

Surfing the Rainbow: Fearless and Creative Out-of-Body Experiences

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I hover up, vibrating, and fly again. I'm in whitish space, endless neutral light. I try flying as fast as I can and it's so quick it's impossible to describe – I could go around the circumference of the world in a second at this speed.

There's enough room in this white space for absolutely anything and I'm alight with exhilaration. It strikes me that in experiences like this there can be no doubt that we are more than just a physical body. We are physics itself; gravitational pull and light particles and the energy-force that pulls everything together ... There's something so harmonious and natural about flying so fast, as if I become the energy of the air itself. There's no resistance and with wonder I think to myself: "This is soul-flying". – My personal account

Imagine consciousness as a rainbow-coloured expanse of silk. Why take up scissors and slice the different colours into separate ribbons? "This deep red is a dream. Snip, snip. This orange is a waking vision. Snip. This sunny yellow is an out-of-body experience (OBE)". The stuff of consciousness is woven together from the same fabric: if we get too fixated on separating it, we risk no longer seeing the big picture.

States of consciousness bleed into each other like coloured dye: a non-lucid dream becomes a lucid dream, which can transmute into an OBE, which in turn might transition into a state of sleep paralysis and then waking consciousness. Within a single lucid dream (in which the dreamer is aware that he or she is dreaming), lucidity fluctuates from effortless clarity to confusion as we get sucked into the dream scene and begin to forget we're dreaming. Similarly, in the waking state we drift from daydreaming to sharp mental alertness and back again. We drive to our child's school rather than to the doctor because we go into the curious state of alert non-attention known as 'automatic pilot mode'; we have a beer in the evening and get a buzz off that; later in bed we lapse into sleepiness and might spontaneously find ourselves having an OBE.

Consciousness occurs on a continuum, and when we turn our attention to conscious experience, we quickly notice the experiential overlap between different states and are able to recognise moments of transition as they arise. Of course, definitions of different states are extremely useful for clarity, and I'm as keen as the next researcher to tease the strands apart

and name them so that we can discover more about consciousness. However, it's important to remember that at the end of the day we're all talking about the same intrinsically connected phenomenon: the rainbow of conscious experience.

With that in mind, for the purposes of this chapter I propose the following definition of an OBE:

The OBE is a state in which self-perception (perceived sensory input, self-location and self-identification) seems external to and independent from the physical body; a state which may be entered spontaneously, involuntarily and abruptly from diverse waking and sleeping states of consciousness. In terms of onset, the OBE differs from lucid dreams in that an OBE might arise from the waking state, trauma, meditation, fainting, or in the midst of great physical danger. However, the OBE can also arise from sleep states such as hypnagogia, sleep paralysis, non-lucid dreaming, and lucid dreaming.

The numerous entries into the OBE state seem non-exclusive in terms of reported onset phenomena: a lucid dreamer may either experience earthquake-like shaking at the onset of a lucid dream-induced OBE, or a gentle transition. A meditator may suddenly find herself floating above her body, or she may experience diverse kinaesthetic and auditory sensations such as vibrations and buzzing before the experience of being 'out of body' seems complete.

Apart from trauma and physical danger-induced OBEs, I have personally experienced each of the above OBE entry points many times, and can testify that the defining features of OBE entries seem closely linked to the attitude and adeptness of the experiencer. In particular, a sleep paralysis-induced OBE entry is likely to involve an unpleasant struggle for someone resisting it, while an experienced practitioner can relax and enjoy the transition. The following are examples of just a few of the ways in which a typical OBE may start.

A sleepy trance while lying in bed (Nicholls, 2012, p. 14):

A jolt of energy shot through my body, something akin to a large electrical shock. It wasn't painful, but it was very close to that level of intensity. As I regained awareness

of my surroundings, I realised I was hovering or floating around a meter above my physical body.

Dream-induced: “Suddenly, with no observable transition, I’m floating cross-legged about a foot above the ground, next to my bed” (my personal account).

Lucid dream-induced (Buhlman, 1996, p. 183):

I said aloud, “I must be dreaming.” Immediately I felt a strange tingling sensation in my body and realised that I’d entered the vibrational state while dreaming... I focused my complete attention on the idea of floating up and out of my physical body. Within seconds I could feel myself lift from my physical body and move toward the living room.

