

## **Evidence for the Akashic Field from Modern Consciousness Research.**

**Stanislav Grof, M.D.**

In the course of the twentieth century, various disciplines of modern science have amassed an extraordinary array of observations, which could not be accounted for and adequately explained in terms of the monistic materialistic worldview and within the context of what Fritjof Capra called the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm (Capra 1975). These paradigm-breaking “anomalous phenomena” came from a wide range of fields from astrophysics, quantum-relativistic physics, and chemistry to biology, anthropology, thanatology, parapsychology, and psychology.

Pioneering scientists from various scientific disciplines have made more or less successful attempts to tackle the formidable conceptual problems presented by the anomalous data. They formulated theories, which suggested revolutionary new ways of looking at the recalcitrant problems they were facing in their respective fields. Over time, a radically different understanding of reality and of human nature started to come into view, which is usually referred to as the new or emerging paradigm in science.

However, this new perspective constituted a mosaic consisting of impressive, but disconnected pieces – Barrow and Tipler’s anthropic principle, philosophical implications of quantum-relativistic physics, David Bohm’s theory of holomovement, Karl Pribram’s holographic model of the brain, Rupert Sheldrake’s theory of morphogenetic fields, Ilya Prigogine’s theory of dissipative structures, and others (Barrow and Tipler 1986, Goswami 1995, Bohm 1980, Pribram 1971, Sheldrake 1981, Prigogine 1980). The credit for finding an elegant interdisciplinary solution for the anomalies plaguing modern science and for bringing these disjointed efforts together belongs to Ervin Laszlo, arguably the world’s greatest system theorist and interdisciplinary philosopher of science.

Laszlo achieved that by formulating his “connectivity hypothesis,” the main cornerstone of which is the existence of what he called the “psi-field” and, more recently, the Akashic field.” (Laszlo 1993, 2003, 2004) - a subquantum field, in which everything that has ever happened remains permanently holographically recorded. In a previous publication, I explored the ground-breaking contributions that Ervin Laszlo’s work has made to two fields in which I have most professional experience – consciousness research and transpersonal psychology (Grof 200). The scope of my paper on Ervin Laszlo’s work did not allow me to include practical examples of the observations that I was writing about. The present publication makes it possible for me to include case histories, which make this material come alive.

Before I get to the practical examples, I would like to briefly describe the type of research I have been involved in and the nature of the paradigm-breaking anomalous phenomena this work has generated. In the last fifty years, my primary area of interest and my lifetime passion has been the study of an important subcategory of non-ordinary states of consciousness, which I call holotropic (literally “*moving toward wholeness*,” from the Greek “*holos*” = whole and “*trepein*” = moving toward). What makes these states a fascinating object of study is their heuristic, therapeutic, and evolutionary potential (Grof 1985, 2000).

This group includes the states which shamans experience in their initiatory crises and use in their healing practices, those that native people experience in rites of passage and healing ceremonies, as well as those that were described in the reports of neophytes who underwent initiation in the ancient mysteries of death and rebirth. Holotropic states occur in systematic spiritual practice of yogis, Buddhists, Taoists, Kabbalists, Sufis, and Christian hesychasts and Desert Fathers; they have also been described by mystics of all countries and historical periods. Modern psychiatrists and therapists encounter these states in psychedelic therapy, in deep experiential work without the use of psychoactive substances, in experiments with sensory deprivation

and biofeedback, and during therapy of individuals undergoing spontaneous episodes of holotropic states (“spiritual emergencies”).

My interest in holotropic states began more than fifty years ago, when a powerful experience lasting only several hours of clock-time profoundly changed my personal and professional life. As a young psychiatric resident, only a few months after my graduation from medical school, I volunteered for an experiment with LSD, a substance with remarkable psychoactive properties which had been serendipitously discovered by the Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann in the Sandoz pharmaceutical laboratories in Basel, Switzerland. This session, particularly its culmination period, during which I had an overwhelming and indescribable experience of cosmic consciousness, awakened in me intense lifelong interest in holotropic states (Grof 2006).

Since that time, most of my clinical and research activities have consisted of systematic exploration of the therapeutic, transformative, and evolutionary potential of holotropic states. The five decades that I have dedicated to consciousness research have been for me an extraordinary adventure of discovery and self-discovery. I spent approximately half of this time conducting therapy with psychedelic substances, first in Czechoslovakia, in the Psychiatric Research Institute in Prague, and then in the United States, at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in Baltimore, MD, where I participated in the last surviving official American psychedelic research program. Since 1975, I have worked with holotropic breathwork, a powerful method of therapy and self-exploration that I have developed jointly with my wife Christina. Over the years, we have also supported many people undergoing spontaneous psychospiritual crises, or “spiritual emergencies” as Christina and I call them (Grof and Grof 1989, 1991).

