

## REINCARNATION AND THE AKASHIC FIELD

### A DIALOGUE WITH ERVIN LASZLO

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This article argues that Laszlo's concept of the Akashic Field (A-field) does not render the concept of reincarnation either redundant or unnecessary, that reincarnation is a fact of nature, something the universe is doing at this stage of its evolution. Not only is Laszlo's theory compatible with the concept of rebirth, it actually strengthens that theory by clarifying some of the processes involved. This article presents a rationale for the belief that through reincarnation the universe is giving birth to a transpersonal individuality that does endure outside space–time and is not dissolved back into the quantum vacuum.

**KEYWORDS:** *Akashic Field, individuality, reincarnation, rebirth, soul.*

It is with deep respect for Ervin Laszlo's stunning achievement in his two most recent books *The Connectivity Hypothesis* and *Science and the Akashic Field* that I open this dialogue with him about reincarnation and the Akashic Field. This article springs from a lively exchange in which he and I and his son, Alexander Laszlo, have been exploring whether his theory really dissolves the need for a concept of reincarnation as he first suggested. I do not think it does. To my eyes, Laszlo's theory is not only compatible with reincarnation, it actually clarifies some of the processes involved in the cycle of rebirth.

Such a discussion throws one back at some point on one's deepest intuitions about the direction and purpose of existence, and my intuitions in this area have been deeply influenced by my work over many years in nonordinary states of consciousness; specifically, those states pioneered and catalogued by Stanislov Grof. Readers will appreciate the complex epistemic issues that surround extracting sound philosophical and psychological conclusions from such esoteric states, and I will not be able to address these concerns here other than to say that I am sensitive to them.<sup>1</sup> Not wishing to claim any universal warrant for these conclusions, I simply offer them as reflecting one person's experience of the divine plenum, the value of which will ultimately depend on a careful comparison with others' experiences and their coherence with prevailing theories in other disciplines.

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### THE AKASHIC FIELD

Laszlo weaves together findings from quantum physics, post-Darwinian biology, cosmology, and consciousness research to propose the existence of a fundamental field he calls the Akashic Field, or A-field. The A-field is the zero-point field of the quantum vacuum, the super-implicate order behind our explicate world. It is a field where nonlocality and superconductivity are the norm, the generative matrix of the big bang and the receiver of the possible big crunch. In Laszlo's hands the A-field is the Metaverse that explains how the universe functions nonlocally as one organism across vast distances; it illumines the statistically improbable first conditions that have impelled the universe on such a fruitful evolutionary journey (because it holds and uses the learning gleaned from previous evolutionary cycles); and it provides a theoretical framework that honors reports of contact with dimensions of mind that transcend personal mind (because it is the Mind that embraces all other minds). Laszlo's commanding synthesis of multiple disciplines, his piercing critiques of mainstream thinking, and his elegant proposals are a profound accomplishment that we will be digesting for many years.<sup>2</sup>

Near the end of *Science and the Akashic Field*, Laszlo suggests that the A-field can provide a more elegant explanation for various forms of reincarnational memories and after death communications (ADCs) than theories that postulate an intermediate structure such as the soul. Because the A-field retains the traces of the universe's entire experience, it retains the memory of everyone and everything that has ever lived. He holds that "former-life memories" and ADCs are legitimate phenomena with strong evidentiary support, but he suggests that these phenomena can be better interpreted as being generated by contact with the A-field. When one has the experience of communicating with the "spirit" of a dead relative, for example, one is actually in dialogue with the memory traces of that relative held by the A-field. Similarly, when one remembers "former lives" in past-life therapy, one is actually reading the memory traces of other people's lives from the A-field. When Ian Stevenson finds traces of historically prior persons showing up in the psyches and bodies of children, it is more efficient, he suggests, to see these as pointing to the A-field's ongoing influence in human evolution rather than pointing to the existence of a reincarnating spiritual presence, a soul (Laszlo, 2004, pp. 156–163).

