

BOOK REVIEW

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Conscious Dreaming: A Spiritual Path for Everyday Life, by Robert Moss. Crown Trade Paperbacks, New York, NY \$16.00.

Possibly no one has done more to revive the ancient practice of shamanic dreaming than Robert Moss. For readers of this journal, Moss's work should be of special interest because he traces its development to a series of near-death experiences (NDEs) he experienced during childhood. He reports having actually died a number of times while suffering repeated bouts of pneumonia between the ages of 2 and 11. Moss refuses to use the term "near-death experience" in referring to these episodes because, for him, there was nothing "near" about them. These were death experiences, and qualifying them seems an unnecessary capitulation to skeptics, a sentiment with which many NDErs will undoubtedly agree.

Moss recalls traveling during his death experiences to far-off places and reliving past lives. At the age of 7, he was first visited by a radiant young man who called himself Philemon. Philemon became Moss's spirit teacher, providing him with ongoing instruction on a number of matters clearly beyond the experience of a young child. Unable to find anyone in his own culture who shared or validated these experiences, Moss, a native of Australia, encountered the first person who seemed to understand him when he befriended an aboriginal boy named Jacko, whose culture knows of, and honors, the Dreamtime.

I could not help feeling compassion and empathy for the young Moss who clearly felt extremely isolated and alone for many years. It made me reflect on many accounts of NDEs I have heard or read about over the years from people whose experiences were invalidated by those closest to them, as well as by our society as a whole. It made me more conscious

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of how important the work of validating these experiences is for NDErs, especially for children.

Rather than deny or attempt to repress his own experiences, Moss, like all great thinkers, courageously follows them, molding them into what the subtitle of the book aptly describes as a “spiritual path for everyday life.” His approach, which he refers to as *active dreaming*, is actually a combination of lucid (or, the term he prefers, “conscious”) dreaming and traditional shamanic methods. Much of his own work has to do with using dreams as a method of precognitively mapping out his life. For example, Moss describes one dream in which he was told, “Troy will be very important in your life.” As a former professor of ancient history, his first association to the dream was that it referred to the ancient city of Troy. Only later did he make the connection between his dream and the town of Troy, New York. He had a series of dreams and by simply following the information provided in them, he comfortably relocated to a farm in Troy, New York.

Moss describes another episode in which his deceased father came to him in a dream, appeared agitated, and gave him information which seemed to indicate he wanted his wife, Moss’s mother, to relocate. The information included the name Rodriguez, which meant nothing to Moss. However, when Moss telephoned his mother, she quickly identified a Mr. Rodriguez as the realtor who had sold her the home in which she was living. As events unfolded, the realtor was able to help Moss’s mother relocate to a retirement community that had also been shown to him in the dream, where she comfortably spent the last years of her life.

Moss does not offer a theory of dreamwork. His approach is a method based on working with leaders in the area of dreamwork, lucid dreaming, a variety of shamanic traditions, as well as 30 of years working with his own dreams. One of the more interesting techniques is dream reentry, a method of reentering the dream, either through guided imagery or shamanic drumming, in order to remember more of the dream or to get more information about it. I have found this technique especially useful on waking up in the morning. By using it, I have remembered large sections of dreams I was unable to recall on waking up. At other times, I have remembered entire dreams using this approach.

In sharing dreams with others, Moss describes a series of rituals that he uses in his workshops. These include forming a circle, lighting a candle, calling on earth energy and light energy, and the use of drumming to call up the dreams. Participants are then asked to share any dream they wish with the group, speaking in the present tense in order to draw

the other group members into the dream. The members of the group are then given the opportunity to ask questions that may clarify their understanding of the dream. Following this, everyone is invited to answer the question of, "If this were my dream . . ." hopefully providing the dreamer with information that may be relevant to his or her own dream.

I must admit that it is a great gift to come upon someone whose ideas are so close to my own. And it is even a greater gift when that person has more experience, and is farther along the same path than oneself, which is how I would describe my relationship to Moss.