The common denominator of these three situations is that they involve holotropic states of consciousness. In psychedelic therapy, these states are induced by administration of psychoactive substances, such as LSD, psilocybine, mescaline, and

tryptamine or amphetamine derivatives. In holotropic breathwork, consciousness is changed by a combination of faster breathing, evocative music, and energy-releasing bodywork. In spiritual emergencies, holotropic states occur spontaneously, in the middle of everyday life, and their cause is usually unknown.

In my work with holotropic states, I was encountering practically daily phenomena that could not be explained by the theoretical frameworks of academic psychiatry and represented a serious challenge to the basic metaphysical assumptions of Western science. My early observations in psychedelic therapy showed beyond any reasonable doubt that my clients were able to relive in holotropic states their own biological birth and even episodes from prenatal life, often with extraordinary details; many of these experiences could be objectively verified. In academic psychiatry, the memory of birth is considered impossible, because the cerebral cortex of the newborn is not fully myelinated. I have shown the weakness of this argumentation in other publications (Grof 1985, 2000).

As our psychedelic research continued, we encountered much more formidable conceptual challenges. In many instances, my clients experienced episodes from the life of their ancestors and even animal ancestors. The only conceivable material substrate for experiences from times that precede our conception would have to be contained in a single cell – the sperm or the ovum – or, more specifically, in the DNA. However, we have observed experiences, for which even this rather fantastic possibility would not provide a satisfactory explanatory principle. We have witnessed many situations where the experiences were crossing biological hereditary lines. People were often experientially identifying with persons from a different racial group, for example, a Slavic person with a Japanese samurai, an Anglosaxon with a black African slave, or a Japanese with a Spanish conquistador, etc.

Similarly, experiential identification with animals was not limited to our direct animal ancestors, where the germinal cells could – at least theoretically – serve as the material carrier of the information. We have, for example, seen in our experimental subjects authentic experiential identification with a silverback gorilla or a chimpanzee, animals with which we have common ancient protohominid ancestors, but not a connection through a direct genetic line. The Darwinian evolutionary tree branches into the gorilla and chimpanzee lines long before it reaches homo sapiens. This problem is even more obvious, if such identification involves birds, reptiles, or insects.

It is important to emphasize that all the above types of experiential identification with other human beings, animals, and plants typically provide detailed and accurate information about various aspects of the world that reaches far beyond what the individuals have been able to obtain through the conventional channels during their present lifetime. Ancestral, racial, and collective memories and past incarnation experiences frequently provide very specific details about architecture, costumes, weapons, art forms, social structure, and religious or ritual practices of the culture and historical period involved and sometimes even specific historical events.

The veracity of this information is not always easy to assess; in case of ancestral, racial, and karmic experiences, this requires very accurate description of the events involved, as well as access to relevant family chronicles, archives, or historical sources. Yet, as we will see, there are exceptional cases where these criteria are met and the results of the verification process can be truly astonishing.

The validation of the information made available through experiential identification is easier when it involves animals. The reason for it is that there are many important aspects of these experiences that cannot be conveyed by the conventional media – books, photographs, movies, television, etc. It is common, for example, to experience full body image of the species involved, its state of consciousness, specific

perception of the world reflecting the anatomy of its optical system (e.g. that of a rapture bird, bee, or octopus) or its acoustic system (dolphin or bat), etc. These experiences also often provide extraordinary insights concerning animal psychology, ethology, courtship dances, or mating habits.

These observations indicate that we can obtain information about the universe in two radically different ways. Besides the conventional possibility of learning through sensory perception and analysis and synthesis of the data, we can also find out about various aspects of the world by direct identification with them in a holotropic state of consciousness. Each of us thus seems to be a microcosm that has also access to the information about the entire macrocosm. This situation is reminiscent of the descriptions found in the ancient Indian spiritual systems, particularly in Jainism and in Avatamsaka Buddhism.

According to Jain cosmology, the world of creation is an infinitely complex system of deluded units of consciousness, or *jivas*, trapped in different aspects and stages of the cosmic process. Each *jiva*, in spite of its seeming separateness, remains connected with all the other *jivas* and contains the knowledge about all of them. The Avatamsaka Sutra uses a poetic image to illustrate the interconnectedness of all things. It is the famous necklace of the Vedic god Indra: "In the heaven of Indra, there is said to be a network of pearls, so arranged that if you look at one, you see all the others reflected in it. In the same way, each object in the world is not merely itself, but involves every other object and, in fact, is everything else." Similar concepts can be found in the Hwa Yen school of Buddhist thought, the Chinese version of the same teaching.

Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz's monads - ultimate elements of the universe - resemble the Jain jives, since each of them contains the information about all the others (Leibniz 1951). In the esoteric traditions, this was expressed by such phrases as: "as above so below" or "as without, so within." In the past, this basic tenet of esoteric schools, such as Tantra, the Hermetic tradition, Gnosticism, and Kabbala, appeared to be an absurd confusion of the relationship between the part and the whole and a violation of Aristotelian logic. In the second half of the twentieth century, this claim received

unexpected scientific support by the discovery of the principles operating in optical holography (Talbot 1991).

After this general introduction, I will give concrete examples of experiences that reached far back into history and contained specific details that could be independently verified. The first story will take us to seventeenth century Europe, to the beginning of the Thirty Years' War. This case illustrates extremely well the conceptual challenges associated with the attempts to verify the historical material from holotropic states and to identify the channels through which the information is transmitted.

### **Ancestral Memory or Past Life Experience?**

#### The Story of Renata

The protagonist in this story is Renata, a former client of mine, who came to treatment because she was suffering from cancerophobia that was making her life difficult. In a series of LSD sessions, she relived various traumatic experiences from her childhood and repeatedly dealt with the memory of her birth. In the advanced stage of her self-exploration, the nature of her sessions suddenly dramatically changed. What happened was very unusual and unprecedented.

Four of her consecutive LSD sessions brought almost exclusively material from a specific historical period. She experienced a number of episodes that took place in seventeenth century Prague, at a crucial period in Czech history. After the disastrous battle of White Mountain in 1621, which marked the beginning of the Thirty Years' War in Europe, the country ceased to exist as an independent kingdom and came under the hegemony of the Hapsburg dynasty. In an effort to destroy the feelings of national pride and to defeat the forces of resistance, the Hapsburgs sent out mercenaries to capture the country's most powerful noblemen. Twenty-seven prominent aristocrats were arrested and beheaded in a public execution on a scaffold erected in the Old Town Square in Prague.

During her historical sessions, Renata had an unusual variety of images and insights concerning the architecture of the experienced period and typical garments and costumes, as well as weapons and various utensils used in everyday life. She was also

able to describe many of the complicated relationships existing at that time between the royal family and the vassals. Renata had never specifically studied this period of Czech history or was interested in it. I had to go to the library and do historical research in order to confirm that the information Renata reported was accurate.

Many of Renata's experiences were related to various periods in the life of a young nobleman, one of the twenty-seven aristocrats beheaded by the Hapsburgs. In a dramatic sequence, She finally relived with powerful emotions and in considerable detail the actual events of the execution, including this nobleman's terminal anguish and agony. On many occasions, Renata experienced full identification with this individual. She was not able to figure out how these historical sequences were related to her present life, why they emerged in her therapy, and what they meant. After much reflection, Renata finally concluded that she must have relived events from the life of one of her ancestors. All this happened at an early stage of my psychedelic explorations and I, admittedly, was not quite intellectually ready for this interpretation.

Trying to reach some understanding, I chose two different approaches. On the one hand, I spent a considerable amount of time in an effort to verify the specific historical information involved and was increasingly impressed by its accuracy. On the other hand, I tried to use the Freudian method of free associations, treating Renata's story as if it were a dream. I hoped that I would be able to decipher it as a symbolic disguise for some childhood experiences or problems in her present life. No matter how hard I tried, the experiential sequences did not make much sense from a psychoanalytic point of view. When Renata's LSD experiences moved into new areas, I finally gave up, stopped thinking about this peculiar incident, and focused on other more recent and immediate conceptual challenges.

Two years later, when I was already in the United States, I received a long letter from Renata with the following unusual introduction: "Dear Dr. Grof, you will probably think that I am absolutely insane when I share with you the results of my recent private search." In the text that followed, Renata described how she happened to meet her father, whom she had not seen since her parents' divorce when she was three years old. After a short discussion, her father invited her to have dinner with him, his second wife, and their children. After dinner, he told her that he wanted to share with her something she might find interesting

In WW II, the Nazis issued an order requesting that all families in the occupied



territories present to the German authorities their pedigrees demonstrating the absence of any persons of Jewish origin for the last five generations. This was a very serious issue, since failure to prove the “purity” of the family lineage had catastrophic consequences for its members. While conducting this mandatory genealogical research, Renata's father became fascinated by this procedure. After he had completed the required five-generation pedigree for the authorities, he continued this quest because of his private interest.