Faint-induced (my personal account):

As the nurse injects me I see black spots in my vision and there’s a roaring in my ears.

I know I’m about to faint. For a moment it feels horrible, then I’m drawn up into the corner of the room where I float calmly and observe the scene. From what seems a great distance I hear the nurse shouting my name....

Wake-induced: “As I walk across the university library, a buzzing grows in my head and I feel myself involuntarily beginning to rise up out of my body” (my personal account).

This chapter examines the way that the OBE can dissolve fear and release deep creativity. The standard definition of creativity is ‘novelty’: the act of bringing new ideas, art and discoveries into existence through the expression of original thoughts, images and insights (Shavinina, 2003). But creativity is more than this. In my essay, ‘Magic, Meditation and the Void: Creative Dimensions of Lucid Dreaming’ (2014, p. 46), I note:

Creativity is also imaginative freedom, a stretching of the psychological, philosophical, and cultural boundaries to which our minds usually adhere. People talk of “thinking outside the box” and “leaps of creative genius”. Creativity in its purest sense means

going beyond what has come before, shrugging off preconceptions and leaping bravely into the unknown.

To this definition I add the element of 'reality creation': lucid states of consciousness such as the OBE often trigger an understanding that we can shape our waking reality creatively just as in a guided OBE or in lucid dreams (Johnson, 2006). I further add the element of healing as a fundamentally creative act. This completes my definition of creativity as novelty, imagination, manifestation, and healing. Fearless OBEs can enrich these four branches of creativity.

How can a sensation of being out of body lead to or encourage creativity? Before this question can be properly addressed, it's important to consider what hinders creativity. Fear is a major hindrance, as can be seen when the roots of artistic blocks are dug up, when a trapeze artist seizes up and falls, or when businesses fail due to fear-provoked decision making. When we have a tool for dissolving fear, creativity is not far away. If the OBE is embraced and befriended, it can be a powerful tool for dissolving fear; yet, paradoxically fear can stop people wanting to have an OBE at all. Let's look at three different types of fear and how having an OBE can help to dissolve them: 1) fear of the OBE itself, 2) fear of a waking life situation, and 3) fear of death and dying.

Fear of the OBE

An OBE can be terrifying for someone who has never heard of the experience and is unprepared. Many people believe they are dying, or that they will get lost and never be able to return to their bodies. These people spend their time out of body feeling distressed and alarmed, fighting to regain a physical connection with their body. OBEs can involve powerful physical sensations such as being swept up by a giant wind, being shaken by earthquake-like vibrations and hearing a roar so loud it's as if an aeroplane is taking off right by your head. In the midst of such phenomena, the uninformed OBEr naturally feels overwhelmed and helpless. When in addition to these phenomena the OBEr also experiences unsettling visions, such as unidentified shapes or presences, he is prone to panic. This is due to a lack of

knowledge about what is happening, coupled with a lack of understanding about thought-responsive environments.

Thought-responsive environments

Thought-responsive environments react to our thoughts, emotions, and intentions.

Sometimes this reaction seems instantaneous, as is the case in dreams. Other times it seems much, much slower, as in waking reality. It seems likely that all environments are thought-responsive on some level. As William Buhlman (1996), advanced OBE explorer, remarks: “all environments are a form of energy, and all energy is thought-responsive to some degree” (p. 95). Lucid dreaming is usually highly thought-responsive and it can feel as though we are co-creating a complex multi-sensory movie simply by engaging emotionally and intentionally with the dream environment. There are different types of OBE and these reflect different intensities of thought-responsiveness. For simplicity I define here only three:

- **Form-based OBEs:** in some OBEs, we find ourselves in a replica of our bedroom or flying through a kind of energetic replica of the waking world. Reports from OBErs suggest that these seem the least thought-responsive type of OBE.
- **Psychological projection OBEs:** in these OBEs, psychological elements and projections are strongly present, and thought-responsiveness seems higher than in form-based OBEs.
- **Bodiless lucid experiences:** This is my term for OBEs where we go beyond form and experience ourselves in white space or another formless environment – these seem highly thought-responsive.

Buhlman (1996, p. 95) remarks on formless OBE spaces:

These areas are often observed as misty voids, empty space, or featureless, open areas consisting of white, silver or golden clouds of energy. Natural energy environments are extremely sensitive to thought. Any focused thought will instantly mold the immediate energy environment.

