsequential, probably a waste of God's time. But it produced moments, more and more frequently as time went on, when I would find myself in God's presence involuntarily and without warning.

In retrospect, it seems that meditation had been about holding open a gap for fifteen minutes, struggling with the distractions that threatened to close it, so that I could recognize other gaps when they occurred. A decade or so later I learned that finding himself walking an inch or two above the ground was precisely how the great D. T. Suzuki, who brought Zen to the West, described his own first experience of *satori*. Standing daily in the presence of God, which I continued for another seven years, had been my *koan* -- just as begging at the gate had been Isidore's.

Before that morning in 1962, if anyone had asked me, *How have you occupied your mind during six years of standing before God*, I would not have known what to say beyond the obvious fact that I had struggled with distractions. Now, with the momentous event of *satori* behind me, I could give an answer much like Isidore's. In the first year it was an unwelcome drudgery. I persisted only because the high school teacher who had taught me the simple technique seemed to embody, in his understated spirituality and centeredness, a goal I might someday achieve myself. Evidently his way of being had alerted me to the reality of a power I had not known existed and lacked the words to articulate. In the second year my thoughts had much less to do with him because I had begun to think perhaps I really *was* in God's presence; and this carried its own subtle reward, although meditation was still mostly a struggle with distractions. This was when I began to notice the tiny gaps in which God became momentarily present in the midst of an English class or as I stood at a bus stop outside the greasy spoon at Greenfield and Seven Mile Road.

My *satori* marked the third stage. At that point I entered a world that was merely the "inside" of a vast eternity. Working out a strategy for how to live a life faithful to that monumental "outside" became my principal concern, one that has been pursued without harassment from the crows of guilt. My consciousness "shifted" from the pursuit of imposed duties to the discovery of what is most meaningfully satisfying.

According to don Juan Matus, a world "stops" when we terminate the internal monologue that sustains it. Before he was assigned to the gate, Isidore's monologue had to do with his

learning and social attainments. Evidently he had achieved considerable success in Alexandria, the cultural capitol of his day, but still longed for a way of life that could satisfy his soul. He rightly looked for it in the Sinai desert, but brought his Alexandrian monologue with him. His arrogance and cruelty correspond to my guilt and oppression. They constitute ingrained and unconscious *strategies for dealing with the world*. This is what C. G. Jung calls *persona*.

Originally *persona* referred to the mask donned by an actor and through which his voice sounded (*per-sonare*, to "sound through"). We all don masks, more or less unconsciously, when we present ourselves to others. We pose as we wish to be seen, as we would like to see ourselves, or as we believe we are condemned to be.

In Alexandria Isidore had lived at ease in a world of art, philosophy, and rhetoric. He gave the orders there, and was probably not wrong in considering himself "enlightened." No doubt he had been a good deal wiser than most of our politicians, for he had glimpsed enough of the life of the soul to be dissatisfied with the glitz and glamour of the city. Very likely he had been shocked by what he found in the desert at St. Catherine's: monks who could not even read much less appreciate the subtleties of a well-made argument, rude men he would have thrown in jail back in the city for thievery and murder, men so plagued with their sex drive that they starved and beat themselves in hopes of achieving freedom from their unruly flesh.

When he asked himself how these low-life rubes could imagine themselves to be on the same spiritual path he was following, his internal monologue was sustaining his Alexandrian persona. What a childish and primitive faith these men had. How did they dare aspire to a moment of *satori*? When he was sent to the gate, he took this Alexandrian persona with him -- only now it was turned upside-down. In the first year he was oppressed with the sinful arrogance that had "sold" him into this "slavery." Just to be seen at the gate by those rubes humiliated him so that he had to croak out his words "in bitterness and blood": *Pray for me, Father, for I am an epileptic*. He was the lowest of the low. The God of excellence and superiority was punishing him for his sins, just as he had punished the lawbreakers in the city of his birth.

By the second year his humiliation had greatly diminished. He saw himself no longer as a jailed convict but likened himself perhaps to a drunken trouble-maker in the city who had given up his wine and become a faithful street sweeper. He imagined God would reward him much as he would have rewarded the reformed alcoholic. His interior monologue had changed. He saw himself no longer as destined by his excellence to rule but deserving in his submission to a higher law. Still the fundamental structure of his world had not been "stopped," being patterned after imperial decrees. He had only accepted a more humble station in that hierarchy. The gaps opened by his meek pose revealed a world of greater power than he had at first imagined, but it continued to resemble the urban structure of his origins. In the greater scheme of things, he did not belong at the gate; for his begging was merely an exercise designed to enable him to rise to a station that suited his talents.

In the third year, the Alexandrian structure of his lifeworld broke up and fell away. His monologue changed radically, and the gaps appeared in an entirely new place. God was no longer the enlightened ruler of Earth, styled after the potentates of Alexandria. Now God appeared in those rude monks he had formerly disdained. He saw their devotion to the world

of soul, that they really lived in that world, that they enjoyed an intimacy with God foreign to his earlier anticipations. Now God, in His Wholly Otherness, passed through the gate, clad in dusty, worn robes, shining from the countenances of those unlettered men: *I lost the courage to look anyone in the face, but lowering my eyes and lowering my thoughts even further, I asked with true sincerity for the prayers of those going in and out.*

He has heard "the sound of one hand clapping." The hand of God claps silently in the glow of those simple monks. The gaps through which the world of soul gleams appears precisely in the last place he expected to find them. The world of Alexandria has been "stopped" for good. Finally he can take his place among these monks, but for Isidore there is no point in doing so. The *koan* of begging at the gate has completed his life's work. He has learned why he came to the desert and, indeed, why he was born. He can die in peace and gratitude.

Thirteen centuries ago, the flesh world was clearly more than the beastliness of compulsive instinctual gratification. It was any life strategy that excluded the gaps through which soul might appear. In this sense, Isidore's battle with the arrogance of education and enlightened rulership was essentially no different from that of the crude sensualists. In both cases, short-sighted persona strategies and the monologues that sustained them distracted monks from the gaps.

