

**THROUGH THE DOORWAYS OF CHANGE:
A PHILOSOPHER'S INNER VOYAGE CONTINUES**

Joseph M. Felser

Almost exactly a year to the day after attending the famed Gateway Voyage program at The Monroe Institute (TMI) in August of 2000, (Felser, 2000), I found myself embarking on the orientation session of the Lifeline, a TMI graduate program. Lifeline proved to be every bit as powerful an experience as my Gateway was (if not more so). Ten days following my completion of the program, as I was still coping with the challenges of re-entry into everyday life, I was working in my college office in Brooklyn, New York when the first of the hijacked airliners struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center. For me, as I know for many, nothing has been quite the same ever since that awful day.

Although I do not think there is any direct link between my two intensely private experiences at TMI and the ghastly, traumatic public events of September 11, it is now impossible for me to see the former except from the perspective of the latter. In hindsight, there may in fact have been certain signs that the collective psyche was being prepared for the coming shock, much as certain sensitives in the past have had premonitions of presidential assassinations or other dark events of a possible future. Thus this very "preparation," if real, hints at the existence of an order or dimension that defies our "common sense" notions of time and space as well as our "scientific" theories of reality. I believe that it is only a direct experience of the living source of this defiance that holds out the promise of freeing us from the mechanical death-grip of old hatreds and the outdated religious and political ideologies that all too often inspire and inflame them. What follows is an interim report of some of my own recent experiences of this source.

STRANGE INTERREGNUM

After the ecstatic climax of my week at the Gateway Voyage in August of 2000, I returned to the rigors of my demanding teaching schedule at a community college and the manifold tasks of daily life. Wood has to be chopped and water carried, after all. Often I was too tired to meditate and, in TMI parlance, "clicked out" (that is, went unconscious or fell asleep) during my daily session. I was back wandering in the desert, feeling frustrated and parched.

A psychic friend suggested that the oasis I had experienced in Virginia had been a mere mirage. I strongly rejected his suggestion, even though I could not fully articulate my reasons. I knew the “gateway” had indeed been opened for me in a new way, one I could not yet even describe, let alone understand. As I struggled with my doubts and questions, I greatly benefited from the wisdom of another friend who kindly advised me, as she gently put it, not to “push the river.” I had to learn (and continually relearn) how to accept the natural ebb and flow of the experiential tides.

At the same time, what I have come to regard as perfectly “normal” events—such as synchronicities and powerful dreams—continued to manifest spontaneously according to their own peculiar schedule and logic. And, in all honesty, what else can one do, in the end, except bear witness to the majesty of nature’s wonders as they occur?

There were at least three episodes during the year in between my visits to TMI that are worthy of note. The first occurred as I was driving home from work one afternoon on the crowded expressway. I was in a particularly despondent mood and, quite uncharacteristically, asked if I might receive some sort of sign of encouragement.

Just then I happened to glance down at the rear license plate on the vehicle directly in front of me, a black SUV. (We were doing a slow crawl in heavy traffic, so I had no trouble reading the plate.) Actually, it was not the plate itself, but rather, the bracket surrounding the plate advertising the auto dealership, that caught my attention.

“We Care,” was the phrase printed on the top part of the frame. On the lower edge of the frame was printed, in bold letters, the name of the local dealership where the driver evidently purchased the vehicle: **MONROE**.

Ok, I thought, as I chuckled to myself, not too shabby a demonstration, Bob! That neat little synchronicity definitely lifted my sagging spirits, at least temporarily.

Another episode, or rather series of episodes, concerned a repeated warning that haunted me for months, and would later come to seem all too eerily prescient. On several occasions during meditation I received a message of some urgency: “Hurry, there’s little time.” In one instance, a figure I recognized as a guide led me into a dark cave as he uttered this disturbing phrase. During another meditation, an Asian-looking man handed me a scroll, which he said I could read later. Then an elderly Native American woman I recognized from my Gateway

experience took my hand and repeated the familiar warning. Little time for what? I began to wonder if this might be a reference to an imminent death, perhaps to my own. So I asked the old woman if this was the case.

“No, not *your* death,” the old grandmother reassured me.

But the manner of her reply indicated to me that death was indeed an issue, even if it was not my own. Something told me that it might be the deaths of many individuals for which I was somehow being prepared. I wrote in my journal (in October of 2000): “I had the sense that it wasn’t a [single] person dying, something much larger, or bigger, an event or something.” As to what this event might be, I hadn’t a single clue.

Later that same night, however, I awoke around 3 a.m., unable to sleep. I decided to see if I could indeed read the scroll given to me earlier, so I imagined myself unfurling it. There I read three statements, printed in this way:

The aim of existence is EXPANSION.

EXPANSION means increase of CONSCIOUSNESS.

CONSCIOUSNESS is awareness of ENERGY.

At the time, I did not discern any connection between this metaphysical teaching of the scroll and the old woman’s grave warning. Now, however, in the shadow of subsequent events, its message reads to me as an affirmation that the true purpose of existence cannot be undermined. Not even by ignorant fanatics who contract their awareness to the point of becoming blind and indifferent to the suffering they consciously cause and celebrate.

A third significant episode was a dream in which I saw several turtles (minus their shells, it so happened) and a tiny lizard interacting in a rocky, southwestern-looking landscape. One of the turtles tried to catch the lizard, but the lizard was fast and outran the turtle. Although I could think of various possible psychological interpretations of this little dream, no reading or set of associations “clicked.” In fact, the dream imagery felt unrelated to anything distinctly personal.