I will explore formless OBEs further on in this chapter. Most beginner OBEs will tend to experience the form-based OBE or the psychological projection OBE. The form-based OBE environment, although less malleable and thought-responsive than most lucid dreams, is still far more responsive than waking physical reality.

In terms of having enjoyable, creative OBEs, this is great news, as it means we can generally guide and shape our experience. If we encounter something that frightens us, we can often change the encounter by changing our attitude from one of fear to curiosity. It's helpful to remember that although the walls of the house may look very solid in an OBE, they are not. Some novice OBEs report feeling scared when the walls of their home dissolve in the OBE state, yet this is simply a sign that the OBE is moving beyond a form-based environment. The house will still be there when the OBE ends!

When we feel fear during an OBE, whether it is form-based or involves psychological projections, there are basic steps we can take to calm down and focus, such as taking a deep breath and relaxing; reminding ourselves we will return safely from this experience; summoning feelings of love and acceptance; and keeping our thoughts positive. If we learn about and keep in mind these simple techniques, we can begin to work with the OBE rather than fighting it.

How thought-responsive environments function

A typical train of panicky thought and its impact upon the thought-responsive OBE environment runs as follows:

Unfamiliar vibrations are experienced and the person projects out-of-body for the first time. He feels terrified and out of control. 'Oh no', he thinks, 'there's a shape in the corner, what if it's something scary?' [In response, the shape becomes noticeably scarier]. 'What if it comes up to me?' [Shape responsively moves towards OBEr], 'Whoa, it's going to attack me!' [Shape approaches faster and at the moment it's about to touch the OBEr, he wakes up bathed in sweat, convinced he has escaped something evil in the nick of time].

Let's rewind that script.

In this new version the OBEr has a spontaneous OBE but because he has read this chapter, he now knows he should relax and breathe. It works a bit, but he's still uneasy because this is the first time and it's all rather strange.

He notices a shape in the corner and feels a little nervous but remembers that this is a thought-responsive environment and consciously guides his thoughts towards a positive outcome: 'OK, a shape in the corner; that's fine, there's plenty of room for shapes. I'm safe here and later I will return safely to my body' [He breathes, relaxes]. 'Uh-oh, the shape's moving towards me... think positive...' [He does his best to muster a feeling of love and acceptance]. 'Maybe it wants to help me?' [The shape grows bright and he sees it is a beautiful ball of light. He's so astonished that the experience ends].

This is a simplification of the thought-responsive process, but it illustrates how the attitude and expectations of the OBEr can impact upon the OBE environment. The greater the fear and resistance the OBEr feels towards phenomena he encounters, the more likely it is that the experience will only become more terrifying.

When I turned twenty, I had a great number of partial OBEs arising from sleep paralysis, where I would feel stuck half in, half out of my body. Struggling and fighting never helped a bit! It didn't matter to me whether I got back in my body or left it completely; I just wanted the stuck feeling to go away. Over time, by experimenting with breathing techniques while 'stuck' and mixing deep calmness with focused intent and visualisation, I taught myself how to transition effortlessly from this irritating state into full, enjoyable OBEs where I could soar into the stratosphere or explore locally. This self-learned breath-work and mind training was my initiation into yoga, although I didn't know it at the time and had never done yoga before.

How to release fear: practical tips

Panicking is possibly the worst thing a person can do during an OBE. I cannot overstate the importance of relaxing the belly and breathing calmly when the freight-train version of an OBE entry runs you over. It's remarkable how simply accepting the experience can transform it fairly quickly into a calm, beautiful event.

Practising yoga and meditation is an excellent way of learning to connect with the peaceful centre we all have somewhere within us. The way to this centre is through the breath. Since we all breathe all the time, whether awake or asleep, the breath is an excellent tool for the nervous OBEr. Once the 'Breathe – Grow calm – Relax' structure has been practiced (and it takes only minutes to learn), it becomes second nature to turn to the breath in any state of consciousness as a way to calm emotions and release fear (see Sevilla, 2004).

Another useful practice is that of visualisation. If we visualise ourselves moving easily away from our physical body towards a beautiful landscape or safe place, the thought-responsive environment generally tends to react by materialising that place. Feeling and projecting love is also a very good way of dissolving fear and fearful visions or sensations: when we explore lucid states with love in our hearts, the lucid environment responds warmly. Summoning a feeling of love can be done by imagining warmth or colour emanating from the chest, breathing freely, and smiling.

