



In the PINES

By T. Lee Brown

Connecting in the weirdness

In addition to earning a handsome salary with robust benefits as a freelance writer*, I do some coaching, readings, and creativity guidance for folks around the U.S. and UK. In the last few weeks, friends and clients have brought up the strange reconnecting brought about by the Recent Weirdness, or RW. (I can't bear to call it C19 or come with a new corona pun).

Some of it's literal: long-lost pals seek each other out on social media. Distant cousins gather for Zoom dance parties. Artists and writers delve into National Letter-Writing Month, plastering envelopes with goodies from The Portland Stamp Company, sending them out to Instagram followers in far-off lands.

But some RW connecting is more mysterious. Confined to their homes, stripped of the busywork and socializing that keeps

them perpetually distracted and striving, the newly unemployed tune into their inner life. In the uncertain quietude, they sense the connections rippling through an unseen, etheric realm of visions, meditations and intuitions.

Dreams become colorful and intense. Some people feel volcanic like Belknap Crater or Mount Saint Helens, their sleeping minds erupting with the hot magma of dreams.

Some reasons are obvious: following an evening of dystopic Netflix viewings, peppered with news alerts on their phones, stressed-out sleepers wander post-apocalyptic dreamscapes, chased by monsters from the id. Old traumas re-emerge, attended by new worries. With no alarm clock to force people out of bed and resume the day-to-day motions of productivity, they have the luxury of dream recall.

Experts deconstruct this into mechanisms that sound rational and scientific. Here is how the sleeping mind plays out its daytime anxieties, they say. Here is a simplistic explanation for why the dreaming mind brings a certain person back into our waking consciousness.

But many experiences defy such explanations. A local woman finds herself receiving messages from the deceased loved one of a newish friend. The messages make no sense to the woman; some seem downright silly. But the friend immediately knows what

the dead loved one is talking about. Each message corresponds to something concrete from real life.

When one person follows Alice down the rabbit-hole of sleep, they find their estranged sister waiting every night. Another finds her dreamworld visited by an old flame. Friends who haven't spoken in years reach out simultaneously on their phones. A man who avoids superstitious, New Age claptrap finds himself pulled into conversation with the ghost of his mother.

What to make of all this? A Jungian might say that our collective unconscious has been wildly aroused by the RW. An old-school rationalist might assert, "Piffle! It's all in your imagination." Some fundamentalist Christians might say it's none of our business to even think about these things: psychic phenomena feel threatening to them, something to be filed away under "sorcery."

Some people believe that we are the universe communicating with itself. We pop out the way mushrooms do from the forest floor, then reflect our sensory findings

back to the greater collective consciousness — or God, or the Great Woo, enter your preferred word here.

Western-European types used to believe that mushrooms were individual plant-like things. Now it is known that for many mushrooms, each morsel appearing above the soil is part of a larger whole, a giant fungus connected beneath the earth via enormous mats of mycelium.

You can call that an "organism" or you can call it a "colony." Perhaps it is both. Scientists consider the largest organism in the world to be a mushroom over in Malheur that spans over 2,000 square acres and has lived over 2,000 years.

Like each mushroom, each of us appears to be a separate, individual consciousness — at least if our beliefs were formed by certain cultures, such as the America I grew up in. In other belief systems, our interconnectedness is perfectly obvious and a rather

ridiculous thing to ignore. From quantum physics to biology, from science fiction to the labels of Dr. Bronner's soap bottles, our culture brims with suggestions that we rugged American individuals are, in fact, All One.

Perhaps we are all jewels, shards of mirror in Indra's Net. Or, as the gentle Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh says, we are both wave and water. We emerge out of the vast ocean and surge toward the shore; then we subside back into the vast ocean. It's a nice way to think about our inevitable, looming deaths.

Personally, I suspect our view of what we consider space-time, and therefore of the universe, is so paltry and limited that we can't possibly grasp (literally or linguistically) how these things work. Perhaps we don't need to. Perhaps connecting with each other and our pulsing, living planet is enough — through whatever means we can.

**Sarcasm alert!*

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