If this all sounds archaic and primitive to us today, we have to be careful not to fall victim to a New Age arrogance in which our scientists, philosophers, and psychics have elevated us far above the world of the Ladder Man, blinding our eyes to the gaps all around us. Let us, therefore, imitate Isidore and stand at the gate of the New Age to see who is passing in and out. What kind of glow resides in the faces of our contemporaries, and how did they relinquish their own persona strategies? How has the contentious, ambitious, and frightfully insecure world of the twentieth century been "stopped" for them? And what difference has it made?

### **The Cosmic Adventures of Robert A. Monroe**

It would be hard to find a better contemporary guide to the landscape of Cosmic Consciousness than Robert A. Monroe, a southern business man and media executive, who began taking out-of-body journeys in 1958, long before New Age enthusiasms had been dreamt of. His experiences began without conscious effort or intention. In fact he found the initial sensations frighteningly unpleasant: a painful tightness in the region of his diaphragm and uncontrollable vibrations in his body. Unable to get satisfactory advice from physicians, psychologists, or clergy, he decided to relax, stop fighting the sensations, and see what would happen. Improbably enough, he found that he left his body behind in bed and traveled to three distinct "locales." He took detailed notes of his journeys, mercifully eschewing wild speculation and leaving us a dependable set of organized data.

His "Locale I" is the world of ordinary experience, but visited "out-of-body," that is by "clairvoyance." Being a highly rational man, he was skeptical of what he was *seeing* in his *imaginal* journeys, and so spent years performing experiments to verify the accuracy of these visionary events. Although he achieved a good deal of success in this rational "science,"

after fifteen or twenty years he became bored with fact-finding travel and decided to let the *dream* take him where *it* wanted him to go. Then began a series of adventures that took him out of this world-into "Locale II." He met spirit beings who have never been human and others who are the souls of men and women who have died. He acquired some remarkable and even grizzly perspectives.

He learned that a fleshly life trapped in the empirical world of space and time is nothing but a fight for survival by plants, animals, and people, each sustaining his own existence by devouring others. The creator of this savage prison derives nourishment from the energy released by all these deaths. When Monroe traveled out-of-body, however, and left the narrow confines of space and time, he arrived at a cosmic perspective that places the myth of the dark demiurge in context. He discovered his full (spiritual) identity takes the form of a dome of luminous fibers, very much like the top half of the luminous egg Carlos Castaneda *sees* when he looks at a human being with shamanic eyes. Each fiber has its own color and, when touched, brings Monroe into *imaginal* contact with a unique alternate life. Some of these fragments of Monroe's wholeness are living on earth in the past, present, and future; others live in other worlds. It is the wholeness of the luminous dome that is essential. It sends aspects of itself to live a space-and-time existence on Earth in order to *learn*. When it has accumulated enough learning, the dome will return "Home" to the One.

"Locale III" appears to be our own world, but lived separately by the alter-egos comprising Monroe's luminous dome. One of these is a woman struggling in vain to save her family from the Bubonic Plague, another is a twelfth century warrior killed by a spear in the back at age eighteen, and a third is a lonely and ineffectual architect-contractor in the twentieth century, unable to sustain relationships or keep a job.

Monroe's journeys constitute a veritable encyclopedia of New Age experiences: clairvoyance, contact with spirit beings, the nature of the aura, "simultaneous past lives," a new interpretation of life and death, the value of *seeing* and *imagination*, and even shamanism. Now in his eighties, Monroe's main work is rescuing the souls of people who have died but become lost in lower levels of the spirit world. This is one of the classic functions of the shaman in traditional societies, to lead the souls of the dead to their destinations in the other world. Furthermore, his luminous dome bears a close resemblance to Castaneda's luminous egg, and his dark demiurge living on death has much in common with Castaneda's giant black Eagle standing on the boundary between this world and the next in order to consume the souls of the departed. Only those who have perfected the power of *seeing* will have their wits about them sufficiently to avoid the Eagle's beak and enter eternity with their individuality intact.

Robert Monroe and the many others who have traveled out-of-body insist their experiences cannot be understood as dreams. They give at least four reasons for this. First, their journeys have none of the arbitrary, absurd, highly personal, and easily forgettable qualities of the dreams we all have at night. They are encountering an incontrovertible *reality*. For example, lions may sometimes escape from their cages, both in dream zoos and in zoos made of iron and stone. If we are standing too close, our fear of the rampaging lion will be much the same in either case, because the dream lion is as objective and dangerous for our dream-ego as any flesh-and-blood lion in our waking experience.

But Monroe's journeying is different. When he travels out-of-body to a zoo in "Locale I" and finds a lion escaping from its cage, he has to hurry back to his body and place an emergency phone call, because he knows beyond any shadow of doubt that a flesh-and-blood lion is actually on the loose inside a specific iron-and-stone zoo. This kind of reality is very rare in ordinary dreams, but not in Monroe's journeys. His painstaking experiments in clairvoyance have repeatedly, though not uniformly, demonstrated such empirical facts. Ordinary dreams may reveal private, psychological facts about the dreamer; but out-of-body journeys may gain access to verifiable public facts.

We have a language for this kind of knowing. We say that out-of-body journeys are *imaginal* events: *dreams* rather than dreams. Unimpressed, Monroe urges us not to limit our attention to clairvoyance. Reason number two: he is journeying for us all, discovering the features of an objective Cosmos. He does not want us to accept this as an article of faith, but rather as a possibility that can be experienced by everyone.

In this regard, his journeys closely resemble the *dreams* C. G. Jung calls "big dreams." In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he describes his trip to Mount Elgon in East Africa, where he found that the Elgoni distinguish little, personal dreams from those that have significance for the whole community. "Big dreams" might advise the people to move their village, to hunt for game in a certain distant valley, or to beware of enemies approaching. They belong to the inborn human capability we have called Cosmic Consciousness; and out-of-body journeys surely seem to be a kind of "big dream."

In contrast to Monroe's optimism that anyone can gain access to it, the Elgoni find that only specially gifted individuals are able to *dream* for the community. In fact, they declined to tell Jung any *dreams* at all because, now that the English colonial governor was in charge of their daily lives, they said *he* had all the *dreams*. Apparently a "big dreamer" only emerges when the community needs direction, and may not be a universal possibility.

