

## Trance Types and Amnesia Revisited: Using Detailed Interviews to Fill in the Gaps

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### Abstract

Unconscious trance states which involve complete amnesia, and conscious trance states which involve dissociation from the body's sensory process and failure to recall speech or body sensation or movement, both occurred among North American yogis and Spiritualist mediums. Exceptions to statistically established cross-cultural associations between mediumistic trance and amnesia are examined in terms of community and individual reportage of trance experience. The relationship between dissociation and amnesia within this sample is discussed.

A common U.S. dictionary (Funk and Wagnell's, 1974) defines *amnesia* as a psychiatric term meaning "loss or impairment of memory; morbid forgetfulness." The word "morbid" here is key; we do not, for example, term ourselves "amnesic" when we fail to remember the name that goes with the face and body of someone we met at a party last week. Rather, amnesia is the failure to remember something we and our society feel we ought on no account to have forgotten; critical information such as our name and place of work; or in general, the salient features of what happened to us two hours ago. A standard psychological reference, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Casebook* (Spitzer et al. 1989) adds that amnesia can result from a head injury or suppression of a traumatic event, while a more recent edition, the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association 1994), mentions partial amnesia as a correlate of voluntary and nonpathological possession trance, thus acknowledging a frequent anthropological usage of the term. While we as anthropologists are quite clear that this latter type of description is what we mean when we apply the term "amnesia" to the experiences of entranced mediums, the types of memory referred to, I have discovered, are unfortunately rather unclear.

Erika Bourguignon (1973) discovered in her cross-cultural study of trance that voluntary possession trance, for which I prefer the term "mediumistic trance," was strongly associated with amnesia, while other types of trance not involving mediumship were not. Winkelman (1986) also reported strong statistical correlations between mediumistic trance and amnesia; while Peters and Price-Williams (1980) reported to the contrary that some part of the trance is remembered in 20 out of 29 cultures where mediumistic trance is practiced in the context of shamanism. Hughes (1991) also indicated that most of her informants, 18 New Age trance channels in Los Angeles, retained partial memory of trance experiences.

The obvious question is why? Why the discrepancy of results, and how exactly is "amnesia" related to trance? While a number of researchers (Greenbaum 1973; Bourguignon and Evascu 1977; Winkelman 1990) have put forth some quite satisfying explanations for why trance types associate with certain sociocultural variables cross-culturally, I am also persuaded by the arguments of Kobben (1967) that if we are to fully grasp the causal bases which might underlie the observed cross-cultural statistical associations, we must also explain observed exceptions, such as those relating to amnesia and trance. While I cannot fully answer the question I pose, I will argue in this paper that part of the answer involves methodology in the collection of raw data on trance, both current and historical; part involves cultural preferences in some societies, but not others, for amnesic or non-amnesic states; and part is a failure to recognize or define within our own discipline exactly what we mean by the term "amnesia" as we have used it in trance studies.

Browsing through the Revelation and Divination category of the Human Relations Area Files on which much of cross-cultural research is based, one realizes that a great deal of the priceless ethnographic research to which we are the fortunate heirs was conducted during a time period when trance was regarded by most investigators as either an outright fraud, a cultural oddity with interesting social implications, or as a socialized form of mental illness. The interviewing of informants about the actual nature of their experiences while in trance was often correspondingly brief or absent altogether. While documentation of that era is beyond the scope of this paper, a few brief vignettes should be adequate to illustrate my point. Among the more blatantly ethnocentric accounts I encountered were some of Jenness's (1922:216-217) condemnations of the mediumistic trances of Copper Eskimo shamans, which he witnessed and clearly believed to be fraudulent:

Hysteria, self-hypnosis, and delusion caused by suggestion are well known to every psychologist or medical practitioner, and everything I witnessed could be explained on one or other of these grounds...it is safest perhaps to attribute them to the overwrought imaginations of a people whose knowledge of the workings of the universe is far more limited even than our own; a people who have no concept of our "natural laws" but in their place have substituted a theory of spiritual causation in which there is no boundary between the possible and the impossible.