Then, several days later, “out of the blue” I happened to pick up a book that had lain unread on my bookshelves for years: *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions*, by the Sioux holy man John Fire (Lame Deer) and the

writer Richard Erdoes. I was enjoying the book immensely when I came across the following passage, where Lame Deer describes some of the traditional child-rearing practices of his people:

Before the child arrived a grandmother always made two little doll-like forms in the shape of a turtle or a lizard. The lizard, *manitukala*, is a little guardian spirit. It lives on nothing almost. It gets its moisture just from the dampness of the earth. *They are very fast and hard to kill* [italics mine]. You cut a leg or tail off and this little creature grows another one. The turtle, too, is very tough. These little animals stand for strength and long life. For this reason they are chosen to protect a baby against evil spirits. (Lame Deer & Erdoes, 1972, p. 135)

I have often had the synchronistic experience of “just happening” to come across something in a book that answered a question I had been asking myself—an instance of what Arthur Koestler called “the library angel” (Felser, 1995). But in this case I was especially impressed because the Native American association had a special meaning to me. For years I have had significant dreams and other exceptional experiences relating to or involving Indians and those animal figures, such as eagles and bears, that played such a large role in native rituals and animistic beliefs. Only recently in my meditations I had encountered an inner guide type figure who also happened to be an Indian. I did not know how all of these experiences fit together, or what they meant. Nor did I entirely trust my own perception of this new “guide,” thinking that his appearance might just be the result of wishful thinking or an outgrowth of my respect for native peoples and their philosophies. I did not want to insult these same peoples by appearing to become an Indian “wannabe,” or by seeming to pretend to a detailed knowledge of their ways that I did not, in fact, possess.

Nevertheless, despite my own (I think not unhealthy) left-brained skepticism, cultural sensitivities, and reticence to draw what might have been emotionally satisfying conclusions, I could not deny the impact of this “coincidence” involving my dream and the Lame Deer book. The “Indian connection” had again been made, by my willing or no. My dream of the turtles without shells and the quick-footed lizard now spoke to me about the necessary balance between vulnerability and strength. The turtle, without his shell, was unprotected, yet still

ablaze with the life force. He went after his prey. The tiny lizard, though, was as quick and resourceful as ever. These were qualities to be prized and cultivated, whatever their origin. If these were my guardians, I was in good hands.

ON TO *LIFELINE*

In April of 2001, I received a renewal of my modest research grant from the university faculty union and decided on my own to return to TMI for another program in order to study firsthand the states of consciousness I was interested in writing about. My original intention was to enroll in the Guidelines program, but, much to my dismay, Guidelines was not being offered during the week in late August when I could attend. Instead, with the institute's support, and with TMI Program Director Darlene Miller's encouragement, I signed up for the Lifeline program, which I had read about in Bob Monroe's last book, *Ultimate Journey* (1994), published about a year before his death.

Shortly after signing up for Lifeline, I had a startlingly vivid dream that seemed to reflect my expectations and understanding of the aims of the program:

In my dream I am observing a grieving man and his young daughter riding in silence together on a subway car. The little girl is softly crying, obviously beside herself with grief over the recent death of her mother. The man, though somewhat distraught, seems resigned, but not devastated, over his wife's death. Then the scene shifts as I watch the pair enter a coffee shop and take seats opposite each other on two comfortable couches. The little girl curls up on the sofa and quickly falls asleep. There is an air of expectancy as an attractive woman makes her entrance into the room. She walks over to the man and they embrace warmly. I know that this is his dead wife, and that he was expecting to meet her there. As they converse pleasantly, I begin to wonder if contact between the living and the "dead" can be so effortless and natural. This has a powerful emotional effect, as I begin to think about my own lost loved ones.

As Monroe described his experience in *Ultimate Journey*, the genesis of the Lifeline program lay in large part in his intention to purchase what he referred to, with mordant wit, as "death insurance." His beloved wife Nancy was ill with cancer and he wanted to insure his ability to make contact with her once she made her final transition from her physical body. At the same time, he was experiencing a sudden, dramatic, and somewhat puzzling

number of changes in his daily out-of-body adventures. For one, some of his most familiar nonphysical guides and friends simply vanished, leaving him stunned and grief-stricken. For another, he seemed to be re-living out-of-body episodes from his past adventures, but from distinctly new and different points of view.

For example, in one episode from his early explorations in the 1960s, he had experienced an apparent past life as a dead soldier on an ancient battlefield. The warrior had to be convinced by a mysterious guide that he was, in fact, dead and inhabiting a nonphysical energy form that could no longer interact with his physical enemies still battling away. But now, in reliving this same event from a different vantage point, he, Monroe was the “mysterious guide” helping the poor, confused dead soldier to accept the reality of his condition, and the Bob Monroe of 1968 to accept that this dead soldier was a past incarnation of his. Monroe concluded that his present self had been reaching back, not only to the Bob Monroe of the 1960s, but to all his other incarnations, in an effort to increase their awareness of their true identity and purpose, and to gather together all the fragments of his larger identity. In other words, his “guides” were actually future, wiser versions of himself, and now that he had become that self, the “guides” had “vanished.”

This realization led Monroe to reformulate his ideas about time and the self, and also to extend his explorations into new territories of the nonphysical realms, or, what in TMI parlance are dubbed “Focus Levels” of consciousness. Monroe, in effect, was rediscovering for himself the process tribal shamans refer to as “soul retrieval.” Some of the personalities he encountered and retrieved in these new territories proved to be aspects or versions of himself, while others were merely confused individuals who did not realize that they were, in fact, deceased.

