

was supposed to be happening, trying to clear my mind, forcing it a bit.

My first stage of experience involved a feeling of free-floating anxiety, a sort of amorphous sense that I'd forgotten something important and that unspecified things happening in the outside world might require my immediate attention. My mind flipped like a blurry Rolodex through a series of cloudy disasters that were currently occurring, none of them holding still long enough to even define themselves.

You know that feeling of having left the burner on the stove going? Raise that to an abstraction, give it a little amphetamine nudge of panic, and that was my initial response to the float. It quickly dissipated.

I use the word "quickly," but time in a float tank becomes as fluid and changeable as the darkness enveloping you. So when I speak of the second stage of my experience, I offer no ticking off of minutes. All I know is that it happened.

The next phase, then, involved a bit of decompression and self-reckoning. Basically, I was trying so hard to have a profound spiritual experience that I scuttled myself with frustration. Nothing brings you up short on greatness like striving for greatness as an end in itself. I was strangling the process in the hopes of achieving ultimate nirvana, and until I realized this, I was a stuck.

At some point, I sort of unclenched and let go: I gave up the ghost, in a sense. If I was just going to be an overcomplicated under-stimulated American lunkhead floating like a corpse in a lightless tank of warm saltwater, then so be it. I quit worrying about whether reaching down to scratch my balls would prevent me from achieving satori. Loosen up, dude.

I'm a bit hesitant to mention what happened in the tank after this, not because I'm embarrassed, or think you won't believe me, or worry that you might consider me whacked or whatever. I don't really care about all that.

My concern is that the experience was so profound and personal and spiritual that even the act of describing it reduces it, by creating a second-hand account that merely mimes the eternal now of all experience.

In the pitch black, I raised my hands and meshed my fingers together so my palms were open before my blind eyes. In total darkness, there is no focal point, and yet there are infinite focal points, and as I stared outward like a mole, the places where my fingers were — or, perhaps, might have been — clasped together began to burn with an orange glow. It looked like a burbling, smoldering orange brain was expanding in my field of vision, fusing my fingers and then both my hands in a nova of brilliant light.

From that point on, everything lit up like a Christmas tree. I crooked my head forward and beheld the outlines of my body glowing with a beautiful celestial blue, while a surge of pure white light expanded in stuttering stop-motion from my crotch, neither serpent nor tree but a little of both. Tilting my head back, I let my vision stretch ever

outward as red, veiny, pulsating membranes descended and passed over and through me, bursting me forth into succeeding dimensions of an infinite starry night.

None of this was scary, though at certain points I would sense a presence, less malevolent than urgent, lunging at my periphery; I welcomed it forth. For a long, long time I simply stared at a Gothic wall of deep red brick that was angled at 45 degrees, towering over me into the dark beyond, oozing and pulsing with a vivid flesh-like vitality, until suddenly I was watching myself watching the wall.



FLOAT OM FOUNDER ANKUSH VIMAWALA

I am aware of the claims of subjectivity, of firefly-like neurons buzzing and zipping across the brain and conjured images from the repository of memory being projected onto the optical cortex, of how hallucinations are locked in the skull. I find them compelling but incomplete. If what I saw and experienced in that tank was simply the perchance-to-dream of me, then I am still a mystery worthy of exploration.

We are the cosmos. At the level of primordial soup, all we are is a wide-open eye staring in childlike awe, and all our talking about it is just the mausoleum upon which civilization is built. There is nothing more profound in this than saying there is only now, forever now, and in the float tank I touched this truth, if only fleetingly. No present and no past. Just now.

When the music came on signaling the end of my float, I was amazed. Time flies when you're having a moment.

I emerged feeling completely alert, sharp of thought, buoyant. My body felt great, almost euphoric.

MY SECOND FLOAT IN THE BIGGER TANK, a week later, was a different beast altogether. I'd been fighting a cold, and inevitably I had expectations. Expectations be damned. I came up face to face with myself in a different way, and I went to war. It was less fantastic, or rather less phantasmal, but no less valuable.

And I must have gone deep, because this time it felt like it was over in a blink. That's all I really want to say about it, not because it was disturbing, per se, but because the places it took me were so personal it would take a novel to set the context. I folded inward, my thought shuffling and dissolving like so much rice paper. And despite the difference between the two floats, I felt the same after both: refreshed, clear, at peace.

"Yes, everyone's experience does differ to an extent," Vimawala says. "Even for the same person, each float is somewhat different. It depends on what they've been going through the past couple of days and a variety of other things. Most people have profound experiences and come out of the tank with their minds blown."

That said, Vimawala says he's never met anyone who regrets floating, though it does indeed happen that folks fall asleep. "Most people go through some period of sleep during the 90 minutes in the tank ... As the mind quiets down and eases into the more natural flow of things, the body is able to access its own intelligence, and knows what is needed to heal and come into an optimal state of being."

There was a time in my life when this would have sounded to me like new-age crap, a con and a put-on, because perspective is everything, and my perspective was full of fear and anxiety. Life seemed like a dark, dastardly game with no exit. I was terrified of death. I believe our consumer society runs primarily on a fear of death, which leads us to pursue with overweening anxiety an empty therapeutic release in the materialism that's foisted on us. We don't live; we compete. We don't awaken; we put ourselves to sleep, over and over again.

The immaterialism of floating strikes me as an appropriate palliative to the dictates of today's rat race. "Western capitalist culture seems to idealize super-sizing things," Vimawala says.

"There is an underlying unease, a need to upgrade," he continues. "If one just stops for a moment and maybe takes a float or two, it might help snap one out of the modern-day hypnosis induced and maintained by a constant bombardment of sensory input and the perceived need to grasp for gratification from outside oneself."

Float Om Healing Center & Tranquility Tanks is at 111 E. 16th Ave.; call 541-632-3231 or visit float-om.com. Inner Health Center at 2757 Chad Dr. also offers sensory deprivation and float tank therapy; call 541-684-0365.

EVERGREEN
SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN INDIAN CUISINE

EW'S BEST INDIAN CUISINE 2014-2015
LUNCH BUFFET
7 Days a Week 11:30am - 2:30pm • Dinner 5-9:30pm

EAT & PARK
FREE PARKING FOR EVENTS AT MATT KNIGHT ARENA
WHEN YOU DINE WITH US

* 1525 Franklin Blvd. Eugene, OR 541-343-7944
evergreenindianrestaurant.com

* 136 SW Third • Corvallis, OR * 541-754-7944

2004 • 2005 • 2006 • 2007 • 2008 • 2009 • 2010 • 2011 • 2012 • 2013 • 2014 • 2015 • 2016

BEST HANGOVER BREAKFAST
12 STRAIGHT YEARS!

BREAKFAST ALL DAY
1689 Willamette | 541-343-1542
7am - 2pm Mon - Fri • 7am - 3pm Sat & Sun

Espresso Hours
7am - 5pm Mon - Fri • 8am - 5pm Sat & Sun

featuring *Tailored.* COFFEE BEANS

Brails
RESTAURANT & ESPRESSO

see our full menu online: brailseugene.com