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Introduction

by Charles T. Tart, Ph.D,

University of California

Davis, California

and

Institute of Noetic Sciences

Sausalito, California

For more than thirty years I have studied areas of the human mind that have not always been considered respectable for a psychologist to study. These have included altered states of consciousness such as hypnosis, dreaming, meditation, and drug-induced states, as well as parapsychological phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, and out-of-the-body experiences. My studies have convinced me that so-called "ordinary" or "normal" experience is just the tip of the iceberg and that we have possibilities that are not only exciting but which make more sense of the human condition than ordinary knowledge does.

As you might imagine, I have met, sometimes studied, and sometimes befriended some very interesting people: psychics, meditators, healers, spiritual teachers, martial art masters, and Nobel Laureates, to name just part of the range. Some have been quite wise, some a little mad, many a mixture of both.

Joe McMoneagle is one of these very interesting people who have a lot to teach us. He does not fit our culture's stereotype of a "spiritual" person or a "psychic." Indeed, he would probably be embarrassed if anyone pigeon-holed him in one of these categories. Joe is friendly, bluff and frank, and his appearance is muscular, self-assured and tough. When you get him talking about his service in Vietnam, you're glad he is friendly. I can't imagine him wearing robes or

turbans, sitting in contorted meditation postures, claiming mysterious "powers," or preaching sermons.

Yet in 1970, Joe McMoneagle "died," was "united with God," and has since learned how to regularly and practically use what might seem like magic to many people.

Like a lot of other modern Westerners to whom this has happened, the result has been not only exquisite happiness but embarrassment, feelings of going crazy, isolation from others, and a shaking of the foundations of life; and, eventually, a greater happiness and feeling of purpose than most of us ever find. Joe is smarter, tougher, and more together than before his experiences started.

What can we make of this?

In my psychological and parapsychological studies of the human mind, I've found that we humans have an overwhelming need for meaning. Just as we need vitamins to maintain bodily health, we need beliefs and experiences that show us that the universe makes sense and that we personally have a part in it. If we don't get enough vitamins, we get deficiency diseases, like scurvy. If we can't find or create enough meaning in our universe, we get psychological deficiency diseases, such as an insatiable greed for material things that we hope (uselessly) will distract us enough so we don't feel the pain of living in a meaningless world.

For most people for most of history, religion provided a framework of meaning. It provided an explanation beyond the individual's limited horizons about why the universe existed (such as God or gods or Universal Love creating and maintaining it), a rationale for the problems of life (the struggle between good and evil, for example, or losing contact with our own higher nature through ignorance and desire), and a set of guidelines for living a meaningful life (morality, duty, and various spiritual development practices). The religious-meaning framework could, to some degree, lift us beyond our isolated individuality and struggles and make us feel part of something greater and worthwhile.

I speak of religion at its best, of course, for religion almost invariably becomes corrupted to various degrees by politics and other mundane factors and can end up creating more psychological and social problems than it solves. All human institutions --religion has no monopoly here--are created with some knowledge and much ignorance and prejudice. With the passage of time, living knowledge tends to harden into dogma and superstition.

What is the "living knowledge?" If you look at the history of the great religions, you discover founders who had profound experiences of an extraordinary sort, experiences that we could describe from a modern psychological perspective as occurring in altered states of consciousness. These "mystical" experiences gave deep insight and certainty and drastically changed the lives of the founders. Although the meanings revealed were often only fully understandable in an appropriate altered state, the founders struggled to express them in ways that made sense and were helpful to as many other people as possible.

To oversimplify, as religions continued beyond the life of their founders, we can see two broad paths of development. In the more common one, the disciples of the founder had no or only partial direct experiences of what the founder taught and so tended to focus more on "doctrine," on the inherently inadequate verbal descriptions of the deep knowledge the founder had experienced. As generations went by, the religion became more and more one of rigid doctrine, uninformed by living experience. Believing became stressed as essential. This kind of religion can be verbally taught to people and emotionally indoctrinated into them by manipulating emotions such as hope and fear. It provides some meaningful framework, but it is shallow, more like conditioning than genuine education, and does not hold up well in crises.

The other broad development path stressed experience, not belief. The founder didn't expect people to simply believe, but to practice the methods the founder had practiced, such as meditation, and so eventually know the truth directly by having similar, deep experiences. We might call this path "spirituality," as distinct from "religion," since the term religion usually implies institutions, hierarchies, doctrines, dogmas, and belief.

Our culture knows a good deal about religion, and little of spirituality. We also know much about the corruption, folly, arrogance, and ignorance that goes on in the name of religion. Combined with the immense success of science, it is not surprising that formal religion is not a vital force in many modern people's lives, and that we look on "religious experiences" with suspicion.