One is able to glean from the accounts he presents that shamanic possession trance with human and animal spirits was present in the culture, that at least one female shaman believed that it was a learned skill which required practice, and that some amnesia was probably present. The next account, from Krause's (1956:198) ethnographic work on the Tlingit is less rancorous, but even less informative in terms of the shaman's own experience:

After the shaman has put on his ceremonial regalia he starts running around the fire in the same direction as the sun, and doubles up his body forcefully, keeping time with the rhythm and the drum and the songs until his eyes, which have been directed to the smoke hole all the time, seem twisted in his head. Suddenly he stands still, looks at the upper side of the drum and screams loudly. Immediately the songs and the drum stop and all direct their gaze on the shaman, since the spirit which has entered him is about to speak. After

the conclusion of the performance the guests are served tobacco and all kinds of food till dawn.

In both cases, as in other early accounts, it seems likely that a blank cultural category in the minds of the investigators all too often resulted in the omission of information valuable to the student of consciousness, which cannot now be recovered, and renders many early accounts of trance as inadequate to supply us with more than a superficial understanding of the relationship of trance to various of its behavioral and experiential features such as amnesia. In citing what are admittedly extreme examples in order to make a point, I neither intend nor imply criticism of the exceptionally valuable work of the many cross-cultural researchers who have made use of the data on altered states of consciousness available in HRAF and primary ethnographic sources. Rather, I wish to begin pointing out the importance of close informant interviewing in obtaining primary data on trance. This becomes even more critical in societies where cultural standardization of certain physical attributes of mediumistic trance is taken as evidence that the invited spirit or deity is actually present within the body of medium, and that the words spoken are actually the words of the spirit, and not those of the medium. Greenbaum (1973:59) has suggested that in some cases, these forms of emic evidence may even protect the medium from political persecution; such is certainly the case in Pat Lawrence's work (n.d.) in Sri Lanka:

The "grace, greatness and strength" of the goddess is thought to merge with the body of the trance dancer, at a point in ritual marked by *uruvanatal* (trembling). In Batticaloa, such a trembling dancer is referred to as a "flowering tree" which attracts shakti, the female energy of the universe. Once this dancing-trembling state has been entered, the person is sacralized, and should be accorded respect as a living presence of the divine (and should not therefore be arrested by the security forces). The goddesses' agency is thought to have entered the bodies of the teyvam dancers through this notion of them as the living embodiment of the goddesses' agency.

Sometimes, the desired evidence of the legitimacy of the spirit transmission is that the medium is amnesic, as in some northern Brazilian and Caribbean (Métraux 1955) sects. As Frigerio (1989:7) points out, with regard to his fieldwork in Argentina, "The reason behind the general linkage established between possession and unconsciousness seems to rise from the emic preference (which is not always attained) for an unconscious trance." This cultural pressure, as Halperin's recent article on Brazilian Tambor de Mina cults (1995) points out, encourages mediums to claim to have remembered nothing when in fact they may be partially conscious during trance, thus yielding confusing or contradictory data for cross-cultural research. Thus, as Halperin demonstrated, unless careful and persistent interviewing about trance experience is done, using several informants, as, for example, in his study and those of Hughes (1991) and Richard Katz (1982), cultural preferences for certain states, rather than what is actually experienced, can distort the primary data on which later cross-cultural analyses are based.

In my own case, sorting out cultural biases was easier; my fieldwork on trance (Buhrman 1996) was carried out in a 121 year old community of Spiritualists in Eastern New York and a more recently-founded community of yogis in Northern

California headed by a North Indian master. My methods were ethnographic participant observation in community life, especially rituals and religious services, extensive interviews of 18 yogis and 18 mediums, and EEG recordings of 18 yogis and six trance mediums. In neither community would a serious practitioner of trance be discredited because his or her experience failed to live up to an expected standard. Nevertheless, even in this more tolerant atmosphere, it soon became apparent that trance experiences of a sizeable minority of informants in both communities fell outside of what was described in the religious literature as the expected form of trance. In both cases, some of the discrepancies between the expected and experienced states involved the attribute of amnesia.

