

Out of Body Experiences

Journey to Other Worlds

By JIM DEKORNE

Though for the most part entirely unconscious of it, man passes the whole of his life in the midst of a vast and populous unseen world.
- C.W. Leadbeater, *The Astral Plane*

*In 1958, a forty-two year old American business executive and electronics engineer named Robert A. Monroe, began spontaneously leaving his body during sleep. Having no previous personal knowledge about out-of-body experiences (OOBEs), Monroe initially feared the worst: perhaps he had a brain tumour, or incipient mental illness. When physical and psychological examinations gave him a clean bill of health, he began a conscientious program of recording all of his out-of-body journeys. This data-gathering resulted in three books: *Journeys Out of the Body* (1971, 1977), *Far Journeys* (1985), and *Ultimate Journey* (1994). With no preconceived ideas about what it was that he was experiencing, his perceptions were unclouded by doctrine or belief. Robert Monroe is dead now, but he left behind him what is arguably the most convincing scientific description of out-of-body awareness written in contemporary idiom.*

Most researchers of this phenomenon postulate that everyone has OOBEs. They claim that these are forgotten because they usually occur within dreams: it is quite rare (in Western cultures at least) for waking consciousness to observe these states as they unfold. "Lucid dreaming," (the insertion of waking consciousness into dream awareness) in fact, is commonly regarded as a useful precondition for anyone's ability to leave the body "at will." It is not surprising then that only a small minority of individuals claim to have such experiences very often, and fewer still say they can initiate them on demand. Robert Monroe was one of these latter, and we are fortunate that his scientific curiosity led him to record the phenomenon for posterity.

Those who do remember an out-of-body experience usually regard it as either the most terrifying or most ecstatic adventure of their life. Few label it as an illusion: an OOBE is as numinous as anything life has to offer - if nothing else, it is proof positive (for the subject, anyway) that consciousness can exist outside of the physical body. I experienced a fully conscious OOBE in 1968, plus numerous rather "dreamy" ones in the years since. Alas, with the exception of the first time, I have so far been unable to fully initiate one. To give the reader an idea of what a conscious OOBE is like, I will describe my 1968 adventure - adapted from my book, *Psychedelic Shamanism*:

A JOURNEY OUT OF THE BODY

On the night of November 11, 1968, my wife and I were living in an upstairs flat at 1329 Cole Street in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. That particular evening I was reading a book which I had purchased earlier in the day from the outdoor bargain table of a secondhand bookstore - Astral Projection, by Oliver Fox. I've since learned that this book is considered a classic of its kind, but then I knew nothing about out-of-body experiences other than that they were strange and interesting. Until that time, I had no real conceptions and few prejudices about the subject one way or the other - if anyone were to ask, I'd likely have replied with provisional skepticism that out-of-body experiences ("astral projections") were probably some kind of hallucination.

The book was fascinating, and had a ring of authenticity to it which impressed me deeply. In fact, I couldn't put it down, and I stayed up hours after my wife had retired so as to finish reading it in one sitting. In the book Fox describes a method which he used to consciously leave his body: this essentially involves the concept of "waking oneself up" while in the middle of a dream. He calls this the "Dream of Knowledge":

In order to attain to the Dream of Knowledge we must arouse the critical faculty which seems to be to a great extent inoperative in dreams... Before going to sleep I must impress upon my mind the desirability of not allowing the critical faculty to slumber; it must be kept awake, ready to pounce on any inconsistency in the dream and recognise it as such. ¹

The technique sounded simple enough, so as I prepared for bed I resolved that I would attempt to awaken my consciousness within the first dream I had - that very night. Why not? With high hopes I shut my eyes ...

I have no idea how long I'd been asleep - suddenly I was aware that I was dreaming: there was a small white dog which began spinning like a top: a bizarre enough image: certainly a dream image... Wake up!

BAM! I was awake. I was wide awake in bed, no longer dreaming, no longer asleep. Awake, and very much still in my body. Well, that didn't work. I'll try again. I dozed off.