There is much in transpersonal experience that supports Laszlo's instinct to dissolve all intermediate structures en route to a more fundamental reality. As one drops into the plenum layer by layer in nonordinary states of consciousness, structures that had appeared real from the perspective of space–time often become transparent to an underlying ground. Not only ego but even collective and archetypal structures can become permeable and fleeting, simply another intermediate organization of experience in an open, unbounded system of energy and information. Virtually all patterns of life can become *sunyata*, transparent, empty of self-existence.

Even more seminally, it is Laszlo's powerful vision of the *living wholeness* of the cosmos that resonates deeply with consciousness research. His stunning articulation of the natural forces that everywhere connect and empower the unfolding universe, that collect and integrate its many initiatives, and that inform

and transform its successive experiments resonate deeply with the *experience* of the cosmic mind that surfaces in systematically explored nonordinary states of consciousness.

And yet, it is also a recurring experience in nonordinary states that our present life is rooted in a specific lineage of lives from which it draws its distinctive shape and character—reincarnation. The age, interconnectedness, memory, creativity, and foresight that Laszlo finds operating in the universe as a whole is entirely compatible, I think, with a universe that compounds its learning in cycles of rebirth. *The proposal that the Metaverse is gathering all experience to itself at a macroscopic level does not trump or displace the proposal that the universe is also compounding its experience in micro-crystalline forms of increasing self-awareness and intelligence.* It is not an either/or situation, I suggest, but a both/and. I would argue that reincarnation is something important that the Metaverse/universe is doing and as such is not made redundant by the holographic properties of the quantum vacuum.

What Laszlo's formulation does show us, I think, is the need to revise older *theories* of reincarnation that have become outdated, dropping formulations that better fit the pre-quantum, atomistic world of Newtonian objects, where separate "souls" (spiritual atoms) bounce around in causal order (karma). Laszlo's theory challenges us to bring forward what might be called a post-quantum model of rebirth, informed by field theory and incorporating insights from systems theory, chaos theory, and evolutionary biology. He calls us to rethink our assumptions and articulate a vision of reincarnation that is compatible with the dynamics he describes operating between the Metaverse and universe. I cannot hope to provide such a comprehensive theory in this short article but only to initiate a dialogue that I hope will engage other thinkers in this larger project. The possibilities are exciting.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF ACCUMULATION

One of the core convictions that I have taken away from both my research and my experiences in nonordinary states is what I call the *principle of accumulation*, that is, the universe's interest in and penchant for accumulating experience and with experience insight, understanding, and new capacities. As more experience and insight is gathered and integrated, forms emerge to hold, crystallize, give form to, and extend these capacities. I see the principle of accumulation operating in the story of a self-emergent universe, and I see reincarnation as an important chapter in this larger story.

For billions of years, life on this planet could only evolve whole species. Whatever the precise mechanisms involved, its creativity was focused on entire groups. Somewhere along the evolutionary journey, life seems to have found a way to evolve not only species but also individuals within the species—within the human species, at least, and perhaps other near species as well, we do not know. We cannot be sure exactly when or where the process began, but somewhere along the way, life seems to have learned how to preserve the learning of individuals and fold that learning into future forms, generating exponential growth and differentiation.

Laszlo has proposed the A-field as a comprehensive field that catches the learning of whole universes and uses that learning to launch new universes. Rupert Sheldrake has proposed the existence of morphogenetic fields that collect the learned experience of groups and use that learning to re-shape morphology and behavior (1981, 1988, 1991). The theory of reincarnation proposes the existence of a more specific field—what we might call the *soul-field*, or soul for short—that preserves the learning of an individual and compounds that learning in subsequent incarnations, activating a succession of potentials that seem to lie latent in the human form.

