

The Question Box

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Energy fields have been proven to be in and around the physical body. Has any link been studied about the human physical energy field and the spiritual field of mystics and intuitives?

Are humans superior to all other animals when it comes to vivisection? The chimpanzees from Alamagordo have all been released (I think), but many of them had been caged for over 35 years.

How would you compare/contrast Walt Whitman and D.H. Lawrence as far as the main ideas they were promulgating?

If scientists don't know or can't identify the margins of consciousness, does it stand to reason (or not) that everyone's margins overlap when they go beyond their own experiences, sense perceptions, and memories into the realm of ideas? Is there a commonwealth field of consciousness (a cosmic consciousness) that we can all plow, till, and harvest if we expand the margins of our own minds?

Finally, would you take the red pill or the blue pill? And how did Trinity's kiss bring back Neo from the dead?

I confess. That last one is my own question and concerns the film *The Matrix*, depicting a dystopian future where human beings have been plugged into an artificially intelligent network that keeps them in a state of suspended animation, hibernating in mechanical cocoons, while the electromagnetic power from their brains and spinal cords gets sucked up, generating a shared virtual reality inside their heads inducing them to dream that they are actually living in New York City in the 1990's (when the movie was made) rather than awakening to the truth that they're just napping Energizer Bunnies snoozing inside a somnambulistic nightmare.

Take the blue pill and you remain in a pleasant dream land. Take the red pill and learn just how deep the rabbit hole goes. Naturally, being Unitarians, we'll choose the red, just like Neo did.

One reason the film works is that it's based on familiar archetypes: a mix of Plato's Cave, *Sleeping Beauty*, and the Apostle Paul. "For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face-to-face; now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." Love, Paul says, is the secret ingredient inside the red pill that frees us from

the illusions of separateness and death and liberates us into full understanding of our true identity as members of one timeless body--the body of Krishna, Christ, Trinity, Kuan Yin, or whatever name you give to Ultimate Reality.

Archetypes, myths, fairy tales are part of what make movies like *The Matrix* work. These are what make poetic symbols and metaphors like the D.H. Lawrence's snake "a king, uncrowned in the underworld" so evocative. They live in the unconscious mind, where dreams arise, and scholars of religion like Joseph Campbell would say they are human universals, part of every man and woman who incarnates the hero with a thousand faces, whose destiny is to disembark from the safety of the womb, leave behind the enchantment of childhood, and then grapple with the ordeals and dragons of adulthood to win the golden treasure of wisdom.

Of course, one problem with *The Matrix* is that it's fantasy, not science. The human brain actually generates about the same energy as a ten watt light bulb, the kind inside your refrigerator. So hooking people up to a power grid doesn't make much sense, practically.

But what a lot we manage with those skimpy ten watts. According to my latest issue of *Scientific American*, the brain consists of about 100 billion neurons with 100 trillion intersections or synapses. 100 trillion is a really big number. If you started counting, 1,2,3,4,5, it would take you about thirty-one thousand years to reach that figure. In an article titled "How Matter Becomes Mind," the authors try to explain the origin of consciousness by mapping that vast complexity onto a computer simulation of 300 node points, in other words, they don't have a clue how we become self-aware. But we do know the brain is continually pulsing with alpha waves, beta, delta and theta waves, some associated with deep sleep, some with dreaming, some with problem solving, some with more relaxed, contemplative moods, vibrating at frequencies from .5 to 30 hertz or cycles per second. And even in high beta mode, part of our brain is dreaming, and vice versa, which would explain phenomena like the case of the German chemist Kekule, over a century ago, searching for the structure of the benzene molecule, who went to sleep and dreamt of a snake devouring its own tail. (Talk about archetypes!) When he awoke, he realized the carbon atoms were arranged in a ring or circular structure. His brain was processing information even while he slept.

For reasons like this, I put some stock in dreams. I myself have a recurring dream that I'm in a house that seems quite familiar, my own house, though not actually the address where I presently live. Now every part of every dream represents some aspect of who you are, because you're the one doing the dreaming; it's your neural net; maybe it's just the bad Chinese food you had for dinner, but it's still a part of you. Yet many say the

house or *home*, in particular, is a symbol for oneself, the psyche. And in this house, in my dream, I'm vaguely aware of a suite of rooms in the back, mostly vacant, not quite scary but somewhat off limits, unexplored, which I take to represent my shadow or aspects of my personality that I don't really want to visit. In a variation, sometimes I dream I enter into a house that appears rather small on the outside, but inexplicably spacious, almost palatial, once I enter. I wonder. Do any of you have dreams like this, of inhabiting a residence that has secret chambers or hidden rooms or annexes? (*Over half the hands go up!*) As Jesus said, "My father's house has many rooms." As Whitman said, "I contain multitudes." Or as D.H. Lawrence put it,

This is what I believe: That I am I. That my soul is a dark forest. That my known self will never be more than a little clearing in the forest. That gods, strange gods, come forth from the forest into the clearing of my known self, and then go back. That I must have the courage to let them come and go.

He also spoke of religion as being a continuous process of conversion, not of being "born again" *per se*, but of being born and reborn.

