

Where Do You Want To Go *Today?*

*Astral travel allows you to transcend time and space without leaving
the comfort of your Barcalounger.*

by Marcia Jedd

Nearly ten years ago, while trying to nap one evening, I sensed I was floating out of my bedroom. My face felt like it was at the ceiling, ready to go through it. “What’s going on?” I wondered. With that thought, I instantly found myself awake and fully back in my body.

One Sunday morning two years later, I jolted awake like never before. I felt like I had slammed into my own body, entering feet first. Upon awakening I slowly recalled visiting my grandmother’s house in Michigan and also being in my own bedroom closet before I came rushing back. It felt like more than a dream, like I had actually been to those places. It took me a couple of hours to fully reconnect with my body.

I knew my experiences were not ordinary. They felt different from lucid dreaming, where you are aware of what you’re dreaming and can gain control and alter the content. Perplexed, I went to the library and found a book on out-of-body experiences.

Sometimes called soul travel or astral travel, out-of-body experiences (OBEs) happen when a person’s consciousness, or part thereof, seems to depart from the body. It feels as though your consciousness has been displaced or projected outward, and thus you can observe things as though you are outside the physical body.

While OBEs are often confused with and share similar characteristics with dream states and other psychic phenomena, OBEs have unique physiological attributes. OBEs have been validated in a number of scientific and academic studies. As with the near death experience (NDE), the OBE varies widely in content

and is influenced by the experience’s beliefs, perceptions, and life events. People who have had OBEs report an emotional comprehension of worlds beyond the physical realm and greater understanding of their own spiritual development.

Some OBEs are evoked spontaneously during natural sleep, meditation, or other states. Some happen during waking states, even during exercise. But OBEs can also be a learned, voluntary behavior that can be induced in either somnolent or active states or by using practiced techniques.

A Desire to Fly

Rick Stack had planned to have an OBE as a result of studying metaphysics in classes by the late Jane Roberts, the prolific author channeler of the well-known Seth material. “I had the idea to bring my waking consciousness with me in the dream state,” recalls Stack about his first OBE experience in 1972. He wound up in a park about 20 miles away from his Bronx home. “The reality of it was so overwhelming [that] I had assumed something happened to me,” he says. He felt surges of energy ripple through his body and soon realized he was out of his body. With that awareness came a sudden desire to fly. “I took off like a rocket and flew around the park.”

Stack knew from that first experience that he — or a part of him — would live forever. As a result, he no longer fears death. He was so affected by his experiences that he now teaches and writes about OBEs. His book *Out-of-Body Adventures: 30 Days to the Most Exciting Experience of Your Life* teaches the reader how to induce and benefit from this life-changing adventure.



Rick Stack

Albert Taylor is a former aerospace engineer and the author of *Soul Traveler: A Guide to Out-at-Body Experiences and the Wonder Beyond*.

“When in the soul state, or the OBE, the physical world is something that you have to pay attention to,” Taylor says. “But in the nonphysical world, the physical world is just one plane of existence. You can ignore the walls — the physical plane — but there is no distinct transition. It’s not like a light switch.”

Taylor, Stack, and other researchers conclude that travel within the physical world is possible during an OBE, including to the past and future. “In the physical world, you are experiencing five minutes. In the non-physical, it seems like hours; or hours can go by in what seems like five minutes,” says Taylor.

Moreover, travel to other dimensions outside of the physical world is considered by many experiencers to be the most compelling aspect of OBEs. Multidimensional travel links the inner self, spirituality, and broader cosmic connections to the creator and universe.

Taylor and scores of researchers before him suggest that the dimensions encountered in the OBE state include the astral plane and beyond. The astral plane, just beyond the physical plane, consists of spirit matter, including ghosts. Beyond the astral plane are the causal, mental, and etheric planes. But both Taylor and Stack caution not to get too caught up in exactly where you go. The experience itself is more important than defining exact locations.

Nevertheless, there are loose transitions between the dimensions or planes encountered in the OBE, along with changes in consciousness levels. “To go to higher levels such as the etheric realms, you shed your astral body, but there is no cut-and-dried transition,” says Taylor. As levels progress, vibrations and sounds experienced may change.