### Amnesia among Trance Mediums in the US

Mediums and ministers in the National Spiritualist Association of Churches and its daughter church, the Church of the Living Spirit, democratically insist that whatever way Spirit chooses to communicate with an individual medium is the best way. Trance mediumship is not preferred over "mental mediumship," which occurs in a conscious and focused waking state. Validation of spirit communication in this tradition is through external verification of the message which was given through the medium, rather than by qualities or characteristics of the medium's state of consciousness during the transmission of information. There is, therefore, no social pressure for a medium either to claim or disclaim amnesia as a part of his or her experience. However, in a manual on mediumship used in the training of ministers in the National Spiritualist Association of Churches, trance mediumship is described as a special relationship with Spirit, where the medium enters a "sleep-like state" and remembers nothing afterwards (Sher 1981:108).

In all, I interviewed 18 mediums, 11 of whom I classified as "full trance mediums," because of their complete dissociation during trance from physical body sensations and outer events. (The remaining seven, discussed below, report partial memory and awareness of their words, voice, and body sensations during trance; these I have termed "semi-trance" mediums.) Of the 11 full trance mediums I interviewed, seven do, indeed, fit the above description. They become completely unconscious during trance, as do some prominent New Age channels such as Jach, who channels Lazaris (1987), and J.Z. Knight, who channels Ramtha (Weinberg 1988). Both of these latter reportedly remember nothing; Lazaris says he prefers Jach to be out of the way entirely; Knight is reportedly paid a salary because her mediumship represents "lost time" for her. The initial occurrence of this type of mediumship for all seven informants was spontaneous (see also Winkelman 1990), as it was for the above-described New Age channels. One of my informants, a Spiritualist healer now in her seventies, described her first unplanned experience of unconscious trance, which happened to her as a young woman:

It was at Norton Hall at Chautauqua. I was supposed to give a talk. I remember getting off my chair, and I don't remember anything else until the applause at the end. Someone said, "That was the best speech I have ever heard," but I didn't remember saying anything. Two years later, someone brought me a tape of that speech, and my voice sounded so different that I would have never recognized it as mine. And in the speech I was talking

about things I had absolutely no knowledge of.

This type of mediumistic trance is frequently emically associated with sleep; Jach describes how he channels Lazaris simply by "taking a nap"; Lazaris agrees that his channel goes into an unconscious deep sleep state (1987:ii). Spiritualists also have this association. Sher (1981:108) defines mediumistic trance as "a sleep-like state...the Spirit takes full control of the medium and the medium is unaware of what is being said or done." Several of my informants also associated their trance mediumship with sleep. However, it should be noted that the term "sleep" appears to be an approximation. The "sleep" referred to does not occur during normal sleeping hours (unless we want to entertain the hypothesis that sleepwalking and trance mediumship are similar phenomena) nor does the medium's breath or body posture take on the conformations usually associated with a person in nighttime deep sleep. And although both Spiritualist and New Age trance mediums use the words "deep sleep" to describe this form of trance, some also believe that they are taken to a "higher vibrational level" during the trance. The following two accounts by elder Spiritualist mediums, who I will call Polly and Audrey, exemplify this type of unconscious trance state:

**Polly:** The trance mediumship in itself is kind of a gift in itself in some way. It was an experience of just falling into a deep sleep, and then when you awaken you didn't really realize you were sleeping. You seldom remember anything that's going on for that hour that you're in trance. The experience, it's just blank. Amnesia? Yep, that's about it. I'm gone. One minute someone's talking to me and then I'm not there. But everyone else keeps me well-informed on what went on. And it's recorded, a lot of them are recorded, so it works out fine. I think letting Spirit work through me in trance is great, because for me it's restful, there's no stress, there's no duress.

