



We Are Stardust

exploring ongoing connections in transcendent reality

Written by TONY GEE

In October 2019, The Compassionate Friends Victoria – with the support of Life Is... Foundation (lifeis.org.au) – launched a bi-monthly discussion forum. The forums provide a platform for TCFV members to discuss spirituality and other transpersonal themes and experiences. The forums focus on continuing bonds and connection, rather than specifically on loss. The following article, written by program facilitator Tony Gee, provides a preview of themes that will be explored in the upcoming forums...

This brief article is an introduction to 'sense of presence' experiences that often spontaneously occur following the death of a loved one. It sets such spiritual or transpersonal experiences within a broader framework that includes not only lived experience, but also those of social science and quantum physics.

"The mechanistic and materialist mindset of the modern age created a deep gulf between science and intuitive modes of envisaging the world."

Ervin Laslo 1

"It does not matter where his body lies, for it is grass; but where his spirit is, it will be good to be."

Black Elk 2

When Apollo 14 astronaut, Edgar Mitchell, the 6th person to ever walk on the moon, was returning to Earth, he had a remarkable experience. He described it like this:

"I had completed my major task for going to the moon and was on my way home and was observing the heavens and the earth from this distance, observing the passing of the heavens. As we were rotated, I saw the earth, the sun, the moon, and a 360 degree panorama of the heavens. The magnificence of all of this was this trigger in my visioning. In the ancient Sanskrit, it's called Samadhi. It means that you see things with your senses the way they are – you experience them viscerally and internally as a unity and a oneness accompanied by ecstasy. All matter in our universe is created in star systems, and so the matter in my body, the matter in the spacecraft, the matter in my partners' bodies, was the product of stars. We are stardust, and we're all one in that sense." 3

He also experienced: *"knowing for sure - that there was a purposefulness of flow, of energy, of time, of space in the cosmos - that it was beyond man's rational ability to understand, that suddenly there was a non rational way of understanding that had been beyond my previous experience".* 4

Mitchell was a highly trained astronaut, an aeronautical engineer who was compelled to examine this "non rational" but "knowing" experience. It shifted his entire life perspective. He did not discount his rational, intellectual knowledge, after all that got him to the moon and back, but this was something more, something deeper and something harder to access or to articulate, and it moved him so profoundly that he spent the rest of his life trying to understand more about it.

While unique in itself (as all personal experiences are) what occurred to Mitchell is not unique to humanity. Non rational, mystical, spiritual or transpersonal experiences are part of every spiritual, religious or wisdom tradition known to man. Such experiences may be seen as accessing a different type of reality than our usual everyday experience. This has been broadly termed *transcendent reality* **5**, a reality that underlies the material but is less obvious in form and generally less accessible in day to day life. In stark contrast to purely rationalist frameworks that have dominated Western thought, such wisdom traditions encompass several key principles.

These are:

- that there is a 'world beyond the world', two realms or realities, the 'seen and the unseen'.
- by our very nature, human beings are involved in both realms (whether we are aware of it or not). There is the day to day material, rational world, as well as the world of dreams, of visions, of peak and transcendent experiences.
- human beings have the capacity to recognise both worlds (some more than others), including their connection to Something Greater (Divine, Creator, Source)
- the aspiration of life is towards realizing this connection, this spiritual in man. This is the highest goal in life. **6**

In terms of 'hard' science, while there is still much debate, a 'physics of the soul' is emerging with a number of physicists finding that there are remarkable parallels in the discoveries of quantum physics, with ancient wisdom traditions. As Laslo states "We are moving toward a new culture of which science could be a part, of which ancient wisdom could be a part and in which they could both find a new integration." **7**

Radin sums this up when he states: "*Underlying the isolated world of ordinary objects and human experience is another reality, an interconnected world of intermingling relationships and possibilities. This underlying reality is more fundamental – in the sense of being the ground state from which everything originates – than the transient forms and dynamic relationships of familiar experience.*" **8**

And in terms of bereavement, and sense of presence experiences, it is this 'underlying reality' that is accessed. While sense of presence experiences may take many forms and incorporate many different and unique individual experiences, their commonality is that they are all examples of connection to *transcendent reality*. Take the account of a woman following the loss of her brother in the Vietnam War. She states,

*I don't call it a dream, I call it a vision. It happened in February 1973. I had been thinking about Allan a lot. My husband was asleep. All of a sudden I woke up and saw this light beaming into the bedroom. It was a beautiful, really bright, white light. I opened my eyes. I saw it, and I saw a vision of Allan. I saw his little cherub face, round and darling, and he said, 'Yvonne, don't grieve. I am in ecstasy.' The light I think is what woke me up. It was unbelievable...for someone else but not for me. I know what I saw. **9***

The great psychologist William James who actually first used the term transpersonal, says:

"Those who have such experiences distinctly enough and often enough to live in the light of them remain quite unmoved by criticism, from whatever quarter it may come, be it academic or scientific, or be it merely the voice of logical common sense. They have had their vision and they know - that is enough - that we inhabit an invisible spiritual environment from which help comes, our soul being mysteriously one with a larger soul whose instruments we are." **10**

Every scientist knows that the first law of thermodynamics states that no energy in the Universe can be created or lost, only transformed. So at death, *"According to the law of the conservation of energy, not a bit of you is gone; you're just less orderly"*. **11**

"Death is simply a shedding of the physical body like the butterfly shedding its cocoon. It is no different from taking off a suit of clothes one no longer needs. It is a transition to a higher state of consciousness where you continue to perceive, to understand, to laugh, and to be able to grow." Elizabeth Kubler-Ross **12**

In the material world we experience separation, loss and impermanence, while in the *transcendent* realm, accessed by transpersonal experiences of varying kinds, and validated by an ever-emerging science, the Universe is recognised as coherent and everything is meaningfully connected. In this Great Mystery only transformation occurs. And whether seen or unseen, believed or disbelieved, we and our children, siblings and grandchildren are/were/remain truly Stardust.

1 Laslo, E. (2006) *The Chaos Point: the world at the crossroads* Hampton Roads Publishing Co. Charlottesville VA p 59

2 Neihardt, J. C. (1972) *Black Elk Speaks* Washington Square Press Pocket Books, NY. p. 122

3 Edgar Mitchell quoted in <http://www.imere.org/content/mystical-experience-edgar-mitchell-scd-phd>

4 Edgar Mitrchell ibid

5 Klass, D. (1999) *The Spiritual Lives of Bereaved Parents* Taylor and Francis USA

6 Walsh, R. (1999) *Essential Spirituality: the seven central practices to awaken heart and mind* John Wiley and Sons Inc NY

7 Laslo, E. ed (1999) *The Consciousness Revolution* Elf Rock Productions, London.p 35

8 Radin, D. (2006) *Entangled Minds: extrasensory experiences in a quantum reality* Paraview Pocket Books NY p 297

9 Palmer, L. (1988) *Shrapnel in the Heart* Vintage Books NY p 31

10 McDermott, J.D. (1967) *The Writings of William James; a comprehensive edition* Random House NY p 801

11 Aaron Freeman quoted in <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=46759531>

12 Kubler-Ross, E. (1991) *on Life after Death* Celestial Arts, California, USA. P 26