

RESPONSES TO COMMENTARY ON "AN EXPERIENCE OF TIMELESSNESS"

William G. Braud

Thank you for your additional comments on my reported experience. You asked whether I previously had had timelessness experiences and asked what might have suggested my mental comment, "Speak for yourself . . ." on this occasion. My questioning of the comment about the impossibility of imagining experience in the absence of time was based chiefly upon an intuitive "knowing" that such timeless experiences were indeed possible and also upon my knowledge of reports of such experiences by others, mainly by those who have had mystical and unitive experiences and experiences of "cosmic consciousness." I do not recall having previously experienced a personal episode of "timelessness," although I have had *related* experiences. I have experienced moments in which my perception of time changed notably (either "slowing down" or "expanding"), in which my spatial perceptions changed, and in which I became very aware of, and an intimate part of, the "flow" of things. But those experiences were never as complete as the experience I report here, nor were all the various "components" present at once, nor did I lose the sense of an "ego" as thoroughly as I did here.

I recall an experience I had in my early 20s in which I fleetingly felt as though the answer(s) to all possible questions had been revealed. Although that experience lasted for only a brief time and then disappeared, and though I could not later recall what those "answers" were, I did retain some special qualities of the experience, itself, and continue to do so, even today. It is difficult to put these feelings into words, but it is as though I know that I *knew* . . . or *knew that I know!*

Timeless moments also occur during meditation; however, they are not as "full," nor are they of precisely the same quality as my "timelessness experience." In fact, the very first time I meditated, after mentally repeating my self-created mantram for some time, it seemed as though the universe became a huge bowl filled with utter blackness, a blackness of liquid velvet. In the experience, that "bowl" moved slowly toward me, and my head moved slowly toward the bowl. Very soon, my head "touched" the

blackness of that bowl. At the moment of that "touching," and as I was enveloped by that rich blackness, there was the most wonderful feeling of bliss I have ever felt. I have often "sought" a repeat of that experience, but it never happened again, either in similar meditative contexts or elsewhere. A quote from J. D. Salinger's short story, *Teddy*, comes to mind in connection with this experience: ". . . pouring God into God, if you know what I mean."

Today, I have a set of contrary views about that "bowl of blackness" experience. On the one hand, there is a continuing gratitude for an experience that was like merging with the Void, or becoming one with Everything in which there are no things. But there is also the suspicion that this was an especially strong appearance of "*makyo*" which, in the Zen tradition, is an unusually pleasant, intriguing, and often sensuous, experience that is but another possible distraction from the path or discipline that one is following—a wonderful production, but nothing to attend to too seriously. It was the almost palpable "delight" of my head touching the blackness of the bowl that suggests the play of *makyo*.

I should also point out that this experience of delight upon confronting and partaking of the blackness occurred as a *grace* in the midst of effort. As in the case of the timelessness experience I report, I *did* something to start the events that ultimately led to the experience (wherein lies the volitional or practice component), but then, at a certain point, the experience "took me over"—the rest of the experience was a gift spontaneously bestowed (the grace aspect) which seemed to be beyond my control or ability to produce. Such a mixture of effort and grace is present in the concept of *synergy* which is so important in Eastern esoteric Christianity.

I feel this mix is important for us to consider. It is present in the experience of Boyce Batey, which you are reprinting. Yes, his experience was quite similar to mine in that he set out to deliberately *construct* an experience—building it up piece by piece out of cognitive connections and sensations in different sense modalities. But notice how he says, ". . . suddenly and without