A Spontaneous OBE

Minneapolis, Minnesota resident Mark Hayes experienced his first OBE recently while taking a nap. He “dreamed” he walked out his front door, but there was no signal as to day or night, hot or cold. “I knew my body was back home sleeping, so I decided to go flying,” Hayes recalls. He found himself on a neighbor's roof and recalls feeling the roughness of the roof tiles and seeing his hands.

He leaped off the roof and landed in another place, in what felt like a different dimension. Hayes then asked for a spirit guide but instead became overwhelmed by cars chasing him. He reasons that the excitement quickly caused him to enter his body in a falling sensation and then jolt awake.

Like many who have spontaneous OBEs, Hayes didn’t consciously remember leaving his body; he simply found himself in that state. “I knew immediately it was a different type of dream. I was aware of my body being asleep back at home,” Hayes says, and he “felt accordingly ‘disembodied.’ ” It was the awareness of his body being elsewhere that made it a profound experience, unlike any other he's had. His own thoughts came to him as external sounds. Hayes has also experienced lucid dreams and has successfully levitated in one lucid dream.

OBEs can happen in times of relaxation, stress, or trauma. Hayes’s experience occurred after a massage. My attempt to escape the bedroom ceiling ten years ago followed a stressful period.

Hayes’s OBE might be typical of the experience because he discovered a range of dimensions or planes. Where you go and what you experience can depend on your level or consciousness in the OBE state. “The question is not only where you go but also in what state,” stresses Stack.



Dr. Albert Taylor, author of *Soul Traveler*

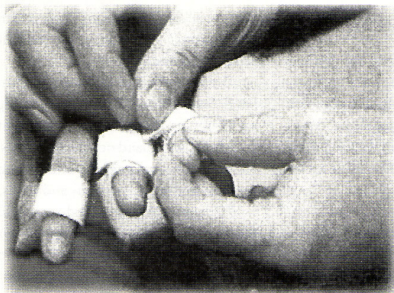
OBE Structures

In *Seth, Dreams, and Projection of Consciousness*, Seth (as channeled by Jane Roberts) suggests that there are three forms which provide basic structures for OBEs or projections:

- the ordinary dream state with the dream or astral body; here is where normal dreams, some levitation, and limited precognitive powers occur.
- the mind form state; levels of awareness and powers broaden to include walking through matter, more levitation, and travel within the solar system.
- true projection form; this is the broadest band of awareness where travel beyond the solar system and full perception of past, present, and future may be known.

Author and physician Deepak Chopra provides a different perspective. He says awareness levels expand with each state of consciousness, which he defines as deep sleep, dream, wakeful, transcendental, cosmic, divine, and unity consciousness.

During an OBE, you can travel to New York in 2010, experience a past life as a Persian king, or visit a distant planet, but researchers say a strong intent or emotional connection must be present. You must have a desire to visit a certain place or experience something for it to transpire in the OBE state. Taylor describes a failed test where a television show producer sent



Monroe Institute

Monitors that will measure galvanic skin response are being placed on a subject's fingers at the Monroe Institute.



Monroe Institute

This brain-wave cap will measure changes during different sleep stages.

him a sealed box and wanted him to put his consciousness inside to reveal its contents. Taylor suggests that while he had the desire to succeed in waking life, he was uninterested while in the OBE state. As Taylor emphasizes, the desire or emotional connection must be strong enough and for a greater purpose than simple curiosity to compel the experimenter to do something in the OBE. Here, the higher self or soul directs the action.

Spiritual Quest

Many researchers connect OBEs to spiritual evolution. OBEs can serve as a catalyst for personal growth in waking life. "OBEs are fun in and of themselves," says Stack, "but the communication with inner reality in these experiences is part of the growth process and leads people to grow spiritually." Those seeking OBEs for cheap thrills and sensations won't get far. "It's a spiritual path whether you realize it or not," says Taylor.

Dream work and OBEs go hand in hand. Stack recommends remembering and studying dreams to make sense of your inner world and personal symbols. He even cross-references patterns and symbols for both his dreams and OBEs. "Dreams are a natural doorway to the inner dimensions of your being," says Stack. Dreams can be used for problem solving, examining beliefs, and promoting health and healing, and they allow us to get in touch with repressed emotions. The key, suggests Stack,

is that dream work allows us to examine our belief systems and alter them.