The new institute program that was developed as a result of Monroe’s expanded perspective (and the confirmation by others of these new insights) was dubbed Lifeline. New Focus Levels were identified and demonstrated to be accessible via training with Hemi-Sync, the patented binaural beat audio technology process developed by TMI. In the literature given to program participants, the program’s aims are outlined as follows:

Lifeline is a multi-faceted graduate program which provides access to states of consciousness beyond those experienced in the Gateway Voyage and Guidelines programs. Its primary emphasis is one of service—service to

those here in physical matter reality and service to those There who have made their transitions from the physical and who may benefit from assistance.

Service here is offered through gaining familiarity with and becoming adept at sending healing energy to those who request it.

Service There is accomplished through becoming knowledgeable about Focus Levels 23 through 27. Focus 23 is often perceived as an area in which certain souls, for a variety of reasons, may become “stuck” following their transitions from physical life. Lifeline participants learn to comfortably make contact with such souls and offer assistance to help them move to Focus 27, the area Bob Monroe (1994) described in *Ultimate Journey* as the Park, or Reception Center, or Way Station. Upon arrival in Focus 27, they are met by loved ones and guides who direct them to the specific areas of the Reception Center most appropriate for their next stages of development.

Participants also are given the opportunity within this program to explore Focus Levels 24, 25, and 26 (the Belief System Territories) and to investigate facets of their own current beliefs and structures for operating within the world. Questions that arise often take the form of “What is my most limiting belief?” and “How do my present beliefs support me in exploring as freely and fully as I would like?”

Perhaps the most significant impact of this week, however, comes from the personal revelations that frequently evolve from the “rescue and retrieval” activities. Beyond the considerable satisfactions of helping others move forward, many participants realize that at the same time they are also retrieving lost parts or fragments of themselves, and thus they are coming into more wholeness, completion, and balance.

I would not be disappointed. There were indeed many personal revelations to absorb and considerable satisfactions to be enjoyed during my week at Lifeline, which was held at the Roberts Mountain Retreat, the former mountaintop home of Bob and Nancy Monroe that was converted into institute facilities after their deaths. But before I describe these specific episodes, I want to briefly mention an important overarching issue that comes up time and again in all my inner explorations.

As the institute’s program literature subtly intimates, one of the great challenges of this kind of work is the ability to balance an open receptivity to experience as it unfolds in its own way with a sophisticated critical intelligence. One must be able to differentiate between literal and symbolic meanings in the imagery presented in

the various states of consciousness, and thus master the techniques of what Bob Monroe called nonverbal communication (NVC). This power of discrimination is also closely tied to an appreciation of the ways in which our expectations, needs, beliefs, and desires interact with, and help to mold, our experience of the environments and entities encountered in the various Focus Levels. The categories of subject and object, along with those of figurative and literal, are thus engaged in an elaborate, intimate dance.

As an example, I will cite what I found to be one of the most revealing episodes of the entire week. It involved two members of our group, Geoff and Ann. Before one of our tape sessions (in which individuals lie down in isolation booths called CHEC units to receive the audio signals that permit access to the various Focus Levels), Geoff decided that he would try to meet up with Ann, nonphysically, to give her a specific message. He wanted to see if she would subsequently recall the communication, thereby providing some objective (or at least intersubjective) validation to their joint experience. (This technique is sometimes called “partnered exploring.”)

It turned out that Geoff did indeed experience himself meeting up with Ann. And Ann, in turn, accurately remembered the message afterward—albeit with a humorous twist. As Ann reported during our debriefing session, the content of the communication was exactly as Geoff had delivered it. Only she had experienced the message as coming from a trusted guide figure long familiar to her from her previous explorations—a woman in a blue dress! At hearing this we all had a good laugh at Geoff’s (red-faced) expense.

This was most instructive to me, and I think to the group as a whole. For we all suddenly realized the degree to which we must be alert to the complex and subtle ways in which our thoughts shape our reality. And, we must also become ultrasensitive to the role of our own limiting beliefs—one of the key aims of the Lifeline program. As a case in point, when I first heard this story, I was tempted to conclude that Ann must have been more comfortable with this message coming from the source of her trusted guide rather than Geoff—a relative stranger—so she projected a symbolic overlay of her guide onto Geoff. I was flabbergasted to realize that I have a limiting belief stealthily operating here. Other possibilities present themselves when we consider that we may be unaware of the nature and extent of our true identity. For example, what if Ann’s guide, The Woman in the Blue Dress, unbeknownst to Geoff, is a nonphysical aspect of himself that he needs to recognize and reclaim? Rather, perhaps Ann accurately perceived the source of the message, and it

was Geoff's perceptions that needed to be, shall we say, redressed? Who, then, is projecting what onto whom?

BELIEFS, LIMITING AND OTHERWISE

The splendid mountain setting of the Lifeline was ideally suited to the exploration of just these sorts of tantalizing questions. I knew this as soon as I drove my car past TMI's Nancy Penn Center (where I'd done my Gateway the previous August) and on up the increasingly steep, narrow, and dusty dirt road to the summit of Roberts Mountain. The views from Roberts Mountain Retreat (RMR) were magnificent. Open vistas outward and inward, I thought, as I filled my lungs with country air. The wave of apprehension whose sudden visit the day before had shocked me now dissipated like a morning fog burned off by the sun's rays. The old fear response had been a reflex, a habit. Now I saw that clearly.

As soon as I arrived at RMR, I was given the tour of the main house and facilities. I was shown my CHEC unit (for Controlled Holistic Environmental Chamber) in my suite in the newly built retreat annex. It was there, in what is basically a comfortable isolation chamber shaped like a Pullman berth, that I would be spending most of my time over the coming week, listening to the Hemi-Sync tapes and sleeping. As I looked about the comfortable and cozy room and imbibed the soothing strains of Metamusic being piped over the loudspeakers of my CHEC unit, a warm feeling of gratitude and satisfaction washed over me. I was indeed happy to be back.