We have strong evidence today that something looking like rebirth is a pattern of nature. The data points to a pattern of historically sequenced, meaningfully connected, intimately associated lives. Laszlo and I agree that when one combines Ian Stevenson's meticulous study of hundreds of children with conscious recall of lives recently concluded (1974, 1975–1983, 1997) with the many volumes cataloguing transformative therapeutic encounters with "former lives" collected by responsible and careful clinicians (e.g., Fiore, 1979; Lucas, 1993; Netherton, Shiffrin, Viertel and 1978; Whitton, and Fisher, 1986; Woolger, 1988) and the spontaneous, unsought appearance of "past-life memories" in nonordinary states of consciousness (Grof, 1980, 1988, 1998), the cumulative evidence for something resembling rebirth is exceptionally powerful. To these observations I would add the testimony of widespread, time-tested spiritual traditions that have systematically explored the deep psyche and concluded that understanding reincarnation is the starting point of wisdom. Without this key insight, they contend, the deeper order and logic of human existence cannot be seen.<sup>3</sup> Mainstream thinkers ignore such a powerful body of evidence today at the cost of irrelevance. Clearly, there is sufficient evidence today to justify a reincarnation hypothesis. Laszlo goes on to ask, however, whether a theory of individual rebirth is the most efficient and insightful way to read this evidence. Are there deeper mechanisms operating inside this data?

Laszlo invokes the A-field to explain these phenomena and in so doing gives them a strongly Buddhist reading. That is, he rejects interpretations that lean on a concept of a soul that has "survived death and is now reincarnated in us," echoing Buddhism's rejection of a stand-alone "self" anywhere in the interconnected web of life. Because the A-field retains in holographic fashion everything that has ever been thought, felt, and sensed, intermediate structures of accumulation become redundant. His position is that when we die, "all that we experience becomes part of the collective memory bank of humankind, to be read out again and again." In this way it is not we or our soul that achieves immortality but "our individual *experience* that achieves immortality" (2004, p. 163, his emphasis). Laszlo reinterprets examples of after death communications in a similar manner by pointing to the A-field's capacity to generate all experiences of apparent post-mortem existence, thus making it unnecessary to postulate any intermediate structure such as the soul. The conclusion is the same: "We as individuals are not immortal, but our experience is" (2004, p. 161).

Laszlo strongly endorses the principle of accumulation, of course, for he sees the Metaverse learning from its experience in generating the universe and using



that learning in giving birth to subsequent universes. However, although he affirms the principle for the macrocosm, he denies it to the microcosm. In retranslating all phenomena suggesting some form of continued, accumulating individuality into mere memory traces in the A-field, he is saying that in the final analysis it is only the A-field that learns and grows. All other structures are temporary and subservient to this larger agenda. There is no genuine survival of individual agency after death, only memory traces of agency, and no genuine compounding of agency across multiple incarnations.

There are essentially two questions here. The first is: Does the universe working in concert with the Metaverse generate a form of transpersonal individuality—the soul—that integrates an extended lineage of human lives woven from a causal fabric of experience?<sup>4</sup> The second question is: Does this individuality endure even if the universe collapses in upon itself and returns to the Metaverse in a big crunch? Putting it simply, is the cosmos birthing souls and if so, do these souls endure as distinct fields within the Metaverse or some other domain?

### FIRST QUESTION

I think the answer to the first question is a strong yes. I suggest that the most natural way to read the data cited earlier is to hypothesize the existence of a field—the soul—that collects and integrates an individual's successive life experiences. The soul has all the capacities we associate with humans and then some. It not only remembers our experience, it thinks and plans. It learns and with learning it grows, becoming more than it was before. Because the soul integrates many lives, how many is anybody's guess, its cumulative capacities far exceed those we associate with any one human life.<sup>5</sup>

The soul-field is the reservoir of the human life, the home and destination of each incarnation. Remaining outside space-time, it receives all our experiences, digests them, and then reaches out for more. Each incarnation further potentiates this field. Just as the Metaverse gives birth to the universe without collapsing into it, the soul gives birth to but does not collapse into the human personality. The soul is always in the background as long as the incarnation lives. It provides constant input and nourishment, although we are largely unconscious of its actions or presence. It waits for our return from space-time, eager to digest the experiences we bring it and to apply what has been learned in its next life.