my trying, I was functioning at another level of awareness." This is, I feel, the important point. We set the stage or *invite* the experience using certain practices and using volition. But then, whether the magical experience responds to that invitation and actually appears on the stage that has been so laboriously prepared is another matter. The magical shift in consciousness happens, if at all, "suddenly" and "without trying"—it is a grace. To attempt, through feverish striving or elaborate protocols, to reproduce such a freely-given experience is usually fruitless. We may, superstitiously, spend years trying to repeat a procedure that just happened to have occurred prior to a special experience in a greedy attempt to recapture that experience or have more of it. In your writings and in the subtitle of this EHE journal, Rhea, you continue to remind us of this important, *spontaneous*, aspect of EHEs. I feel parapsychologists might benefit from devoting more consideration to this spontaneous element in psi occurrences, too. We may try to set the stage using various preparatory techniques (such as relaxation, Ganzfeld stimulation, hypnotic suggestions, rapport building, expectancy construction, or whatever), but perhaps these are but invitations for psi to appear. Whether psi accepts that invitation or not, or whether psi appears just as frequently on stages to which it has not been formally invited, is, to me, another matter. The experience is never guaranteed. There seems always to be an aspect of "grace" involved in psi as well as in other EHEs.

You commented on my mention of "tears of wonder-joy." This is a term I coined some years ago. I have had such experiences for as long as I can remember, and I didn't have a good shorthand term to use for these. One day, while re-reading a favorite short story, *The Door in the Wall*, by H. G. Wells, I came upon the phrase, "very glad and wonder-happy." At that moment, I had a name for my experience: I began calling it "wonder-joy tears." These are tears that fill the eyes on occasions that have nothing to do with pain or sadness. On the contrary, they occur, along with feelings of awe, appreciation, gratitude, and joy when one directly confronts, I believe, realized instances of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. To me, these "wonder-joy tears" are physiological indicators (also accompanied by hairs standing on end and feelings of chills and thrills up and down the spine) that the "eye of the heart" or "eye of the spirit" is open and active, directly perceiving an especially clear manifestation of the divine. Yes, as you mention, at the Institute of Transpersonal

Psychology (ITP), where I teach, I've begun a formal study of persons' experiences of such "wonder-joy tears." A colleague, Rosemarie Anderson, is also studying a variation of such tears. She is interested in the experience of sacred tears or transformational weeping in which one seems to be weeping for much more than oneself, for all of humanity. She is curious about how such weeping may be indicators of or facilitators of, spiritual transformation. Diane Schwedner, a graduate student at ITP, is also exploring "tears of wonder-joy" (especially the phenomenological accompaniments of such tears, when they occur in men) for her dissertation research. So this is an experience in which there is some density of interest at ITP. We hope to report our findings when the work has progressed further. But yes, "wonder-joy tears" did accompany my "timelessness experience," and I suspect they may be accompaniments or aftereffects of other EHEs, as well. They may, themselves, be still another indicator of the *exceptional* nature of such experiences.

I found it most interesting that Boyce Batey had his exceptional experience in the context of reading Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. I, too, have had exceptional experiences in connection with reading Wordsworth's poetry (especially his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*), the poetry of other English Romantic poets, and, of course, the poetry through which the mystics of all ages have attempted (so successfully, I feel) to express their ineffable experiences. To me, exceptional human experiences are expressed so much more faithfully through poetry, art, and music than through linear prose. I often feel that we can learn much more about exceptional experiences, and about psychology in general, from poets, novelists, artists, and musicians than we can through reading the learned tomes of psychologists and other academic writers. Perhaps there is a lesson for us here. Perhaps we can read the poets, especially mystical poets such as Wordsworth, Donne, Traherne, Vaughan, Blake, Eliot, Rumi, and many others, for purposes of appreciation, inspiration, and understanding, as well as for preparation for and invitation of a great variety of exceptional human experiences. And perhaps we can enrich this poetic storehouse with our own poetic accounts of the experiences with which we are graced—as effective and inspirational modes of expressing these experiences to others.

*William James Center for Consciousness Studies
Institute of Transpersonal Psychology
744 San Antonio Road
Palo Alto CA 94303*

**William Braud, Ph.D. is Professor and
Research Director at the Institute of
Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto,
California.**

Copyright Notice

You may forward this document to anyone you think might be interested. The only limitations are:

1. You must copy this document in its entirety, without modifications, including this copyright notice.
2. You do not have permission to change the contents or make extracts.
3. You do not have permission to copy this document for commercial purposes.

The contents of this document are Copyright © 1997 by the Exceptional Human Experience Network. This article originally appeared in the journal, Exceptional Human Experience, Volume 13, Number 1, June, 1995, pp. 67-68. Used with permission.