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# ARTIFACTS

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## A Journey to Other Worlds

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**Daniel Miller graduated from MU with a bachelor of English in May 2014, and he is a first-year masters' student now in English at MU. His fiction has appeared in ZONE 3, Puerto del Sol, and Hobart, among other publications. He selected to write about this topic simply because he has always been fascinated with astral projection and lucid dreaming. He tried to achieve this state while researching and writing the paper.**

The astral body appears in many different cultures throughout time and throughout the world. In Egypt, the “KA was not the soul of man . . . but its vehicle” (Muldoon & Carrington, 2011, p. xxii). In the Qur’an, Muhammad’s astral body travels in the Isra and Mi’raj story. And, among other sacred and secular texts, the astral body appears in Hindu scripture, Taoist practice, and even Christianity. In his article regarding the afterlife, Woolger (2014) notes that “in such journeys in the world religions and innumerable tribal practices” scholars have “described a common pattern of ‘ascent’, which is to say an ecstatic, mystical or out-of-body experience, wherein the spiritual traveler leaves the physical body and travels in his/her subtle body into ‘higher’ realms” (para. 4).

Dually, this quotation makes apparent the historical depth of astral projection as well as uses specific terms—spiritual, mystical, and the idea of ‘higher’ realms—that separates astral projection from other types of out-of-body experiences (OBEs). In the following paper, I intend to define the well documented astral projection legend, and then compare and contrast variants of the legend found around the world.

Smith (2010) defines OBEs as “the sensation of leaving and floating outside one’s body, often while seeing one’s body.” He goes on to explain that “this experience is presented as evidence for a nonmaterial and disembodied ‘astral body,’ ‘spirit,’ or ‘soul,’ capable of paranormal journeying through

‘astral projection,’ or ‘spiritual travel’” (p. 211). It is interesting to note that many sources use the term “out-of-body experience” as a catch-all for any similar phenomenon. It is also interesting, and perhaps important, to note that this definition has been used in every source except one, a text that defines astral projection as a type of doppelganger legend. Xiong (2008) describes astral projection as a phenomenon in which “the out-of-body self can be seen by others” and “astral projection can be subdivided into spontaneous and voluntary” (p. 204). The author goes on to cite well known variants—Goethe and Freud—who have experienced this type of astral projection.

Despite this unusual definition, though, the phenomenon most often is described as the former definition, that is, a sensation of the astral body traveling to an astral plane, and it is this definition that the paper will concern. After defining OBEs, Smith (2010) explains how astral projection can occur. He states that “although an OBE can be spontaneous, it is more often associated with near-death experience, stroke, epilepsy, the ingestion of psychedelic drugs...or the emergence of hypnogogic states” (p. 211). It is the latter method that I find so interesting and chose to research. A hypnogogic state is defined as the drowsy period between wakefulness and sleep and it is during this period in which, according to Muldoon’s and Carrington, astral catalepsy and astral projection takes place.

It is difficult to define what the astral plane is as it is unique to each person and what they know or have seen. Though exacts cannot be explained, Muldoon and Carrington (2011) calls this area a *dream world*. He says that “when you are dreaming you are not really in the same world as when you are conscious . . . while dreaming you really are in the astral plane . . . once detached—whether slightly or remotely—you are in the astral plane” (p. 97). Once in the astral plane, the astral body is limited by the astral cable. According to Muldoon and Carrington, “the astral cord is an elastic-like structure, connecting the astral body with the physical,” he goes on to say that “the astral cord always stretches from one body to the other, regardless of the space or distance between them” (p. 29).

Now that the astral projection legend has been described, I’d like to discuss specific variants of the legend. Because, of the other variants I found, Muldoon and Carrington have the most knowledge of and experience with astral projection, it is his that I will set the context of the legend. Muldoon, who has experienced this legend since the age of twelve, prefaces his book with a selection of letters, but only two letters describe specific variants. Both variants take place in the morning, after waking up and falling again to sleep. In the first variant, Muldoon (2011) notes that “while lying on the stomach, the sensations while moving through the air are reversed.” (p. xxxix).

In the second variant, Muldoon and Carrington note that his astral body traveled to a familiar place and came in contact with a familiar figure, seemingly suggesting that astral projection relies on the subconscious to “create” the aforementioned *dream world*. Upon waking, they found that he “was conscious, but unable to move; I could not utter a sound, could not move my eyelids” (p. xxxix). Clearly, he is describing sleep paralysis, a period of catalepsy as well as a hypnogogic state.

Next, I will describe other variants of the legend that appear around the world and attempt to discuss how they differ, and for this information I used the website of the Out of Body Experience Research Foundation, which offers a space for people to share their experiences. Moving first from Muldoon’s experience in America is that of Marco from Italy. Marco prefaces his transcript by saying that “if I had

not lived it (it was traumatic and negative) I would have not realized that God exists and loves us! It would seem strange to understand, but I came to this conclusion by simply reading the Bible as a result of these experiences.” Marco goes on to tell his experience but, strangely, most of his transcript is not about astral projection so much as a religious testimony. Marco spends more than half of the variant discussing how this single experience changed his life as he “discovered the greatness of God.”