A person's belief systems and perceptions influence the content of an OBE, just as they influence daily waking life and dreams. Both Stack and Taylor say thought forms quickly manifest in the OBE state. As a result, demons, angelic beings, past-life dramas, and glimpses into the future are all possible in the OBE state. The intense emotions of fear and love also influence the content of the OBE, and seem to override lesser emotions like anger or jealousy.

"You have to suspend ideas that create things like fear and [you must] quiet the mind. Then you start to experience real things," says Taylor.

Sometimes, however, strong feelings can lead to spontaneous OBEs. Taylor's own fear led him to walk through walls, so to speak. As he floated out of his body during an OBE launch, he could see his wife lying in bed next to him and hear noise in the bathroom. Concerned about an intruder in his home, he found he was able to look through two barriers to observe his son, who had come home unexpectedly, in the shower.



Monroe Institute

Robert Monroe, founder of the Monroe Institute and out-of-body traveler par excellence.

“I believe that my consciousness ignored the physical walls and saw through them. I could hear the noise and look at the walls. Then the walls weren’t there. I could see the door of the bathroom and then it ceased to exist,” says Taylor.

A profound OBE several years ago put Taylor into what he thinks was the etheric realm, similar to what transpires in the NDE. “Near death experiencers come back so changed because it really opens up your consciousness. There’s knowledge you are not privy to at lower levels,” he says. He felt “all knowing” during the experience, and he remains mesmerized by its power and beauty.

Taylor recalls OBEs back to age five, remembering voices call his name and feeling unable to move (night paralysis). He has seen his future in various OBEs. In one instance several years ago, Taylor was shocked to discover he would no longer be with his wife. He maintains that a person’s spirit guides protect them from information about their past, present, or future which could be harmful or prevent them from learning lessons. But, says Taylor, you can still act on information you are given. “Life and death are not predestined. You have free will,” he says.

Proof for OBEs

The mainstream scientific community has accepted the notion of the OBE as it has accepted some psychic phenomena in the realm of “anomalous cognition” (extrasensory perception), says Skip Atwater, research director at the Monroe Institute and former operations officer for the government’s remote viewing program. “Scientists are interested in the quality, accuracy, and amount of information rather than attempting to label it. They are not interested in proving you were in or out [of the body],” says Atwater.

The Monroe Institute, located in Faber, Virginia, was founded by the late Robert Monroe, whose

OBEs in the 1950s led him to study consciousness, sleep learning, and sound research, all related phenomena. The institute’s researchers conduct investigations based on laboratory tests with subjects reporting what they experience while listening to sound patterns and experiencing meditative states. Meditative states are a necessary part of OBEs.

Atwater says that the body undergoes physiological changes during the OBE or other relaxed states, including lowered galvanic skin response and raised peripheral skin temperature as muscles relax. Skin temperature sometimes drops slightly as consciousness leaves the body. Changes in consciousness are also indicated by “skin potential voltage movement” (voltage differences measured by two electrodes placed on the fingers).

The most remarkable changes occur in the brain as brain-wave patterns slow and become more balanced. When brain waves go to lower frequencies and awareness is maintained, a unique state of consciousness emerges. This is the “mind awake-body asleep” concept that many people experience right before sleep, and is called hypnagogia. Research at the institute explores this state and levels beyond. Researchers use the Hemi-Sync process, which uses sounds to change brain waves to lower frequencies, altering the electrochemical environment of the brain.

As suggested earlier, while there are similarities between lucid dreaming and the OBE, the states are not identical. “They take place in two distinctly different brain-wave states. Confusion arises when you have a lucid dream that you are out of body,” says Atwater. An OBE may occur upon waking from a dream, during hypnagogia, or during waking states. The lucid dream typically evolves from normal dreaming. Also, the lucid dreamer usually finds incongruities in the dream, while someone

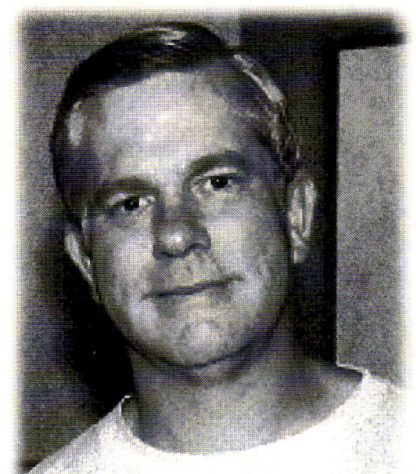
having an OBE usually finds an environment consistent with the real world.

