

Personal Consciousness Development in the Network

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Some two years ago I suggested at a Consciousness Group meeting, as a result of a feeling that we could hardly talk about and model other types of consciousness without first experiencing them for ourselves, that members might like to work on their own consciousness by developing an altered state of consciousness (ASC). I suggested that we should start on lucid dreaming as apparently the easiest. Two members joined me right away. One of them has had success, the other I have not heard of since. Since then various other members have joined the sub-group and we now have a list of some thirty-five. Mike Brown kindly agreed to be the Technical Secretary and I agreed to write a Position Paper. (We now have a Lucid Dreaming subgroup and a Modelling subgroup of the Consciousness Group.)

Since that day a number of members of that group have had success and some have informed me of it. One of them has had a lucid dream of hers dramatized on TV. The usual time taken to develop the first one has been about three months. The position now is that I rarely hear from most of the members on the list and I can only assume that they have found it too difficult to sustain their practice for long enough to achieve success. I should be most grateful if all those members who have not been in touch for a long time would let me know whether they have given up. It would also be most helpful if later members (a number volunteered to join at the last Annual Gathering) would let me know whether they are still trying. Needless to say, something very worth while and, in my case at least, enormously exciting and significant, takes a while. But we need some details for the records of exactly what was done, and what occurred or did not occur. We can learn from failures as well as successes.

Development of further ASCs

The Network Council has now accepted a suggestion that we should expand our work on consciousness and has approved my writing this article suggesting how we might do it. Di Clift (whose lucid dream was dramatized on TV) suggested that some members in Local Groups might like to choose one type of ASC and work together on it, comparing notes as they went at the group meetings. She has started such a group in the Guildford Local Centre. I would be glad to write a Position Paper for each of the ASCs for which we had such volunteers. Would local convenors like to suggest this and let me know of any takers? Of course members who do not belong to a Local Group need not feel excluded and they might work on their own, corresponding as they wished with any Local Group ASC secretary interested in the same ASC, or with me.

States of consciousness

Here is a list of some states of consciousness.

Normal daily consciousness (the 'consensus trance' in which most of us spend our days).

Hypnagogic and hypnopompic states (those fascinating states - much the same - just before entering and just after leaving sleep). This is probably the state in which R.L. Stevenson was helped by his 'brownies' to write his stories. This creative state should be a most interesting state to develop and how to do so is well understood. It has also been suggested that it facilitates telepathy and other ESP. It might also be helpful in producing an OBE.

Normal dreaming (most of our dreams appear to be forgotten, and it would be helpful if we had members of the Network who would learn clearly and consistently to remember their dreams so that research could begin).

Lucid dreaming (which we have already considered in more than one article and in a Position Paper).

Hypnotic trance (probably the same as a mediumistic trance and, in the form of self-hypnosis, the same as a meditational trance). The mesmeric trance appears to be very different from the hypnotic trance and much more powerful' in that wide-ranging phenomena impossible to obtain with the hypnotic trance appear to have been possible and these need to be repeated and studied.

Out-of-body experience (like an early stage of the near-death experience). Some (the proportion has never been stated) of the people taking courses in the Monroe Institute appear to be able to develop the OBE using the 'binaural beats' which are a feature of the Monroe tapes. Perhaps there are such people in the Network willing to undertake some research. Others might be interested and willing to take a Monroe course and tell us of any results. There are other ways of helping to achieve an OBE which might also be studied with enough participants.

Meditation. A great deal remains to be learned about meditation. There are many different types and much to learn. The widest practised in the west is probably Transcendental Meditation and for those not practising meditation it might be a good one for a start as it tends to have a 'scientific' flavour.

Shamanic journeying, probably the most ancient item in this list, appears to have similarities to some of the above. We have relevant experience in the Network and there is a large literature. (My own next efforts will be in this direction.)

Possible hazards

Some of the above states are obviously free of hazards. Some may involve hazards, but they still need to be developed in order to learn about them. I had no problems when I produced my OBEs but I have heard of some who had. Members who would like to work on the OBE would obviously proceed carefully with support from the rest of us. It is most important to learn about this as so many members of the population in general have the experience spontaneously, are terrified, and receive no help at all from the medical or psychiatric professions to whom they naturally turn. Many people who write to me about their OBEs describe a very loud roaring noise like a hurricane - yet I heard nothing like this. We really should find out if we can what this is and why it occurs sometimes.

The facts of experience needed for modelling

Scientific facts are no more and no less than the experiences of rational people and it is with these facts that we must work in our modelling (theorizing) of the various ASCs.

Models we already have

The following is a rough list of models we already have in terms of which people explain (which is the same as describe) their experiences.

Realism (the normal' philosophy of normal science and almost useless for modelling the paranormal (by definition) and useless for modelling consciousness).

Behaviourism (really a philosophy based on realism and scarcely worth consideration).

Epiphenomenalism (perhaps also hardly worth consideration)

(Quantum) Idealism. (I am very attracted to this!)

Theosophical 'layer cake' model (originally - roughly - from Hindu and Buddhist sources). Most esoteric schools appear to have uncritically accepted this model and to be unaware of existing scientific evidence which falsifies some of it.

Experiments already carried out to test the latter model

The Theosophical Research Centre Science Group carried out tests for some years and showed (and published) scientific evidence appearing to indicate clearly that the so-called etheric double (on which most healers consider they are working), and the astral body, do not occupy physical space. (This has important implications for healers, many of whom consider that they can both feel the 'etheric double' - in physical space - and 'recharge it with energy' - prana, qi. The practice of Reiki has relevance here.)

Reports back

The results of all this research (when there is some to report) might be reported back to the membership in general in Study Days, for discussion and constructive criticism of it. It should perhaps then be followed by Network Proceedings to let the rest of the scientific world know about it. Alternatively, the Society for Psychical Research, with whom we have collaborated, already has journal, proceedings and a refereeing procedure set up.

Ethical committee

Council considered that there would not normally be a need for an ethical committee as the subjects for these experiments would be ourselves. However, if and when ethical matters arose the Council itself could act as an ethical committee.

Final remarks

When we have a minimum of two members of each subgroup who have studied and experienced a particular type of consciousness and can go into it reasonably reliably then experiments can start on the basis of which modelling can take place. It is likely that some types of achievable ASCs can be used for valuable experiments that will lead, in addition to better representational models, to better and more reliable and detailed evidence for human survival of bodily death. Bereavement is probably the cause of the majority of human suffering much of which could consequently be greatly reduced (especially for those who prefer scientific evidence to religious faith).