I believe a model of life that includes the concepts of rebirth and the soul-field will have more explanatory power than other models and will result in a more adequate interpretation of human existence. There are several reasons. First, I do not think that the A-field *by itself* will actually be able to explain all the reincarnation data. There is a specificity to reincarnation memories, a complex causal map that emerges in past-lives therapy that would be hard to explain by invoking the A-field alone. Given that the A-field includes all the experiences of all beings who ever lived, we still have to explain why and how these particular lives and not others were singled out and brought forward into one life. What is the logic guiding the assembling of parts that make up "me" and everyone around me? Explanations for the specific configuration of historical connections we find

in the data will require unwelcome ad hoc hypotheses that complicate the A-field landscape. Reincarnation explains this specificity as feedback cycles reflecting the learning of self-emerging, individuated organisms.

Second, I think that reincarnation is an important concept to hold onto because it is congruent with an evolutionary model of progressive complexification. Reincarnation appears to be one of the important ways that the universe is growing itself in the human phase of its evolution. If we delete it, we will miss some of the complexity of the natural world. Our universe seems to delight in diversity, producing an overflowing variety of fish, fowl, and bug; and yet variety in the pre-human world is still relatively restricted to whole species. It is in the human form that we find an explosion of psychological traits and physical capacities, and I suggest that this diversity derives not just from our larger brain but from the differentiation and specialization that reincarnation empowers. The cycle of rebirth and the correlated concept of the soul-field is simply part of the complexity that accompanies the emergence of self-aware, self-directing, and self-growing life forms at advanced stages of evolution. Reincarnation is but a relatively young branch of the ancient tree of evolution. The next two points speak to a more subtle existential loss that would result from abandoning the concept of reincarnation.

Third, reincarnation supports the belief that the challenges we face in our lives are meaningful *to the individual* in a larger framework. It encourages an ethic of taking responsibility for one's choices and for investing one's energy wisely, because each choice reverberates to one's long-term betterment or harm. The A-field theory undermines this incentive and erodes personal responsibility. By referring the challenges we face in life back to a single source, it tends to absolve us of individual accountability. It takes us back in the direction of something approximating a creator God who makes us the way we are *ex nihilo* but whose reasons are ultimately inscrutable.

Fourth, reincarnation changes our entire relationship to the universe by lifting the restriction of time from our participation in her. It not only illumines how our distant past has shaped our present person, it lifts our eye to the future horizon. As the restriction of time falls away from our self-understanding, a profound expansion takes place in the human psyche. A new set of truths come into view. It tells us that our *individual* participation in the universe and its creative process is not restricted to these few years this body lives but stretches into the distant future. We discover that we have a personal investment in the health of the planet and a personal involvement in the long-term unfolding of the universe. As long as the universe lives, our destinies are potentially intertwined. Estimates of when reincarnation actually began vary widely, but what are a million years behind us compared to the billions that lie ahead?

Laszlo's initial approach to reincarnation and ADCs trims some of the complexity that I believe exists in the universe in the interest of pursuing foundational principles, but I do not think this trimming is necessary or advisable. In fact, I would turn things the other way around and suggest that Laszlo's deep insights into the dynamics of the generative matrix operating behind and within the physical universe actually strengthens the reincarnation hypothesis by illuminating some of its inner dynamics.

It should already be apparent that there are strong parallels between my description of the soul and the incarnate personality and Laszlo's description of the Metaverse and the universe. Indeed, as I have read Laszlo's work, I have been struck by how often his conceptualization of macro-evolutionary processes beautifully illumines processes that others have seen operating in reincarnation. Consider the following passage, for example:

In each universe, complex systems leave their traces in the vacuum, and the informed vacuum of one universe informs the evolution of the next. Consequently, each universe creates conditions favorable to the evolution of life in successive universes. In each successive universe, life evolves more and more efficiently, and thus in equal time evolves further and further.