For example, while having a lucid dream you might dream you are in your bedroom, but you notice that the wallpaper pattern is different from the one you know in reality. In sharp contrast, in the OBE your wallpaper appears exactly as the wallpaper in reality because you are actually seeing it, albeit outside of your physical body, which is a few feet away sleeping.

As Atwater explains, both regular dreaming and lucid dreaming take place in beta brain-wave states. “The subjective awareness of dreaming and lucid dreaming are different, but brain states are the same,” he says. On the other hand, OBEs are characterized by delta brain-wave activity.

Atwater suggests that those who are able to relax naturally may be more inclined to OBEs. “They have a natural ability to clear their minds and alter attention away,” he says.

Inducing an OBE may be easier than you think. Stack says that, along with dream work, a sincere desire to have an OBE is nearly all that is needed. “It’s almost automatic: just the focus and understanding that there are other realities and that you are a multi-dimensional being,” he says, can be enough to let you make the trip.



Monroe Institute

Skip Atwater, research director at the Monroe Institute, believes anyone can learn to travel out-of-body.

Glossary

out of body experience (OBE or OOBE) / astral or soul travel – experience in which your consciousness seems to depart from your body, enabling observation of the world from a point of view other than that of the physical body and by means other than those of the physical senses.

dream – mental activity associated with the rapid-eye-movement (REM) period of sleep and primarily beta brainwave activity.

lucid dream – dream state with the awareness that you are dreaming. Experiencing a dream with waking consciousness or dreaming with the consciousness that you are dreaming.

hypnagogia – state between waking and sleeping. Pre-sleep phase which may contain dream-like images (known as hypnagogic images). May occur with sleep paralysis symptoms. Characterized by “mind awake, body asleep,” the hypnagogic state is conducive for launching into an OBE.

near death experience (NDE) experience – often characterized by feeling that the self has left the body and is hovering overhead or moving through a dark space or tunnel, often accompanied by powerful emotions. Experiencers may have full recall of the event later.

night or sleep paralysis – also known as catalepsy, this condition is characterized by great difficulty in moving while in an aware state (i.e., lack of response to external stimuli and muscular rigidity). Occurs most often at sleep onset and may be accompanied by hypnagogic illusions and hearing sounds. Night paralysis can precede an OBE. Night paralysis is known to occur in a variety of physical and psychological disorders, such as epilepsy and schizophrenia, and can be induced by hypnosis.

Sources: *American Heritage Dictionary*; Skip Atwater, Monroe Institute; *Columbia Encyclopedia*; *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*; International Association of Near-Death Studies; D. Scott Raga, *Leaving the Body*; Rick Stack; Albert Taylor; www.spiritweb.org.

You Might Be Having an OBE if...

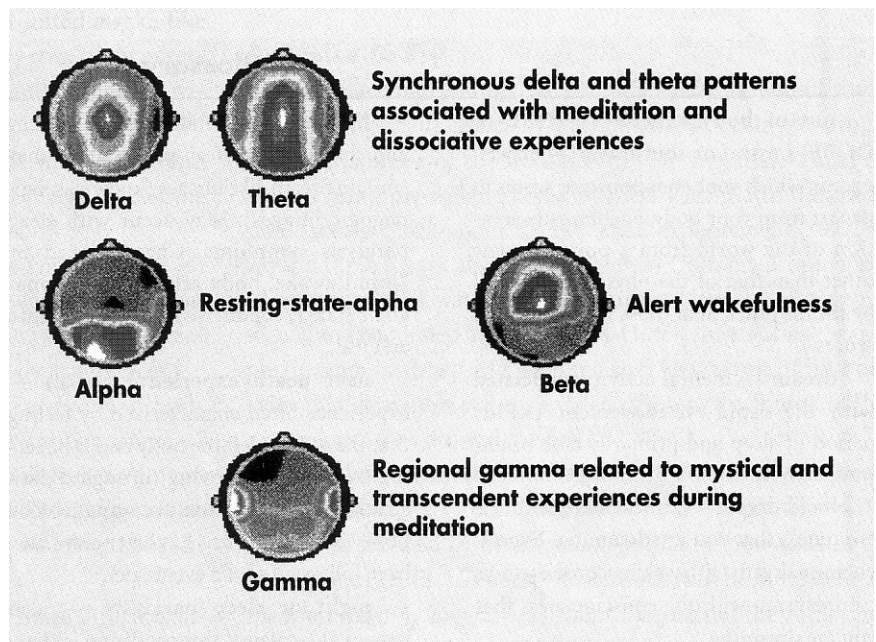
- You dream you are traveling - whether driving your car, riding in an elevator, or flying. This may signal you are in an OBE state. Albert Taylor suggests that OBEs can be cloaked as flying or traveling dreams.
- You feel a vibration or a tingling sensation, someone is touching or stroking you.
- You experience “night paralysis” or catalepsy, the feeling that you can't move. This can precede an OBE. “Sometimes people panic in this state. You try to move, but you can't. Once you are out, the paralysis goes away,” says Taylor.
- You feel like something or someone is pressing you to the bed. Taylor calls this “the heavies.”
- You hear your name called or other voices, or hear whirring, roaring, or crackling noises.
- You have spirit guides appear in your dreams and OBEs, manifesting in various forms, creating a comfortable experience for you.

