



Essean Perspectives Series

HELP FROM BEYOND

In the silence of the evening, the furnishings of the room barely are visible in the soft glow of the single candle perched upon the dresser next to the small bed upon which a young man reclines. Propped slightly upright against a large pillow, he focuses intently upon the picture of an elderly spiritual master adorning the far wall. After extended moments, his eyelids lower, extinguishing the image for no more than an instant. Suddenly, a flash of intense light illuminates the room and there, at the foot of his bed, stands the subject of his meditation. The elderly master reaches out and takes the young man's hand and, together, the pair miraculously enters a heavenly garden. The young man is delightfully at ease as he strides beside the older man, engaging the spiritual master in conversation. He asks all the complex questions burdening his mind and the master patiently responds, providing simple answers to each. Ultimately when he exhausts his questions, the garden and the master vanish in a receding aura of light, leaving him restfully reclining in the dimly lit room. The young man assumes he had a vision and has reached out to receive much needed help from the beyond.

Throughout history, the above described phenomenon has occurred in varying degrees to thousands of individuals. Whether in the guise of an angel, a saint, a departed sage or some other animated personage, the visitor possessed an undeniable realness. However, was the vision truly real? The answer would be a qualified yes and no. Yes, to the extent that all human perception is real to the recipient and, no, to the degree that it was not evoked by the immediate external environment. It existed, as all things exist, within the confines of the individual's mind. The vision was internally instigated. It occurred because

the individual sought and willed it into being. Yet, it truly was help from beyond – from beyond the reach of the normal, everyday conscious mind.

If for simplicity we consider the human mind to be contained within the physical brain, we can define two distinct forms of awareness that occur within that mind. First, there are the experiences prompted by the events occurring outside the human brain. These we generally define as our normal reality. They are generated by those things affecting the senses that feed stimuli to the brain. Light strikes the receptors in the eyes that, in turn, relay a barrage of separate impulses to the brain. Thus, we see an "object". However, we do not see the essence of that object but merely a portion of the light that object reflects and the contrasting darkness where there is no reflected light. Thus, our visual impression of that object is highly restricted. In fact, it is an illusion in the strictest sense for it does not portray that object as it truly exists. Indeed, to us, this is "reality" because it is the practical perception through which we experience the external realm and upon which we base our lives.

As with vision, all of our mental data is derived from stimuli fed through sensors to our brains and, despite its inherent limitations, this data forms our practical grasp of the "real". It is our primary contact with the realm beyond our minds. However, beyond this first form of "reality", a second similar form exists. We experience this alternate "reality" within the confines of the brain and generally refer to it as "fantasy" (an imagined internal realm). Nonetheless, it is equally as real as our perception of the external environment in that it is composed of the same identical components, stored as our memories of the external world. With or without conscious prompting, our minds draw upon past externally provoked experiences (memories) and, like constructing collages, assemble new perceptions from those. These manufactured impressions are as real as our immediate impressions of our material world. They are the same in composition, only the source has changed and only our ability to distinguish that difference separates our "real" and "fantasy" realm. It also should be noted here that conscious verbal and nonverbal thought are, in fact, aspects of the "fantasy" realm.

The human mind is an ingeniously inventive entity and necessarily so. Our survival rests upon our ability to generate novel solutions to the multitude of problems we encounter in daily life. We are compelled to invent new concepts that our senses do not naturally provide. This compulsion forces an internal rearrangement of common experiences, taking bits and pieces of each to generate concepts different from those we glean from the external environment. To illustrate graphically, we can take the images of a lion and a horse, extract the head from the first and mount it upon the body of the second, and visualize an animal that does not exist in our external world. Moreover, since our sense data arrives in minute impulses, we can dissect that data with the skill of one rearranging grains of sand and devise infinitely more complex elements of thought. The incredible advances of our sciences are based upon this ability to fantasize, thereby rearranging the commonplace experiences of daily living into the modern marvels that now regularly unfold. Whether we label this process inspiration, imagination, creativity or some other term to separate it from our perceptions of

the external world, it differs only in its source. Both are same in fundamental nature; both are occurring within the confines of the human mind. Therefore, in which category does the vision described in the opening paragraph belong?

Like all awareness, a vision is an internal reality. It is a construction much like a dream and can evoke all of the sensations we derive from our encounter with the external environment. In essence, a vision is a "reality" we manufacture as a means of communicating with our inner selves. It is necessary to digress for a moment to explain the basic feature of human consciousness that supports this claim.

In the course of our daily lives, our minds acquire an immense amount of data – more in the span of a single day than we consciously could digest or analyze in a lifetime. Thus, the mind prioritizes. It stores that data in memory and limits its focus to that which it deems the most critical or desirable elements of life. That focus constitutes the aspect we call our "conscious" minds. Actually, it is no more than the spotlight of our awareness. For example, if absorbed in a television program, we stare at the video screen and ignore the rest of the room. However, we still experience all of the visible room and attend to its sounds and all the other experiences of sense. We consciously dismiss these and concentrate on the video and audio of our television set until some other experience demands our attention. A column of smoke rising in a far corner of the room (hopefully) immediately would turn our eyes away from the television. Until that diversion, we remain preoccupied with the televised fare.