Moving to South Africa is the astral projection experience of “Dustin S.” Dustin’s experience differs greatly from the others because the variant portrays a negative example of the variant. Dustin prefaces his transcript by noting that he had “contact from something,” prior to his OBEs. This appears to be his reasoning for why he experiences astral projection, that is, the source of the legend. His experience is sensually assaulting rather than enlightening and later, in a follow up questionnaire, Dustin names the emotion he felt as “terror.” Also differing in this variant is the lack of a higher realm. Dustin, in both OBE experiences, finds himself being thrown around and physically abused in a real-life setting. There is no signs of a “higher realm,” such as white light, a feeling of fulfillment, or a spiritual figure.

Moving, once more, to Chile is the experience of “Marc S.” Like Marco, Marc travels to a plane he describes as, “white, illuminated, fulfilling, peace, love like a vital energy.” Though the transcript of his experience is significantly shorter, Marc also notes the presence of a “Superior being,” that is, a descriptor choice that suggests his experience was religious or spiritual. When asked in the questionnaire whether he met or saw any other beings, Marc responded, “yes . . . I did not see persons, but I saw spiritual “corporalities” which presented themselves with enormous humility. I did not know them. I recognized their spirituality” (Marc S).

Finally, though it is perhaps the least descriptive of the previous variants, I would like to note my own experiences with the astral projection legend and my attempt at legend-tripping. I’d like to preface my variant by noting that I have tried to reproduce the legend many times, in fact, I attempt to astral project every night but only once have I had success. Before falling into a hypnogogic state, I remember planning my trip and I believe this visualization in addition to my will to project best explains the success. Once in a hypnogogic state, my astral body separated from my physical body, rising up and tilting from horizontal to vertical.

Although I watched my body externally, as if from a camera panning alongside my journey, I recall feeling all that my astral body felt. My astral body rose in stages. First it rose through the ceiling, then above the neighborhood, then above the city, then the state, then the world and finally above, as far as I could tell, space. As I gained height I felt vibrations—vibrations that become more intense the higher I became—which made me more and more happy. I cannot explain what these vibrations were but when I woke, intuition claimed it as a physical manifestation of positive energy. My journey ended in a pure white plane and I cannot recall whether I woke up then or simply lost lucidity.

Like two of the three found variants, I too, as Marc puts it, “rose through a stream of light.” I “felt a slight feeling of happiness and amazement!” I did not, however, see figures on the astral plane or feel particularly moved as those prior accounts. It is important, too, to note that none of these accounts, not even Muldoon’s, mention the astral cable, as important as it is. What I mean to suggest is, astral

projection and OBEs in general can be vastly different from person to person. There are, of course, commonalities but the legend can change immensely based on whoever is experiencing the OBE.

Muldoon, Marco, Marc, and I are not the only people who have experienced this phenomenon. As stated, the legend appears throughout the ages. Other notable practitioners of astral projection include Aleister Crowley, Satguru, Kirpal Singh, Robert Monroe, and Swedish scientist and philosopher, Emanuel Swedenborg. In her research, Blackmore (1984) sent, by mail, a survey to 593 randomly selected people—321 questionnaires were returned and usable for the date. The results of this survey show that of the 321 people who finished the survey, 39 “who replied claimed to have had an OBE”. She goes on to note that, “there were no significant age or sex differences between OBErs and non-OBErs” (p. 5). Furthermore the survey’s results show that 85% of OBErs have had multiple out-of-body experiences and 2 of the 321 (5%) “claimed to be able to induce an OBE at will” (p. 6). When asked about how the OBE was induced, “the most common of the circumstances . . . was ‘when resting but not asleep’ (59 percent). 31% ticked ‘other’, several claiming OBEs during sleep or dreaming. 26% noted operations or accidents and 18% drugs and medicines” (p. 6).

As a whole, this data suggests a few things. Firstly, Blackmore’s research proves that anybody is able to experience astral projection or an OBE, regardless of gender or age. Second, the research shows that, although there are multiple ways of inducing an OBE, the most common takes place in the hypnogogic state that Muldoon discusses. Finally, the research proves that recognizing the ability to have an OBE is key to experiencing the phenomenon again. Additional information the survey produced was that people having OBEs were just as likely to describe it as dreamlike as they were to describe it as like-reality, more often than not the astral plane appeared similar to the real world, and most who saw their body described its appearance as “normal.”

The purpose of Blackmore’s research was to find *what* sorts of people have OBEs and I think it is important to note that “OBErs were more likely to report many other experiences . . . mystical experiences” (Blackmore, 1984, p. 6). These mystical experiences, I’d argue, suggest that certain OBErs experienced astral projection and journeyed to a spiritual world. Results show that “19 percent of respondents claimed to have had a ‘profound or moving religious or mystical experience’ . . . The most commonly reported experiences were a sense of great humility and a oneness with God” (Blackmore, 1984, p. 11). Certainly this describes Marc and Marco’s experiences.

In conclusion, astral projection is an incredibly unique phenomenon. Everyone who experiences it does so differently, but it is safe to say that what separates astral projection from other types of OBEs is a sense of spirituality. In some cases, Marco’s for example, the spirituality is religious and certainly the phenomenon appears in the lore of many religions, but astral projection can also be secular. Both my experience and that of Muldoon were, to some extent, enlightening but neither mentions a religious figure. In the world of folklore and legends, it’s difficult to place a finger on astral projection. It is unlike La Llorona, unlike the hook, and a multitude of other legends that take place in the real, physical world. To perform astral projection is to journey past the real, physical world to a higher plane; a spirit world.

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