Shortly thereafter, other members of the group began to check in. There were fourteen in all, plus two veteran trainers, John and Carol. Folks had come from places as far away as Spain and Argentina, California and Alaska. Everyone had done Gateway, and some had participated in several TMI programs. Most seemed to be comfortable with their own exceptional experiences, viewing them as entirely normal and expected. As I'd come to expect, it was a diverse group in terms of age (from newlyweds to newly retired), gender (exactly 50% each), and professional background (the medical, legal, social service, real estate, and technology professions, among others, were represented).

Much to my own surprise, I experienced an almost instantaneous rapport with all the members of the group. Although I am usually not too good when it comes to remembering names, I astonished myself by immediately

and effortlessly recalling each and every individual's name as soon as I'd heard it but once. This was most unique and, I felt, augured well for the week to come.

The introductory tape sessions were given over to refreshing and reinforcing our experience with the distinct states of consciousness we were all familiar with from the Gateway, if not from other TMI programs and our daily meditation practice. In TMI parlance, we were "resetting" the Focus Levels, all the way from Focus 10 (mind awake, body asleep) and Focus 12 (the state of expanded awareness), to Focus 15 (the timeless void), and on to Focus 21 (the interface with energy systems outside space-time). This is referred to as "resetting" as TMI engineers (Atwater, 1992; 1993; 2001) claim that a robust entrainment of brainwave patterns occurs with repeated exposure to Hemi-Sync signals.

I found it easy to enter into the requisite states of deep relaxation and mental alertness. Nothing dramatic occurred during these sessions, as I was well familiar with these focus levels. However, the depth of the states and the rapidity with which I was able to enter into them was noticeably enhanced. One of the vivid images from these early sessions that made an impression was a mysterious axe-wielding figure in a hooded robe. I interpreted him as a sign that I was successfully cutting myself off from the distractions of everyday life and would be able to concentrate on the process.

As the program literature informed us, one of the aims of Lifeline is to introduce participants to the experience and management of energies that may be used for healing. In an early tape exercise, we were asked to imagine an energy bar of light power. Notably, my bar refused to obey the commandments of my instructed visualization and instead insisted upon retaining another form: that of a glowing ball surrounded by a sparkling, hourglass-shaped energy field. Finally, in its own time, the shape duly resolved itself into that of a glowing bar. So much for the thought that I was "making it all up"! Jung, I suppose, would blithely call this "the autonomy of the unconscious." But that hardly demystifies the mysterious and magical way in which the inner imagination is not a mere fantasy but a gateway to something real, something we do not make, yet is our own. This is the paradoxical place where we encounter the "I" that is I, yet not-I.

The healing energies to which we were introduced are real indeed. Of this I have no doubt. During a subsequent exercise that took place in the meeting room of the log cabin, we were asked to partner up with

another member of the group and act as both a giver and receiver of this energy. In both cases I experienced intense sensations of heat in my midsection, particularly when sending these energies to Sarah, my partner. Sarah, too, noticed this phenomenon. I removed my sweater. We both joked about “hot flashes.”

Another interesting and unexpected phenomenon occurred during the reset of Focus 12. Last year, at Gateway, I had signed up for my first-ever massage. Sharon, the massage therapist, told me that during the massage I might find specific images popping up as she worked, particularly if I had certain “blockages.” And at one point, as Sharon massaged my right leg, which had been cramping during several of the tape sessions, I caught a brief glimpse of what I took to be prehistoric proto-humans huddling inside a dark cavern. Now, during the reset of Focus 12, I momentarily seemed to be back in that cave with a group of primitive, almost ape-like humanoid creatures. Suddenly a glowing red sphere appeared in their midst. They seemed afraid and backed away from the sphere. Then the scene vanished. I still did not know what it meant, or why I saw it, but the most surprising thing was encountering what I felt certain was the same scene a year later. Oddly, I felt akin to one member of the humanoid group, and also with the glowing ball of light of which they were all so afraid. But beyond this, I am still in the dark.

The reset of Focus 15, which I usually experience as a quiet, still place where time becomes plastic or “loopy,” promised to be an uneventful “click out”—my first at Lifeline. But after drifting off, I became aware again. I had the impression of wintertime and of hovering above a clearing of trees, watching through the bare branches as a group of people walked through the woods from what I knew to be a funeral. Next, I distinctly heard the word “Hon” (as in, short for the endearment “Honey”) uttered in my right ear by a female voice. Somehow I knew that this voice was “my” wife’s, that is, the wife of the man who was being buried. (I should add here that my wife in this focus level never calls me “Hon”!) I had the sense that I was watching my own funeral from another life. I, or rather this man, did not feel sad, but rather somewhat guilty about leaving his wife.

Was this vision just a dramatization of the guilt I was experiencing in leaving my “real” wife home alone, with dog and house, so I could spend a week in Virginia happily jumping from one Focus Level to another? Well, why couldn’t it have been the reverse? Perhaps my present guilt sensitized me to an awareness of, or a “bleed-through” from, some other, adjacent existence, one that resonated with my present feelings. (I put it this way

instead of in the usual linear, past-life or reincarnational terms because I suspect that psychics like Jane Roberts, 1972, and remote viewers like Joe McMoneagle, 1993, are right, and that everything that can happen does happen. simultaneously, in the infinite sea of a “spacious present.” Thus, like these two sensitives, I am not inclined to accept traditional ideas of karma, etc.) I could not prove that the latter was true, of course. But then neither could I prove that it was merely a psychological fantasy.

