



S E N S I N G

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Scientists record field effects through physical measurement, but many of us have sensed fields in our lives—sometimes vividly provoking a new sense of community, connection, and transpersonal awareness. — EDITOR

ECHOES FROM THE FUTURE

B E T S Y M a c G R E G O R

The destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001 was an event of mythic proportions. The complete obliteration of two monumental structures and the violent ending of nearly three thousand human lives—the enormity of it, the suddenness, the finality—were beyond the scope of ordinary consciousness. What happened that day ruptured the normal flow of everyday

affairs and stunned the minds of ordinary people who witnessed it, whether in person or on television. For some it blew open the doors to “noetic” consciousness. What follows is an account of one extra-ordinary experience triggered by the extra-ordinary events of 9/11.

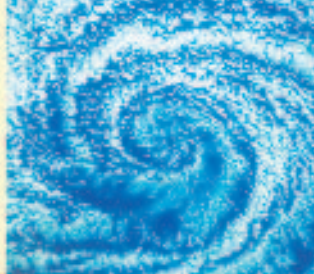
On the evening of September 10, 2001, my husband Charles and I boarded a plane at Newark Airport, New Jersey. We were taking a late night flight back to our peaceful island near Seattle, Washington, after paying a visit to New York City, our home for the previous thirty-two years.

From my window seat in the plane, I found myself facing east, looking through the clear night sky at the familiar skyline of New York City, my home for so long. A sense of love for that great city welled up in me as I

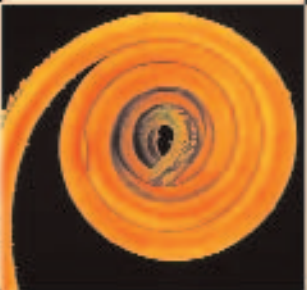
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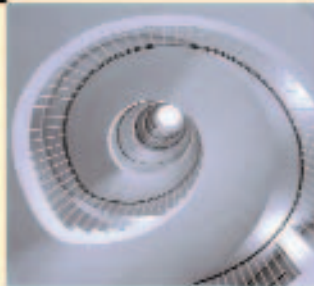
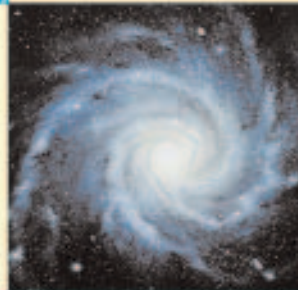
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Sensing Fields

S E N S I N G F I E L D S

sat there, watching the twinkling city lights, knowing they represented the teeming lives of a vast number of human beings, each one different but in some way all connected. I savored the unique New York City spirit, made up of the blended energy of such a diverse mix of humanity, fed by the wellspring of their lives. I could feel that special energy pulsing in my veins and knew it would always be part of me, knew I would always call New York my home, no matter where I lived. As the plane started down the runway, I bade goodbye to “my” city.

It was now midnight. In darkness, the day of September 11 was beginning.

Once in the air, the lights were dimmed and everyone settled down for the lengthy ride. I made myself comfortable with my head on Charles’ shoulder, and drifted off to sleep. Some time later I woke up abruptly. Feeling unpleasantly rattled, I looked around, wondering what might have disturbed me. All was peaceful. I figured the crick in my neck must have pushed me up out of sleep. Or maybe it was Charles snoring in my ear. Spotting an empty row across the aisle, I decided to move there and stretch out.

I arranged myself fairly comfortably in the new row, grateful to be able to lie down, snuggled under a blanket. I was still quite tired and expected to fall back asleep promptly. But something didn’t feel right. I emptied my mind of all thoughts, focused my attention on the muted roar of the engines, and lay very still—more awake than ever.

In the beginning it was almost imperceptible, the strange feeling that started to come over me. It began with an awareness of how absolutely still my body was. I wondered vaguely why it was so perfectly motionless and felt a growing urge to move it. But when I sent out the intention to move, to my surprise my limbs did not respond. I wondered if I was asleep and having a bizarre dream in which I seemed to be awake but wasn’t. The more I tried to move, however, the more I detected a kind of resistance. Something hard and unyielding surrounded my body, immobilizing it. Yes, I felt it clearly now, I was completely encased and held fast in concrete.

Part of me looked on and knew that this could not really be happening. It seemed wholly possible to open my eyes at any moment and find myself exactly where

I was supposed to be—lying on a plane seat, under a blanket. But I didn't choose to. Something powerful had taken hold of me, and I allowed it to lead me on.

