



Unexplained Visionary Experiences

by Betty J. Kovács, Ph.D.

Most of us—if not all of us—have had experiences that cannot be understood or satisfactorily explained by the so-called logic of our present worldview. Yet it is these very experiences that can “open the way” to the transformation not only of our own personal worldview but eventually that of our culture as well. When we reflect on our own experiences, they become more vivid, intense, and meaningful, but something even more powerful happens when we share our experience with someone we trust: it returns to us with a new significance and an even greater intensity. The German poet Goethe understood this process of reflection and re-reflection as the very basis of our growth and development, not only as individuals, but as communities, organizations, and cultures. He sometimes used the image of a lens or burning glass as a symbol of how our shared reflection can intensify the reality of our experiences.

Western culture is the only culture in the history of the world that has ever attempted to develop a civilization without a spiritual dimension. Since this culture has affected the entire planet, most of us are born into a world that does not welcome the open reflection of experiences that cannot be reduced to the material dimension. How many of us have had a friend or an acquaintance risk telling us just such an experience but follows it with the comment, “I have never told anyone about this.”

For years I taught symbolic/mythic language, which includes dreams, visions, myths, and fairy tales—the concentrated language of a culture’s spiritual traditions. These symbolic, high-energy tales required the focused reflection of all of us in the class and this inevitably ignited our dreams and memories. Students often told me privately some of the most remarkable dreams, but they also told me of experiences—incredible experiences—that they had never told anyone before because they were afraid of ridicule. But this is changing—and it is changing *because* so many of us are having experiences that do not fit into a materialistic worldview *and* we are finding safe places where we can explore them. In so doing, we become powerful mirrors reflecting back and forth the reality of another dimension. And then we, ourselves, become *openers of the way* to a new world.

So now I will share a very recent experience I had while I was visiting in New Jersey. My friend Kim Saavedra and I had traveled there to visit much-loved friends. One evening, after we returned from New York where we saw a play and had dinner, Kim and I went to the guest room we were sharing. We got ready for bed, talked for a while, then said goodnight. In what seemed like seconds after I closed my eyes I *saw* what I *knew* was Kim's subtle body forcefully and quickly fly over me and land on her feet on the floor by the window. I yelled out to Kim, "What are you doing?" Somehow she managed to say "Nothing." I then yelled out, "But you are standing over here!"

The figure was wearing a long, white dress but from the breast up there was white gauze unfurling like a spiral. She turned to look at me (perhaps because I was yelling) and I could feel the tremendous stress she was experiencing in Kim's body. But I also experienced the non-material solidity and powerful energy of the subtle body and thus the subtle/spiritual dimension. Then it was over. While I had experienced visions of those who had passed into the subtle/spiritual world, I had never before witnessed another person's subtle body. Kim didn't wake up, but as soon as she did the next morning, I told her about it. She knew nothing of the event, nor did she remember hearing me yell.

It is important to explain that Kim had been diagnosed with breast cancer seven months earlier. She had completed the chemotherapy and radiation treatments and that week had started taking another medicine, Tamoxifen. She didn't tell me that she hadn't felt well on the day we left Los Angeles because she wanted to go on our trip and didn't want to worry me. The next day after my experience of her subtle body, she was not well enough to leave the bed. This is very unusual for her. I had difficulty accepting that her body was that stressed when she was so far along in the treatments. However, we both knew that the body must have had great difficulty responding to the many chemicals involved in cancer treatment.

It is interesting to me that as this event was unfolding, I immediately *knew* certain things without question. I knew it was Kim's subtle body and I knew it was experiencing stress. My logical brain did not click in until later. What I knew came from that deep intuition that we all have but all too often disregard. Yet it is this ability that deserves our greatest respect since it is our intuition that gives each of us the key to our own inner experiences. The visionaries and mystics of the past thought of this as *the organ of the soul*. Henri Corbin, the great philosopher and champion of this intuitive, imaginative ability, tells us that the Sufi mystics understood that it is this organ of the soul that *perceives* visionary reality. It makes possible "a precise mode of perception" that allows us to see "a precise order of reality."

Many cultures in the past knew this and nurtured the development of this ability. Unfortunately, in our culture we have so completely lost the knowledge that we have this organ of perception that we immediately equate visionary seeing with the physical eyes. If our eyes are open during a vision, we seem to feel that what we see is more real than if our eyes are closed. Yet it doesn't matter one way or the other because we are *seeing* not with the physical eye but with the eyes/organ of the soul.

Since we have no memory of this ability, we have, as the German poet Rilke reminds us, so eliminated from our lives the strange and the mysterious that the organ or senses “with which we could have grasped them have atrophied.” However, we can strengthen this organ of soul by respecting and reflecting on the knowledge we receive through it and by sharing our experiences with others we trust. Just as Goethe realized, we can reflect on our own experience, allow others to reflect on it, and observe its growth and development as it returns to us in a larger, more intensified form. Together we can become the burning glass through which our concentrated attention can ignite our ability to perceive and experience that “precise order of reality” that we call the subtle or spiritual world.

We can start by reflecting on what we absolutely *know* intuitively. For example, I knew it was Kim’s subtle body and I knew it was in deep stress, but the rest was left for reflection and interpretation of the subtle world’s language of image, symbol, and feeling. Perhaps the unfurling gauze from the breast up reflects the fact that Kim is healing. I am not really sure why she was dressed in white. And I am not sure *why* I had the experience. Was it to reflect back to Kim just how stressed her body was so that she would be especially careful? I don’t know. I do know that she stayed on Tamoxifen for a few more weeks and was finally so stressed that she had to stop taking it. In fact, one evening when she was telling me just how stressed her body was, it seemed to me that her physical image merged with the subtle body image I had seen earlier. Sometimes our interpretation unfolds in time, and sometimes we are left with questions.

The one thing that years of experience have taught me is that very often such questions unfold into clearer vision when we share them with others, for it is in this sharing that the true depths of our experiences are revealed. Together we have the ability to focus, concentrate, and intensify the reality of the spiritual world. This is what happened when I told Bob and Phran Ginsberg about this particular experience. And they came up with a wonderful idea for all of us.