Did I need to prove something, if only to myself? I began to wonder about this. Ask and you shall receive? OK, I was asking. If I wasn't “just” imagining these things, I reasoned, then there must be some way of achieving what researcher Charles Tart might call “state-specific evidence,” or something suggestive of shared mutual experience of the kind Tart (1972) himself reported in his well-known experiments with mutual hypnosis. Obtaining some sort of confirmation, at least for myself, became a priority.

One evening at dinner I was chatting amiably with Janet, a very sweet and quiet woman who, I learned, was both an avid out-of-body experiencer and a Reiki practitioner. Suddenly her eyes took on an added intensity and glow.

“Do you mind if I ask you a question,” she said, changing the subject.

“No, not at all,” I replied.

“Do you have any special relationship to American Indians?” Janet inquired casually.

This made me laugh out loud. “Do I!” I exclaimed. “Lately it seems I can't get interested in reading anything unless it's about Indians.”

Which was the truth. But I did not mention my other experiences involving Native Americans, or the Indian “guide” (and his female companion) I sometimes envisaged during my meditations. It sounded too hokey or “New Agey,” even to my own ears.

“That makes sense,” Janet added. “Because you have a guide figure, an Indian, and he's standing right next to you, right there,” she stated matter-of-factly, looking over and nodding in the direction of my right shoulder.

I was stunned. I excitedly explained about my own vision of the Indian and the young dark-haired woman carrying the basket I took to be his daughter.

“I don’t see the daughter,” Janet stated emphatically. “But the man is definitely there, very strong. He’s forty-ish, lean, and wears one of those chest plates.”

To prove my interest to Janet (and to help reinforce her confidence in her own intuitive abilities), after dinner I showed her a treasured object that I’d brought with me on the trip, “for good luck.” It was a plains-style Indian necklace made for me several years ago by the Oglala Sioux teacher and writer, Ed McGaa (Eagle Man). Janet admired the workmanship and thanked me for the confirmation, which she appreciated.

For the first time, I had received at least a partial confirmation of my own perceptions. This helped my self-confidence and enabled me to see that it was possible to build trust in my abilities. If I was to wield Occam’s razor and be parsimonious in my explanation, I could deem it a “coincidence.” But this really wouldn’t explain anything at all. It wasn’t as if Janet was going around telling everyone that they had an Indian guide. Why had it been me? Or, perhaps Janet had telepathically picked up on my interests and subconsciously fed them back to me. But telepathy would surely mean, to paraphrase the words of the TMI affirmation, that “we are more than our physical bodies,” and that we know more than what we say our physical senses can tell us. No matter which way I looked at it, I could begin to feel the claustrophobic “tinker toy” view of reality that I normally fall back into as a matter of mental habit begin to loosen up and not quite fit.

Another key insight came when as a group we did a (non-tape) belief exercise in the cabin. We were asked to entertain the possibility that what we have in our lives at present is but a reflection of what we believe, both positively and negatively, about life and ourselves. The trainers then asked us to use our nondominant hand in order to draw two pictures. One image was to depict our most limiting belief, or what we felt was our deepest wound. The other was to represent our most fruitful belief or our greatest virtue.

With crayon awkwardly cupped in my left hand, I found myself drawing a broken circle. I analyzed this as an expression of my deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and incompleteness. Next I sketched a tall vibrant evergreen, which seemed to symbolize some of the qualities I value most: endurance, growth, and sensitivity. Our exercise partner was to examine our pictures and give us their own interpretation. As my partner Miri focused on my broken circle, it suddenly struck me that my sketch could also be viewed as a cracked, abandoned egg-shell. So where was the new hatchling? Right here, of course, where else? Thus, I suddenly recognized that my wound

could also be viewed as a womb in which the very qualities I prized most had been incubated. Like the old stories promise, where you stumble you will find your greatest treasure. But could I really accept the change of perspective that this insight offered?

This is not easy. Even now, as I recall this lesson, I am mindful of what remote viewer (and teacher of remote viewing) Joe McMoneagle (1993) identifies as the key challenge to the process of re-visioning one's world. One must muster the courage to walk through what he calls "the doorways of change"

I've had numerous individuals tell me that change was the least likely problem with which they would have to deal [in learning the skills of remote viewing]. They assured me of this. But it proves to be the single greatest hang-up. There are many people I've met who consider themselves to be very close to the doorways of change. Most are metaphysically inclined. They are interested in the pursuit of knowledge and well-versed in the study of the philosophic cause or underlying nature of things. However, that doesn't mean they are willing to give up or alter their extant perception of how or why things work. (p. 103)

Am I ready to walk through the portal, or am I content to loiter at its threshold? Lifeline gave me plenty of motivation to face the reasons why I might still be resisting change. Was I afraid of losing intellectual "respectability"? Perhaps this was why I had asked for confirmation, even if only unconsciously, at the outset of the program. And although it took me a while to realize or admit it, the confirmations began to pile up.

THREE CASES SUGGESTIVE OF SOMETHING

There were several outstanding episodes that provided solid food for thought. No doubt a determined skeptic could still poke sufficient holes in these examples. Yet their cumulative impact drew me closer than ever to the doorway of change. There were other experiences at Lifeline that I could mention (Felser, 2002), but I'll stick to these three.

Ari's Wall

One episode involved a member of the group named Ari (short for the Hebrew, Ariel). It often seemed as though Ari's considerably detailed experiences during the tape exercises were almost totally unlike what anyone else had reported. They bore little resemblance to the Focus Levels as others were describing them. It was as if everyone else had been enjoying a cool swim in the lake, and Ari would come back and complain about how hot and dry it had been in the desert. This didn't faze Ari, an iconoclastic former investment banker turned physical therapist. Nor did it trouble the trainers, who encouraged him to continue his solo flights to wherever he was venturing.