This is a cyclical process with a learning curve... The vacuum becomes more and more informed *with* life, and therefore more and more informing *of* life. (Laszlo, 2004, pp.139–140, author emphasis)

Making a few changes required by context, this passage becomes a beautiful description of the dynamic connecting the incarnate personality and the soul-field. This is more than simply a matter of parallel language. I suggest that Laszlo's powerful theory of macro-processes operating in the universe at large illumines some of the specific mechanisms operating more locally in reincarnation.

The clarity of Laszlo's presentation underscores the clumsiness of much popular and even some professional language surrounding rebirth. The way we speak about reincarnation often fails to do justice to the subtlety of the process and players involved. Laszlo is right to object to this language and to the concepts it implies. He is correct that phrases like "one life reincarnates into the next" and "the soul moves from life to life" are too clumsy to be true. This would be equivalent to his saying that "one universe becomes the next" or "the Metaverse moves from universe to universe." But we do not need to throw out the baby with the bathwater. If we have strong evidence that human beings reincarnate, we need to develop a sophisticated understanding of the underlying mechanisms involved, and this Laszlo's cosmology actually helps us do.

I want to make it clear that in defending reincarnation I would argue for a less linear, more "quantum" interpretation of the data than traditional religious theories of reincarnation have generally recognized. The principle of accumulation does not commit us to a narrow reading of either karma or the soul. I suspect, for example, that there is a much more complex latticework of lives behind our present form than traditional theories of reincarnation admit, with much "borrowing and lending" of experience taking place behind the scenes at the soul level. At least I want to hold open this possibility for more advanced stages of the game. Furthermore, whereas reincarnationists tend to view the karmic effects of our choices as registering narrowly, influencing only our individual soul's development, I think that karma also radiates out horizontally through the web of souls and accumulates in the collective field of the species mind. That is, karma registers nonlocally as well as locally. There is nothing inherent in the theory of the soul that commits us to the atomistic isolation of previous theories. The soul is a quantum-like phenomenon,

an open field suspended in dynamic tension with surrounding fields. Within this living network, it pulses in rhythm with a larger heartbeat.<sup>6</sup>

### THE BARDO

Before turning to the second question, let me insert a brief note on after-death communications and postmortem existence. Most spiritual systems that affirm reincarnation have also affirmed the existence of an intermediate state between lives, popularly known as the *bardo* following the Tibetan text the *Bardo Thödrol*. Like Laszlo, I accept the better evidence for ADCs, but while I tend to see this data as suggesting some form of continued survival of the personality after death, I also see it as often reflecting a relatively low grade form of postmortem existence. The key is the Eastern insight that the bardo is a highly variegated domain with many experiential levels.

I do not doubt that some, perhaps many persons continue to exist after death in a spirit version of their earthly personas, but many sophisticated spiritual systems have seen this as a tragedy rather than an asset because so much more is available to them than this. What traps people in such lesser manifestations of their potential is their overidentification with the life just completed, a fixation that is culturally reinforced by our Western mantra of "personal immortality." According to these systems, it is only in the "lower bardo" that the identity assumed tends to be the most recently completed life. With time and experience, including more lifetimes on Earth, the identity one assumes after death tends to shift from the most recent life to the larger composite that integrates all one's earthly existences—namely, the soul—but it takes much work before such an integrated system emerges. This view is echoed in the experience of many contemporary explorers, such as Robert Monroe, founder of the Monroe Institute and author of three books on the out-of-body state.<sup>7</sup>

Even a spiritually mature individual who has transcended the egoic identity after death may manifest to loved ones in ADCs in the role of the egoic identity because that is how their loved ones knew the individual in this lifetime. Moreover, persons often make the transition beyond the personal identity gradually after they die. My point is that we should not assume that the more easily available information coming from the lower bardo, which is heavily conditioned by space-time consciousness, represents the entire postmortem domain. If we make this mistake, we will only trap ourselves in a superficial and incomplete understanding of our deeper trajectory.<sup>8</sup>