In the last analysis, this is not so different from Monroe's view. He presents himself as the exceptional individual who has managed to escape from Plato's cave. To show us that the ordinary world we take for granted is only a ghost of the larger reality of human life, Plato tells a parable about a group of individuals chained from birth inside a cave, with their backs to the opening. What they can see are shadows of worldly events taking place outside the cave and cast upon the wall before them. Since they have never been outside the cave, they take this shadow-play as the whole of the world. One of them, however, manages to slip his bonds and escape. He brings back a report of three-dimensional men, animals, and trees, all alive in glorious color, and of a sun that rises in the morning and sets in the evening. The captives refuse to believe his story and even consider putting him to death for his dangerous ideas -- a fate similar to that of Plato's teacher, Socrates.

This brings us to Monroe's third claim. His journeys are not dreams because the realities he encounters in them are so overwhelmingly vivid and "real" -- more compellingly real and filled with significance than even our waking life. Indeed, the greater Cosmos of "Locale II" is a larger reality, and our empirical world merely its shadow. He cannot prove this to us, any more than Plato's escapee could prove his findings to his enchained companions. But he asserts that the *experience* of that Cosmos will convince anyone by its vividness. He knows he risks our ridicule in taking such a position and does not wish to force it on us. His attitude

is similar to that of don Juan Matus or John Climacus: once you have *seen* the *nagual* or the world of soul, you cannot doubt its reality; beforehand it seems absurd. Thus, if we wish to continue to call Monroe's journey's *dreams*, we will have to recall that the *imaginal* world is more vivid and "real" for its sojourners than the sensory world is for us.

The fourth characteristic: Monroe retains his ordinary consciousness while out-of-body. He knows he is in non-ordinary reality and never forgets his body slumbers at home in bed. "Little dreams," by contrast, so thoroughly submerge us in the dreamscape that we lose sight of the fact we are no longer awake. We think there is a flesh-and-blood lion after us, about to snap off our hind leg at the knee. Should Monroe face a lion while out-of-body, he would be more terrified -- if possible -- than we. He knows it is not a bodily lion and has no fear his sleeping body will be mauled. He quakes for the journeying body -- his greater reality. For when the fleshly body dies, the journeyer lives on. But if the journeyer should die, it is all over.

Thus the cosmic journeyer claims not only that his *dreamscape* is a larger and more complete reality than our everyday landscape, but that the Robert who enters that world is a larger and more complete Monroe. At first glance, this seems to resemble what psychoanalysis has been telling us for a hundred years. Our conscious, waking identity is only the smaller part of ourselves. When we take our dreams seriously, we discover aspects of our unconscious identity that fill out and complete our understanding of who we are. The lion in our dreams is part of that larger Self -- a raging, aggressive part. If the lion devours us, we will fall into a state of blind, uncontrollable rage and do damage to ourselves and others. On the other hand, if we can find a way to "integrate" that lion, we can become a more effective personality, more assertive, perhaps, and in touch with our instincts.

Again Monroe responds that we have missed the point. We are still trying to find a way to be more comfortable in our earthly chains by interpreting the shadows on a wall. The denizens of the cave are never in danger of being devoured by the shadow lion. But the Cosmic Lion (or in Castaneda's imagery, the Eagle) threatens us with a real and ultimate *death*. We will never grasp the significance of out-of-body journeys until we dare to face our own demise.

### **The Guardian at the Gate**

In actual fact, there is no "Cosmic Lion" in Monroe's books, but there is a great pseudo-god, a demiurge, who lives on death. This unnamed being of unknown gender has turned the Earth into that balanced ecology of death we call the food chain. All of us, from one-celled organisms to philosophers and mystics kill one another to nourish ourselves. In the beginning, the demiurge (or "partial power," "lower potentate," what the Gnostics called an Archon) was interested in death itself, in any form it occurred; for the energy released at a being's death supplied an essential force to enhance the tyrant's own existence. But as time passed, the demigod discovered that the highest quality energy emanated from the death of sentient beings. The higher the consciousness attained by a bodily being -- the more aware it is of its tenuous hold on life and terror of death -- the more valuable the nourishment released at its demise. The clinging to life, the panicky struggle to survive, the longing and desolation occasioned by the passing of loved ones, the cruelty and aggression that drives off

competitors: all these emotions enhance the death energy and delight the demiurge.

Monroe was shaken and appalled by this vision but unable to evade its truth. It surely describes the bottom line of fleshly existence. Humans are by and large flesh people, obsessed by our survival drive. From the moment we are born, we are on our way to death. Although we suppress this knowledge in a bad-faith attempt to shake the horror residing in our hearts, we act from it constantly. It blinds us to the gaps through which soul might appear. We are the inmates and guards of our own fleshly prison, snarling at threats both real and imagined, and poised to pounce on every opportunity to enhance our precarious and illusory security.

Human existence is Being-toward-death, says Martin Heidegger, the most important philosopher to write about ultimate things in the wake of Nietzsche's proclamation of the end of metaphysics. Nietzsche himself depicted the Earth as a great ball of death. The soil of our planet is comprised of the decomposing corpses of those who have gone before us, the plants and animals that flowered, swam, galloped, and soared through a few exceptional moments before succumbing to the inevitable fate of providing inanimate fodder for those to follow. Life is the exception, death the constant.

Monroe's vision of the demiurge who lives on death brings us vividly back to the barren Sinai desert of the seventh century, where the Ladder Man's disciples fought their fleshly compulsions by fasting, flagellations, all-night prayers, and standing at the gate. Death, too, lies at the center of the teachings of don Juan Matus. Stretch out your left arm to the side, straight from the shoulder. Don't look! Your death is standing there, less than three feet away, watching, waiting, ready to strike at any moment.

Flesh people cringe to glimpse death out of the corner of their eye. A "warrior," however, profits from death's constant presence. The instant we stop fleeing the certain knowledge of our impending demise, death becomes our "advisor." We act with the constant knowledge that our time on this Earth is limited, and we begin to attend to essential matters. We stop wasting our time. We get down to the business of our own unique, never-to-be-repeated life. We live it, in the imagery of Nietzsche, as though our existence were condemned to be repeated over and over for all eternity. What would I do right now, if I knew it were my last moment on Earth? What would I do if I knew I would face this moment again in lifetime after lifetime, and my act would determine the quality of this moment for all eternity? I would choose the act that best enhances my existence -- the most powerful act, the most compassionate, the most far-reaching. The blinders would fall from my eyes. Life would be simpler and more convincing.