He was able to trace back the history of his family more than three centuries, thanks to the meticulously kept archives of the European parish houses that had preserved birth records of all the people born in their district for untold generations. He was now able to show Renata the fruit of many years of his investigation, a carefully designed, complex pedigree of their family, indicating that they were descendants of one of the noblemen executed after the battle of White Mountain in the Old Town Square in Prague.

Renata was astonished by this unexpected confirmation of the information she had obtained in her LSD sessions. After having described this extraordinary episode, she expressed her firm belief that “highly emotionally charged memories could be imprinted in the genetic code and transmitted through centuries to future generations.” Renata’s letter ended with a triumphant “I told you so.” She felt that this new unexpected information provided by her father confirmed what she had suspected all along on the basis of the convincing nature of her experiences - that she had encountered an authentic ancestral memory. As I mentioned earlier, this was a conclusion I was at the time reluctant to accept.

After my initial astonishment concerning this most unusual coincidence, I discovered a rather serious logical inconsistency in Renata's account. One of the experiences she had had in her historical LSD sessions involved the execution of the young nobleman, including all the emotions associated with it. In the seventeenth century, long before the revolutionary breakthroughs of modern obstetrics, a dead person was not able to procreate, Death would have destroyed all material channels through which any information about the life of the deceased could be transmitted to posterity.

As a result of this realization, the situation got even more complicated than it was before. “the plot got thicker.” On the one hand, Renata’s experience received a powerful independent validation from her father’s genealogical research. On the other, there was no material substrate to account for the storage, transmission, and retrieval of

the information involved. However, before we discard the information contained in Renata's story as supportive evidence for the authenticity of ancestral memories, several facts deserve serious consideration.

None of the remaining Czech patients, who had a total of over two thousand sessions, had ever even mentioned this historical period. In Renata's case, four consecutive LSD sessions contained, almost exclusively, historical sequences from this time. And the improbability that the convergence of Renata's inner quest and her father's genealogical research was a meaningless coincidence is so astronomical that it is difficult to take this alternative seriously. Clearly, academic psychiatry has no sober logical explanation for this concatenation of events.

Occasionally, people who had read or heard this story suggested that Renata might have picked up the information from her father, who was passionately involved in his genealogical quest. However, Renata's knowledge of the nobleman's life and of the historical period went far beyond her father's knowledge of the same. While he was excited about his genealogical finding, his enthusiasm had not inspired a genuine historical interest. We are thus left with an extraordinary situation for which the current materialistic paradigm has no explanation. It is an example of the observations from modern consciousness research that have recently received the name "anomalous phenomena."

As we saw, Renata interpreted her experiential identification with the nobleman from the seventeenth century as an ancestral memory. In other similar cases, a sense of ancestral connection is missing or is very surprising, since it is crossing racial boundaries. However, we have also observed several situations, where the discovery of a black person, a Native American, or a gypsy in the ancestry of a white family made in a psychedelic or holotropic session was later confirmed by genealogical research.

Very frequently, the experiences that seem to be happening in other countries and historical periods are associated with a sense of personal remembering (*déjà vu* or *déjà vécu*). People then talk about reliving of memories from their past lives, from their previous incarnations. These observations throw a new light on the problem of

reincarnation, a concept of extreme spiritual and cultural importance, which has been pooh-poohed and ridiculed by materialistic science and rejected by Christian Church.

The idea of karma and reincarnation represents a cornerstone of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, the Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, and Taoism. Similar ideas can be found in such geographically, historically, and culturally diverse groups as various African tribes, native Americans, pre-Columbian cultures, the Hawaiian kahunas, practitioners of the Brazilian umbanda, the Gauls, and the Druids. In ancient Greece, several important schools of thought subscribed to it. Among them were the Pythagoreans, the Orphics, and the Platonists. This doctrine was also adopted by the Essenes, the Pharisees, the Karaites, and other Jewish and semi-Jewish groups, and it formed an important part of the cabalistic theology of medieval Jewry. It was also held by the Neoplatonists and Gnostics.

### **The Siege of Dún an Óir:**

#### **The Story of Karl**

Past life memories represent a fascinating and clinically important group of experiences in holotropic states. Besides bringing new accurate information about other cultures and other historical periods, they often provide important insights into various otherwise incomprehensible areas of our life, and have a remarkable healing potential. As impressive and convincing as the various features of past life experiences may be, in and of themselves, the dream of every researcher in this area is to find cases, where some important aspects of these experiences can be verified by independent historical research. For me such dream came true when Christina and I met Karl and had the privilege to facilitate his process of deep self-exploration and healing. Karl enrolled in one of our Esalen monthlong seminars after he had done some inner work in a renegade group of primal therapy in Canada. It was one of the groups of people, who had left the institute of primal therapy in Los Angeles after serious disagreements with Arthur Janov.

