

AN EXPERIENCE OF TIMELESSNESS

William G. Braud

*I saw Eternity the other night,
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright;
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years
Driven by the spheres
Like a vast shadow moved; in which the world
And all her train were hurled.*

- Henry Vaughan

*To see a world in a grain of sand
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*

- William Blake

*He who binds to himself a Joy
Doth the wingéd life destroy;
But he who kisses the Joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.*

- William Blake

This is an account of an experience of the author that occurred a little over a year ago. The account of the experience itself, deliberately written in the present tense, is expanded from notes taken immediately following the brief experience.

The Experience

It is September 24, 1993--the first day after the autumnal equinox. I am sitting in an armchair at home, reading an article about anomalous temporal phenomena. I had chanced upon this article in the November-December 1985 *Parapsychological Review* while looking for another article in the same issue. In this article by Douglas Stokes, in which he gives an overview of theories of unusual time-related phenomena such as precognition, retroactive psychokinesis, and backward causation, I come upon the phrase ". . . it is impossible to imagine experience in the absence of time." I think to myself, "Speak for yourself, Douglas. It certainly *is* possible to do this, and many persons have reported such experiences." I get up and walk to the kitchen, thinking about what a timeless experience would be like. I direct my attention to everything that is happening at the present moment--what is happening here, locally, inside of me and near me, but

nonlocally as well, at ever increasing distances from me. I am imagining everything that is going on in a slice of the present--throughout the country, the planet, the universe. It's all happening at once. I begin to collapse time, expanding the slice of the present, filling it with what has occurred in the immediate "past." I call my attention to what I just did and experienced, what led up to this moment, locally, but keep these events within a slowly expanding present moment. The present slice of time slowly enlarges, encompassing, still holding, what has gone just before, locally, but increasingly nonlocally as well. By now, I am standing near the kitchen sink. The present moment continues to grow, expand. Now it expands into the "future" as well. Events are gradually piling up in this increasingly larger moment. What began as a thin, moving slice of time is becoming thicker and thicker, increasingly filled with events from the "present," "past," and "future." The moving window of the present becomes wider and wider, and moves increasingly outwardly in two temporal directions at once. It is as though things are piling up in an ever-widening present. The "now" is becoming very thick and crowded! "Past" events do not fall away and cease to be; rather, they continue and occupy this ever-widening present. "Future" events already are, and they, too, are filling this increasingly thick and full present moment. The moment continues to grow, expand, fill, until it contains all things, all events. It is so full, so crowded, so thick, that everything begins to blend together. Distinctions blur. Boundaries melt away. Everything becomes increasingly homogeneous, like an infinite expanse of gelatin. My own boundaries dissolve. My individuality melts away. The moment is so full that there no longer are separate things. There is no-thing here. There are no distinctions. A very strong emotion overtakes me. Tears of wonder-joy fill my eyes. This is a profoundly moving experience. Somehow, I have moved away from the sink and am now several feet away, facing in the opposite direction, standing near the dining room table. I am out of time and in an eternal present. In this present is everything and no-thing. I, myself, am no longer here. Images fade away. Words and thoughts fade away. Awareness

remains, but it is a different sort of awareness. Since distinctions have vanished, there is nothing to know and no one to do the knowing. "I" am no longer localized, but no longer "conscious" in the usual sense. There is no-thing to be witnessed, and yet there is still a witnesser. The experience begins to fade. I am "myself" again. I am profoundly moved. I feel awe and great gratitude for this experience with which I have been blessed.

Already, I begin to think about the experience. I begin to make notes about it and about what it suggests. When time collapsed, space collapsed as well. There was no space. There was no distance. Everything was accessible. Yet there was no-thing to access, and no-one to do the accessing! The moment is filled with all things at all times. Wonder-joy tears, again, and goose-flesh and a feeling of thrills up and down the spine. Is this what *akasha* is? Could this fullness be "read out"? Accessed? If so, all psi phenomena could arise from this. This experience began with time and in time. Soon, it became filled with all of time and all things. Then, it ceased being merely thick time or timeless, and became eternity. Eternity is not a very long time. It has nothing to do with time. Eternity is the complement of time. Somehow, pen and paper are at hand and, standing at the dining table as the timeless experience gradually leaves me, I make the following two lists:

Eternity	Time
Whole	Parts
Simultaneity	Succession
Acausality	Causality
No one	Individuals
No many	Differences
Nonlocal	Local
Unconscious	Conscious
Implicate	Explicate

I make two additional notes to myself:

What happens to *space* if time is collapsed?