One of the places Ari kept revisiting became so well known to the group that it acquired the moniker of "Ari's wall." He described the wall only vaguely, and confessed his deep puzzlement about its nature and purpose. But he kept investigating.

Then, during one of our tape exercises, I was momentarily presented with the image of a stone structure. At first, I was disoriented and believed I was viewing the structure from a strange angle up in the air. But then I realized that the structure itself was angled, as if I was viewing a section of the side of a pyramid. I noticed intricate, serpentine-like designs or hieroglyphics etched onto the surface of the wall. Their vibrant reddish-maroon color stood out against the sandy brown patina of the stone.

"That's Ari's wall!" I shouted mentally as the scene abruptly faded out. I don't know how I knew this, but I was certain that I was right.

"I think I saw your wall," I excitedly told Ari as we settled in for the breakout session in the main house following the conclusion of the tape exercise.

As he listened to my description, Ari nodded while grinning broadly. "That's it," he replied. Then he described his latest encounter with the mysterious wall, which he now understood was not an obstruction preventing him from exploring, but rather, a mystery he was meant to puzzle over and learn about as he progressed. Ari and I both sensed a connection between us, a feeling that would be reinforced during the week at Lifeline.

Carol's Fountain

One of the new Focus Levels to which we were introduced at Lifeline was Focus 27, known as The Park. As the name suggests, this area is usually experienced as a quasiphysical environment replete with green lawns, benches, pavilions or buildings, and bustling activity. The Park is a waiting area, assembly point, and healing center for nonphysical humans to which the newly retrieved are usually brought. Other family members or guides typically greet and begin to orient new arrivals. Bob Monroe believed that The Park is a consensus reality, being the collective creation of the thoughts and desires of certain humans who sought to provide for others a comfortable and peaceful environment for acclimating to their new situation and further transition.

During one early visit to Focus 27, I spontaneously manifested the image of a circular water fountain with a statue in the middle. The fountain was surrounded by a wider circle of stone benches, with paths radiating outward to different sections of The Park. I could sense the bubbling water and bright sunlight shining on the walkways through the tall trees. It was a peaceful little scene. But I felt certain that I was making it all up, as if I had said to myself, "Well, what could I expect to see in a park?"

In the debriefing session that followed the exercise, Carol, one of the trainers, made an offhand mention of her "special place" in Focus 27. (Everyone in the program is given the opportunity to create for themselves a safe haven in 27 to which they may return at any time, including the time following their own physical death.) I couldn't quite believe my ears when Carol said that her special place in The Park was a fountain.

As the session ended, I walked over to Carol and showed her the sketch of the fountain I'd made in my notebook just after the exercise had ended and I was still ensconced in my CHEC unit. Then I explained what I had imagined (or, was it now permissible to say, seen?), including the curved stone benches, and other details.

"Yes, that's it, that's my fountain," Carol acknowledged casually, as if we were talking about the happy coincidence of shopping at the same local supermarket. Now Carol also confessed that she had actually done the tape with the rest of the group and had thus participated in the exercise (which was not always the case). Although she hadn't seen me there, she had envisaged herself at her fountain during the tape. So perhaps it was not surprising that someone else had picked up on this. Or was it?

Here I feel obliged to mention another synchronistic connection to Carol—though I was too flabbergasted to acknowledge it to her at the time (which I now deeply regret). One afternoon as we were chatting in the kitchen, I raised the possibility of Bob Monroe (who passed in 1995) “hanging around” TMI and its environs to assist and observe. I mentioned my own dream of Monroe and the experience of “seeing” him as a guidance figure during my Gateway the previous year (Felser, 2000). I also told Carol that I knew of at least one person (who had been very close to Monroe during his later years) who was deeply skeptical of this notion, and who believed that Monroe would be off somewhere else exploring new dimensional frontiers.

At this Carol smiled and said that it was interesting that I should bring this up. For she had just finished writing an article in which she mentioned sensing Bob Monroe’s presence during one of the TMI outreach programs she runs in Spain. (Carol had known Bob while he was here for many years, whereas I never met him—in the flesh.) But then Carol mentioned another experience, a dream she had had shortly after Bob’s death in 1995. In her dream she was standing in a crowded bar when she spied Monroe at the other end of the room surrounded by a group of people. Excited, she went over to greet him. But after acknowledging her presence, Bob informed her that he was far too busy to talk now, and that he was interested in learning how to sing opera! Carol laughed when she recalled this exchange. She interpreted this event as Bob’s way of contacting her, while at the same time letting her know that his primary attention was not (then) focused in this physical dimension and its environs. Yet, Carol was convinced that this situation had changed, and that Monroe had since (in our temporal terms, of course) returned at least part of his focus to his previous work involving TMI and consciousness expansion.

“You know,” Carol said, “this project was pretty important to him.”

As I nodded in agreement with this sentiment, I felt an odd mental “tugging,” and then an even odder sensation, almost like the giddiness one experiences after getting off a thrill ride at the amusement park. Carol was drawn into another conversation and I stood there in the kitchen in a kind of abstracted daze. Carol’s comment had triggered the memory of something I’d forgotten, another dream of Bob Monroe.

In this dream I was standing before the entrance to a doorway, surrounded by a group of people staring at someone or something. As I moved closer to the object of everyone’s attention, I could see that it was Bob Monroe. But he was wearing the strangest outfit! He was dressed in a funny-looking white robe with big buttons.

