

STUDY GUIDE

Description of Alien Encounters

Alien abduction experiences are characterized by subjectively real memories of being taken secretly and/or against one's will by apparently non-human entities, usually to a location interpreted as an alien spacecraft. [description courtesy of *Varieties of Anomalous Experience*, published in 2000 by the American Psychological Association, p.254]

Portions of this Study Guide are based upon a coursebook by David Lukoff, Ph.D., DSM-IV Religious and Spiritual Problems, available from Internet Guided Learning. This Study Guide was adapted by Will Bueché.

The experiences are typically recurring, beginning in childhood, and may run in families.

The same content themes are present in reports from the US and other countries:

- capture, examination
- communication with aliens
- otherworldly journey
- theophany (receipt of spiritual messages)
- return to Earth

Association with Spirituality

Extraordinary experiences such as alien encounters function for some individuals as transcendent experiences. Some report that their lives have been radically altered on a deep spiritual level by their encounters with aliens. They developed a heightened reverence for nature and human life, and transformed their lives in ways similar to what happens with people after a near-death experience (NDE). Kenneth Ring, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Connecticut and one of the world's chief authorities on near-death experiences, conducted research indicating that both alien encounters and NDE may be,

in effect, alternate pathways to the same type of psychospiritual transformation ...that expresses itself in greater awareness of the interconnected-ness and sacredness of all life and necessarily fosters a heightened ecological concern for the welfare of the planet. [1992, *The Omega Project*]

Reality and Alien Encounters: Proponents

Contemporary ideas of where aliens may come from reflects advances in our understanding of reality, particularly in the area of physics. Whereas in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s aliens were presumed to come from other planets via interstellar space travel, in the 1980s and through the present day aliens are considered to possibly come from other dimensions. This contemporary idea is reminiscent of early spiritual concepts regarding otherworldly life, which held that divine beings had the capacity to cross over from the "spiritual world" into the material world.

This may originate in some subtle dimension, some other dimension, the etheric world, whatever you want to call that other dimension, and then cross over, manifest in the physical world and be real in this world. [John E. Mack, M.D., interview with Jeffrey Mishlove, 1995]

In my opinion the UFO abduction phenomenon is very real. It is however only perceptible in an altered state of the ego. ...In the moment of the abduction the victims are forced into an altered consciousness....The victims are abducted into a world that is neither exclusively physical nor psychic. [Remo F. Roth, Ph.D., interview 2004]

Reality and Alien Encounters: Opponents

An opposing view posits that alien encounter experiences are fantasies experienced during naturally occurring altered states of consciousness, such as those which transpire between sleep and wakefulness. During these hypnagogic or hypnopompic states the physiological process of sleep paralysis (a restriction of movement which our bodies enact during rest so as to prevent our limbs from reacting to illusory events in dreams) experienced in concert with hallucinations derived from imagination and cultural material, and perhaps accentuated by dreams, creates the impression in some people that an extraordinary event has taken place in reality. Harvard Medical School psychologist Richard J. McNally, Ph.D., is a proponent of this view:

They become aware of being completely paralysed. But elements of dreams can still intrude into wakefulness. The person will often say they see figures in the room, they will say, "I sensed a presence, these looming figures next to me," lights flashing, electrical sensations coursing through their body, a feeling they are levitating off the bed, buzzing sounds and the like. ...The phenomenon of sleep paralysis has been reported in many different ways in many different cultures throughout history. In Newfoundland, it's called being visited by the "old hag." In the southern United States, it's being "ridden by the witch." In the Middle Ages, it was interpreted as being visited by agents of the Devil. In Massachusetts, it's being taken up in a space craft and molested by aliens. ["Abducted by aliens?" *London Daily Mail*, Feb 18, 2003, p. 35]

The suggestion that different states of consciousness, such as those entered into by meditators, shamans, other spiritual practitioners, and perhaps experiencers themselves, may in some way facilitate perception of or contact with another aspect of reality— such as what in traditional theological terms is described as the "spiritual" world— is not supported by material evidence. Indeed, according to the standards of the physical sciences, there is no evidence that a spiritual world exists. Historical beliefs in a spiritual world may however be *caused* by these illusory experiences. Astronomer Carl Sagan suggested

If indeed the bulk of alien abduction accounts were really hallucinations, don't we have before us a matter of supreme importance— touching on the fashioning of our beliefs and perhaps even the origins of our religions? There is genuine scientific paydirt in UFO and alien abductions. [Sagan, Carl. "What's really going on?" *Parade*, March 7, 1993, pp. 4-7]

Secondly, it is reasoned that aliens could not reach Earth by traversing interstellar space. "For one UFO [to reach the Earth] from the nearest star, it would take the equivalent of all the energy that humans have ever used," San Francisco University psychologist Barry L. Beyerstein (chair of the British Columbia Society of Skeptics) explained in a recent interview, adding, "I would wonder why they would waste their time on a small planet by an insignificant star." [Hiebert, Rick. "Little Green Gurus: An academic finds spiritual significance in reports of human-alien encounters." *The Report: Canada's Independent Newsmagazine*, Oct 21, 2002]