Death has been the underlying theme in everything we have witnessed in our survey of six thousand years. The Mayoruna burned their village every morning in order to get to the aperture between the worlds and renew their essential existence as soul people who live in a greater Cosmos. What a difference between them and the Bosnian Serb I heard interviewed on the radio this morning. That man, driven by survival fear, hatred, and illusions of ethnic superiority, calmly stated that he was moving to Serbia and would burn his house when he left so that no Muslim could ever occupy it. He is caught in a panic-driven cunning that originated in the Age of Aries, all but extinguishing Cosmic Consciousness. The Gnostics at the dawn of Pisces scorned their own mortal flesh in a quest for the deathless realm of soul

and spirit. The story of Jesus depicts a man who embraced death in fear and trembling in order to be faithful to his divine identity and be resurrected in a body that passed through walls and ascended into Heaven. The Victorian table-rappers and channelers communed with the souls of the deceased to reassure themselves that life will survive death, even the death of the nineteenth century. Our own anxieties belong here, too, as we face the death of a millennium and a zodiacal eon, hoping for a more satisfying and meaningful existence in the New Age.

That death lurking an arm's length from Castaneda's left shoulder is poised to enter through his abdomen. In order to *see* with the eyes of his soul, he has to open a gap in that region of his luminous egg. He stretches out luminous fibers through that opening to manipulate the *imaginal* Cosmos but must stand guard every second, prepared to slam the gap shut before his death slips in. Shamanizing treads a narrow line marking the boundary between the everyday world of space and time and that monumental world that most of us enter only after our last breath. The shaman plays with his mortality, tempting death, in order to steal the greater secrets that lie beyond what our fleshly eyes can see.

Monroe was all too familiar with that deadly game. When, in 1958, he stumbled involuntarily over the line and found himself hovering near the ceiling, looking down upon his sleeping body, he thought, "I am dying, this is death." He became afraid to sleep, even to lie down, because the next time he might not make it back. His waking life was filled with panic-driven visions of brain tumors and insanity. Medical specialists were puzzled. Christian ministers spoke as politely as they could of demonic possession. The vibrations and tightness in his diaphragm, premonitory signs of departing his body, would not go away. It was quite a while before he could contain his survival panic long enough to remain separated from his body for a few seconds at a time. He feared each episode would be his last moment on Earth. There was nothing rewarding about this experience. It was a torment of terror and completely out of control.

He came to call this fear his "animal panic," because it was totally involuntary and instinctual, a last-ditch clutching at life in the face of certain death -- like a mouse in the jaws of a cat. He had been journeying for some fourteen years when he published his first book (*Journeys Out of Body*), but still he had to remind himself before every sojourn that he had not died yet and would probably not die this time, either. The reason and logic of his left brain provided little security against the timeless visions of the right hemisphere.

The reader of Monroe's books, sitting in an easy chair, sipping a favorite beverage, may well become impatient with his constant references to the fear of death. What is wrong with this man, we want to say. Does he not realize this is just a *dream*? When we react like this, we are missing the point. This is precisely why Monroe insists his journey are not *dreams*. He is encountering more awful realities than our left brains will tolerate. They begin with the first fundamental fact of our conscious fleshly existence: that we are Being-toward-death.

Monroe's journeys are not reflections on death. They are encounters with death. By the time his first book appeared, he had faced death at least a hundred times a year for a decade and a half. It is only in his second book (*Far Journeys*), however, published almost three decades after his sojourns began, that he says: "Once the *fear* barrier is crossed, the individual begins to know, rather than believe, that he does survive physical death." It would be reasonable to

guess that he journeyed more than twenty years before he had that moment of enlightenment, when the weight of his "animal panic" fell away.

Let us put John Climacus' question to the Robert A. Monroe who emerges from the pages of his three books: *How did you occupy your mind during those twenty years of staring death in the eye?* In the first year, he did his best not even to glance in death's direction. It had not been his idea to leave his body in the first place. He just found himself thrust out. One moment he was lying in bed, trying not to fight the tightness in his diaphragm, and the next moment he was floating, looking down in horror at the body asleep on the bed. He knew death was nearer than she had ever been, and he did not want her to get any closer. So he immediately dove down at the slumbering form below him, and the next moment was relieved again to find the covers on top of him, the mattress underneath, and the ceiling back up where it belonged.

In the second year he tested death. What would she do if he hovered for a few seconds before scurrying back to safety? What would she do if he floated over to the door and took a peek into the hallway? Would the stairs be in their usual place, or would he find himself in one of those topsy-turvy dream-houses? He floated furtively, alert for the slightest indication that death might be sidling closer -- and not at all sure that he would be able to detect such a thing. He tested death's limits, cautiously and with his heart in his mouth. When he could bear the tension no longer, he would zip back to his body, relieved that he had eluded death one more time. In this second year, he never ventured more than ten feet from the bed.

In the third year he decided somewhat uneasily that death was not particularly interested in how far he traveled. He still journeyed anxiously, but he dared to visit the houses of friends and set up experiments to determine the accuracy of his out-of-body observations. Was he *seeing* what was really taking place at the party in his friend's living room, and precisely at the moment it was happening? He would call his friend the next day to find out. In this phase he was still eluding death, failing to look her in the eye. He was distracting himself with his experiments, pretending death did not care what he did. But it was a bad-faith assumption, an attempt to deny the soul-shaking dread that pursued him both in this world and in that.

It was some twenty years before he had his *satori* and the weight of his dread fell away for good. He was on one of the mid-level spheres of "Locale II," the world of soul, meeting with one of his non-human friends, discussing the nature of the Cosmos. This was when he received the legend of the demiurge who lives on death. He was horrified and depressed for weeks, as he turned the grizzly details over and over in his mind. He found it was true. The bottom line. As soon as he knew how unavoidably accurate the legend was, it dawned on him: survival from impending death is the law of the *flesh world*. That is what keeps it going. Flesh people are trapped in the world of space and time by their terror of death. They are so preoccupied with survival that they cannot see the greater Cosmos through which Monroe sojourns so regularly. Yes, he will die, and he would rather it not be too soon, for he still has much to learn. But when his body dies, his identity will survive and continue its sojourns.