In the course of primal therapy, these people started having various forms of transpersonal experiences, such as archetypal visions, identification with various animals,

and past life memories. Janov, who had no understanding of the transpersonal domain of the unconscious, was violently opposed to anything related to spirituality and interpreted these experiences as “cop-out from primal pain.” Many people, who valued the technique of primal therapy, but could not stand the strait-jacket of Janov’s conceptual prejudice, left his institute and formed their own group.

Karl had begun his self-exploration as a member of such a group. After some time, his inner process reached the perinatal level. As he was reliving various aspects of his biological birth, he started experiencing fragments of dramatic scenes that seemed to be happening in another century and in a foreign country. They involved powerful emotions and physical feelings and seemed to have deep and intimate connection with his life; yet none of them made any sense in terms of his present biography. He had visions of tunnels, underground storage spaces, military barracks, thick walls, and ramparts, which all seemed to be parts of a fortress situated on a rock overlooking an ocean shore. This was interspersed with images of soldiers in a variety of situations. He felt puzzled, since the soldiers seemed to be Spanish, but the scenery looked more like Scotland or Ireland.

This was the time when Karl came to our Esalen workshop and shifted from primal therapy to holotropic breathwork. As the process continued, the scenes were becoming more dramatic and involved; many of them represented fierce combat and bloody slaughter. Although surrounded by soldiers, Karl experienced himself as a priest and at one point had a very moving vision that involved a bible and a cross. At this point, he saw a seal ring on his hand and could clearly recognize the initials that it bore

Being a talented artist, he decided to document this strange process, although he did not understand it at the time. He produced a series of drawings and very powerful and impulsive finger paintings. Some of these depicted different parts of the fortress, others scenes of slaughter, and a few of them Karl’s own experiences, including being gored by a sword of a British soldier, thrown over the ramparts of the fortress, and dying on the shore. Among these pictures was a drawing of his hand with the seal ring engraved with the initials of the priest’s name.

As he was recovering bits and pieces of this story, Karl was finding more and more meaningful connections between various aspects of its plot and his present life. He started suspecting that the drama of the Spanish priest in remote past might be the source of many of his own emotional and psychosomatic symptoms, as well as interpersonal problems. A turning point came when Karl suddenly decided on an impulse to spend his

holiday in Ireland. After his return, when he was looking at the slides he had shot on Ireland's Western coast, he realized that he had taken eleven consecutive pictures of exactly the same scenery. This surprised him, since he did not remember having done it and the view he had chosen did not seem particularly interesting.

Being a pragmatic man, he took a very rational and analytic approach to this quizzical situation. He looked at the map and reconstructed where he stood at the time and in which direction he was shooting. He discovered that the place which attracted his attention was the ruin of an old fortress called Dún an Óir, or Forte de Oro (Golden Fortress). From the distance he was shooting, it was barely visible with the naked eye and he had to look hard to find it in the slide.. Suspecting a connection between his strange behavior and his experiences from primal therapy and holotropic breathwork, Karl decided to study the history of Dún an Óir looking for any possible clues.

He discovered, to his enormous surprise, that in 1580, a small invasion force of Spanish soldiers landed in the nearby Smerwick Harbor to assist the Irish in the Desmond Rebellion. After being joined by some Irish soldiers they numbered about 600. They managed to guerrison themselves within the defences of the fort at Dún an Óir, before they were surrounded and besieged by a larger English force commanded by Lord Grey. Walter Raleigh, who accompanied Lord Grey, played the role of mediator in this conflict and negotiated with the Spaniards. He promised them free egress from the fortress, if they open the gate and surrender to the British. The Spaniards agreed to accept this condition and surrendered, but the British did not hold their promise. Once inside the fortress, they slaughtered mercilessly all the Spaniards and threw their bodies over the ramparts into the ocean and on the beach.

In spite of this absolutely astonishing confirmation of the story that he laboriously reconstructed in his inner exploration, Karl was not satisfied. He continued his library research until he discovered a special document about the battle of Dún an Óir. There he found that a priest accompanied the Spanish soldiers and was killed together with them. The initials of the name of the priest were identical with those that Karl had seen in his vision of the seal ring and had depicted in one of his drawings.