**Audrey:** What do I experience when I'm in trance? I would have to say I don't know. Talk about the Big Sleep, I'm out and gone. To go into trance, I might be sitting right here, and I relax, and I go into a prayer state, and become aware of Spirit, and make sure Yardley is there, and I just let him take over. They do the work, like I said, I'm just the instrument. If spirit says you go, then I go. I say a prayer, and give myself to them to be used as their instrument, that's how I do it. I would just know I was going, I'd know when they were there, and who was there, and then when my beloved Irishman Yardley would say, "Okay, here we go, relax," it's like sort of floating out a little bit and then I would feel the heart give a strong beat and that would be it. Other times the spirit's energy just takes you over [with no prior warning]. I have sat here talking to friends and I am in the middle of a sentence and I start to finish it and they all look at me [strangely], and I say, "What happened?" And that quick I was out, and that quick I was back in. They took over long enough to say what they wanted to say and that was it.

These accounts are thus in conformity with previously reported associations of amnesia with mediumistic trance, and they extend the description of unconscious mediumistic trance by emically relating them to deep sleep. However, from here on out the plot thickens considerably for three reasons. The first is that the remaining four full trance mediums I interviewed remember neither the words spoken through

their lips nor the actions of their physical bodies during trance, but they experience a continuous and remembered inner awareness during trance, and cannot therefore properly be described either as "amnesic" or in "deep sleep." The second reason is that the "semi-trance" mediums exhibit partial memory. The third problem is that a sizeable minority of Yogic meditation practitioners, who neither exhibit nor experience any type of mediumistic activity, nevertheless report amnesic trances in terms nearly identical to the unconscious trance mediums' descriptions.

In the first case, mediums in what I have chosen to term "conscious full trance" have no more memory of their physical body process or of the events transpiring in the outside world around them than do their counterparts who experience unconscious trance. They, too, must rely on tape recordings or the descriptions of others to find out what the spirits have said while using their bodies to communicate. Nor would it be surprising if such people typically and quite honestly reported, referring to their failure to remember anything of their contact with the spirit or spirits that they are channelling, that they "remember nothing." But here, the appropriateness of the word "amnesia" becomes highly problematical, because although dissociation from the physical body and the external world is complete, there is, during trance, an unbroken stream of conscious awareness of inner experience. This inner experience is remembered after the medium comes out of trance, just as yogic informants are able to some degree to report about their experiences of *samadhi*.

One of my informants, a pastor of a Spiritualist church in Colorado, remembers nothing of the actions of her body nor her speech during trance. She once expressed astonishment when we told her that "Sage Flower" had talked to us while she was in trance. She said, "Sage Flower?! But I kept reaching out to Magdalen!" Nevertheless she remembers and describes quite clearly her inner experiences while entranced:

There's a momentary heaviness, like I wouldn't be able to open my eyes, as though my body and mind go to sleep. Then it seems like I wake up, and yet I'm not awake. Mostly I see whirling colors, lovely lavenders and whites. There's a sense of pleasantness, of floating. Today there was a hollowness, like my breath was hollow. Then a soft, brilliant light which I was engulfed in, and a peaceful calmness.

Lenore, who at age 73 is retired, is one of Lily Dale's most prominent elder trance mediums. She sums up her memories of trance experience over the years as follows:

In trance, Spirit takes over so fast that it's almost inexplicable how I feel. Oh, I'm just soaring to the sky. It's like, I don't know how I can express it, even. It's like an exhilarating feeling and I can feel it from my toes, right up through my head, and it's like there's no limit to space. I'm enveloped in light. I had the feeling of the great expanse, not only of space, but of light, I always had that feeling at the same time. I think there was only one time, I would say it was all of thirty years ago, that I had the experience in trance of knowing where I was and who I was... I never had any sense of what I was saying.... Of course in those days, you didn't have a tape recorder, so you had no way of recording what was said. People would just tell you afterwards. They could tell immediately the change in my voice, it is a man's. Nine times out of ten, it is a man talking through me and mostly my Indian teacher, this White Cloud of mine.

I have argued elsewhere (Buhrman 1996) that the types of inner experiences reported by the conscious fully entranced mediums, rather than being amnesic, are indistinguishable from descriptions of Yogic samadhi. In an atmosphere of great tolerance within the Spiritualist churches for the different ways that it is possible for spirits to communicate with humans, I can only speculate as to why trance mediumship is associated with unconscious trance in the Spiritualist Church literature, when clearly a sizeable minority of its trance mediums are, in fact, conscious during trance. If what is important is the message, and not the state that produced it, it might be reasonable for an audience, as well as one's colleagues, to assume that a medium, who says she remembers nothing of the experience of Spirit contact, remembers nothing at all. Or perhaps it is simply that in the formative years of Spiritualist teachings on mediumship, most of the trance mediums happened to be unconscious, rather than conscious, vehicles.