Alien Encounters and the Mythic World

Structurally there are parallels between alien encounters and ancient mythic patterns which can be traced back to 30,000 BC. The shaman's journey shares many elements with alien abduction. The abductee is taken taken aboard a ship ("other worlds" or a "cosmic pillar" in a shamanic journey), is forcibly examined (which parallels the painful dismemberment of the shaman). Then the abductee returns with a message (just as the shaman returns with songs and other instruments of healing). Ralph Metzner, Ph.D., considers alien/UFO themes to be a variation of the shaman's "upper world journey,"

experiences in which we are granted a preview or vision of our life or of some aspect of the world. They are usually accompanied by insights, intuitions, and new images; and they often instigate a mood of playful and euphoric creativity. [1998, *The Unfolding Self: Varieties of Transformative Experience*, p. 118]

Alien Encounters and Psychopathology

While psychopathology is indicated in some isolated alien abduction cases, assessment by both clinical examination and standardized tests has shown that, as a group, abduction experiencers are not different from the general population in terms of psychopathology prevalence. [2000, *Varieties of Anomalous Experience*, p.268]

While for the most part alien encounter experiencers are not mentally ill, some seek therapy to help come to terms with explicit memories of anomalous experiences. A recent study of ten experiencers conducted by Harvard Medical School psychologist Richard J. McNally, Ph.D., concluded that while “none of them was suffering from any sort of psychiatric illness,” recollections of alien encounters are

accompanied by heightened psychophysiological emotional responding that resembles the accompanying recollection of traumatic experiences among people with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. However, unlike individuals with PTSD, abductees seem to respond to other stressful and positive scripts, too. Needless to say, the heightened psychophysiological responses to imagery does not confirm the veracity of the experiences described... But it does underscore the emotionally evocative significance of the information contained therein, irrespective of its truth.” [McNally, Richard. 2003. “Psychophysiological Responding During Script-Driven Imagery in People Reporting Abduction by Space Aliens.” In press]

Glossary

A glossary of alien-related terms to improve discussion and/or writing about the themes and subjects in the film *Touched*, with an emphasis on neutral terminology.

ABDUCTION: An involuntary ALIEN ENCOUNTER.

ALIEN: In popular culture, “alien” typically refers to a being from another planet. The term is used in real life regardless of different theories of where the beings may be from or what their nature may be [physical, spiritual, imaginal, mythic, etc.].

ALIEN ENCOUNTER: An experience in which one interacts with apparent aliens. This neutral term is generally preferred over words such as “alien abduction.” Another neutral term is “alien contact.” Suitable terms for secondary use include “encounter,” “experience,” “interaction,” “episode,” “contact.”

ANAL PROBE: Some experiencers report that aliens use an electroejaculator to collect semen, as used by mankind in animal husbandry. (An electroejaculator, inserted in the rectum, uses a mild electrical current to produce contraction of the pelvic muscles resulting in ejaculation). See HYBRID.

EXPERIENCER: One who is aware of their alien encounter experiences. Many people who have had such experiences prefer this neutral term over words such as “abductee” or “victim.” Typically applied to those who believe they can learn something of value from their experiences.

EXPLICIT MEMORY (also DECLARATIVE MEMORY): Consciously known recollections. Contrary to popular belief, most experiencers are consciously aware of one or more of their experiences, or portions thereof.

GRAY (also GREY): Thin, pale humanoid beings with large black eyes who communicate telepathically. By far the most commonly reported type of alien, with thousands of accounts since the 1970s, and non-contemporaneous accounts (i.e. from adults reporting childhood experiences) extending back to the 1950s. Grays are described as being engaged in a long-term effort to make human/alien offspring (see HYBRID). Aliens in the film *Close Encounters* (1978) and the TV series *The X-Files* (1989-2003) were modeled on descriptions of grays provided by UFO researchers; hallucinations based on these familiar media portrayals may explain the consistent descriptions of aliens in real life, yet an absence of a similar phenomenon involving realistic encounters with aliens from other films raises questions about this theory.

HYBRID: “The Hybrid Project” is believed to be an effort to create a new race that shares properties of both human and alien. Experiencers described various efforts to produce viable offspring, typically involving the removal of egg or sperm and the placement and subsequent removal of an embryo. Sexual relations between human and alien are also sometimes reported, though this does not seem to be done for purposes of creating a hybrid (which seems to require scientific intervention), but rather for bonding or communication.

He talked of the “future of mankind,” and of a new race that “will be able to reproduce, and they will know love and happiness like humans know, and they will know their soul and their consciousness like we don’t know, and they will inhabit the planet and take care of it and make it a beautiful place.” [Karin, excerpted from Dr. John Mack’s 1999 book *Passport to the Cosmos*]

INTERDIMENSIONAL: A modern theory about the nature of alien encounters is that they may be a form of contact between different dimensions of reality. This concept is reminiscent of the theological concept that reality is comprised of material and spiritual levels.

MULTIPLE WITNESSES: When two or more people are present during an alien encounter, such as in the cases of roommates or passengers in a vehicle, an opportunity exists to discern both the external and subjective dimensions of the experience. However, experiencers often report that other people are oddly unresponsive during encounters. Sometimes one subject will report an entire experience while the other may only witness the initial or final moments (for example, seeing blue light at the onset of an experience or witnessing a person being returned to their room by strange beings at the end of an experience). Sometimes (as in the case of Peter in the film *Touched*), others may observe an unidentified flying object above where an experience is taking place.

THEOPHANY: A manifestation of a spiritual being for the purpose of delivering a message to a human being. In religious traditions, the “illumination” provided by a theophany is said to be an overwhelming experience.