Now for the first time he can really look death in the eye. He *sees* that he has not been cheating her and could never have done so. Furthermore, he no longer wants to. Death is inevitable. She will come when she will. Meanwhile he will make the most of what time he

has left to learn what he can, enhance his existence in whatever way he can discover. His time is now as precious to him as to anyone who has looked death in the eye and been granted a few more years to live life more earnestly and enthusiastically.

## **Leaving the Body**

Monroe, who has a high respect for statistics and careful experimentation, estimates that 25% of the American population has had at least one out-of-body experience. Many of these occur at times of physical and psychological crisis, such as automobile accidents and surgical operations. Celia Green's dry catalogue (*Out-of-the-Body Experiences*, 1968) details many that occurred in unexceptional circumstances, as when walking down a familiar street or while gardening. But most seem to have taken place during some period of stress in the individual's life -- perhaps during a frightening dream or, more likely, during a mid-life crisis.

It is evident that in 1958, when Monroe's involuntary departures from his body began, he was in the midst of a mid-life crisis. Few details are provided, but he reports a tension between his wife and himself over religion. She was a devoted Catholic, while he was a confirmed agnostic. His first out-of-body experiences, in fact, occurred on Sunday mornings when his wife and daughters were attending mass and he was home alone. His wife was deeply disturbed by his accounts of what had been happening to him, believing there was something forbidden and anti-Christian about her husband's experiences. In the second book, we learn that he has left his wife and married Nancy Penn, a woman familiar with "psychic" experiences and an enthusiastic supporter of his researches in non-ordinary reality. Monroe also quite frankly reports in his third book (*Ultimate Journey*, 1994), written after Nancy's death, that this second marriage had had an erotic and spiritual dimension that had formerly been unknown to him. The reader of my earlier book on the spiritual and transcendent dimensions of erotic love (*Divine Madness*, 1990) will not be surprised to learn this, for Eros affords us a readily available doorway into the world of the soul.

Although New Age enthusiasts with a poor sense of history, like R. M. Bucke (*Cosmic Consciousness*), are inclined to see out-of-body journeys as evidence of a new development in the evolution of human consciousness, studies in the history of shamanism will dispel this notion. It is beyond question that shamans have been leaving their bodies to journey in the greater Cosmos for tens of thousands of years. Mircea Eliade's classic summary of the evidence (*Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*) makes the out-of-body experience definitive of shamanism. Ecstasy (*ek-stasis*, to stand outside oneself) is what distinguishes the shaman from other practitioners of the sacred.

Shamans are typically "elected" by the spirits during a life-threatening illness during which they leave their bodies and travel to the "underworld," where they watch their body being dismembered by spirit-shamans. Perhaps the flesh will be ripped off their bones or boiled in a great pot. Then their bones will be reassembled with a significant difference. The new bones may be made of stone or crystal or connected to one another with bands of iron. They acquire in this way a new journeying body, one that is stronger and capable of monumental feats in the world of soul. Shamans generally heal the sick by traveling in the greater Cosmos

to recover the errant soul of the patient and restore it to the body. They also conduct the souls of the dead to their "home" in the other world. In this ancient tradition, Cosmic Consciousness gains access to an invisible realm greater than the world of space and time and that has causative effects upon our ordinary world.

Monroe's twenty-year-long struggle with the *koan* of staring death in the eye corresponds rather well with the traditional shaman's experience of dismemberment. Furthermore, Monroe was inclined to believe, although reluctant to say, that he had discovered the reality of the soul. Because *soul* seemed a theologically dubious word to him -- tainted as it was with Christian conceptions he could not accept -- , he preferred to speak of the "Second Body." Unwittingly, however, he has touched upon another strand in the history of religion. In 1871, Sir Edward Tylor published *Primitive Culture* in which he argued that all religion derives from early humans' dreaming experience. Because dreams seemed to be a kind of sojourn in another world, while the body remains asleep at home, Tylor reasoned that primitive humanity was led to postulate the existence of a soul that could roam free of the sleeping body, and that the plants, animals, people, and even stones met in their dreams were understood to be the souls of those physical beings. Tylor called his theory "animism," the idea that everything in the world possesses a soul (*anima*) which "animates" it and gives it invisible power.

Tylor's animism provides an interesting bridge between the Cosmic Consciousness of our pre-Taurian ancestors and the experiences of New Age pioneers like Monroe. Still it has not been a widely accepted theory, as it seems to turn our primitive forebears into nineteenth century philosophers, constructing a metaphysics of the soul and the greater Cosmos that requires a great deal of left-brain thinking. Very likely Tylor was too much of an armchair philosopher. But it seems to be a fact that our ancestors many thousands of years ago did live in a world more animate than our own and paid a great deal more attention to their dreams. Surely shamans, since time immemorial, have been living in the world Tylor describes.

A final piece of evidence: the alchemists, too, seemed to have lived in the world of animism. The objects of their proto-science were all conceived to be ensouled. They spoke of working with the *souls* of mercury, salts, metals, and water; and not a few of their experiential reports suggest out-of-body journeying. For example, one of the very earliest alchemists in the Western tradition was a certain Zosimos of Panopolis, who lived in the third century of Pisces, when the flame of Gnosticism had not yet guttered out. He was both a Gnostic and an alchemist who left behind a record of his visions. In one of them he meets a priest who tells him that the first step in personal transformation is "casting away the grossness of the body":

I submit myself to an unendurable torment. For there came to me one in haste at early morning, who overpowered me, and pierced me through with the sword, and dismembered me in accordance with the rule of harmony. And he drew off the skin of my head with the sword, which he wielded with strength, and mingled the bones with the pieces of flesh, and caused them to be burned upon the fire of the art, till I perceived by the transformation of the body that I had become spirit.

In another vision, a barber appears to him and says, "Those who seek to obtain the art enter here, and become spirits by escaping from the body."