### SECOND QUESTION

The second question is the more challenging and the more difficult to answer conclusively. Does the transpersonal individuality generated by reincarnation endure as a distinct consciousness? More pointedly, does it persist if in the distant future the universe should return to the Metaverse in a big crunch? Answering yes to the first question does not commit one to answering yes to this question. We could accept the existence of the soul as an emergent structure, a life form that is birthed



in the evolutionary process, but deny it enduring status in the Metaverse. This is essentially Vedanta's interpretation as I understand it—that the soul and all forms that emerge in space-time are ultimately without separate existence (“illusions”) and will eventually dissolve back into the One-without-a-second. Thus Ramakrishna says:

O friends of Truth, none of your meditative disciplines will be of any ultimate value unless you realize directly—here and now, before continuing even one step further along the path—that *akhanda satchidananda* alone exists, that you simply are indivisible Being, Consciousness, and Bliss, that Mother performs all action, including your own acts of devotion and meditation. Your aspiration to realize Truth is simply God longing for God. (Hixon, 1992, p. 164)

Other monistic spiritual systems echo this refrain.

This interpretation of the soul is strongly congruent with Laszlo's suggestion that in the end nothing survives the big crunch but the primary reality of the A-field. All perceptions of a persisting individuated existence misread our true condition. Stanislov Grof also seems to lean in this direction, giving a strongly Vedantic interpretation to the unitive experiences that arise in nonordinary states of consciousness (1998).

With this kind of spiritual pedigree behind it combined with Laszlo's powerful integration of scientific insights, this position obviously has much to recommend it. Try as I might, however, I cannot endorse it. My experiences in nonordinary states of consciousness have forced me in a different direction. Although embracing many of the seminal insights of Vedanta and other monistic systems, I have come to believe that there is something being generated in the evolutionary interplay of universe and Metaverse that does endure beyond space-time and beyond any crunch that may lie ahead for the universe. I have come to the conclusion that deep in the generative process of life, critical thresholds are reached that propel consciousness back into the Metaverse in a form that is *not* dissolved by that reunion, and moreover that this development is part of the design and intent of evolution, one step in a long unfolding of potentials we are only beginning to glimpse and no doubt see incompletely. The primary argument I would offer for this conclusion comes not from facts and theoretical considerations but from experience.

There was a period in my inner work when wherever I touched my personal life in expanded states of awareness, it broke open to reveal a tapestry of collective threads. I could not find any part of “my” existence that was not also part of the larger tapestry of humanity's collective life. Indeed, I seemed to have no private existence of my own. Every part of my life was owned by the universe, was part of its larger life. As I surrendered to these experiences, it seemed that I was on a trajectory that would eventually deposit me in the Vedantic conclusion that the One was the only true life being lived in the universe. But this is not what happened, not exactly. Over the course of years, other experiences emerged that opened a complementary track, not canceling out these insights but adding something to them. In these experiences something was born that I immediately and intuitively recognized would endure beyond space and time. What was being birthed was

both individual and cosmic. It preserved my individual history but was operational on a cosmic scale that completely eclipsed my personal concerns.

In numerous spiritual traditions it is said that true individuality does not exist until the moment of spiritual awakening. Thus Taoism speaks of the birth of the “Immortal Fetus” and holds that before this point there are no structures present in the psyche strong enough to withstand the dissolution of death or the overwhelming encounter with the Tao. Something about this rang true to my experience. I found myself participating in the emergence of a new and higher form of individuality. Moreover, what was happening to me seemed to be simply an instance of a larger evolutionary pattern within the population at large. Through integrating the experiences of countless cycles of rebirth into one coherent structure, the universe seemed to be birthing something that would endure beyond previous frames of reference, and something that would eventually become the platform for incarnated capacities that had barely begun to register around the edges of human history in the *siddhis* (powers) of saints and sages.

If I step back and restate the lessons gleaned from these exercises, they look something like this. The universe relentlessly generates, collects, and integrates experience. In time, self-emergence yields systems strong enough to begin to form continuities across multiple incarnations. At first fragmented and disjointed, these lives eventually come together to form more integrated wholes. Integration increases the energy of the emerging organism. At some point this process reaches a critical instability, a bifurcation point where something comes into being that had not previously existed. If we use the term “soul” for the field that holds our lives lived up to this point, then what emerges here is a post-soul phenomenon. Alternatively, if we choose to continue calling this new thing the soul, this transition represents a quantum step forward in the life of the soul.