I saw a huge champagne bottle with a label on it reading: AIR. It began whirling rapidly... Wake up!

BAM! I was awake, in my room, my wife sleeping beside me, her face strangely flushed, and beside her in bed was... ME! I was passively floating above my body, and looking outward toward the doorway of our bedroom. Standing there was a young woman, perhaps nineteen or twenty years old, slightly overweight, Hispanic, with a dreamy Mona Lisa smile on her face. There was something wrong with her - a very pale green "aura" surrounded her head and shoulders, projecting outward no more than two or three

inches. She was aware of my presence in a vague sort of way, but seemed quite preoccupied with something. She walked into the hallway. I felt myself floating in that direction - a very strange (yet somehow maddeningly familiar) sensation.

Although the experience was certainly not identical to “normal” waking consciousness, in terms of being able to differentiate experience, I was as awake as I am now writing these words. I was astounded by what was happening to me and almost overwhelmed with the realisation: “I’m doing it! I’m projecting!” I felt no fear at all. Indeed, the experience was exhilarating!

Suddenly, the woman reappeared and I consciously and deliberately reached out to touch her to see if she was real (even though I understood from my reading of a few hours before that such an attempt at “astral” contact usually terminates the experience). I compulsively needed to know if she had substance. My hand went through her body as if it were air - a most disquieting “sensation,” or lack thereof!

BAM! An instantaneous change of scene. No longer in our flat, I found myself standing in somebody’s upper middle class living room - a large picture window with opened drapes overlooked what appeared to be the lights of the South bay. (Later I deduced that this must have been somewhere down the peninsula, Menlo Park, perhaps.) It was no hallucination - I can still see the furniture, the way the room was arranged. There were no lights on, but I could discern everything as clearly as if it were daylight. The room was suffused with a shadowless amber-golden glow.

In the right foreground stood another young woman, about the same age as the first - late teens, early twenties - petite, pretty, short blonde hair, wearing a shortie nightgown. She was aware of and disconcerted by my presence in her home, but in a distracted, groggy, sleepwalking sort of way. Although in an altered state of consciousness, I was nevertheless in some sense fully awake: she on the other hand was behaving like someone who was dreaming. Throughout the experience there was this sharp sense of difference between our respective awarenesses. She turned and moved down the hallway to my right.

I “willed” to follow her - I don’t know how else to describe it: it’s not the same way one sets out to walk. I “floated” across the room and down the hall behind her - a sensation like no other! You just “think” it, and you’re in motion! On the way down the hall I could see the half open door of a real (not a dream) bathroom: towels hanging over a shower door... sink... toilet... some items of clothing crumpled on the floor...

At the end of the hall was another doorway - somehow I “knew” that this was her bedroom. She stopped, turned - saw me floating there. Panic on her face! She flashed past me and “ran” back up the hallway. I certainly meant her no harm: I was high from the experience, intensely curious and trying to communicate or make some kind of connection. I did a kind of flip in the air

and drifted back toward the living room. She stopped at the end-table next to the couch and frantically grabbed something from an ashtray. I think it was a cigarette butt. (An astral cigarette butt?!) In panic she tried to force this item into my hand - from my point of view it was very clearly a dream-logic sort of thing for her to do: as if she were trying to make me disappear by forcing me to accept a cigarette butt!

As in the previous encounter, I reached out to touch her, compulsively needing to know if she actually had substance. (This compulsion was uncontrollable - an indicator that I was not in full command of my experience, though certainly awake and conscious in a way I'd never been before.) I gently grasped her shoulder, expecting that everything would disappear, as Fox said it would in his book, but was surprised to find that unlike the first woman, this one was solid. In fact, it was just like touching a "real" person - I could clearly sense the texture of the nightgown and the warmth of her flesh beneath it.