In the seventeenth century, one of the last of the alchemists, Gerard Dorn, described the

sought-for transformation in a three-stage process. The first step is a kind of death, in which the soul separates from the body; for in the natural, fleshly condition, the human soul is too much under the influence of the body's sensory and instinctual compulsions. After separation from the body, however, the soul falls under the higher influence of the spirit and forms with it a "mental union" (*unio mentalis*) which opens the soul's eyes to greater realities. Once this has been achieved, the spirit/soul union is rejoined to the body (stage two). Now the individual is a bodily being who is open to spiritual realities. In the third stage, the body/soul/spirit of the alchemist is united with the "unitary world" (*unus mundus*), which is the world as it existed "before the first day of creation." This is surely what we have been calling Cosmic Consciousness, an awareness of the greater Cosmos as it exists in itself outside of space and time. For space and time did not exist until the creation of this material world.

Thus there is a tremendously rich and continuous tradition in human history wherein spiritual transformation requires some kind of out-of-body journeying. Very likely most of those who left their bodies were individuals who had reached some kind of crisis in their daily lives: a profound physical shock, such as an accident or surgical operation; a crisis of identity, such as most people undergo at mid-life; or a crisis of worldview, the kind of thing that may have led Isidore to leave Alexandria for the Sinai desert or influenced modern physicists like Lawrence LeShan who has become a psychic healer, Fred Alan Wolf who immersed himself in shamanism, and Wolfgang Pauli who tried to complete the theory of quantum mechanics with the psychology of C. G. Jung.

How are we to make sense of this universal human capability of taking leave of the body and journeying through a greater Cosmos as a soul, "Second Body" (Monroe), or "double" (Castaneda)? Do we take it as a *literal* fact that we each have some kind of "subtle body" which resembles our "gross body" in all respects excepts its physicality? Or do we take it as a *symbolic* fact, suggesting that the greater Cosmos is not a "place" at all and the subtle body not a "thing" at all, but rather that the journeys are dream-like experiences? In calling them *dreams*, in the spirit of Castaneda, we take a middle position. They are symbolic events that are also objective. They are "bigger" than personal dreams because they bring the journeyer into contact with realities that exist outside of what can be verified by the senses. Because *dreams* gain access to *imaginal* truth, Monroe may indeed be journeying for us all.

The *sight* of the body lying on the bed is surely a clairvoyant vision, essentially no different from Monroe's journey to his friend's living room. In both cases the fleshly eyes are closed and remain ensconced in the head resting on the pillow. The *seeing* of the body is an *imaginal* event: true, objective, and indubitable, but non-sensory. No fleshly eyes see it. The body is an *imaginal* representation available through the Cosmic Consciousness of the right brain, a point of view that Monroe explicitly accepts. But because the experience can be questioned, remembered, collated, and conceptualized, Monroe's left brain is also at work. In short, the whole brain that is encased in the head on the pillow is receiving and processing the image of the body as well as the *dreamscape* of the greater Cosmos.

The ego of Monroe's left brain and the "collective unconscious" of his right brain cooperate in his visions. Monroe believes he has proven this to be the case in having developed a method to help others to leave their bodies and enter Cosmic Consciousness with their egos intact. He has a laboratory in Virginia supplied with waterbeds and headphones. The subject

relaxes on a bed while tones of separate frequencies are sent to the two ears, each neurologically connected to its separate side of the brain. The whole brain "hears" neither of them, but rather a third frequency, located midway between what its right and left halves are registering. It is this third, *imagined*, frequency, Monroe believes, which enables the soul to leave the body. His procedure parallels what Castaneda experienced when he learned to enter the *nagual* (Cosmic Consciousness) while his two guides, don Juan and don Genaro were whispering incompatible messages into his separate ears. Castaneda felt himself undergoing a disturbing split whereby he seemed to be simultaneously in two worlds until the visions coalesced and he entered the monumentally shocking world of the *nagual*.

We might speculate that our ordinary "little" dreams rely primarily on the right brain, while ordinary waking consciousness relies primarily on the left hemisphere. We can postulate a spectrum of human consciousness in which the far left region (corresponding to the left brain) is devoted to waking consciousness and the far right to the dreams of ordinary sleep. In the middle section, rarely or never visited by the majority of us, are the "waking dreams" -- visionary experiences entertained by an observer who retains her ego-functions of questioning, discrimination, and choice together with the memory that her body lies asleep.

The waking dreams within the central portion of this spectrum may be of several types. Perhaps the simplest is the process Jung calls "active imagination." This would be located on the boundary line between waking consciousness and waking dreams. The subject remains awake but in a light trance. Beginning with a spontaneous fantasy, or more likely a scene from his "little" dream of the night before, he deliberately withholds the critical faculties of his left brain to allow the fantasy to develop. Never losing his awareness that this is an imaginal experience and that he is seated in his living room, the user of active imagination retains the understanding and will of his ego. He can leap into the raging torrent to save the maiden in distress, or he can stand helplessly on the bank and watch her being swept away.

My own experiences with active imagination confirm what most people report, namely that we suspect we are "making it all up." The critical faculties of the ego resist the reality and validity of what is being seen. We can test the validity, however, by trying to force the imagery to follow our conscious will. If the fantasy process obliges us, Jung says, we are not doing active imagination; we are simply day-dreaming. Only when the process retains its unconscious integrity, can this experience be called a waking dream.

I once pursued an active imagination process over the course of several weeks, devoting a half hour a day to observing, participating in, and recording the story unfolding in my waking dream. At one point I found myself in an underground room piled high on all sides with unmarked cardboard cartons. In the center of the room was a large bird-cage containing a fierce hawk. Without thinking, I walked directly toward the cage, intending to pick it up and carry it back outside to the open air, when suddenly I stopped, wondering what was in the cartons. I lifted one of them down to open it, but was surprised to find that it disappeared as soon as I set it on the floor. It had returned to its former position, stacked against the wall. I lifted it down again, and again it disappeared. After three or four attempts, I gave up. Clearly my waking dream was uninterested in the cartons. I therefore proceeded to the bird-cage, where the real interest lay, and my active imagination continued. Evidently too much willfulness on the part of the ego interrupts the integrity of the dreaming process.

At the other end of the waking-dream spectrum, where the fantasy process shades off into sleeping dreams, we might locate what has lately been identified as "lucid dreams." Lucid dreams begin in sleep, but at some point the dreamer becomes aware that she is dreaming. Most people have some recollection of lucid dreaming, usually from childhood. Today there is a small library of books available that describe lucid dreams and give procedures to encourage them.