We say, "It *takes* time." Question: "What *gives* time?"

Context and Triggers

It is helpful to know more about the context in which this experience occurred. I had been preoccupied by the concept of time. In the months preceding the experience, I had been thinking very much about time, about the "reality" or nonreality of time, about unidirectional versus bidirectional time. I had been thinking much about time-displaced paranormal events such as precognition, retroactive psychokinesis, and (most importantly to me, then and now) about the possibility of "backward-going" influences upon one's own physiological activity for purposes of retroactive healing of labile, still not completely determined or "concretized" seed moments of developing disease or health. I had been thinking about locality and nonlocality, about the possible nature and consciousness of the part of me that might be extended in time and in space. I had been thinking about the so-called *akashic* record and how such a record might be accessed. I had recently learned, from a Sanskrit scholar, that *akasha* (which means "space") is derived, literally, from *a* (meaning "absence of") and *kasha* (meaning "fist"). The image conveyed by the term *akasha* is that of an opening, unstructured hand--the opposite of a closed, structured fist.

It was in the midst of this intellectual context that I chanced upon Douglas Stokes' article. The article may have provided a seed upon which this time-related intellectual ambiance could coalesce and condense. Further, the phrase about the impossibility of a time-free experience (quoted above) served as a challenge that prompted the first part of the experience. I feel I deliberately started constructing a time-absent experience as an intellectual exercise, to counter this statement. I controlled the beginning of the exercise. But soon, the experience grew to something unexpected and uncontrollable. The experience took me over, and the later (curious how our time-based language insinuates

itself even into this attempt to describe the timeless!) aspects of the experience were spontaneous and unplanned surprises. The entire episode may have been an elaborately organized *experiential dramatization* of the intellectual concepts with which I had been preoccupied. If so, I directed only the beginning of this drama; for the remainder, I was clearly in the role of the directed.

Feeling Tone

The feeling tone of the entire experience was positive. At various "times" (!) in the experience, there were feelings of curiosity, excitement, awe, oneness, wonder, and gratitude. The emotional sequelae of the experience were feelings of excitement, exhilaration, energization, and thankfulness. I cannot recall any fear or anxiety associated with the experience.

Meaning and Interpretation

I believe the experience gave me an experiential and wordless appreciation of the nature of the timeless, the eternal, the distanceless, and the unbounded. To me, this was a direct knowing of a complementary aspect of ourselves and of Nature that is timeless, spaceless, distinctionless, whole. Whether or not the experience was an unconsciously constructed dramatization of intellectual concerns does not seem especially important. The experience may have been an answer to unvoiced (but certainly thoughtfully considered) questions. It may have been presented in the service of many needs. There is no doubt that it gave me a complementary bodily, imagistic, emotional, and intuitive appreciation of another, complementary aspect of our world.

Consequences

I feel the experience increased and deepened my understanding of time, eternity, space, the "void," distinction and nondistinction, the bounded and the boundless, implicate and explicate realities, consciousness and unconsciousness, and of aspects of reality and of psychic functioning that I continue to find helpful in my life and my work.

There was a sense of energy, excitement and refreshment that flowed out of the experience and that prompted and fueled many emotional and intellectual presentations in the months following the experience. Not long after the experience, I was able to reach a similar, timeless place through intellectual exercises based upon boundary and boundary-less concepts found in a wonderful book that I highly recommend (Ken Wilber's *No Boundary*). However, this intellectual, word-based experience was much more effortful, and much less complete, satisfying, emotional, and meaningful than was the effortless and profound experience described in this article. It was a pale shadow of the earlier gift.

I have shared the timelessness experience with my classes, with small groups, and with individuals, many of whom appear to have been inspired by it. For a while, I was so filled with the positive aftereffects of the experience that I wished to help others have similar experiences. I considered developing exercises to facilitate such experiences and, perhaps, even building research projects around timelessness experiences. These latter considerations have waned in importance. What remains, in undiminished form, is the memory of the experience itself, its emotional gifts, and the direct insights it allowed. For these, I am eternally appreciative and grateful.

In 1911, Evelyn Underhill wrote her classic book, *Mysticism*, which remains, for me, the single most complete and satisfying treatment of the subject. Above the mantle of her book-lined study, she kept an embroidered plaque given to her by a friend. The plaque was stitched with the single word, ETERNITY. I like to think that my experience serves a function similar to that of Evelyn's plaque: It provides an always present focus to which one may return to be reminded of the hidden yet profound half of ourselves and of Nature that is so well epitomized by that single word.

References

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