Somehow I knew that this was a clown outfit, although he sure didn't look like your average circus clown. Although he seemed to be aware of my presence, he and I did not communicate. Upon awakening, I had interpreted this dream from a purely psychological angle. I thought my unconscious was making sure that I didn't place Monroe on too high a pedestal, so I was seeing him as a clown figure to compensate for any conscious tendency toward over-idealization.

But now, as I stood in what had once been Bob Monroe's own kitchen, I suddenly recognized with astonishment that this psychological interpretation was perhaps, at best, only one small part of a much larger truth.

"I, Pagliacci," I laughed to myself, recalling the title of the Italian opera featuring characters who perform as clowns. It was as if I had just solved a very neat puzzle set up by a very clever mind. I felt a sure mental "click" as all the remaining pieces fell neatly and serendipitously into place. Although my "dream" of Bob Monroe as the clown had taken place years after Carol's dream of him as an opera singer, the time element didn't matter. Somehow, for some reason, Carol and I had shared this experience of what now seemed clear to me to be some sort of communication, perhaps one slyly tailored to provide me with a strong hint of the confirmation I was now so plainly seeking.

This brought home to me how ignorant we truly are and the extent to which our reflexive use of concepts and categories often merely masks this ignorance and serves a kind of superstitious purpose. We declare, with great confidence and authority, for example, that "This is a dream," or, "This is merely an ordinary dream." But we do this only to reassure ourselves and make ourselves comfortable with a great unknown, a great mystery, just as some compulsively pious soul might neurotically finger prayer beads or desperately cling to a religious creed long after ceasing to believe it. In truth, nothing in existence is "merely ordinary," and we have not the slightest understanding of something as "mundane" as a "mere" dream. All of our scientific theories and philosophical concepts with which we congratulate ourselves are little more than meaningless mantras, superstitious charms to ward off the spooks we are too afraid to admit to fearing.

Jung was right, of course; religion (in its conventional forms of symbol, creed, and ritual) serves to "protect" the individual against having a direct religious experience. But so too, alas, do most of our socially acceptable

ideas and cultural habits of mind. They are anesthetics used to dull our fears and reassure us of the façade of “normalcy.”

Bobby's Retrieval

In one of the tape exercises, I was briefly in Focus 23, the level of “stuck souls” who do not know they are dead. As usual, I experienced 23 as a sort of grey foggy mist reminiscent of Sherlock Homes’ London at midnight. Then I found myself floating in a space-like environment where strange, incomprehensibly shaped machines were whizzing past me. This was in one of the so-called Belief System Territories (BST), the Focus Levels of 24, 25, and 26, where those religious folks who have very specific conceptions of the afterlife usually wind up, at least for a while. Later I interpreted the machines as my own shorthand symbols for some of the rigidly mechanical, tightly enclosed belief systems I must have been observing.

(Actually, you don’t have to have a belief in heaven or even an afterlife to wind up in a portion of the BST at death. Anyone who has a rigid belief system of any sort may wind up in a BST, if only temporarily. For example, compulsive shoppers might find themselves in an area of the BST that appears to them as a huge mall where all they ever do is shop, but never drop—some people’s idea of heaven, I’m sure).

Next I entered Focus 27, The Park. There I encountered a little boy with dark hair, maybe five years old, who told me that he died of leukemia. When I asked him his name, he replied, “Bobby.” Or at least I was pretty sure that that’s what he said. I must have “clicked-out” after this, as I found myself coming back to waking consciousness following the voiced instructions of Bob Monroe on the tape. I sensed there was a great deal of activity that I was not consciously remembering.

After this tape exercise, we broke down into small groups to discuss our retrieval experiences, if anyone had one. Ann reported that she apparently rescued a little boy from Focus 23 and brought him to 27. Greatly moved by his plight, as he seemed to be alone, confused and frightened, Ann convinced him to come with her to The Park. She described him as perhaps eight years old, a dark-haired Mexican boy who answered to the name of Roberto. He told Ann that he died of leukemia.

Was “my” Bobby Ann’s Roberto? Had I indeed encountered the same little boy Ann had retrieved? Although we did not report exactly the same information, I felt the minor discrepancies in age and name were outweighed by the obvious “hits” involving physical description and the cause of the boy’s death. (As a rule I don’t literally “hear” in these experiences; it’s more like a wordless “knowing” or else a telepathic communication. So some level of translation into words is already taking place, thus leaving room for interpretation—or error.) I had encountered Bobby in Focus 27—just where Ann said she left Roberto. The details, of course, were not sufficient to permit verifying them against historical records to demonstrate that such-and-such a person had died, etc. Yet, the sheer improbability that our respective stories would dovetail so nicely and neatly made a strong impression on both Ann and myself.

Thus, it turned out that the dream I had before arriving for the Lifeline (in which I had marveled at the apparent ease with which the widower effortlessly encountered his deceased wife) was, after all, a valid perspective, even if one not easily embraced by skeptics. But, as the English philosopher R.G. Collingwood (1946/1956, p. 252) observed, a skeptic is not the same thing as a critic. A skeptic is one who demands evidence but who, once they get it, won’t even examine it because it flies in the face of their basic guiding assumptions. A critic, on the other hand, not only asks for evidence, but is willing to examine, evaluate, and, if need be, accept it even if it contradicts his or her habitual ways of thinking. Although I was never a skeptic in Collingwood’s sense, I had always reserved a part of myself as a critic, which seemed not only appropriate but essential. Robert Monroe himself would agree. He cautioned that critical rational thinking is not to be abandoned in the course of these inner explorations, precisely because our specifically human purpose lies in developing “left-brain consciousness” in harmonious tandem with “right-brain” perceptions (Monroe, 1994, p. 86). I could hardly deny that my experiences at Lifeline had made headway in providing valuable evidence to convince my internal critic. More than ever, I perceived the curtain between what we call life and death as an exceedingly sheer and porous membrane. This may discomfit some, but that makes it no less true.