Castaneda began his dreamwork by developing a capacity for lucid dreaming. Following don Juan's advice, he sought to awaken his ego-consciousness in the midst of a dream by deliberately looking at his hands in his sleep. Once he knew he was seeing his hands in a dream, he would have the conscious will-power to attend to any image in the dream that he chose. Castaneda says it took many years of trying before he could remember to look at his hands in his sleep; but when he was able to do so, he was presented with a new problem. Either he would get so excited at having succeeded that he would wake himself up, or else the dream would suddenly become so interesting that he would forget he was dreaming and become immersed again in the sleeping dreamscape.

Thus lucid dreaming constitutes a precarious balance between the conscious functioning of the ego and the unconscious integrity of the dream. Lucid dreams seem to appear as gaps in dreaming consciousness, moments when the ego slips in -- just as the gaps in our waking consciousness allow the *dream* to slip in. Unlike active imagination, lucid dreaming never seems to be vulnerable to the suspicion that I am making it all up. It is vulnerable rather to a different problem: the incompatibility between the waking world of the ego and the compelling imagery of the dream.

These problems do not seem to arise in out-of-body journeys, where ego and dream, left and right hemispheres, are cooperating in balance. For this reason, I locate out-of-body journeying in the center of the waking-dream spectrum. What brings Monroe back from his sojourns in the greater Cosmos is not the ego's excitement ("Oh look, I'm dreaming, I've finally done it, isn't it wonderful!"). Rather it is some discomfort in the sleeping body, a full bladder or the shutting off of circulation in a limb -- the same sort of discomfort that wakens us all from our nocturnal dreams. Or sometimes it may be that the dream events become so scary that he retreats to his body to escape -- just as we may unconsciously retreat from an ordinary falling dream by waking up before we touch bottom.

The defining experience of out-of-body journeys seems to be the vision of the sleeping body from an outside vantage point. On the one hand, we can understand this as a mere matter of fact. It is "nothing but" another dreaming vision. If my dream can take me to Central Park in New York City or to the home of my childhood in Detroit, why not to the room in which I am sleeping? What is so extraordinary about *seeing* myself asleep? Do I not have numerous dreams in which I am both the actor in the dream and also an outside observer?

Monroe and Castaneda could not be so sanguine. Observing their body asleep constituted a monumental shock for them. We will never understand the nature of out-of-body journeys until we grasp the emotional power of that shock. To *see* that body is to know that *it is not me*. Such knowledge disrupts everything I have known about myself from earliest childhood until now. We all take it for granted that we are the person we remember and perceive ourselves to be. Our awareness of ourselves is completely bound up with the history of that

body, all the things that have happened to us and all the choices we have made. The world we live in is an assemblage of all we have learned while walking about in that body.

To stand outside my body and *know* my vision is real, is to be exposed to the unthinkable. The world cannot be as I have constructed it; it is unimaginably different. It constitutes the death of everything I have come to know and depend upon. I am not who I thought I was, and the world is not as I assembled it. I have entered a realm that is Wholly Other, and I have not the faintest idea what it is or how to negotiate it. My habitual monologue that sustains my world is centered in the body, and the body is over there lying on the bed while I stand here in the doorway. I no longer know who I am. I have lost all certainties. Nothing is dependable. Anything can happen. I am a powerless mote blown willy-nilly in an endless ether.

I have passed through the gap. The flesh person I always knew myself to be lies immobile on the bed. I do not know how to be a soul.

### **Struggles With the Flesh**

Death may have been Monroe's Guardian at the Gate that leads to the other world, but lust was waiting for him just over the brink. He warns his reader about the overwhelming emotional pressure of unconscious drives,

because you are no longer just a conscious, intelligent self. You are, perhaps for the first time, an entirety. Every part of you will be heard from, and must be considered in any action that you take. The trick is to keep the conscious, reasoning you (the one most cognizant of the physical world) in a dominant position. It isn't easy.

As soon as the fear of death had become manageable enough that he could feel other emotions, he found himself assailed by that chaotic bundle of instincts and drives he calls his "entirety." It may have been "entire," but it was hardly a whole. There was nothing unified about it. He was torn in all directions at once. All the impulses he had harnessed in becoming a successful businessman and adventurer broke loose from their habitual confinement. The most threatening of all for Monroe was the sex drive.

Paradoxically enough, he had to leave the body to experience the power of what Climacus and his followers called the "flesh." The flesh is not so much the body but might more accurately be described by Freud's notion of the Id, that turmoil of animal drives we try to conquer by repression. The monks of the Sinai struggled with this reality while still in their bodies. Possibly the fact that Monroe had to leave his body to experience it, demonstrates what Western civilization has accomplished over the past thirteen centuries. We have learned to maintain an ego by which we dependably enough know ourselves and analyze the world. But our Id still lies coiled in the psychic basement, every ready to raise its Hydra heads to devour our flimsy conscious attainments from all sides at once.

In one of his earliest disengagements from the body, Monroe *saw* his sleeping wife as an irresistible sex-object. Hardly recognizing her as the person he knew intimately, he tried in vain to waken her with his "Second Body" so he could satisfy his uncontrollable lust. When, in desperation, he returned to his body to unload his desire, his need evaporated. On another

occasion, he had barely lifted out of the body when he felt himself attacked from behind by a naked male sex-fiend, clutching him tenaciously, scratching his neck with his beard, panting his lust into his ear. The homosexual assault terrified and disgusted Monroe; and he battled in panic for some time before he realized his adversary was his own sex-charged body.

Sex in this stage of his journeying had no connection with love-making. It was an impersonal drive seeking release, humiliating him by its intensity, and growing exponentially with Monroe's nearness to the object of his momentary obsession. He had to flee the out-of-body state when he met a woman there, lest he be unfaithful to his wife. He cites Gurdjieff's statement that "if there had been *two* obstacles as formidable as sex, he would never have achieved the mystical state.