### **When Spiritual Experiences Can Be Dangerous:**

Revisiting the Salem Witch Hunt

Our observations concerning past life experiences are not limited to our work with clients, workshop participants, and trainees; many of them happened in our own lives (Grof 2006). In 1976 Christina and I lived for several months in the Round House at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. It was a small charming structure located by the creek dividing the Esalen property into two parts. Its busy waters rushed down from the mountain ridge and formed a large waterfall just before joining the Pacific Ocean. In front of this house was an opening in the ground spewing hot mineral waters into a little private pool. According to the local lore, the Esalen hot springs had their origin in an interconnected system of volcanic underground caverns that spread under much of California.

The rushing of the creek and the roaring of the waterfall represented a very powerful sensory input. However, even more impressive was the psychic power of this place. Over the years, we have invited to our Esalen workshops as guest faculty many people with extraordinary psychic abilities – clairvoyants, shamans from various parts of the world, members of the Spiritist Church, Indian yogis, and Tibetan masters. They all seemed to concur that the area around the Round House was a “power spot,” a place endowed with extraordinary spiritual energy. Those trying to find some scientific explanation for the impact it had on people attributed it to high concentration of negative ions due to the proximity to the ocean, the crashing waters of the waterfall, and to the presence of giant redwoods lining the creek on both sides.

In any case, whatever was the reason for it, living in the Round House had a very powerful psychological impact on both of us. It was unusually easy to go into a meditative state; I found myself often slipping into a trance, in which I forgot our geographic and historical coordinates and felt that our little eyrie was situated somewhere in an archetypal domain beyond time and space. Christina, who was at that time undergoing her spiritual emergency, experienced there an extraordinary intensification of her inner process. One weekend, her experiences reached such intensity that they resembled a psychedelic session.

After a period of intense anxiety and uncomfortable physical feelings, she had a powerful experience of what she felt was a memory from one of her past lives. She became an adolescent girl living in New England’s Salem, who had episodes of non-ordinary states of consciousness. Her fundamentalist Christian neighbors interpreted these episodes in their bigoted craze as possession by the devil. This brought an

accusation of witchcraft; she was tried by two judges dressed in ceremonial robes, and sentenced to death by drowning.

In the middle of her experience, Christina recognized that these two judges were in this lifetime her ex-husband and her father, both of whom were educators. She suddenly understood, why she always had a strong negative reaction when she saw them in their dark academic habits performing school ceremonies. It also seemed to her that the difficulties she had had with them in this lifetime were, at least partially, karmic carry-overs from the Salem episode. The past life memory culminated in an experience of execution by drowning. Christina found herself being carried to a pond, tied to a board, and submerged, head first, under water. She managed to notice that the pond was surrounded by birch trees. As she was reliving her death by drowning, she was screaming, choking, and bringing out a lot of mucus, both by her mouth and nose.

While living in Hawaii, Christina had suffered from severe allergies and sinusitis. She had many medical examinations, tests, and treatments, including a series of injections for desensitization. Her doctors, frustrated by the failure of all therapeutic efforts, finally suggested a surgical procedure, involving scraping and cleaning the sinus cavities. Christina decided to refuse such a radical procedure and accepted her predicament. She discovered to her great surprise that, following the episode, in which she relived the Salem trial and death, her sinus problems disappeared.

Fortunately, by this time, my belief in what I once had held as “scientific worldview” which had been rigorously proven beyond any reasonable doubt, was already seriously undermined by many similar observations. Without it, this episode would have left me in a serious intellectual crisis. There was certainly a certain element of cosmic humor in the fact that Christina’s difficulties that had resisted concerted effort of scientific experts were resolved by reliving a karmic episode involving ignorance, religious fanaticism, and false accusation of witchcraft.

This episode had a very interesting sequel many years later, when Christina and I visited Boston to conduct a holotropic breathwork workshop. The workshop ended in the evening and our flight back to San Francisco was not until late afternoon the next day. We thus had a good part of a day for sightseeing. We decided to call Marilyn Hershenson, a psychologist and dear friend of ours, who had been a member of Swami Muktananda’s inner circle. We became very close in the early 1980s, when she coordinated with us a

large international transpersonal conference in Bombay. Marilyn was very excited and offered that she would spend the day with us and drive us around.

When we discussed what would be a good place for lunch, Marilyn suggested her favorite restaurant situated on the ocean near Salem. As we approached it, we found out that its name was Hawthorne Inn. This immediately brought to mind Nathaniel Hawthorne, his *Scarlet Letter*, and the topic of witchcraft. As we were having lunch, Christina recounted for Marilyn the story of her past life memory involving Salem witch trials. Marilyn was astounded, because she had relived a similar episode of her own in one of her meditations in the Siddha Yoga ashram.