To this point I was unaware of any intentions on my part (other than compulsive curiosity), but as soon as we made contact it instantly became a sexual thing - almost as if we had thrown a switch that energised a magnetic field of some kind. For the merest fraction of a second she pushed me away, then reversed polarity and just as strongly grasped me to her in a totally desperate embrace. I kissed her neck and was acutely aware of the feeling of my beard against her skin. (This was very, very real!) She hooked her legs behind mine and kissed my mouth passionately. There was no "penetration" in the usual sense, just a sudden, blinding blue-white flash of light uniting us for the briefest of instants - very much like that made by an arc welder... B-Z-Z-Z-T!

BAM! I was wide awake in bed, my wife asleep beside me; my chest was pounding so violently that I actually feared that I was having a heart attack. I could hardly catch my breath - it felt like I'd just crashed into my physical body at the speed of light. I arose and stumbled around the pre-dawn flat, trying to calm down; for some reason I was frightened, experiencing extremely anxious disorientation: here I was, but I'd just been somewhere else - who was I, and what was real? These familiar physical surroundings seemed strangely less authentic than where I'd just been! Somewhere, perhaps only a few miles away, was there a pretty young blonde pacing around her living room trying to integrate what she could only remember as a very sexy dream? Good grief - I'd just cheated on my wife! It sounds silly to say it, but I actually felt guilty!

Every night for the next several weeks, and off and on ever since, I tried to duplicate that out-of-body experience. Although I have had various levels of "success," (usually very dream-like and uncoordinated), never to date have I managed to reproduce the clarity and relatively conscious control of that first amazing adventure. Over the years I have come to a rather "mystical" understanding of it - if I were able to access that kind of conscious, controlled experience at will, I very likely would do little else, and I now believe there is some wiser part of my psyche which does not want me off

adventuring on the “astral plane” at the expense of my duties in the here and now.

LESSON: It is entirely possible to exist as a consciously perceiving entity outside of your physical body. The implications of this fact could hardly be more revolutionary. For anyone who has had such gnosis (i.e., has actually experienced it), the materialist position becomes instantly reduced to a partial truth at best, an intolerable illusion at worst. The “consensus reality” of the masses and their governments can then loom like a kind of enervating perceptual tyranny imposed upon the individual: many sixties seekers wound up dead or in prison because they were unable to wisely integrate this sudden alteration of their understanding.²

Nine years later, the paperback edition of *Journeys Out of the Body* first appeared in bookstores. I was unaware of the first (1971) edition, and believe that it was this later version that finally brought Monroe’s adventures to the attention of the general public. At any rate, I’d long since quit trying to “will” an OOB, so it was with great excitement that I read this book: here was a sober, contemporary description of a phenomenon that I already knew about first-hand. I recognised immediately that he was describing empirical facts: his simple narrative style, his willingness to share intimate details of his life, his scientific differentiation and rational arrangement of details with no axe to grind all bespoke a man concerned only with telling it like it is. Although in no way as adept as Monroe was, I knew my own experience well enough to endorse his as accurate.

Because so many OOB descriptions sound just like vivid dreams, it is not easy to impart their uncanny reality, their “otherness,” to someone who has not shared the experience. *No, it was NOT “just” a dream: it was very different!* Here is a description of one of my own “dreamy” OOBs to give a flavour of what they can be like:

I was taking an afternoon nap - often the best time for conscious OOB awareness, since at those times we are usually less comatose. (The “hypnogogic state,” or twilight zone between full sleep and full wakefulness, is especially fertile for engendering out of body experiences.) I became suddenly aware that I was having a “lucid dream.” In it, I was lying on a bed in a bare, antiseptic room with white walls. It had the ambience of an extremely clean but old-fashioned hotel room: something out of the 1920’s. Then I opened my physical eyes (a dangerous thing to do, but I was not in full control, thereby risking termination of the experience), and saw the bookshelf next to my real-time bed. Realising that I was in the twilight zone, I quickly closed my eyes and was immediately back in the dream landscape. (Most of my OOBs have been characterised by this dual consciousness; the trick is to be able to transfer one’s full awareness from the physical to the dreaming state: for me, anyway, not an easy thing to do.)