And yet. . . we too readily throw out the baby with the bath water. We automatically dismiss unusual experiences as crazy. Some are indeed "crazy," but not all of them. We practice a kind of dogmatic, fundamentalist "religion" that sociologists call scientism, a belief system masquerading as science that claims that only what is material is real, that all spiritual or religious ideas and experiences are per se impossible and crazy and must be stamped out if humanity is to progress. Yet a "meaning" system that says life is just a meaningless accident of molecules bumping around for endless eons, that consciousness, including all of its highest aspects, is nothing but a by-product of the brain, that all dies and comes to nought, is not an inspiring meaning system. Indeed, I think it causes a lot of the suffering of modern life, suffering which could be avoided.

But science has given us enormous amounts of useful information about the world and ourselves, and we can't ignore it just because its manifestation as scientism is depressing. One of the unique things about Joe McMoneagle's book is the way it bridges science and the spiritual.

In July of 1970, Joe McMoneagle died. He was delivered to a German hospital with no detectable respiration or heart beat. When he revived, though, he reported an incredible and life-shaking experience, what we now call a near-death experience (NDE). He wasn't really dead, of course, since the term has a finality to it that didn't come about, but no one in their right mind wants to come as close to death as so often occurs in NDEs: most people who come that close don't tell us an interesting story later; they get buried.

There is another way to describe what happened to Joe McMoneagle. Recall the distinction between two broad paths that religions follow, the path of belief and the path of experience. While much is made of one's own efforts on the experiential path, there is frequently a tradition of initiation, in which someone of high spiritual accomplishments, or "someone" who is a spirit (adequate words are hard to come by here) can sometimes temporarily lift a student up beyond their current level of development and give them at least a transient glimpse of higher spiritual possibilities. This is grace.

We proudly trace our rational, Western civilization back to ancient Greece, with people like Socrates and Plato building the intellectual foundations of our culture. What we usually forget is that most of the great Greek philosophers were also members of various mystery religions, long since stamped out by Christianity. A crucial element in some of those mystery religions was initiation. Not a mere formal ritual, as we have come to think of initiations, but trials, vision quests, undertaken only by the most serious seekers and aided by prolonged periods of fasting, purification, isolation, and drama. The highest kind of initiation involved inducing an NDE, such that the seeker knew from personal experience that the human mind was more than the body and would survive death.

While the details of these procedures have been lost to us, a strange historical development has occurred. Modern medicine, not generally known for its spiritual bent, has developed resuscitation technology that has effectively "initiated" many people into the Mysteries !

So we can say that Joe McMoneagle was given the highest mystery initiation of the ancient world! Without any cultural preparation or subsequent support!

The NDE has happened to many people now. A few have written and lectured about it. The vast majority of them are pretty quiet about their NDEs, but their lives have been transformed. Their "initiation" has provided a new, deep, and vital framework of meaning. Most, for instance, would deny they believe in life after death; they would say they know this is true from direct experience. Most would talk about the importance of learning to appreciate the wonders of the here-and-now and of learning how to love. We can learn a lot from them, regardless of what we think about the ultimate meaning or validity of the NDE.

Joe McMoneagle is unusual among those who've had an NDE, though, for he has not simply ignored science and scientism as meaningless in the light of his new meaning system; he has worked hard to find out how this way of knowing fits with genuine science. This led him to become a subject in experiments on one of the most interesting kinds of psychic phenomena, remote viewing, and to become an expert remote viewer. In the classic remote viewing experiment, one experimenter goes away from the laboratory and hides, i.e., goes to some location known only to him or her. Meanwhile back at the laboratory the remote viewer, the subject, is asked to use some kind of psychic ability to

describe the place where the first experimenter is hiding. Refined techniques have been developed, and are described in this book, to objectively decide whether you do indeed get psychic perceptions of the remote target site or just random musings. Quite often you do get startling accurate psychic perceptions.

From the point of view of scientism, the supposedly scientific belief that only what is material is real, doing a remote viewing experiment is nonsensical. Someone in a closed laboratory room can't see where someone else is. Light waves don't pass through solid walls.

A once-in-a-lifetime NDE makes the materialistic, scientific position obviously wrong. But you don't want to come that close to death in order to appreciate the NDE point of view. It's too tricky to make sure it's a "near" death experience! Repeated remote viewing, often done in accordance with the best scientific standards, give something like the NDE perspective to the test of us who understand the value of good science but hope for some meaning in life beyond scientism.

The story and the information in this book are a fascinating read and should open up some important new views of life.