### Partial Trance among the Mediums

Hughes (1991) indicated that most of her informants, 18 New Age trance channels in Los Angeles, retained partial memory of the channeling process during trance which for many of them included a feeling of blending with the channelled entity. Seven of the 18 trance mediums in my study (whom I have not discussed previously) did so as well. For this group of mediums, partial awareness of physical body sensations and sensory functions were also present. In other words, unlike the full trance mediums I described previously, dissociation from the physical body process, including such functions as hearing, speaking, and feeling/sensing was only partial, while the inner experience seems often to have included the same richness of intuitive, emotional, and religious components described by the conscious full trance mediums. From one of these mediums I borrowed the term, "semi-trance," which I will use in referring to this state. This medium describes the experience:

Mentally I recite my prayer, asking that only the highest and best come through. I place my life in God's hands. There's a transfer of energy, like an opening of a conduit. Then there's a sense of darkness—I'm located behind my eyes but everything is dim. Still there are some physical sensations, a sense of peace in my physical body... then I turn to the side, almost as though I am curling up into one side of my heart, from where I can listen to what is being said. My mental processes become somewhat inactive. I can't [formulate] questions; I need others to ask them.

Although semi-trance mediums afterward remembered "being there" and listening to what was said, there was often less than normal recall of the content of the communication; in many cases semi-trance mediums also listen to tapes of their channelled sessions afterward. In semi-trance, the medium retains some awareness of sensory input from the physical body and its surroundings during trance. Something of the process of spirit communication—which uses the medium's vocal apparatus and sometimes his or her body as well, and may include the experience of partnership or union with the spirit guide—is remembered after the trance:

To go into trance, I use the breath, and I use a feeling. A feeling of love to my teacher, inviting him to come, when he's very close, he starts to talk to me, so I get clairaudience. It took me a while to decide to allow him to use

my body, and then longer to prepare; I went through a lot of preparation so that I could. There is this really familiar, extremely vivid awareness of breathing, heartbeat, blood flow, and other body process[es] very quickly that happens just before I go into trance. Then I just slip outside of my body. I just seem to be moved aside from my body. I'm not really seeing a lot when I'm away from my body, but I hear and sense what I'm feeling, like emotions of love. I stand right next to Raja and listen. I listen to the whole thing. I told him, why would I go away? Why would I not want to listen to my teacher?

In what I have termed full trance, by contrast, there seems to be, in both the conscious and unconscious varieties, no awareness of the external world or the vocal or motor apparatus of the physical body during trance, and, except for an initial contact, no memory of the process of spirit communication remaining in the mind of the medium at the conclusion of the trance.

### Amnesia Among Yogic Meditators

Though I have consistently practiced Yogic meditation over the last 20 years, I have never personally experienced amnesic meditation states. Nor was I aware, until undertaking this study, that many of my fellow practitioners had. Despite being aware that a few EEG studies had connected meditation with sleep (Murphey and Donovan 1988:18), I had felt baffled as to how to interpret the experiences of occasional biofeedback clients in my workplace. When giving a guided visualization intended to evoke a relaxed state as well as the selected entrainment of either alpha or theta waves, alpha waves would diminish and brainwave patterns dominated by delta would appear on the EEG screen. But the person's body remained sitting upright and gave no appearance of sleep, nor did their breath patterns alter visibly. The experiential description of these people at the conclusion of the session was always remarkably similar: they remarked that they didn't think that they had been sleeping. (The comparison with sleep was, however, invariably made without my elicitation). They felt relaxed, but reported no particular feelings of euphoria, well-being, or clarity commonly reported by people following meditation, and certainly no profound alterations of consciousness. They also reported that they had no memory of the experience, no thoughts, no body sensations, and no recall of my voice or any other external stimuli after a certain point in the induction. And, almost invariably, when I asked what they thought had happened, the reply was something like, "I don't know. I must have gone away somewhere, but I don't know where." I was also puzzled by the reports of two meditation students, who complained that they had been unsuccessful at every type of meditation practice they had tried, because an unconscious type of trance was the invariable result of any attempts at meditation.