Adopting an attitude of curiosity when observing strange visions or scenes which arise during an OBE is an effective way of gaining perspective and clarity. If you're in search of creative inspiration for a painting or a story, these visions are imbued with creative potential, so try to notice everything about them: watch them like a film. Remind yourself that after all this, you will find yourself safely in your bed. Don't forget your ability to fly in the OBE state; kick out a little or wriggle upwards like a mermaid.

If you are truly desperate to escape the OBE experience and return to your body, try wiggling your toes, which brings your attention to your physical body, or hold your breath for as long as you can – this second technique can shock the body into returning to regular waking consciousness.

From fear to creativity

Having a creative attitude towards the OBE instead of a fearful one makes a big difference. Instead of wishing it would never happen to you again, it's far less psychologically stressful to think of something fun to try out in case it does happen again. Imagine how your ideal OBE might unfold – would you fly over mountains, experiment with putting your hand through a

wall, or enjoy the sensory explosion of doing floating somersaults? Once we open ourselves to the creative possibilities of OBEs, we soon find ourselves hankering after more experiences and working on inducing them.

Personally I've found that curiosity burns stronger than fear. If we get curious about OBEs, any fear rapidly diminishes. Reading widely on the subject and talking to experienced practitioners is also helpful, as the experience will seem less foreign.

The golden rule of fearlessness in OBEs can be visualised as a see-saw, because it's all about balance and reciprocity: if you tip too far down into fear, the fear-factor of the experience rises in response. If you are relaxed and calm out of body, and feel balanced within yourself, your OBE is far more likely to be a relaxed and calm one.

Anja, a German novelist, has had a vast number of OBEs. Over time she has taught herself to be completely free from fear in this state. In a personal interview with me, she remarked:

Having no fear is an inner attitude. People fear they won't be able to return to their bodies but that's nonsense, you always come back. Nothing can happen to you, you won't get lost! You don't need to be scared and it's important to release all fear. Instead of feeling afraid, why not explore this state: try things out, travel to the US or wherever you want to go.

As a final note, this subchapter comes with a caveat: those who have suffered sexual or mental abuse or are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder or anxiety-related disorders are unlikely to find it as easy to 'relax and go with the OBE flow' as the majority of people will. In these cases, it would be wise to consult a psychotherapist or hypnotherapist to help with the underlying issues first.

Fear of a waking life situation

Job interviews, air travel, and moving house are just a small sample of common life experiences which can be very stressful. When we become aware in a thought-responsive environment, we have the opportunity of engaging with and releasing deep-rooted fears. In

OBEs with psychological elements and projections, we can ask for help purposefully, by posing a question directed to the environment when we are in a stable state of awareness:

“How can I overcome my fear of flying in aeroplanes?”, “What do I need to learn to land this job?”. Alternatively, we can indirectly trigger a response from the environment simply by thinking certain thoughts and feeling certain emotions.

Caz Coronel reports how an OBE helped her to overcome her fear of public speaking. When she was asked to speak at the 2014 ‘Gateways of the Mind’ conference in London, Caz initially felt “consumed with fear” (see Coronel, 2014). She decided to incubate a dream to help her choose a subject she felt so passionate about that she would have the courage to get up on stage. Shortly after falling asleep she had an OBE where she was whisked away to a forest and deposited before a cliff-face covered in ancient carvings of owls. These made her recall her sister’s remark that Caz gave out advice ‘like a wise old owl’ and should really try taking her own advice more often. Caz thought back to some recent advice she’d given to someone: “face your fear”. Apparently in direct response to Caz’s train of thought, a dark, frightening presence materialised behind her. In a private interview with me, Caz reports:

I very rarely feel fear in an OBE after so many years’ experience but this presence was not nice and the whole experience was hyper realistic... The presence descended upon me and pinched my non-physical skin on my shoulders to the point that it really hurt. My mum used to always pinch me when she was mad at me (which was a lot of the time!). Suffice to say I am not a fan of being pinched. Suddenly I felt, in the pit of my stomach, my fear turning to rage. ‘How dare this thing make me feel afraid!’ I thought. I knew that the one thing I could control was my attitude towards it. ‘Damn it,’ I announced. ‘You can do what you want to me but I will *not* be bullied by you!’

