

...renning wants the public to embrace it is this: "Become a donor. Both men and women should have a "D" code on their driver's licenses indicating that they wish to be tissue and organ donors. So many lives can be enhanced, saved, if people will just take this small step. I think men simply don't think about it. It's not that they are callous or lack compassion; the thought just doesn't automatically pop into their heads."

Another step people who decide to become donors need to take is to let their families know of their decision. It doesn't do any good to have a "D" on your driver's license if people don't know that you want to be a donor. In the throes of grief, people aren't about to take out your wallet and check your license. This is a great talking point for families. How many of us know our children's wishes around this issue, or even our spouse's/significant other's for that matter?

Death is uncomfortable to talk about, but ignoring the eventuality doesn't make accepting it any easier. Like making out a will, this decision needs to be made prior to a person's demise. Since none of us knows the day or the hour of our departure, I think it's best to prepare in advance by making these decisions, and keeping

In this month at my hospice in-service meeting, I learned that even people who die of cancer and other diseases are still able to donate skin and corneas. Almost anyone can donate corneas, as the eyes do not depend on blood supply.

Some people worry that their loved one won't be able to have an open-casket funeral if they are donors, but this is a myth. The bodies are restored to their full structure, so there should be no concern about disfigurement.

What I know today is that without a donor, my friend Rick would be dead. There would be no more of his hugs for his children, grandchildren, or wife. This 58-year old man would be just another heart failure statistic among so many.

There is no way to thank the donor, or even his family, for this remarkable gift of life, since hospitals are bound by the confidentiality of both donor and recipient. But it is our hope that just knowing that their son's organs *enhanced or saved as many as seventy people's lives* is something to rejoice about, and perhaps it even makes death less of an enemy.

If you or any member of your family would like to become an organ and tissue donor, please call 1-800-355-SHARE. Recycle yourself, and give the gift of life! ■

Passport to the Cosmos

by John E. Mack, M.D.
edited by Will Bueché

Harvard psychiatrist and Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer John E. Mack, M.D., spoke at the Seven Stars bookstore in his hometown of Cambridge, Massachusetts, earlier this year. Dr. Mack talked about his new book, Passport to the Cosmos, and shared where this passport has taken him in his understanding of the relationship between alien encounters and human transformation. These remarks are excerpted from his discussion.

I am always asked, "Why did you write this book when you had already written that other book, *Abduction*?" How many times can a Harvard professor lose his respectability or virginity in the intellectual world? You can't come out twice, so why did you do this book? What's different?

My reason for writing this book is to try to move the conversation out of the argument of whether UFOs and abductions are real or not. I have to confess to you that I believe that is boring at this point. It is definitely real, and if you want to deconstruct what "real" means we can do that. Whether it is materially real or not, or

comes from some other place and shows up materially — I love those ontologically sophisticated discussions — but this is not the main thing. The main thing, for me, has become "What does it mean for us that people of sound mind — hundreds of thousands if not millions of people from all over the world, not just in the Western countries, but on other continents and among indigenous people — are having what seem like authentic, incontrovertible encounters with some sort of beings that apparently enter into our physical world and communicate to us about ourselves, and seem in some way to be connecting with us?"

The heart of the writing of this book began when I was invited by Mu Soeng and Catherine Diehl at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies to spend time there alone in a cottage with all my notes and transcripts. I took all my boxes of interview transcripts and sat with them, sorting them day after day, to see what ideas and themes seemed to emerge from that material.

I began to be struck by how powerful was the environmental dimension to this, the overwhelming communication of danger

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"I feel spiritually I've been touched..." Kay
"...will deepen my spiritual awareness..." Ele
"I definitely felt an energy shift..." Conie B.

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were the elevated and imposing statues of Padmashambava and King Songsten Gampo, the founders of Buddhism in Tibet. After inwardly bowing to these heroes of the past, I continued to the end of the hall, where there was the golden tomb of one of the past Dalai Lamas, the first of many such structures I would encounter in the Potala. These breathtaking tombs are step-pyramids covered with thick sheets of gold. The largest one in the Potala is occupied by the fifth Dalai Lama, the greatest of all past Dalai Lamas and the ancient builder of the Potala Palace. About thirty or forty feet in height, it is covered with thick sheets of gold and hundreds of precious gems.