Brain Waves and OBEs

Visitors at the Monroe Institute learn how to alter brain-wave patterns to experience enhanced mental, physical, and emotional states.

The waking state is characterized by Alpha and Beta brain-wave states from about 8 to 30 hertz. Here, thought processes are limited and brain-wave patterns are incoherent. Deep relaxation is characterized by coherent or synchronous patterns. During the OBE, deep Delta and some Theta brain-wave states are achieved.

The “disassociative” state is marked by slower brain waves of 0.3 to 8 hertz. Beyond this state are transcendent states where brain waves change even further and incorporate Gamma-level brain wave activity (30-hertz plus).



Tips on How to Have an OBE

General Tips To Work Up to an OBE

1. Try to eliminate any fears you associate with being in an OBE state. Researchers consider the experience safe.
2. Record and interpret your dreams either in a journal or with a tape recorder, preferably immediately after awakening. This practice will help you make sense of an OBE.
3. Will yourself to remember your dreams and give yourself the suggestion before retiring that you want to have an OBE.
4. Practice techniques for relaxation and OBEs from the Earth position, that is, lying on your back.

Rick Stack's Tips

Author Rick Stack suggests that mastering techniques is not as important as overcoming resistance to the OBE. "There's an inner muscle: You just do it," he says. Stack offers these pointers:

1. Set your alarm for 60 to 90 minutes before dawn. Keep yourself up for at least 15 minutes. Let yourself go back to sleep, giving yourself suggestions to "wake up" in the dream.
2. One way to do this is to bring your waking consciousness with you into the dream state by launching from the "mind awake-body asleep (hypnagogic state) just before falling asleep. "Let yourself fall asleep but bring waking consciousness to the edge of sleep by focusing on something," says Stack. Tibetan Buddhists focus on the throat chakra, for instance.
3. Pay attention to changes in the body, such as numbness or tingling sensation. "Check in on your body and pay attention to when your body is starting to go to sleep," says Stack.
4. Focus and attempt to float out of your body.

Al Taylor's Tips

Al Taylor recommends an interrupted sleep technique, similar to Stack's. Taylor suggest trying to eat an evening meal a little earlier than normal for a good energy level. If you normally go to bed at 10:00 p.m., set your alarm for 1:30 or 2:00 a.m. Get up, rest, read, or watch TV for about two to three hours. Now go back to bed.

Do a full relaxation routine. Taylor visualizes a ball of energy or white light above his head and brings it through "Relax the brow, jaw muscle, etc. like molasses all the way down to the feet. It takes a long time, but allows you to focus on something and allows the body to fall asleep," says Taylor.

The more relaxed you get, the easier it is to leave the body, but the key is not to fully fall asleep. Drift down to a low state of consciousness, clearing your mind, but keep your mind alert. "If you are very alert, you visualize and dream, but you realize you are making a transition," says Taylor.

Masters such as Robert Monroe get to the point of bringing a full state of awareness through the launch of the OBE. For many, especially during unplanned or spontaneous experience, the luxury of that awareness may not happen until later in the OBE.

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For further information about out-of-body travel, the author recommends the books mentioned in the article.