Knowing that with care I could “will” myself out of my body (don’t ask me how to do this, one somehow just does it), I rolled onto the floor. The floor

was solid: I could feel my feet walking on it, and the physical half of my dual awareness thought that I had merely gotten out of my physical bed, but no - the white-walled hotel room was still there and unrelated to any location I can consciously remember having been before: at the same time, it was very familiar. (This is a common feature of these events: somehow one recognises where one is as an alternate, normal, everyday location: *"Sure - I've been here before. No big deal."* Or sometimes, a numinous, exciting location: *"Wow! Yes! I remember this place: I want to stay here!"* even: *"I'd give ANYTHING to be able to stay here!"*)

I stepped into a small bathroom, containing only a stark porcelain tub: the walls were blindingly white and the air was laden with steam. There was nothing especially interesting here but I "knew" that my wife was in another room down the hall: I could see it clearly because golden light was seeping through the walls. I began walking in that direction, hearing my shoes clicking on the floor. (In "real time" I was not wearing shoes.) The experience was extremely dreamy: I was only barely conscious, and struggled to awaken further, knowing that if I could just "pop through," the dream would take on an entirely different and numinous reality.

At just that moment (of course!), the telephone rang and I instantly found myself in a semi-cataleptic state back in the physical world! This was somewhat comparable to my dream dilemma, except that now I was trying to awaken in the physical! It took almost a half-hour to fully emerge from my groggy awareness: it was exactly the way one feels when suddenly awakened from deep sleep in the middle of the night.

OK, so what? What's the difference between this and any vivid dream? The difference is that some portion of my mind knew I was dreaming and had the ability to influence the dream by taking conscious action: the way we do in normal waking life. Monroe addresses this common (and obvious) question in *Journeys Out of the Body*:

The question posed most often is: How do you know you aren't dreaming, that what you experience is nothing more than a vivid dream or a hallucination of some sort?... The most certain statement that can be made is that when the condition exists, you are as aware of "not dreaming" as you are when you are awake... The ultimate proof of such affirmation is to experience one's self in this state of being.³

Unfortunately, in the above situation, although I was awake enough to know that I wasn't "just dreaming," I was nevertheless still half-asleep (if that makes any sense). I had difficulty in differentiating the two realities: part of me was fighting not to awaken physically while the other part of me was struggling to "*awaken deeper*" into the dream. When experiencing such a hypnogogic dilemma, it is extremely difficult to distinguish which side of the duality you're working in. I've had a fair number of these quasi-lucid dreams now, but don't regard any of them as definitive out-of-body experiences because the level of ego-control was only marginal at best.

Also, what do we mean by “out-of-body?” Although half-awake in a dream, I didn’t experience the sensation of being completely separate from my physical body, of being fully able to go places and do things in another realm. A portion of my awareness was certainly out of its normal habitat, but another portion was still somehow tangled up in the physical. How many bodies do we have, anyway?

It is a difficult discrimination to make, but those with better control of the experience have identified a multiplicity of bodily states. Monroe, Fox and others describe a “Second-Body,” and some authors (including Monroe in his next book) claim that we have at least three, and perhaps four; these seem to correspond to emotional, mental and spiritual vessels nesting within each other like Chinese boxes. This is a plausible hypothesis to explain the subtle spectrum of OOBEE awarenesses, though my own experience has been much too limited to sort it out with such precision.

What independent evidence do we have that might confirm such anomalous experiences? The first data we have, and it is considerable, is found in the literature on shamanism. Anthropologists studying tribal cultures describe the shaman as a ubiquitous (albeit unique) human figure, found worldwide, who is distinguished by his ability to function in the out-of-body state. Indeed, it is precisely this ability which defines him as a shaman:

Shamans can voluntarily enter altered states of consciousness... in these states shamans experience themselves leaving their bodies and journeying to other realms in a manner analogous to contemporary reports of some out-of-body experiences.⁴

Robert Monroe then, whether he ever thought of himself as one or not, fits the definition of a shaman - not because he had OOBEEs (we all do, apparently), but because he could enter that state voluntarily, take action within it, and return with full recall of the experience. *Journeys Out of the Body* describes his “shamanic apprenticeship,” and is of singular interest because it differs in conceptual detail from his succeeding books. In fact, reading the three volumes in sequence reveals a progression of awareness: from Shamanic to Gnostic, to “Something Else,” which we will examine in due course.