I experienced this birth as an explosion of brilliant, luminous, extremely dense, exquisitely clear, crystalline diamond light. A spark of *Sambhogakaya* by any name. It was at once both exquisitely individual and yet operating on such a vast scale and in such intimate cosmic embrace as to transcend all previous reference points I had for individuality. Its birth seemed to be the culmination of countless sojourns in space-time and in one instant completely redefined my understanding of life's project.

This Diamond-Soul is an individuality that is not at all separate from the infinite field of the plenum, as this boundary had been erased in my sessions long before. It is a sense of being conscious not as a person but nevertheless as an individual, although not an individual within any frame of reference with which I was previously familiar. Within the contextual presence of an intelligence and energy that was so vast that I could only think of it in terms of Divinity, this refined sense of individuality persisted. It was not in any way other than the Divine Matrix but rather a delightful expression of it. If I were to try to say what this individuality consists of, I would say that distilled to its essence it seems to be *the capacity for consciously integrated experience*.

Precious gems and diamonds in particular sometimes appear as an intimate part of exceptionally clear and expansive states of consciousness. The following excerpt taken from one of Stanislov Grof's own sessions illustrates this point. It

also illustrates the subtle carryover of individual awareness within vast transpersonal horizons. This experience emerged in a psychedelic session after a major breakthrough that propelled Grof and friends he intuited himself to be traveling with beyond the limits of space and time:

I realized that the state of consciousness I was in was that of a diamond. . . . All the other physical properties of the diamond seemed to be pointing to its metaphysical significance—beauty, transparency, luster, permanence, unchangeability, and the capacity to bring out of white light a rich spectrum of colors. I felt that I understood why the Tibetan Buddhism is called Vajrayana; the only way I could describe this state of ultimate cosmic ecstasy was to refer to it as “diamond consciousness.” Here seemed to be all the creative energy and intelligence of the universe as pure consciousness existing beyond time and space. It was entirely abstract, yet containing all the forms and secrets of creation.

I was floating in this energy as a dimensionless point of consciousness, totally dissolved, yet maintaining some sense of separate identity. I was aware of the [mental] presence of my friends who made the journey with me. . . . We all felt that we have achieved the state of ultimate fulfillment; we have reached the source and the final destination, as close to Heaven as I could imagine. (Grof, 1988, pp. 146–147)

Although Vedanta tends to dispense with individuality emphasizing instead one’s cosmic identity, my experience has been that the Cosmic Intelligence I have engaged in nonordinary states has often bent over backwards to *protect my individuality* even while stretching that individuality to its breaking point. I have often felt that I was being fed the experience of transcendence drop by drop, as if it were being carefully titrated into my being, allowing me to assimilate the experience gradually. Even when I begged to be taken back into full union, it often held back, as if too much of the Divine too fast would actually work against the larger project.<sup>9</sup>

Over the course of time I began to realize that the goal of these exercises was not simply transcendence but *integrated transcendence*. If the goal had been simply to return to the Source in ecstatic oblivion, this could have been accomplished much more easily. Instead, the goal seemed to be to achieve a state of awareness that opened me to the Source but without completely destroying all the cognitive structures associated with my historical consciousness.

As one sinks into the Totality, the sheer intensity of the encounter can be overwhelming. It seems to take years, perhaps millennia to develop the capacity to enter into the Divine Embrace without exploding into incoherence. The danger of overwhelming one’s capacity for integrating experience is especially pronounced in spiritual methods that use powerful technologies to trigger sudden and dramatic shifts of consciousness, yet within these practices one learns how to let go and lose coherence at one level and then recover it at completely new levels. It was the repeated recovery of coherence within ever deepening experiential fields that drove me to conclude that *even as the self dies, a deeper form of individuality is being born*.