The feeling of being imprisoned in concrete intensified—with it now was a sense of dread. I could not turn my head or move my arms or legs or expand my lungs with a deep breath of air. I was hopelessly trapped and on the verge of claustrophobic terror.

And then the pain began. Faint at first, it rapidly grew stronger until it filled my whole body. For the concrete was shifting. From all sides it was pressing in on me, tighter and tighter, squeezing me with unbearable force. My body was about to be crushed.

A voice in me screamed out: No! Not possible! How can this be? For a split second my mind spun around wildly, refusing to believe, looking for a way out. But it was absolutely, perfectly clear: there was no escape. There was nothing to hold on to, nowhere to run to. In another instant my life would be over. I saw that.

I saw death before me.

Then, in what I knew to be the final second of my existence, something else became clear: there was one last opportunity, one final choice that could be made. It was to accept—to willingly let go rather than being swept forcibly away. So, in that remaining instant, I

I was passing through an invisible barrier and bursting out the other side.

decided—I made my choice. I stopped resisting and said *Yes, I accept.* I let go with my whole being—utterly, totally, completely—and stepped forward to meet death.

Suddenly, everything changed. I was passing through an invisible barrier and bursting out the other side. And I found myself flying! Instead of having the life crushed out of me, I had been set free! I felt myself expanding, transforming into lightness and buoyancy—and filled with joy. Instead of disappearing into nothingness, I was spreading my wings in an infinite expanse of breathtaking beauty. I was soaring, and it was glorious.

And then it was over. I was back on the airplane, lying exactly as I remembered. Still flooded with joy and a sense of unbounded freedom, I wondered what on earth had just happened. What was that all about? I had no idea how much time had passed; it could have been

minutes, or it could have been hours. I lay there for a long while, completely mystified, until sleep crept up and took me gently away.

After landing, it was a long trip from the Seattle airport to the ferry and across the Puget Sound to the island where Charles and I live. We were totally exhausted when, a little before 6 AM Pacific Time, we finally arrived home. As the pale light of dawn was spreading across the eastern sky, we headed upstairs and tumbled gratefully into bed. Three thousand miles away, the north tower of the World Trade Center was bursting into flames. Shortly thereafter, a second plane roared into the south tower. As Charles and I slept, stunned New Yorkers—many dear friends among them—gaped in horror and disbelief as first one tower, and then the other, crumbled into dust. Thousands of lives ended that morning in the crush of concrete. Later, as word of the disaster flashed across the country like wildfire, I knew that I had somehow been part of what happened that day.

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I have pondered at length on this experience. What does it say about the way the world works? To me it says that the fabric of existence is woven together in ways that are beyond our understanding. Yet we can and do

experience the interconnectedness. Together we human beings are as one being in a world that is a living whole. Tension among us affects us all, and that night an unbearable tension was beginning to move toward the breaking point.

The events of 9/11 created a psychic shockwave that rippled through the consciousness of vast numbers of people simultaneously. The visual images of destruction, witnessed and re-witnessed by millions on television, contributed mightily to the transmission of that shockwave. I believe that the sudden transition out of life of so many souls in such a highly charged way also reverberated energetically through the collective human psyche.

This extraordinary situation had the effect of triggering noetic awareness. Many people felt the impact as I did, in nonordinary ways. A sense of interconnectedness

was experienced—inexplicable but palpable. A “transpersonal state” of direct knowing, operating outside of the linear dimensions of time and distance, became accessible. It was in this way that the gathering force of what was about to transpire rippled through my consciousness, creating a resonance—a kind of “vision”—even before the actual events in New York City began to unfold. The thoughts, images, and sensations that occurred to me were a prescient echo of what was coming into being.

From my perspective, the impact of that shockwave was transformative. It woke many people up. It inspired heroic acts of courage and stirred profound compassion. The shared sense of pain evoked an outpouring of caring and sympathy in nations around the world. Perhaps this was a painful but important step forward in the growth of our interconnectedness, forging bonds in the fires of intense experience. A shift in the collective consciousness happened that day. How enduring that shift was we may not appreciate for years to come.