I puffed out my energy chest as much as I could, defiant in my stance. It then lifted me up in the sky and whisked me away from the forest in a furious rush, returning to the version of my bedroom and delicately plopping me back in my body. I awoke instantly realising that I had literally been in the grip of fear but that I had not let it get the better of me! The answer came to me immediately that I would do my speech on fear.

This may seem a paradoxical example as it shows how fear of a waking life experience was dissolved through overcoming a fearful OBE experience. Yet this is often how the unconscious mind works in relation to thought-responsive environments. It can seem as if we are being tested, or presented with a challenge we must rise to. In the above example, Caz faced her fear and gained not only an element of psychological integration (liberation from fear of the pinching mother), but also a creative answer to her dilemma.

This example also illustrates how OBEs can lead to reality creation: an attitude practiced in the OBE state can be implemented with greater ease in waking life. In this OBE, Caz created a powerful psychological model for herself by standing up to something frightening. In waking life, she mirrored this experience by drawing on its lesson. Despite her phobia of public speaking, Caz didn't let her fear get the better of her. She was able to control her attitude towards the feared situation and manifest the bravery she found in her OBE. She stood up in front of a large audience and successfully delivered her talk on overcoming fear: 'Tales from the frontier: using OBEs to overcome fear in the waking state'.

Fear of death and dying

Recent studies such as the AWARE study led by Sam Parnia (2014), along with the work of researchers such as P. Fenwick and E. Fenwick (2012) and Penny Sartori (2014), have put the spotlight on the possibility that consciousness continues after death. Their research has shown that people who have near-death experiences (NDEs) often report subsequent acceptance of and fearlessness of death.

In NDEs, as in OBEs, self-perception seems external to and independent from the body. The sense that the physical body is not required and that one can be conscious beyond the body can invoke feelings of peace and the conviction that death is merely a transition, rather than the end of conscious experience. Since OBEs can occur spontaneously at moments where we feel ourselves to be in extreme physical danger, they can release us completely from the terror of impending doom, and simultaneously resolve a generalised fear of death and dying.

British lucid dreamer Natalie O'Neill has only had three OBEs in her life, and all three occurred from the waking state, seemingly as dissociative reactions provoked by traumatic

experiences. In each of these situations a spontaneous OBE enabled her to remain calm and feel safe while harrowing or dangerous events unfolded.

In one incident in Greece, she was involved in a motorbike crash where she was riding pillion. As the motorbike skidded and crashed, Natalie found herself floating above and behind the bike, watching as everything happened in slow motion. In a personal interview with me, she reports the incredible feeling of peace that came over her; there was no sense of concern, no pain:

I remember the bike going from side to side in slow motion and then I was outside of myself. I couldn't have been any calmer. Totally at peace, content, just watching it like you'd watch a movie. I remember thinking: *This is probably what happens to everyone when they die*. It made me feel much better about everything; it made me think that whatever happens when we die, it's going to be fantastic! I totally believe something continues after death. It's just one little journey, this one on Earth. I know 100% that your energy continues after your physical body dies.

Living through a traumatic event which triggers a spontaneous OBE is far from the only way of overcoming the fear of death. All OBEs and lucid experiences such as floating in the void, or becoming lucid in a dream, teach us that we can be conscious without a physical body. We don't even need a dream body in our lucid dreams – experienced lucid dreamers often report becoming “a dot of consciousness” (Johnson, 2014, p. 63) or pure awareness, with no sense of limbs or movements (such as walking or sitting, which imply the presence of a body).

A growing ease accompanies the OBE as we explore and learn. This ease, coupled with the refreshing awareness that the body is unnecessary in such states, tends to lead to a more relaxed attitude to the inevitable separation of consciousness from the physical body at the moment of death. After spending time in OBE states, there is often a stronger sense that consciousness could well continue after death, and this is understandably a more comforting prospect than believing that we simply cease to exist at the moment of death (Sartori, 2014).

OBEs can free people from fear, whether the fear is specific or generic, life-centred or death-centred. Once we are free from fear, we are open to creativity: the mind is released from its

shackles and can begin to dance. What kind of creativity can we access in the OBE state and how can we manifest this in our waking lives?