Journeys Out of the Body however, is pre-eminently a shamanic book. In it, Monroe describes his visits to three separate realms, which for lack of a better nomenclature, he labels Locale I, Locale II and Locale III. Here are his descriptions of these three very different locations:

Locale I... consists of people and places that actually do exist in the material, well-known world at the very moment of the experiment. It is the world represented to us by our physical senses which most of us are fairly sure does exist. Visits to Locale I while in the Second Body should not contain strange beings, events, or places. Unfamiliar, perhaps, but not strange and unknown. ⁵

Locale II is a non-material environment with laws of motion and matter only remotely related to the physical world. It is an immensity whose bounds are unknown (to the experimenter), and has depth and dimension incomprehensible to the finite, conscious mind. *In this vastness lie all of the aspects we attribute to heaven and hell... which are but part of Locale II. It is inhabited, if that is the word, by entities with various degrees of intelligence with whom communication is possible.*⁶ [Emphasis mine]

Locale III... proved to be a physical-matter world almost identical to our own. The natural environment is the same. There are trees, houses, cities, people, artifacts, and all the appurtenances of a reasonably civilised society. There are homes, families, businesses, and people work for a living. There are roads on which vehicles travel. There are railroads and trains... However, more careful study showed that it can be neither the present nor the past of our physical-matter world.⁷

Leaving for later an examination of Locale III, let's compare Monroe's description of the first two realms with the classical shamanic conception of the cosmos:

For most shamanic cultures, the universe is believed to be composed of at least three levels: the Middle Realm is the world as we know it, the world of normal human events; the World Below, the Underworld, can be associated with the dead and dangerous spirits; and the Over World, the Celestial Realm, is frequently characterised as the abode of the Sun, in some places the realm of transcendent consciousness.⁸

In his initial out-of-body travels then, Monroe corroborates the shamanic worldview as a tripartite structure. Although at this early stage of his initiation he perceives Locale II as one realm (because he includes both heaven and hell within it), I am separating them for the sake of comparison. (Locale III is something else again: a possible "fourth world" which strangely is never mentioned again in either of his succeeding books.) In another chapter I will speculate on what Locale III may refer to, but for now let's stay within the shamanic cosmology.

Locale I, the Middle World of shamanism, is how normal spacetime reality appears to someone perceiving it from the Second Body: that is, from a position transcending physical matter. We know immediately that this is a dimensional separation because although he can see other people from this position, they cannot see him: to them, he is invisible. (A three-dimensional observer can distinguish one, two and three spatial dimensions, but not four. Physicists regard time as a fourth dimension, but it is not "spatial" in any way that we can access physically.) Monroe, obviously perceiving from what must be a fourth *spatial* dimension, labels our realm "Locale I" because, proceeding linearly from what is regarded as normal awareness, it was the first world he entered when he began having OOBES.

The Shamanic Middle World (corresponding to Locale I), on the other hand, is sandwiched between the Lower and Upper Worlds: a hierarchical progression conforming to our mythological notions of hell as “below” and heaven as “above.” Human beings reside in the middle, where the shamans among us have access to either realm. We can see then, that the only significant difference between Monroe’s and the shaman’s point of view is one of conceptual arrangement. Since their content is identical their “differences” may be regarded in the same way that a glass of water can be described as either half-full or half-empty.

Shamanism, the aboriginal religion of humankind, is currently confined almost exclusively to moribund tribal cultures. Although considered by some to be naive, shamanic cosmology, as I will attempt to show, is arguably a more accurate view of our transmateral essence than any provided by the world’s monotheistic religions. Monroe’s portrayal of what he calls the “Second State” therefore, is a contemporary interpretation of an archaic and fundamental human reality.