I think that the birth of an individuality capable of sustaining deep immersion in the Divine depths without fragmenting or lapsing into unconsciousness marks an important transition on our long evolutionary journey. As such, I suggest that *such an individuality may be the greatest gift being given to us by space-time itself*. The older spiritual paradigm sees and values the undifferentiated One as the *summum bonum*. It counts all self-differentiation as not only temporary but ultimately inferior. It sees the dissolution of structure and return to the oceanic bliss of Oneness as life’s greatest gift.

But what if this is an incomplete vision? What if one of the great gifts being given us by the physical universe is actually the gift of individuality itself? What if the larger goal is not mere dissolution back into the Primal Void but conscious return? What if the One is actively working to grow itself into forms sufficiently complex and strong that they can withstand the full impact of return without complete dissolution? A cadre of Bodhisattvas pictured in Buddhist art suggests that there is an exquisite form of living that *only begins* after the isolated self dies in non-dual embrace. Their idiosyncratic features suggest that this form *preserves our uniqueness* even while opening the floodgates of the universal.

In closing, I am reminded of the Taoist teaching that human beings have not one soul but two, a yang soul called the *hun* and a yin soul called the *po*. According to this theory, when a person dies, their *hun* goes to the “heavenly” domain whereas the *po* goes to the “earthly” domain. (This refers to more than the body returning to the soil because a *po* is a conscious entity.) This simple idea encourages us to think more flexibly about how our lives may be received and digested by the cosmos when we die.

Increasingly I am convinced that our soul-fields will take all that we have learned and become through multiple incarnations and will exist intact outside the manifest universe *and* that all our learning will also be preserved inside the universe as well. Everything we experience as a human being is preserved by the collective mind field of humanity and the fields that underlie this field. It is folded into the human project, perhaps even becoming traces of someone else’s future life after we are no longer reincarnating here ourselves. I do not know where we will be existing then, whether in the A-field or some more fundamental domain we cannot yet envision, but that we will exist as true individuals I can no longer doubt.

## NOTES

1. See Bache (2000), chapter 1.
2. I am assuming that the A-field and the Metaverse are interchangeable concepts. If this is not exactly correct, they are close enough that it will not affect the outcome of this discussion.
3. These traditions differ, however, on how best to interpret the implications of this phenomenon.
4. The soul is a transpersonal phenomenon most simply because it integrates many lifetimes, many “persons” into a meta-personal consciousness. Whereas some authors cite reincarnation research as contributing to the evidence for personal survival (Almeder, 1992), the true effect of reincarnation is to shatter the concept of *personal* survival by radically expanding the agency of survival beyond personal categories. If we live on earth many times, each life contributing to the learning curve of the next, the resulting consciousness integrates so many lives that to speak of personal immortality misses the mark.



5. For more on the soul and the rhythms of the reincarnation cycle, see Bache (1990), especially chapters 3–5, although I should add that this is an early and somewhat dated presentation of my thinking.
6. On the collective dynamics of karma, see Bache (2000), chapter 6, "Beyond Personal Karma."
7. See Monroe (1970, 1985, 1994), and my discussion of Monroe in Bache (2000), chapter 5.
8. For more on this point, see Bache, (2000), pp. 45–48.
9. Gurdjieff's words may be relevant here:

If we could connect the centers of our ordinary consciousness with the higher thinking center deliberately and at will, it would be of no use to us whatever in our present general state. In most cases where accidental contact with the higher thinking center takes place a man becomes unconscious. The mind refuses to take in the flood of thoughts, emotions, images, and ideas which suddenly burst into it. And instead of a vivid thought, or a vivid emotion, there results, on the contrary, a complete blank, a state of unconsciousness. The memory retains only the first moment when the flood rushed in on the mind and the last moment when the flood was receding and consciousness returned. But even these moments are so full of unusual shades and colors that there is nothing with which to compare them among the ordinary sensations of life. This is usually all that remains from so-called 'mystical' and 'ecstatic' experiences, which represent a temporary connection with a higher center. (Ouspensky, 1950, p. 195)

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