The four branches of creativity

Once fear is out of the picture, the OBE becomes something rather beautiful. Deep space experiences such as floating out of body in what I have termed a state of 'lucid suspension', or speeding effortlessly to the stars, take us to the source of creativity (see Johnson, 2014). The body is forgotten and the mind experiences total freedom. Artists and writers can inspire their creative work by cultivating such experiences, but even 'non-artists' can benefit in terms of creative thinking, healing potential, and a broader perspective on life and death.

Novelty and imagination

Almost 40 years ago, in 1976, artist Jurgen Ziewe had the following lucid-dream induced OBE which he describes in his book, 'Multidimensional Man' (2008). A 'tremendous force' carried him away. At first he resisted it, but at the moment he decided to relax and go with it, he was deposited in an environment so alien that the experience has stayed with him all his life, and informs his virtual reality creations, animations, and artwork.

I saw what resembled a body of water, but it wasn't water, it was a crystalline liquid mass, shimmering and shining... plant-like entities grew around the pond and seemed to be on fire. Flames were coming out of their roots, but it was not fire. It was iridescent light rising from the ground and up through the stems.

The thing that was the most striking of all was the indescribable beauty, the harmony that the objects created among themselves and with their environment, and the sounds that rained down on the scene, together with the cascading lights emanating from the crystalline pond... The borders between what was sight and sound became blurred and what a moment ago was a liquid object moving in harmony with its surrounding turned out to be a sound with a shape, and so I was never quite certain whether it was a sound I saw or a colour with a shape I heard...

Through the indigo depth of the liquid I saw large silver bubbles rising to the surface, up to two feet in diameter... The bubbles burst with a musical ‘pop’ when they reached the surface, releasing sounds dressed in misty puffs of colour, which rained back down onto the liquid surface... I noticed a soft, almost wet feeling on my feet. I looked down and realised I was standing on grass, which formed a soft furry skin over the landscape. Even this, when I moved through it, emitted a shimmer of musical notes.

Such an abundantly creative OBE barely requires commentary to point out the elements of novelty and imagination. The synaesthesia, or mingled senses; the surreal and alien quality of the landscape, are grist to an artist’s mill. Ziewe has drawn on this OBE time and again over the years in an effort to recreate it, which can be seen in the surrealistic depictions of his virtual reality films. Anyone who has this kind of super-creative OBE can draw on the experience for inspiration, whether they are artists in the physical realm or not: such an OBE can imprint the memory with great beauty, and beauty is itself a creative force. My own lucid dreams and creative OBEs informed the writing of my two novels, ‘Breathing in Colour’ and ‘Dreamrunner’, giving me insights into synaesthesia, bodiless environments and sleep disorders (see Jay, 2009, 2010).

Creative OBEs can be purposefully induced when the OBEr directs her intent towards having one. Calling out, “Show me the most beautiful landscape!”, or “take me to the heart of creativity!” may trigger a sudden sense of being borne aloft and blown through space until one comes to rest in a new scene, or it could be an altogether gentler experience, with the new environment forming around the OBEr like mist.

My doctoral research shows how this project-specific creative inspiration functions within lucid dreams (Johnson, 2006). The research I conducted highlights the experiential and creative overlap between some OBEs and lucid dreams; although as I noted earlier, form-based OBEs seem less malleable than lucid dreams. A specific request and subsequent guiding actions can work together with the thought-responsive environment and the inherently creative nature of the OBE to trigger new ideas, methods, and perspectives.

Manifestation and healing

We have seen how an attitude practiced in the OBE state, or a fear overcome, can carry over into waking life and help us in the area of reality creation or manifestation. Just as we can learn from waking life lessons, so we can learn from experiences we have across the entire spectrum of consciousness. Daydreams allow us to re-run situations or fantasise about possible outcomes. Dreams and nightmares can help us with waking life dilemmas by flagging problems or suggesting solutions (Barrett, 2001). Similarly, we can benefit from lucid dreams and OBEs where events are guided either involuntarily, through unvoiced expectations and emotions, or overtly through specific requests, intentions, or actions.

One of the many wonderful things about being conscious within a noticeably thought-responsive environment is that the more we experiment with observing the impact of our thoughts and intentions, the more clearly we understand the impact our thoughts and intentions also have on our waking life. Even the waking state is thought-responsive, and I like to describe waking physical reality as a kind of slow dream because it usually responds a lot more slowly to our thoughts and intent than other states of consciousness. But sooner or later, even physical reality responds to our intent.