The vision I experienced that night remains with me. It still brings me awe and causes me to wonder. What happened that morning as the twin towers fell and thousands of souls were rushed without warning into the last moment of life? In that immeasurable instant just before meeting death, did they have the opportunity to make one final choice? How many chose in that instant to accept—and departed from this life in freedom? How many spread wings of joy and soared into the beyond? What about the anguished loved ones who remained behind, imagining a death of pain and horror, never dreaming of any other possibility?

I wonder, what is the truth about death, that great mysterious passage that awaits us all? The vision that came to me that night spoke of death as liberation. Despite the terrifying circumstances of dying, it said that death itself is beautiful. For death pulls aside the veil of mystery and reveals the eternal nature of existence—a wondrous, ongoing, flowing movement from one form to another, the dance of life unending.



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This experience is ignited by the clarity, strength, and focus of the surrounding psychic field.

HIGH OCTANE LEARNING

C H R I S B A C H E

College is supposed to be about mind-opening experiences; but the life-opening experiences occurring for many of my students over the years went much deeper and were more challenging than the usual undergraduate’s “Aha!” Eventually the number and depth of these experiences were such that I was forced to rethink many of my assumptions about teaching and to formulate a new model of the transpersonal dynamics of collective learning.

I call this high-octane version of learning “Great Learning,” as distinct from ordinary learning. Great Learning takes place when students have become so deeply absorbed in their self-education that they keep their journals after a course has ended in order to use them as reference points in the years ahead. Other reliable signs are when nobody wants to leave the room after the bell has rung, preferring to linger in the afterglow of some breakthrough, or when students feel a sense of loss when a course reaches its conclusion.

I believe that an important ingredient contributing to igniting these powerful transformational experiences has to do with the clarity, strength, and focus of the psychic field that surrounds and saturates the learning environment. This includes both the teacher’s personal field (reflecting the depth of his or her spiritual practice) and the field created by all the students in the course. The stronger, clearer, and better focused the mental field of a given learning circle, the more likely it is that skillful inquiry will spark deep changes in people’s lives. This is so true in my experience that I have become convinced that the intellectual exchange of ideas is but a vehicle for a more fundamental energetic exchange that takes place “underneath” the verbal dialogue. ➤

*And the more souls that resonate together
The greater the intensity of their love
And, mirror-like, each soul reflects the other.*

— DANTE

Everyone knows that words not supported by the energy of personal experience carry much less power to influence others than words which are. This happens, I think, not because the words themselves are different or are delivered with a different inflection, but because when people speak, they unleash a tangible but invisible power into the space around them. This power comes ultimately from our experience and from the energetic access that our experience has created in us. Our words float on this power, like a canoe floating on a rushing stream. Moreover, it is not just the speaker's power that is important here but the power of the mental-emotional-spiritual field of the entire group. The strength of the class' "need to know," the intensity and authenticity of their involvement in their own learning, influences the strength of the energetic stream that underpins our verbal exchange.

In the playful dance of course content and energetic resonance, ordinary learning sometimes crosses a threshold to become Great Learning. Education becomes transformational learning. What may begin as an intellectual exercise cracks open to reveal penetrating and timely truths. When learning reaches this white-hot level of intensity, old boundaries can fall away in seconds, old wounds can open and be drained of their accumulated poisons, the hard can become soft and pliant once again.

Chris Bache will be presenting a workshop at IONS in May 2005 (see: www.noetic.org for details). For more on transformative learning, read "Teaching in the Sacred Mind" in Chris Bache's book *Dark Night, Early Dawn*.



CHRIS BACHE, PhD, is a professor of religious studies at Youngstown State University and adjunct professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies. He is also the author of the book *Lifecycles*. An award-winning teacher, his work explores the philosophical implications of nonordinary states of consciousness.

THE MAGIC OF CHANT

ROBERT GASS

Judith and I are standing on stage before fifteen hundred people in a Kansas City hotel ballroom. In another time and place we might be called shamans or priest and priestess. However, at this annual gathering of the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), we are simply named "conference weavers." Like others of the priestly guild, it is our role to make sure that the prescribed rituals are performed correctly (introducing the speakers and keeping workshops on schedule), to bring people together in community, and to infuse the entire ceremony with the sacred.

Even to my spotlight-impaired vision, the presence of different castes and tribes is apparent from the range of faces and ceremonial garb. Scanning the crowd, I can see everyone from young initiates to elders. Some are wearing business suits, many are in T-shirts and jeans, others are in African dashikis or Indian saris. It is the opening evening of the conference, and the gathered faithful are clearly excited to be here, though exhausted from their pilgrimages on airplanes, crowded shuttle buses, and the serpentine lines at the hotel registration desk.