I believe one is born first unto one's self --for the happy developing of one's self, while the world is a nursery, and the pretty things are to be snatched for, and pleasant things tasted; some people seem to exist thus right to the end. But most are born again on entering adulthood; then they are born to humanity, to a consciousness of all the laughing, and the never-ceasing murmur of pain and sorrow that comes from the terrible multitudes of brothers and sisters. Then, it appears to me, a person gradually formulates his or her religion, be it what it may. An individual has no religion who has not slowly and painfully gathered one together, adding to it, shaping it, and one's religion is never final and complete, it seems, but must always be undergoing modification.

A religion so acquired is the goal of the hero's journey, I think: the alchemical transmutation of lead into gold, or suffering into enlightenment, which is a state of heightened realization. When an MRI scans the brains of Buddhist monks who have spent thousands of hours sitting on a cushion, a special part of the cerebrum lights up, the *anterior insula*, emitting high frequency gamma oscillations. These monks have devoted their whole lifetimes to meditating on the Noble Truths: that all life is suffering, that the root of suffering is ego, craving and attachment, that nirvana is to be found through the cultivation of generosity and compassion for others. Instead of focusing their energy on self-aggrandizement, winning and achievement, they deliberately center their attention, in every breath, in each moment, on the well-being of all creation. And this is the doorway to what might be called the ecological self, the experience of

interdependence and mutuality with all living creatures. For if the mind has a subconscious or basement level, why shouldn't it also contain a super-conscious or upper story? But the path often leads through pain.

Jane Goodall spoke of that agony and the ecstasy in her autobiography *Reason for Hope*. There she described the death of her husband Derek Bryceson, whose tragic diagnosis of colon cancer marked a descent into darkness and soul-searching for the famous primatologist. In spite of her prayers, doctors found the condition inoperable and gave Derek just weeks to live, weeks of anguish and bodily torment. "The gradual increase of pain, the injections at night instead of pills ... Oh, the horror of it, suffering for the suffering of one I loved more deeply with each passing day." Jane looked everywhere for help: to Western medicine, faith healers, psychics, but nothing slowed the disease. Derek's death brought her to an abyss of doubt and despair. "And so, for a while, after Derek's death, I rejected God, and the world seemed a bleak place."

It was a year and a half later that hope re-entered her world, she explains. Exhausted from a lecture tour in America, she'd return to the Gombe Stream Reserve, to be with her beloved chimps, her other family. Climbing the hilly terrain, she found herself caught together with them in a drenching rainstorm, then basking in the soft glow of sunlight that followed. "It is hard-impossible really-to put into words the moment of truth that came upon me then."

It seemed to me, as I struggled afterward to recall the experience, that self was utterly absent: I and the chimpanzees, the earth and trees and air, seemed to merge, to become one with the spirit power of life itself. The air was filled with a feathered symphony, the evensong of birds. I heard new frequencies in their music and also in the insects' voices--notes so high and sweet I was amazed.

Every vein in every leaf seemed unique and individual. Time slowed. Jane at that moment felt she was part of a natural order that "dwarfs and yet somehow enhances human emotions." The forest had given her, she says, "the peace that passes understanding."

She was changed, one might say spiritually converted, by the experience. Jane Goodall no longer spends her time doing fieldwork or scientific research, but battles for an end to laboratory testing on chimps and other primates. It's needed work, not just for our closest cousins, but for the millions of dogs, pigs, rodents and other sentient creatures who are killed annually. Because animal research is not just science (sometimes it may even be good science), it is also Big Business, funded by Big Pharma, by Big Agriculture, (think Monsanto, think Cargill), by the Department of

Defense (which put those Alamogordo chimps in captivity) and other entities who do not want you to know about goats genetically modified to contain the DNA of spiders, or about phosphorescent sheep, or about dolphins trained for underwater mine warfare. Because it is not in their interest for you to know. Trust us, they say.

I find it hard to trust. Years ago, Dori and I wanted to find out how our tax dollars were being spent at the University of Vermont and tried to attend a meeting of the IACUC, the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee that oversees animal research on campus. Every university has one. IACUCs were created and mandated under the Federal Animal Welfare Act to include at least one member of the public unaffiliated with any testing facility to monitor and approve experimental protocols and insure compliance with the best ethical and veterinary standards. As citizens, curious for information, we were immediately expelled by the committee, made to sit out in the hall like naughty school children, while the IACUC went into executive session for the entirety of its meeting with no minutes or records of its proceedings. Were they making two-headed monkeys in their animal labs? Probably not. Who knows? Nobody. But they were certainly making monkeys out of us and out of the university's commitment to free inquiry and transparency. They were trampling on the open exchange of ideas and shredding any semblance of accountability. And I expect our experience was not unusual.

It is now a felony to record or take unauthorized photos inside an animal lab or inside a factory farm. Under the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, it is not just a simple misdemeanor of trespass or unlawful entry or even malicious mischief. And it's certainly not considered an act of whistleblowing or investigative reporting to document unsafe, unsanitary or unethical conditions. No, it's a crime of terrorism punishable by twenty years in a federal penitentiary, thanks to a statute written and endorsed by ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council, and if you've never heard of ALEC, better ask the Oracle and run for the nearest phone booth, because they're as close as it comes to the agents owning and operating the Matrix.

So having answered your questions, or some of them, I leave you with these questions. Are you happy thinking your meat comes from the grocery store, or would you really like the law to let you know what really happens inside animal industrial agriculture? Do you want to know how the CIA used animal experiments to perfect human interrogation and torture at its black sites, or would you prefer just leaving it in the gentle hands of the intelligence community? In other words, do you want to take the red pill or the blue pill, and how far down the rabbit hole are you willing to go?