Coming back home, both literally and figuratively, after a week of such powerful experiences is a challenge, as I knew well from my Gateway. However, the second time around the energies had been subtly different—more balanced and mature, and far less volatile. This made the process of re-entry into everyday life, with its routines, demands, and working assumptions, far less traumatic and disruptive than in the previous year.

However, one morning a week or so later, I awoke only to be assaulted by powerful waves of agitation and anxiety. Although I had never done this before, I decided to bring with me to the college my cassette player and a musical tape encoded with Hemi-Sync signals (what Bob Monroe dubbed “Metamusic”) that I often found particularly soothing. Later that morning, in my college office, I played the tape several times, which seemed to help. I felt much calmer. I went off to teach my 8:00 a.m. class feeling pretty good. Oddly, however, by around 8:40, my energies completely drained out. I felt like a punctured tire. I could barely stand up (and I always walk around as I lecture). I had come to a natural stopping-point in my material, and found myself hesitating before going any further. In an uncharacteristic move, I suddenly decided to dismiss the class early—something I never do with an 8 a.m. class. I walked the short distance to my office where, as I listened to the Metamusic cassette, I busied myself with paperwork.

It was around 8:45 a.m., on September 11th: just around the time the first plane hit the World Trade Center a scant few miles away.

As fate would have it, it would be another two hours before I would emerge from my office to discover the unbelievable horror that was taking place in Manhattan and Washington, DC. One of my first coherent thoughts (like everyone else, when not experiencing numb disbelief I seemed to be operating mechanically on automatic pilot) was of our Lifeline group. Could we help? I wondered. At one point I tore myself away from the apocalyptic scenes on the television sets in the crowded cafeteria and stole back for a few moments of quiet solitude in my office. I sat down and attempted to go to Focus 23 but suddenly felt far too emotional to calm myself sufficiently. I felt powerless to help. So I concentrated on sending energy to the other members of the group. Maybe someone could break through, I thought. Or rather, hoped.

When the e-mails from the group members started to pour in, it turned out that my experience of being met by a wall of emotion was not atypical—there was just too much grief and shock on all sides (ours and theirs) to do

anything, at least at first. Others finally felt able to assist, and reported experiencing the helping hands of our fellow Lifeliners.

“Felt your presence at the W.T.C. site,” reported George in a handwritten note he sent me in late October. I was grateful for that, and for dear George’s kind thoughts.

Had the Lifeline been our way of preparing for a disaster that none of us could have consciously conceived or imagined, let alone fathomed? This is an uncomfortable, and perhaps unanswerable, question. Philosopher Michael Grosso (1996) has written eloquently about nine reasons to fear the paranormal. Questions about time and space, freedom and fate, death and life have a way of making us decidedly antsy and likely to turn tail and run. Especially when our favorite metaphysical assumptions get kicked in their proverbial pants. But, as Grosso concludes, our understandable reasons for fearing something (say, the “bizarre” idea that the future can somehow cause the past) are not legitimate reasons to disbelieve what our experience and intelligence tell us is true.

*

*

*

*

So, I continue to explore, experiment, and ask impossible questions. I think I have finally walked through Joe McMoneagle’s door. There is no turning back now. After re-establishing contact with a member of our Lifeline group in the wake of 9/11, Gina and I decided to attempt some “partnered exploring” sessions. We would arrange to meet, nonphysically, at certain times in the Focus Levels, and then compare notes afterwards via e-mail. Some of the results so far have been impressive, others confounding, all intriguing. As I suspected, one of the principal challenges is to remain sensitive to the inevitable differences in perception along with the subtleties of interpretation. We are learning.

REFERENCES

- Atwater, F. H. (1992). Laboratory evaluation: the efficacy of hemi-sync frequencies. *Hemi-Sync Journal*, 10, No. 3, i-iv.
- Atwater, F. H. (1993). From a dissociative to a transcendent state: an eeg ???definition of the hemi-sync process. *Hemi-Sync Journal*, 11, No. 1, i-iv.

- Atwater, F. H. (2001). *Captain of My Ship, Master of My Soul: Living With Guidance*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads.
- Collingwood, R. G. (1956). *The Idea of History* (T.M. Knox, Ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1946)
- Felser, J. M. (2000). My gateway voyage: an experiential account. *EHE News*, 7, 17-25.
- Felser, J. M. (2002). Explaining infinity to a monkey: Challenges and rewards of nvc (non-verbal communication). *TMI Focus*, 24, No. 1, 1,4,8.
- Grosso, M. (1996). Nine reasons to fear the paranormal. *The Anomalist*, No. 4, 4-7.
- Lame Deer, J., & R. Erdoes. (1972). *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- McMoneagle, J. (1993). *Mind Trek: Exploring Consciousness, Time, and Space Through Remote Viewing*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads.
- Monroe, R. A. (1994). *Ultimate Journey*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Roberts, J. (1972). *Seth Speaks: The Eternal Validity of the Soul*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Tart, C. T. (1972). Psychedelic experiences associated with a novel hypnotic procedure, mutual hypnosis. In C. T. Tart, Ed., *Altered States of Consciousness* (pp.) Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Department of History, Philosophy, and Political Science

Kingsborough Community College/CUNY

2001 Oriental Boulevard

Brooklyn, NY 11235

E-mail: JFelser@kbcc.cuny.edu