Since we were only several miles from Salem, it suddenly seemed very appropriate to visit this town between lunch and our departure for California. As we were entering Salem, Christina asked Marilyn, if there was a pond in Salem. Marilyn, who had spent her entire childhood in Salem decisively denied it. But then she suddenly took by mistake a wrong turn, which was surprising, since she knew the town well. This unplanned detour unexpectedly brought us to a pond on the shore of the ocean. It seemed like it was originally a bay that was separated from the body of water by an old stone dam.

Christina got out of the car, as if in a haze. She was looking around and seemed disappointed. "I don't see any birch trees," she said and started walking around the pond. "Where are you going?" we asked her. "There have to be some here," she said and continued walking. We parked the car and followed her. Finally, on the other side of the pond, Christina discovered a birch tree; its trunk was broken and its crown was submerged in water. "You see, they were here," she said. "This must be the last one."

We returned to the car and decided to visit the courthouse where the trials had been held. On the way there, Christina told Marilyn that she recognized in the two judges in her past life experience her ex-husband and father in her present life. "But there was only one judge at the trial," Marilyn objected. "There were two judges!" Christina said assertively. When we came to the courthouse, we found out it was closed. But by the front door was a large tablet, describing the trials. Not only did it confirm that there were two judges, but one of them was called Corwin, which suddenly seemed like a cosmic joke, Christina's ex-husband's name being Win.



Before we returned to the car, I bought in a gift shop a little illustrated booklet on Salem, which included the story of the witchcraft trials. As Marilyn was driving us to the airport, I was reading aloud selected passages from this booklet. We found out that the girls, who were accused of witchcraft had spent much time with the slave servant Tituba, who was accused of being the link to the devil. Tituba was an Indian from an Arawak village in South America, where she was captured as a child, taken to Barbados as a captive, and sold into slavery. We concluded that Tituba was probably teaching them some shamanic techniques that were misunderstood and misinterpreted by ignorant neighbors as work of the devil.

The most interesting information I found in the guidebook was that Old Salem, where many of the historical events had happened, was currently called Danvers. That came as a shock to us. Danvers was the place, where in 1978 we held a large conference of the International Transpersonal Association (ITA). It was a conference, where we presented for the first time our concept of “spiritual emergency,” implying that many episodes of non-ordinary states of consciousness that mainstream psychiatrists diagnose as psychoses and often treat with drastic methods, such as insuline coma and electroshock, are actually psychospiritual crises.

In our lecture in Danvers, we suggested that properly understood and supported, these crises of spiritual opening can actually be healing, transformative, and even evolutionary. We gave the talk in a hall from which one could see, on the other side of the valley, an old-time psychiatric hospital that had one of the worst reputations in the country. They were still using shock methods, which bore great similarity to the practices of the Inquisition and similar witch hunters. We were stunned by this incredible synchronicity. Of all the possible locations, we presented our modern plea for a radical change of attitude toward non-ordinary states of consciousness, in a place that, unbeknownst to Christina, was the site of her past life memory. And her suffering and death in this karmic episode was caused by misunderstanding and misinterpretation of non-ordinary states of consciousness.

Immersed in this drama, we arrived at the airport in the last minute. We ran to the gate and the door of the airplane closed behind us as soon as we were inside. We sank into our seats, fastened the seat belts, and started to discuss and process the extraordinary events of the day. As soon as we were in the air, the stewardess from the first class appeared in the economy class, carrying a tray with glasses of white and red wine.

I could not believe my eyes. She had very dark skin and all around her head was a large corona of long unkempt dreadlocks sticking in all directions. I could not believe that she had passed the scrutiny of her superiors, who are usually meticulous about their personnel's appearance. "Here is Tituba, your Barbados maid," I jokingly said to Christina. The hostess approached us and gave Christina a very long and meaningful look. "We have some wine left over from the first class," she said. "Would you like some?" And pausing a little, she added with a very serious tone in her voice, as if her question was one of great importance: "Would you like white or red?"

We each took a glass of wine and were pondering on yet another strange synchronicity. The stewardess appeared again, this time carrying a tray with carnations. She smiled at us and asked: "We have also some flowers left, would you like some?" And, presenting the tray to Christina, she asked with the same serious tone of voice: "Would you like a red one, or a white one? Christina hesitated for a while and then she chose the white one. Later, she told me that, in the context of everything that had happened that day, this simple choice seemed to be loaded with great karmic significance. Choosing the white carnation seemed like a successful closure of this dramatic episode of her life.