Unfortunately, most shamanic cultures are pre-literate; our knowledge of them depends largely upon the second-hand reports of anthropologists - outside observers who generally do not partake of the experiences they describe. In addition, the tribal shaman’s preoccupations revolve around nature spirits, animal and plant deities and other phenomena which are redundant to the technological reality in which most of us live. Though the overall *structure* of the worlds and the *experience* of visiting them are the same for everyone, the cultural expectations of the shaman generally determine his or her destination. These realms (as far as anyone knows) are infinite: one would not normally expect Peruvian shamans to visit New York City (though there are recorded instances of such contact); neither would one expect an American business executive to find himself floating around in the Amazonian rainforest.

Rather than limit ourselves to second-hand anthropological accounts of shamans’ oral descriptions of their OOBes then, let’s proceed to evidence found in the only “shamanic” religion I know of that possesses its own literature: Tibetan Buddhism, where it is easy to find almost exact paraphrases of passages from *Journeys Out of the Body*.

Lamaism, the unique form of Buddhism which emerged in Tibet during the 7th Century C.E., was deeply influenced by the indigenous (pre-Buddhist) Bon religion, which was pre-eminently shamanic in content:

Lamaism has preserved the Bon shamanic tradition almost in its entirety. Even the most famous masters of Tibetan Buddhism are reputed to have performed cures and worked miracles in the purest tradition of shamanism.⁹

If the shaman is, by definition, a master of the out-of-body experience, then we can expect the literature of a religion influenced by shamanism to describe this condition. Tibetan Lamaism has documented in exhaustive

detail what it's like to experience the Second Body in the Second State - in the process differentiating the original three worlds of Shamanism into a vast spectrum of discrete realities. The most immediately accessible testimony in English translation is found in the *Bardo Thodol*, or Tibetan Book of the Dead: a volume intended to be read aloud over the corpse of a recently deceased human. The purpose of this ritual is to advise the soul of the departed about the various dimensions (the Bardo realms) which it is now encountering:

Bar-do literally means 'between (Bar) two (do),' i.e. 'between two [states]' - the state between death and rebirth - and, therefore, 'intermediate' or 'transitional [state].' The translator, in certain instances, favoured 'Uncertain [state]' as its English rendering. It might also be rendered as 'Twilight [state].'¹⁰

The Transitional State of awareness consists of the perception of a kind of multidimensional vestibule providing access to many focused realities. For ease of visualisation, we might imagine the Bardo as crudely analogous to outer space which, although nominally "empty," offers the possibility of travel to an infinity of focused material worlds floating within that space: stars, planets, etc:

The Bardo is the intermediate state whence one may be reborn in this world in a human body, or in the ghost-world in ghost body, or in one of the paradise realms, such as the *deva-loka*, in a god body, or in the *asura-loka* in an *asura* body, or in one of the hells in a body capable of enduring suffering and incapable of dying there until the purgation is complete. Following death in a hell, or in any other of the after-human-death states, the normal process is to be reborn on earth as a human being. The True Goal, as the *Bardo Thodol* repeatedly explains, is beyond all states of embodiment, beyond all hells, worlds, and heavens, beyond the *Sangsara*, beyond Nature; it is called *Nirvana*.¹¹

It is important to emphasise that it is not necessary to die before one can visit the Bardo realms: those with shamanic abilities can do it at will:

The art of going out from the body, or of transferring the consciousness from the earth-plane to the after-death plane, or to any other plane, is still practiced, in Tibet, where it is known as *Phowa*.¹²

It is of great significance to realise that classical shamanic out-of-body techniques have been adapted by, and are being performed within, a predominantly Buddhist culture. Even the nomenclature is similar - Monroe's "Second Body" is described this way in the *Bardo Thodol*:

When on the second stage of the Bardo, one's body is of the nature of that called the shining illusory-body... This is the ethereal

counterpart of the physical body of the earth-plane, the “astral body” of Theosophy.¹³

So infinite are the dimensions accessible from the transitional state that the Tibetans have identified at least six different entry points:

There are six states of Bardo, namely: the natural state of Bardo while in the womb; the Bardo of the dream state; the Bardo of ecstatic equilibrium while in deep meditation; the Bardo of the moment of death; the Bardo [during the experiencing] of Reality; the Bardo of the inverse process of sangsaric existence. (i.e. the state wherein the Knower is seeking rebirth.)¹⁴

For our comparison with Monroe’s Locale I, the *Sidpa Bardo* is of immediate interest. This is the Bardo of “seeking rebirth,” though it seems to be more than just that, since Monroe has obviously been there while out of his body - i.e., far from dead in the physical world:

It’s a little disconcerting when you rush headlong toward a building or tree and go right through it... You never quite get over the physical-body conditioning that such things are solid... I still have the tendency to move in the direction of the door to leave, only to realise again the situation when my Second Body hand goes through the doorknob. Irritated with myself, I then dive through the wall rather than the door to reinforce my awareness of the Second State characteristics.¹⁵

Compare this with the Tibetan description of the *Sidpa Bardo*:

Thine intellect having been separated from its seat - is not a body of gross matter, so that now thou has the power* to go right through any rock-masses, hills, boulders, earth, houses, and Mt. Meru itself without being impeded... That, too, is an indication that thou art wandering in the *Sidpa Bardo*....¹⁶

Author’s note: This power, supernatural in the human world, is normal in the fourth-dimensional after-death state. In the human world, such powers, innate in all persons, can be developed and exercised through proficiency in yoga.

In comparing my own experience with these accounts, it is plausible to me that my initial OOB took place (for the most part anyway), in Locale I. Although my hand went right through the first entity I met there, there was certainly an analogue of “physical” contact with the second entity. This suggests that we may operate on “different wavelengths” within these larger dimensions, Bardos or Locales. I have always intuited that the first entity was physically deceased: her “aura” was very weak and sickly. Perhaps she was a “ghost” dreamily drifting around an apartment she’d lived in once: a Locale II being, wandering in Locale I.

Or something like that - all we can do is describe our empirical observations and measure them against analogous information recorded by others. In comparing many diverse, yet obviously parallel descriptions in the literature I have come to the conclusion that precise distinctions are very difficult to pin down: by definition, these realms of awareness do not conform to physical matter conditioning. Locales I and II probably interpenetrate at times, and the Bardo Thodol commentaries explicitly acknowledge that the Tibetan differentiation is culturally determined in content.

Rationally considered, each person's after-death experiences, as the Bardo Thodol teaching implies, are entirely dependent upon his or her own mental content. In other words, as explained above, the after-death state is very much like a dream state, and its dreams are the children of the mentality of the dreamer. *17*

Monroe's Locale II, containing both the Lower and Upper Worlds of shamanism, is a seemingly infinite hierarchy of worlds, realms, and states of being. He describes a layer in which "hungry ghosts" pull and bite at the disembodied explorer, and (because he is presumably unfamiliar with the shamanic differentiation between the Upper and Lower Worlds), speculates on what this place might be:

Could this be the borders of hell? It is very easy to conclude that a momentary penetration of this nearby layer would bring "demons" and "devils" to mind as the chief inhabitants. They seem subhuman, yet have an evident ability to act and think independently. *18*

He goes on to differentiate what can only be regarded as a location in the shamanic Upper World - a heaven if there ever was one:

To me, it was a place or condition of pure peace, yet exquisite emotion. It was as if you were floating in warm soft clouds where there is no up or down, where nothing exists as a separate piece of matter. The warmth is not merely around you, it is of you and through you. Your perception is dazzled and overwhelmed by the Perfect Environment... Each of the three times I went There, I did not return voluntarily. I came back sadly, reluctantly. Someone helped me return. Each time after I returned, I suffered intense nostalgia and loneliness for days... So great was (this sadness) that I have not tried to go There again. *19*

Unquestionably, the most important distinction that Monroe makes about Locale II is the observation that it is a realm where one's thoughts take on a kind of "physical" reality - "physical," at least, in the terms of the laws of that dimension.

