

## ***Reaching for Consciousness***

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When I was eleven years old, I went to a slumber party where our group of prepubescent girls spent hours into the night ‘hypnotizing’ each other. I had never seen anything like this and didn't know how much to believe was real and how much was just ‘faking.’ Already at that age my critical mind worked in high gear, often keeping me from experiencing because I was so busy analyzing. But there was enough in what I saw that night to leave me wondering. I was fascinated by the idea of states of consciousness other than the ordinary one, states where we could reach deeper parts of the mind.

I spent many hours reading science fiction, especially stories involving psychic skills. Not content to just read fiction stories, I searched for ways to develop my own psychic abilities. I'd read that humans use only a fraction of the brain's potential, and I wanted to develop myself beyond that. I was intrigued by the idea of astral travel, ready to get ‘out of the body’ and have adventures in other realms. I began experiments with self-hypnosis, meditation, and visualization techniques, applying myself to these practices with much the same zeal that I brought to my training as a dancer.

I expected that I would feel something identifiable, or that I would at least have some clue that something had changed during the time I was meditating or in trance. I was disappointed to find no dramatic shift. At first I was unable to get any visual images at all. I could not figure out where I was supposed to ‘see’ things - on my eyelids? I remember an exercise where I was to imagine my consciousness, my sense of ‘I,’ traveling to different parts \_of my body. I could not get beyond experiencing myself right behind my eyes. I led my step-father through the exercise, and he seemed to be able to travel all over his body! I was very frustrated, an extremely logical and literal young woman, attempting to get results tangible enough to prove they were more than fantasy and pretend.

Despite my determination not to fool myself into thinking something was happening, I learned to practice ‘as if,’ on the principle that I would never get any results without practice. If I hoped to see those results, I needed to apply myself fully, ‘as if’ I really believed these practices

had meaning and would lead me somewhere worth the effort I was putting in. I tried to just do the work and not worry about whether I 'really' felt something or not.

In retrospect, the long-term results of those practices are clear to me. I'm grateful to whatever drove me to begin self-development training at that early age, as that work became a foundation I drew from in struggling through adolescence and early adulthood. What began as an attempt to gain some control in my turbulent life led me along a path into spiritual connection and an ongoing dance towards consciousness. The turbulence in the world around me may be beyond my control, but I learned a great deal about how to find my balance in the midst of it. From that grounded center, I can do considerably more to affect the turmoil around me.

What is it that motivates the search that for me eventually led to a fuller sense of connection to the universe? From where I started I had no idea where the path would lead, just a certainty that it was worth following. Unable to find a teacher I was willing to completely trust, I felt alone on my journey much of the time, at least for the first years. Over time, through many trials and errors, I learned to trust the part of me that is deeply connected to the whole, the part that knows where I'm going even when I can't see where the path leads from this perspective close to the ground. And I learned to stay unattached to what I think my goals are for 'doing the work,' as they may look very different by the time I get to where I'm going.

When I leave space for what I don't know to be filled in, the answers come in time. I try to stay open-minded, curious and inquiring, finding ways to keep my balance through uncertainty. In those times of contracting inwards, I allow myself to rest, to breathe, to find comfort and build strength — and then continue the journey. At its worst, the path is rocky, I stumble and lose my way temporarily, my focus narrows to a small patch of ground at my feet, and I worry that the road will deadend at the next curve. At its best, I feel connected to many other journeyers, my heart overflows with the joy of traveling, and my perspective includes a bird's eye view flying above myself as I dance onwards through the adventure of life.