The existence of past-life experiences with all their remarkable characteristics is an unquestionable fact that can be verified by any serious researcher who is sufficiently open-minded and interested to check the evidence. It is also clear that there is no plausible explanation for these phenomena within the conceptual framework of mainstream psychiatry and psychology. While all these impressive facts do not necessarily constitute a definitive 'proof' that we survive death and reincarnate as the same separate unit of consciousness, or the same individual soul, they represent a formidable conceptual challenge for traditional science and they have a paradigm-breaking potential. Having observed hundreds of past life experiences and experienced many of them myself, I have to agree with Chris Bache that "the evidence in this area is so rich and extraordinary that scientists who do not think the problem of reincarnation deserves serious study are either uninformed or bone-headed" (Bache 1988).

#### CONCLUSION:

Ancestral, racial, collective, karmic memories, experiential identification with animals, plants, and inorganic materials and processes, and other types of transpersonal experiences meet the criteria for “anomalous phenomena.” Their existence and nature violates some of the most basic assumptions of materialistic science. They imply such seemingly absurd notions as relativity and arbitrary nature of all physical boundaries, non-local connections in the universe, communication through unknown means and channels, memory without a material substrate, non-linearity of time, or consciousness associated with all living organisms, and even inorganic matter. Many transpersonal experiences involve events from the microcosm and the macrocosm, realms that cannot normally be reached by unaided human senses, or from historical periods that precede the origin of the solar system, formation of planet earth, appearance of living organisms, development of the nervous system, and emergence of homo sapiens.

I do not know any other scientific conceptual framework than Ervin Laszlo’s connectivity hypothesis and his concept of the Akashic field that would provide a reasonable explanation for the above paradoxical findings. The observations from the research of holotropic states suggest that the individual human psyche has – at least potentially – the capacity of accessing all the information stored in the akashic field. It can do it not only in the role of an uninvolved observer, but also as a protagonist, identifying experientially with all the people, animals, plants, and even inorganic objects and processes that are part of this field.

I have been so far talking about phenomena that belong to the material world. One fascinating question remains wide open for further exploration. Laszlo’s akashic field is an excellent model for the historical aspect of C. G. Jung’s collective unconscious. However, Jung’s collective unconscious also encompasses another domain, which is radically different from the former – the archetypal realm with its mythological beings and abodes of the Beyond. And yet, in holotropic states, visits to archetypal regions and encounters with archetypal figures often appear on the same continuum and in various combinations with experiences reflecting phenomena from the material world. This suggests that – in some yet unexplained way – the archetypal world is either an integral

part of the akashic field or the akashic field mediates experiential access to it.

### **Literature:**

- Barrow, J. D. and Tipler, F. J. 1986. *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bache, C. M. 1988. *Lifecycles: Reincarnation and the Web of Life*. New York: Paragon House.
- Bohm 1980. *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Capra, F. 1975. *The Tao of Physics*. Berkeley: Shambhala Publications.
- Goswami, A. 1995. *The Self-Aware Universe: How Consciousness Creates the Material World*. Los Angeles, CA: J. P. Tarcher.
- Grof, S. 1985. *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York (SUNY) Press.
- Grof, S. and Grof, C. 1989. *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis*. Los Angeles, CA: J. P. Tarcher.
- Grof, C. and Grof, S. 1991. *The Stormy Search for the Self: A Guide to Personal Growth Through Transformational Crises*. Los Angeles, CA: J. P. Tarcher.
- Grof, S. 2000. *Psychology of the Future: Lessons from Modern Consciousness Research*. Albany, NY: State University of New York (SUNY) Press.
- Grof, S. 2006. *When the Impossible Happens: Adventures in Non-Ordinary Realities*. Louisville, CO: Sounds True.
- Grof, S. 200 “Ervin Laszlo’s Akashic Field and the Dilemmas of Modern Consciousness Research.”
- Jung, C. G. 1959. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. *Collected Works*, vol. 9,1. Bollingen Series XX, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Laszlo, E. 1993. *The Creative Cosmos*. Edinburgh: Floris.

- Laszlo, E. 2003. *The Connectivity Hypothesis: Foundations of an Integral Science of Quantum, Cosmos, Life, and Consciousness*. Albany, NY: State University of New York (SUNY) Press.
- Laszlo, E. 2004. *Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- Leibniz, G.W. 1951. *Monadology*. New York: C. Scribners Sons.
- Pribram, K. 1971. *Languages of the Brain*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Prigogine, I. 1980. *From Being to Becoming: Time and Complexity in the Physical The Creative Cosmos*. Edinburgh: Floris Books.
- Sheldrake, R. 1981. *A New Science of Life: The Hypothesis of Formative Causation*. Los Angeles, CA: J. P. Tarcher.
- Talbot, M. 1991. *The Holographic Universe*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.