Passport

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about the planet that was coming from this apparently outside source. Bernardo Peixoto, a shaman born in northern Brazil, one of three members of indigenous cultures whom I discuss in detail in the book, told me that the Ikuyas — his people's name for beings that seem similar to the gray beings reported by people in the West — are coming now "because they are conscious that we as human beings on this planet are destroying ourselves." They are trying to influence us, he suggested, by bringing knowledge and understanding of our connection to each other and to the earth, and a reminder that "we are just one part of a big, big whole."

The experiences that are written about in the book make it clear that the encounter phenomenon opens people to an awareness of Self, with a capital S, that goes way beyond any kind of ethno-national identification, to a much larger sense of being a child of the divine, or a child of spirit, a child of the cosmos. And so it is in a sense a passage experience from a nationalistic identity to a collective identity, to a larger global identity.

When you open Self to a connection beyond the material world, beyond the earth to a larger firmament, this opens people to the sacred. It opens people to a sense of the divine, of

since it was the monsoon season, many of the roads were washed out, so we were forced to ford broad, rapidly moving rivers. Once in Gyantse we visited the Kumbum Stupa (left), a gigantic stupa (dome-shaped Buddhist shrine) with 108 rooms. Kumbum means "one thousand" and refers to the number of images contained within the stupa's prodigious number of rooms. As we climbed to each successive level of the stupa and visited its corresponding rooms, I was impressed to find that the one thousand images were not small statuettes, and some even had dimensions to rival those I had seen in Lhasa. Our view at the top of the stupa was spectacular, and allowed us to survey the entire city of Gyantse, as well as the surreal-look-

being one with All That Is, what people used to call God, and when that occurs, then everything becomes part of that. Everything becomes part of God, part of the divine. Everything you do, everything you see, every material or non-material object, whatever you encounter becomes a part of that sacred universe.

Many of the destructive things that we do, particularly the destruction of the earth itself, become impossible from the place of that kind of consciousness. You'd cringe every time you saw a bulldozer. You would shrink in horror from every polluted stream; it just wouldn't be okay.

And similarly, in the way peoples treat one another, it makes Erik Erikson's notion of pseudo-speciation really, really powerful. Pseudo-speciation means the treatment of others, other peoples, other ethno-national groups as if they were another species, rather than as one human species or family. He was talking about the scope of being human, the need for a shift to a new human identity. He did not speak directly about the concept of cosmic identity, so we may need to expand his concept.

The alien abduction experiences themselves are often initially quite frightening, yet over time, many experiencers form a powerful bond with one or more of these beings. People become deeply connected with these entities. They have palpable experiences that are just as powerful, sometimes more powerful, than relationships here. They view them not just as these cold, calculating, indifferent big-eyed creatures, but

being one with All That Is, what people used to call God, and when that occurs, then everything becomes part of that. Everything becomes part of God, part of the divine. Everything you do, everything you see, every material or non-material object, whatever you encounter becomes a part of that sacred universe.

From Maitreya's chapel, it was just a short walk to the huge room constructed specially to accommodate the colossal, stupa-tomb of the tenth Panchen Lama. Above this towering gold-plated pyramid is the sacred mandala of the Kalachakra, a form of Tantrism practiced in the legendary kingdom of the immortals, Shambhalla. The Panchen Lama has a special connection to Shambhalla by virtue of having incarnated there as its king. Past Panchen Lamas have even written guidebooks on how to travel there.

bonds develop between experiencers and those strange creatures that often have an intense, transcendent, spiritual, sometimes even erotic, element to them.

When people start to recall an invasive encounter, they begin to shake on the couch. They sweat. They cry. They scream at the beings, "You can't do this to me; this is terrible." The transformational, the transcendent, the kindness aspect, the Earth-connected aspect of it, usually comes after passing through a kind of dark night of the soul, an initiation, whatever you wish to call it.

As a clinician, my role is to listen to a person as he or she describes an experience, and simply stay there in an empathic place. I may say I am sorry for the pain, and I will ask, "And then what happened?" But I don't say, "Oh those aliens are terrible, that is too bad they did that to you," because that would evoke a victim mentality. If you do not argue the good or bad, if you just stay with it, it moves from there.

The people who have the experiences move. They change. They grow. They transform. They become Earth-conscious. That is why I seek to give them voice, for they become passionate on behalf of the stewardship of the earth.

I think that the most important point here is that something that opens us to a larger sense of self, of identification with others and with a more cosmic level of being, will open us to a sense of the divine and a reverence for life, for nature.

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