In an article which appeared in this journal, I discussed the phenomenological overlap between lucid dreams and NDEs and argued that lucid dreams may offer one method of replicating components of an NDE in a laboratory setting (Green, 1995). Since that time, in my work with a group of colleagues and friends, none of whom are NDErs, we have been able to replicate collectively during the lucid dream state almost all of the components of an NDE. In an article that appeared in the magazine *Shaman's Drum* (Green, 1996), I presented the case of a woman who had a deep NDE during which she was met by a deceased friend. Since her NDE, she has been visited by her friend on an ongoing basis during dreams. He often gives her advice and helps her in a variety of ways, much as Philemon helped the young Moss.

Moss has also worked with contemporary teachers of Western shamanism, as have I. Despite being quite skeptical, he attended a basic workshop on shamanic techniques taught by a former professor of anthropology and practicing shaman, Michael Harner. Kenneth Ring (1989, 1990) and I (Green, 1996, 1998) have pointed out that an NDE is actually a time-honored form of shamanic initiation. Prior to reading Moss, I speculated (Green, 1998) that because an NDE is a shamanic initiation, NDErs should be expected to learn the skill of shamanic journeying more quickly. I was pleasantly surprised to find that Moss provides us with an excellent example of this.

While at a basic workshop on shamanism, and learning to journey using sustained drumming, Moss traveled to the Upper World, one of several shamanic realms. Despite his skepticism, he experienced a powerful journey, during which he rose from the upper branches of a tree, through a cloud-like membrane, explored various dimensions of the Upper World, was forced to outmaneuver or outwit threatening gatekeepers, and saw many forms of the Goddess. At a certain level he was forced to change form (referred to as *shapeshifting* in the shamanic literature), became lightning, came face-to-face with an entire pantheon of figures from many religious traditions, and finally, "Beyond them,

behind them, projecting from its own center, was an immense *being of Light*" (italics mine).

Following his journey, Moss returned to ordinary reality only to find a group of very concerned people gathered around him. He was told he had been "gone" for 12 minutes beyond the time the drum beat sounded for people to return, that he did not seem to be breathing or have a pulse and appeared dead! Moss's own conclusion was: "I felt I had died and come back in some quite literal sense, just as I had done in my childhood illnesses—with the vital difference that this time the experience was *intentional*."

In Chapter Five, Moss introduces the concept of shamanic dreaming. He defines the shamanic dreamer as "a conscious dreamer who has developed the ability to enter the dreamworld at will, to communicate with dream guides, to journey across time and space and into other orders of reality, and brings back gifts of healing and insight for the benefit of others." This definition echoes the position of many, including myself, who have noted that lucid dreams are phenomenologically identical to shamanic journeys. The only difference is that shamans use their lucid dream journeys to gather useful information and to be of assistance to those in their community.

Some of Moss's chapters read like descriptions of the various components of an NDE. In Chapter Seven he discusses dreams of the departed, in Chapter Eight takes up the theme of guides and guardian angels, and in Chapter Nine Moss discusses dreams of healing. He writes that, "When you are ready to make this journey, you will find that in dreaming you can not only explore the territory described by NDE survivors, but go far beyond the threshold where they usually stop. You can study many worlds beyond the physical plane. You can study the soul's transitions after physical death and investigate alternative afterlife possibilities."

Although I am skeptical that conscious or shamanic dreams take one *beyond* the realm experienced during a deep NDE, I am also intrigued by that idea. Moss's point with regard to being able to journey repeatedly into the same realm and study different aspects of it is both accurate and important. An NDE is a spontaneous event that, by definition, occurs at the point of apparent physical death. Conscious dreams and shamanic journeys provide one with a method for replicating the same experience, at will, and without physical injury or illness.

Although I was deeply impressed by Moss's book, I would have enjoyed reading more about his early death experiences, which he mentions in passing and then fails to return to. Despite this, I consider *Conscious*

Dreaming to be a unique synthesis and contribution, and an excellent example of how one man was able to integrate and build on his NDE. For anyone who is a dreamer, an NDEr, or who has chosen to follow the shamanic path, *Conscious Dreaming* is a book you will want to read. And having done so, you may agree with me that Moss is one of those gifted individuals who walk between the worlds and truly deserve the title of shaman.

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