Sometimes we chant leaders have it easy. It is always a delight to guide people who are already sitting in the soft silence of a beautiful shrine or temple that emanates peace and spiritual presence. Tonight, the ballroom resonates with the echoes of yesterday's sales meetings and banquets, the air-conditioning feels like it was set near zero, the unyielding chairs seem designed to promote extra visits to the chiropractor, and the cavernous space has the acoustics of the average supermarket.

Fortunately, we come trained in a certain arcane art that helps us deal with situations just like this one—the art and magic of chant! Stepping up to the microphone,

I start finger picking my guitar and begin:

“It’s in every one of us, to be wise . . .”

There are instant smiles and “ahhs” of recognition from many, for this chant has been a kind of anthem for those in the field of consciousness.

“Find your heart, open up both your eyes . . .”

More and more voices join in:

“We can all know everything, without ever knowing why . . .”

As people begin to sing out something happens. In the words of one participant, “It was like a wave of energy. I could sense it and feel it.” Onstage, I feel it too—a palpable experience of people joining their sounds and their hearts, a sense of some kind of force building.

Think of a chant as a template for sound vibrations. The melody, rhythm, vowel tones, harmonics, and meaning of the lyrics represent a pattern of energy. When a group repeatedly intones *Om Namaha Shivaya* or any other chant, the group energy field begins to shift and reassemble around the template of the chant, much like a viscous liquid when poured into a mold. Chant alters group fields by harnessing all the mechanisms I call the “five powers” of chant: anchoring, entrainment, breath, sonic effects, and intent.

The transformative power of chanting in groups depends significantly on people being willing to take part. If I started a chant onstage and no one joined in (one of my recurring fears), not much would happen to the group energy. When we’re chanting in a group and the person next to us doesn’t sing, we feel their absence—it’s as if there is a hole in the group field. If people chant without enthusiasm, the energy field will be decidedly less vibrant and powerful than that of another group singing the same chant wholeheartedly.


But, once a group actually starts to chant, a number of things begin to happen simultaneously. The “five powers” of chant begin to exert their forces, gradually shifting the consciousness of the participants.

First, anchored memories and feelings may be triggered: the smiles on the faces of the audience at IONS when I began the familiar “It’s in every one of us.” As these associations and emotions are triggered and released in individuals, the tone, texture, and movement of the group energy field begins to change. Not everyone has personal associations with “It’s in every one of us,” but people are swept along with

the wave of recognition and good feeling generated by those who do.

While this associating and triggering is going on, the extended tones and harmonics of chant are transforming the energy field. When groups intone syllables like *OMMMM*, strong repeating vibrations of sound begin to massage their bodies and alter their brainwaves, harmonizing individual variations in the field, and establishing a new fundamental frequency for the group—both musically and energetically.

As a group continues to repeat a chant, powerful forces of entrainment come into play. Think of fifteen hundred people, side by side at the beginning of the evening in the IONS ballroom, all vibrating in their own rhythm. We start to chant *Om Namaha Shivaya*. Lips form the “Oh” sound, and then a long vibrating “mmmm” fills the room. Every few seconds, the sound “Sh” from *Shivaya* moves through the sonic field like a windshield washer: “Sh...Sh...Sh....”

We begin breathing at the same time in the natural pauses in the text, bringing all the many physiological responses linked to our breath more into alignment with each other. The entrances and exits of consonants lock in together, and the spaces between the phrases start to shimmer in the purity of their silence. Individual voices become more finely blended and tuned, and we start to instinctively follow the subtle musical dynamics in the rising and falling of the melodic lines, hearing and reacting to the subtlest of cues, like a flock of birds simultaneously turning as if joined by invisible threads. Just as the pendulums of two clocks set side by side come to beat in the same rhythm, the fifteen hundred voices and souls are now one harmonious, vibrating field of energy, entrained to the chant. 

—Adapted from *Chanting: Discovering Spirit in Sound*, by Robert Gass with Kathleen Brehony (Broadway Books, a division of Random House, 1999).



ROBERT GASS, EdD, is a Harvard-trained psychologist, workshop leader, and organizational consultant to groups ranging from General Motors to Greenpeace and the Win Without War Coalition. Also a highly-regarded composer, chanter and recording artist, Robert has released some 20 CDs of music to uplift the human spirit.