In some OBEs we can experience instant manifestation: we decide to visit the sun and BAM! We're floating right in front of this giant fireball. Or, we meet a frightening entity and instead of fleeing we do our best to send it love and ask calmly what it wants from us. Our inner calmness infects the environment and the entity is no longer so scary, or it transforms into something else. This latter example can help in waking life situations when we encounter aggressive people: being able to give a calm, compassionate response generally reduces the explosive potential of the situation.

Another aspect of both creativity and manifestation is healing. OBEs have potential for both psychological and physical healing. Graham Nicholls (2012), author of 'Navigating the Out-of-Body Experience', remarks: "after several hundred OBEs, I have found nothing but healing and transformation within my own experiences" (p. 13).

After William Buhlman had cancer surgery, he had experiences of floating in a cube of white light (see Buhlman, 2013). He had the strong sense that these experiences were fundamental to his physical healing. Luigi Sciambarella points out that in the OBE, "You can connect with a

state of pure, unconditional love” (personal correspondence, 2013), and this, too, is an optimal state for healing as it provides us with respite from the hurt, dissatisfaction or negative emotions we usually identify with. In particular I have noticed that states of consciousness in which I find myself floating bodiless in white space have a healing quality.

Surfing the rainbow: from out-of-body to bodiless

“I’ve had white light out-of-body experiences where just for a moment I understand the nature of reality, the universe, everything” (Anja, personal correspondence, 2015).

What happens when we find ourselves in a state the only distinguishing feature of which can be described as ‘infinite space’? We have no sensory input from our physical body, so we could say we are out of body, but we are not really out of the body, and nor are we embodied. In states of deep awareness where we do not identify with a body image of any sort (whether we label this the dream body, astral body, or energy body), we simply experience ourselves as bodiless.

In such states, all we experience in terms of graspable stimuli that we can report upon waking up is endless white (or grey, or black) space, or millions of dots of light. As mentioned earlier, I call these states Bodiless Lucid Experiences (BLEs). Signposting states of consciousness isn’t always straightforward, but I have previously termed the most common entry point for BLE as the “gap between dreams” (Johnson, 2014, p. 60), as such states usually occur following a shift in the dream-state where all representational imagery falls away, or in transitional stages of sleep. In BLE we have no sense of location beyond the perceived self-location as a dot of awareness in space. There may be a sensation of movement. There may be a sense of wonder, oneness, or belonging; maybe a sense of understanding the nature of the universe.

Perhaps at first we continue to identify with ourselves as ‘I’, but after a time in the white space, there’s not much for the ego to bounce off. When everything dissolves, what remains? When we spin a rainbow spinning-top, the colours merge into whiteness. When the rainbow of conscious experience merges into white light, self-perception and ego dissolve. What remains is lucid awareness.

There's something immensely reassuring about being stripped of a body and all sensory perceptions but all the while remaining lucidly aware. There's a freedom to the experience; a sense of boundlessness. When I return from a BLE, for a time the pressures of my daily life are less powerful and I feel at peace with the idea of my own death.

It's like being protected by a shield of knowledge – the knowledge that waking life is transitory and the body is only a carapace. None of this means I feel less love for life: compassion flows more easily when we sense that we all came from oneness and will return to oneness.

In terms of creativity, white light OBEs and BLEs provide a space of great nourishment because we can be completely at rest within the white light, whether we have the sensation of movement or not. Creativity needs restorative moments, points of reconnection with something deeper than surface, everyday reality. Doing what I have called 'soul flying' in white light has a similar effect to spending an hour or two in a floatation tank: upon emerging the body feels looser, the mind is broad and spacious, and thoughts are slower and deeper. When we take this state of consciousness to the writing desk, the canvas, the musical instrument, or any waking life situation, we're ready to create.

On its most basic level, creativity involves being willing to release preconceptions and open up to new experiences. I've had hundreds of classic lift-off OBEs and many thousands of bodiless experiences in the void and in lucid dreams, but I'm still learning. If we release preconceived fears and expectations and actively cultivate a spirit of adventure, we can become intrepid explorers of our own conscious experience. Through exploring OBEs and related states such as lucid dreams and waking visions, we allow the unknown into our lives, and with the unknown arrives all the beauty of a profound mystery waiting to be discovered. Instead of panicking and resisting, the secret to creative OBE is to take courage and find our balance, so that we can surf the rainbow of conscious experience.

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