*Samadhi*, or Yogic trance, is the articulated goal of Yoga practice. It develops over a number of years of practice through sequential stages of conscious trance (*samprajnata samadhi*), ultimately leading to a different sort of trance (*asamprajnata samadhi*), which culminates in a permanent state of enlightenment. These stages are elucidated in an important text, the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali (Aranya 1983), which is viewed within the discipline as containing the most complete map to higher consciousness available in the Hindu tradition. In the community, the *Yoga Sutras* are diligently studied and discussed in meetings between the master and the students. Periods of

unconsciousness like those I have described above receive little if any attention in Yogic literature or in Yogic teaching—almost as if they did not exist. Nevertheless they do occur; six of the 18 experienced yogis in the sample reported having experienced such states; but only in response to my fairly detailed questions about meditation experiences and their own code of modesty which made it easier for them to talk about their failures than their successes. My informants often seemed as puzzled about the nature of these unconscious states as I was. The descriptions of the state usually went something like this: "It doesn't seem exactly like I was sleeping, but more like feeling that I went somewhere else, but I don't remember where. I don't remember anything."

One woman added:

Now my *sadhana* [sitting practice] is becoming more conscious, less tamasic. I am starting to have continuous awareness. Before, I used to drop down and be gone, lose track,—when the mind leaves there isn't any memory. Samadhi is supposed to give knowledge, but if there isn't any memory, how can there be knowledge?

We did eventually receive an emic explanation for these unconscious states by asking the community's guru. He explained that according to Yoga philosophy there are two types of *nidra*, or sleep, dream sleep and deep sleep. In deep sleep, *tamas guna* [the quality of dullness and inertia] overpowers the mind's normal activity, producing a contentless, thoughtless, and unconscious state. When the mind stops during meditation, a person either gets samadhi or sleep, depending whether the mind is at the time dominated by *tamas* or by *sattva* [the quality of alert clarity and peace]. The state called *yoga nidra* (a rather different usage of the term from what I had heard in other Yoga groups) occurs when the physical body and mind behave differently from usual entry into and exit from normal sleep. A meditator entering Yoga *nidra* will remain sitting motionless and erect with none of the usual external indications of sleep, and upon "waking" will immediately encounter the object of meditation still in the mind, just as it was when the meditator "fell asleep."

### Conscious Trance and Sensory Amnesia Among the Yogis

While the English word "dissociation" can apply in a variety of psychiatric contexts (Hilgard 1986), Yoga uses a specific Sanskrit term to denote trance-related dissociation. Dissociation (*pratyahara*) and trance (*samadhi*) are not emically equivalent terms in Yoga, but the two processes commonly occur together. Samadhi refers to a deepening of engagement of one's awareness in the single aspect upon which the mind focuses. The word *pratyahara* refers to the withdrawal of the conscious awareness from the senses and the objects of their perceptions. Most yogic meditation practices are done with closed eyes to encourage *pratyahara*, which makes meditation easier. *Pratyahara* tends to occur partially in deep meditation and more completely in samadhi. As samadhi deepens, dissociation increases. One of the older yogis in the community enters so deeply into samadhi that she cannot hear the alarm clock next to her ringing. Yogic practitioners have all heard stories about Yogis who enter high stages of samadhi for a number of days during which their bodies are fed and daily carried by their disciples to the river to be washed, all without arousing the yogi back to body consciousness. While the word "amnesia" implies that

the failure is one of memory; the emic term "*pratyahara*" suggests that the minds of deeply entranced individuals simply fail to register certain types of sensory input; therefore they have no memory of it afterwards.

Informants who experienced lower stages of samadhi reported no interruption of conscious awareness, but they did note that they would lose body awareness for a time, either partially or completely. Upon completing practice, for example, they would suddenly notice that their leg was asleep, or they would suddenly notice in meditation that their breath had comfortably suspended, but they would not remember when those sensations had begun.