Powerless in the face of a lust that refused to be banished, Monroe finally resorted to his waking-world monologue and tricked the drive by promising it gratification -- but later. Everything in good time. Fobbing off his drives with promises, enabled him to control himself on his sojourns. He would politely ask a woman if she would like to enjoy sexual congress with him; and he could respect her wishes when she declined. Evidently, two developments had occurred. He had gained a precarious balance with his lust, and he seems to have changed his mind about remaining faithful to his wife. Had he decided that *dream*-sex was permissible? On what basis, given its incontrovertible reality -- even its susceptibility to the old monologue? Did it seem advisable to gratify the drive in order to stay on the journey? Or was his marriage already in serious trouble?

During this whole period Monroe saw himself as conducting experiments. He left the body each time with a definite plan to test the clairvoyant accuracy of his *seeing*. To do so, he had to exercise an impeccable will and clarity of thought. The moment he allowed himself to be distracted, he would find his "Second Body" whisked away to some unintended location and the experiment spoiled. Most significantly, he had little interest in "Locale II," the untestable world of the soul. He generally found himself there by default, a result of failure to control his journeying.

It was by default, therefore, that he learned that sex in the out-of-body state was not a genital experience at all, but a transcendent experience of merging:

The "act" itself is not an act at all, but an immobile, rigid state of shock where the two truly intermingle, not just at a surface level and at one or two specific body parts, but in full dimension, atom for atom, throughout the entire Second Body. There is a short, sustained electron (?) flow one to another. The moment reaches unbearable ecstasy, and then tranquillity, equalization, and it is over.

This is an experience we can all have without leaving the body. When we get beyond the pure physicality of genital release and attend to the interpersonal communication occurring between ourselves and our beloved, we will feel this same merging that Monroe describes. The boundaries between my "I" and your "you" dissolve, and we enter one another ecstatically. We feel it throughout our whole body, as a oneness that is no longer "mine" and "yours" but "ours." We find we meet our beloved as never before, in unimaginable intimacy, coming to know ourselves and our partner more thoroughly than we had ever dreamed possible.

Evidently Monroe had been unaware of this possibility before his out-of-body visits to "Locale II." Probably it points to something unexplored between himself and his wife. Surely it helps us to understand one of the prime motives in his attraction to Nancy Penn, for it seems that the resolution of his struggles with the fleshly power of sex was taking place in two realms at about the same time. In his waking life, he had found a partner with whom he could share his soul work. In his journeying life, he was learning the emotional richness of sexuality.

The experiences in his second book all take place during his association with Nancy. Among them is his profound symbolic encounter with sex. In one of his "Locale II" journeys, while afflicted by a sudden crisis of lust, he came upon a great heap of living flesh that he likens to the intertwined and squirming ball of night-crawlers a fisherman finds at the bottom of his bait can. This mountain of writhing forms rose as high and as far to either side as he could see. It was in continuous motion, slimy wet tubes of flesh flowing in and out of the mass in a relentless search for unattainable satisfaction. Suddenly, he was shocked to realize these "worms" were human arms and legs, male and female, seething with restless life. But they were all dead. These were humans who had left their bodies at death and, instead of sailing off into spiritual bliss, had become trapped by the lust they had not resolved during their lives. It seemed as though they would spend an eternity in this hell of unrequited lust. Monroe knew he could join them if he wished but was repelled. He grabbed a hairy leg and pulled out a handsome, dark-haired man, who lay gleaming in his sweat, struggling to crawl back in.

From that point on, I had a new technique to control any surfacing sexual drive. All I need do is think of that wriggling, writhing, mindless pile of humanity. That does it.

If the confrontation with death was his first *koan*, the struggle with sex was his second. In both cases he needed to gain an outside perspective, a symbolic representation that placed the fleshly compulsion in context. Twice he arrived at a point where he could say: "So *this* is flesh, this panicky drivenness, this almost deliberate blindness, this slavery to base instinct. I am *not* this." He begins to realize what it means to be a soul person.

The Ladder Man's monks *knew* they were flesh. The reality of instinctual compulsion was obvious to them all, and not only to those who were reformed rapists, murderers, and thieves. A gaunt and holy man could sincerely convict himself of gluttony -- not because he ate too much but because *thoughts about food* distracted him from the gaps through which soul might appear. Now, at the end of the Age of Pisces, this way of thinking is almost incomprehensible. We worry about gaining weight rather than gluttony, but our preoccupation with our figure serves the same distracting purpose.

Monroe saw his experiments in clairvoyance as a noble, scientific endeavor. He was *dreaming* for us all, and very thoughtfully taking the trouble to back up his *dreams* with numbers. Above all, he *needed to know* he was not fooling himself with his out-of-body hobbies. If what he was *seeing* was really there, the world we have been bumbling around in for the past three or four millennia is the broom-closet. The shock was too much to take. Despite its convincing vividness, it might still be an illusion. As scary, disgusting, and humiliating as most of his experiments were, he kept at it. Journeying was so compelling he could hardly bear to be sick -- not on account of the sore throat and aching muscles, but

because he would not have enough energy to get out of his body. He was as obedient to his sojourns as Castaneda was to don Juan or Isidore to Climacus. Was it all foolishness, or was he discovering the secrets of the Cosmos and of the human soul?

These are the kind of thoughts we have when we begin to meditate upon our master's question: *What is the sound of one hand clapping?* Why did he give me that one? I'll just have to *pretend* to think about it. It's too absurd. Zen must be about something else. As long as we fight the *koan*, there is no hope of finding any gaps. Gaps appear when we stop distracting ourselves. Monroe distracted himself from the world of the soul for some two decades by preoccupying himself with proofs.

The "Second Body" he entered during those twenty years was not really so different from the physical body back on the bed. Not only did it have the same shape, but the Robert Monroe who occupied it brought all of his everyday preoccupations along with him. He kept up the same old monologue. *The trick is to keep the conscious, reasoning you (the one most cognizant of the physical world) in a dominant position. It isn't easy.*

Around the time of Monroe's *satori*, -- while walking two inches above his "Second Body," when he encountered the legend of the demiurge and the image of the writhing pile -- he discovered there was a "Third Body." The "Third Body" was his gap. He slipped out of his monologue, dropped the weight of his guilt and terror, and entered the world of soul. He discovered it was no longer interesting to make out-of-body space probes to Mars. There is something out there that was monumentally more important.