Superseding all appears to be one prime law. Locale II is a state of being where that which we label thought is the wellspring of existence. It is the vital creative force that produces energy, assembles "matter" into form, and provides channels of perception

and communication. I suspect that the very self or soul in Locale II is no more than an organised vortex or warp in this fundamental. As you think, so you are.²⁰

The Bardo Thodol, composed a world away and centuries before Robert Monroe was born, makes a nearly identical observation:

This is highly important. Hence be extremely careful... Thy present intellect in the Intermediate State having no firm object whereon to depend, being of little weight and continuously in motion, whatever thought occurs to thee now - be it pious or impious - will wield great power.²¹

Monroe restates this even more forcefully in what is a quintessentially shamanic observation, for only an adept can consistently command the level of control referred to: an accomplishment as rare as the prevalence of shamans among us.

There seems to be nothing that thought *cannot* produce in this new-old other life. This invites a note of caution in large red letters: be absolutely sure of the results you desire, and constantly in control of the thoughts you engender.²²

Obviously, whether labeled Bardo, “Second State,” “Upper World,” “Lower World,” or “Locale,” Robert Monroe, the shamans and Tibetan Lamas are describing the same general phenomena within the same perceptual matrix. We will examine the implications of these and many other correlations later. For now, suffice it to say that the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how Monroe’s descriptions of his out-of- body journeys are consistent with data from other sources worldwide, both ancient and modern; how, although considered anomalous (at best), by mainstream psychology, the OOB phenomenon reveals a fundamental reality buried within the awareness of every one of us. This reality is so basic to our human-beingness, that the general cultural denial of it, worldwide, is a matter of extraordinary significance: another topic we will explore in detail later on.

Monroe’s second book, *Far Journeys*, appeared eight years after his first, and is significantly different in conception and content: in it we see a fully accomplished shaman entering deeper realms of experience, in which Locale II becomes differentiated into discrete levels which have much in common with the ancient Gnostic conception of reality. The shamanic cosmos has not been abandoned: far from it - it has become considerably more sophisticated. We will examine these themes in the next chapter.

Footnotes:

1. Fox, Oliver (1962). *Astral Projection: A Record of Out-of-the-Body Experiences*, University Books, New Hyde Park, NY, pp. 34-35
2. DeKorne, Jim (1994). *Psychedelic Shamanism*, Loompanics, Port Townsend, WA, pg 7
3. Monroe, Robert A. (1977). *Journeys Out Of The Body*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, NY, pg 179
4. Walsh, Roger (1990). "Shamanic cosmology: a psychological examination of the shaman's worldview," *ReVision*, Vol. 13, No 2, pg 86
5. Monroe, op cit, pg 60
6. Ibid, pg 73
7. Ibid, pg 94
8. Halifax, Joan (1990). "The shaman's initiation," *ReVision*, Vol 13, No 2, pg 55
9. Eliade, Mircea (1964). *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, pg 434
10. Evans-Wentz, W.Y. (1960). *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Oxford University Press, NY, pg 28
11. Ibid, pg xxxiii; 12. Ibid, pg xiii; 13. Ibid, pg 100; 14. Ibid, pg 102
15. Monroe, op cit, pg 63
16. Evans-Wentz, op cit, pg 158
17. Ibid, pg 34
18. Monroe, op cit, pg 121
19. Ibid, pg 74; 20. Ibid.
21. Evans-Wentz, op cit, pg 172
22. Monroe, op cit, pg 183

The above chapter, excerpted from the author's work in progress called *The Structure of Reality*, is titled 'Hyperspace: The Final Frontier'. Jim DeKorne is the author of *Psychedelic Shamanism: The Cultivation, Preparation, and Shamanic Use of Psychotropic Plants* (ISBN: 0-9666932-5-6), available via mail order from Polyester Books in Melbourne, Tel: (03) 94195223 or on the Internet through www.loompanics.com. Interested publishers can contact Jim DeKorne via *New Dawn* at editor@newdawnmagazine.com