### Discussion

Since a reasonably adequate initial sample of 18 trance mediums and 18 yogis turned out to represent three apparently distinct experiential types of trance, which crossed the lines of community and religious affiliation rather than sorting out according to them, these data do more to point out to us what is inadequate about our present ideas of amnesia/trance categories than they do to establish a new model. Within my sample of trance mediums and yogis, it appears that amnesia regarding sensory awareness, physical sensation, body movement, and speech is related to depth of dissociation of the practitioner. While this is not a novel finding, it is debatable, and quite unclear in the anthropological literature on trance, whether or not this type of failure to remember either should be in the present discussion, or has been in various previous reports, termed "amnesia," especially in cases where conscious memory of inner awareness accompanies it. But as discussed previously, it is precisely these functions of body and speech which are said to be taken over by the entering spirit during mediumistic trance, and in some cultures memory loss involving these functions may be the most emically important feature of the trance for the practitioner to emphasize.

On the other hand, amnesia regarding one's inner awareness during trance may represent something quite different, since this type of amnesia was reported only by those practitioners, both yogis and mediums, who experience unconscious trance. In spite of the obviously greater sensory-motor complexity of the mediumship process compared to that of meditation, meditators who experience deep sleep yoga *nidra* and the mediums who experience unconscious trance seem to be describing essentially the same inner state of unconsciousness. There is no memory of what took place in the intervening period between entering and coming out of trance, but frequently there is a feeling of "having gone away somewhere." The emic explanations of both communities associate the unconscious trance state with deep sleep, but there appear to be some differences. What my informants have told me suggests that, unlike normal sleep, something of the body-brain orientation prior to entering the trance is somehow maintained during the trance. The body often does not lose its posture; upon coming out of trance the meditator's awareness returns automatically to the object of meditation; the trance medium Audrey completes the sentence that she began before entering trance.

What is different is the way in which the unconscious state is regarded in the two traditions, and how it appears in individuals. In the mediumship of the Spiritualist churches, what is deemed important is to help others by accurately and clearly

conveying messages from beneficent spirits to human beings. It is understood that this can be done via a variety of kinds of altered states. In the course of developing one's mediumship, the medium and his or her spirit guides eventually settle on a way which is best for the medium to receive and transmit. What is important is the message, not the state which produced it.

In Yoga, an opposite valuation prevails; it is the state of consciousness itself rather than any of its external attributes which is critical. Samadhi is widely written about in the religious literature of Hinduism and discussed among Yogic meditation practitioners, whereas unconscious deep-sleep-related trance occurring during meditation practice is seldom, if ever, mentioned in Yogic literature. Certainly it is not a disaster for a yogi to experience such states. For the thoughts to stop is regarded favorably, but the unconscious state is seen as serving no purpose, and seems to be regarded by those yogis who experience it as rather a waste of time. I speculate that this may be the reason for one of the few discrepancies that I noticed in the trances of yogis and mediums: among the 11 full trance mediums I interviewed for this study as well as among full trance New Age channels of my acquaintance, the two types of full trance have so far appeared mutually exclusively within a given individual. Among yogis, however, where a great many methods are explicitly practiced with the intention to increase *sattva* guna and decrease *tamas* guna, the unconscious deep-sleep-like trance disappears after a number of months or years, and is replaced by samadhi.

In both communities, highly regarded written texts about trance states incompletely described the experiences of trance practitioners, resulting in an under-reporting of the occurrence of conscious trance among the mediums, and an under-reporting of unconscious trance among the yogis. Thus inaccurate reportage by communities or individuals resulting from emic preferences for one type of trance or another, inadequate depth of questioning by interviewers, and the lumping together of what may be different types of trance-related memory under the rubric of "amnesia," may have all contributed to a statistical linking of amnesia with mediumistic trance, sometimes even creating an impression of inherent psychobiological relationships which do not in fact exist. More in-depth questioning of a number of informants in studies involving trance and terminology which reflects different types of trance memory would be useful in our discipline.

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