In daily existence, we deal with the vast input of sensory data in relatively the same manner. We ignore all but a slight fraction of one percent of all we perceive until we desire or need to utilize some element of that total living experience. Unfortunately, we are not blessed with total absolute recall. Thus, while we may have a nagging suspicion that the data we need resides somewhere within our memories, we often cannot reach in and extract it as easily as we can examine the external world. Further, beyond the experiences we accrue in life, we possess other memories that we inherit along with our genes. The ability to breathe, focus our eyes and a host of other instinctive traits are built into our overall mental structures in the form of genetic memories we acquire at birth. Like the birds ability to fly south in the winter and return to a particular nesting place, or the salmon's ability to leave its saltwater habitat and swim into a freshwater stream in search of its spawning grounds, we inherit very sophisticated memories from generations past. These also reside within the confines of our minds to assist us when necessary. Nevertheless, we simply do not reach inward casually and explore this storehouse of data at will. Fortunately, Nature has provided each of us with a unique capacity to utilize in emergencies. When intently pressed, the mind aborts its normal conscious focus, gleans necessary data from its internal memories (both genetic and environmental), and constructs demanded perceptions for our conscious minds. This may take the form of a sudden inspiration, a seemingly reflex action, or a full-blown revelation pressed upon us like a dream. When sufficiently provoked, the mind is programmed to respond.

Visions are ordinary everyday phenomena. They range from the subtle inspiration or "ah-ha!" experience to the apparition described in the opening paragraph of this piece. In the case of the latter, only the conscious focus departs the external realm. It turns inward into the expanse of consciousness to entertain the subjective reality of that realm. We could call that experience "illusion" but that designation, as explained earlier, also applies to all experiences of mind. All are constructed of memory even while they are being perceived. While being assembled within the brain, individual mental impulses are minute pieces of experiences that already have occurred. The process is identical to the formation of a dream. As stated above, the only distinction rests in their sources – on whether they are externally or internally provoked.

With the above qualifications, visions are real. They are constructs of mental data designed to advance the awareness of the mind. Are such visions as the one described in the opening paragraph fallible? Possibly. They are gleaned from memories and are as prone to error as any thought we can construct. Yet, they may be incalculably useful for they provide access to the greater inner expanses of our minds.

Visions can be evoked by anyone for it takes no special gift or calling to fantasize. If we fervently concentrate upon a desired image of an individual with sufficient intensity and in the proper atmosphere and surroundings, we can commune with our memory constructs of that individual within the boundaries of the mind. However, bear in mind the nature of that experience. We are communicating with none other than our inner selves. Moreover, that communication will be as prone to error as anything generated by our minds. Therefore, it later should be rationally analyzed.

How does one evoke a vision? First, select an image upon which to concentrate. This could be a picture or statuette that, to you, symbolizes a source of wisdom and tranquility. Place that image in a quiet room – one illuminated by a very dim, slightly amber light or a candle set in an appropriate glass holder. Now select a comfortable sitting position before that image – a sitting position that is restful but attentive enough to forestall the onset of sleep. Incidentally, an element of mental fatigue can and does enhance the process. This can be achieved by an hour or so of pertinent reading that stimulates and slightly taxes your mind. Finally, you must believe the vision will materialize and fervently desire it. Skeptics will debate unconsciously the merits of the exercise, thus defeating the process by fragmenting their concentration. If you have fulfilled the above requirements thus far, make a conscious effort to set aside your fears. Your vision will be thoroughly manageable. If it disturbs you in any fashion, your conscious mind automatically will abort the vision and return you to normal consciousness as if you merely had indulged in a dream.

Having accomplished all of the above, focus your mind. With your eyes locked upon the image upon which you concentrate, select a name for that image, preferably a single melodic word, and repeat that word endlessly, letting no other voiced thought intervene. If you persevere in your effort, your vision will appear.

Through visions, we can communicate with our ancestors for memories those ancestors compiled have been delivered to us within the physical bodies we inherited. Through contact with those memories, we can experience aspects of their lives, some so remotely distant from our immediate ancestors that we would be hard-pressed to discern a direct connection with our personal selves. Further, both our ancestors and ourselves were exposed to assimilated memories – to the direct communication between individuals that transpire in the course of daily life. Just as a magnet leaves an impression of its magnetism within a nail it brushes past, one individual's physical energies leaves an impression of that individual upon the physical surroundings he or she encounters in life. The subatomic activity of one body alters the subatomic activity of others with which it interacts and, in this manner, physical structures such as clothing, furnishings and the like acquire some imprints of human patterns – imprints that are composed of the same elements from which memories are derived. Thus, our visions can embody elements that have no seemingly biological connection with our heritage. They can afford us a brief glimpse into other lives – into other places and eras in time. Such is the nature of visions. They are no more mysterious than the everyday workings of the human mind. With a bit of conscientious practice, we can step into the formerly privileged realm of sages, saints and prophets, and enjoy this commonly available help from the beyond.

Please resist the urge to initiate a new religion based upon your visions. The world has enough competing cults without another being added to the fold. As stated earlier, visions are fallible! They must be analyzed and evaluated in the sobering light of day, and in the same manner in which you analyze your dreams. No vision should be taken at face value! If you foolishly do, it will thoroughly disrupt your life.

[Author's note: The vision outlined in the first paragraph of this piece was one I encountered when I first began to meditate. At that time, the answers I received from my elderly sage seemed absolutely profound. However, when I began to explore those answers, I discovered that many of them were either misguided or patently wrong. In later meditations, I found that the responses I received from my elderly "sage" were resident within my mind, many of which I since have judiciously placed in my mental "garbage file".]

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Comments solicited. Send to: hainaloa@gmail.com Subject: **Help from Beyond**