



Extended Human Capacities

by Larry Dossey

Photography by Rainer Holz and Larry Dyer

AMANDA, A YOUNG MOTHER LIVING in Washington state, awoke one night at 2:30 a.m. from a nightmare. She dreamed that a large chandelier hanging above her baby's bed in the next room fell into the crib and crushed the infant. In the dream, as she and her husband stood amid the wreckage, she saw that a clock on the baby's dresser read 4:35 a.m. The weather in the dream was violent. Rain hammered the window, and the wind was blowing a gale. The dream was so terrifying she roused her husband and told him about it. He laughed, told her the dream was silly, and urged her to go back to sleep, which he promptly did. But the dream had so frightened Amanda that she went to the baby's room and brought the child back to bed with her. She noted that the weather was calm, not stormy as in the dream.

Amanda felt foolish—until around two hours later, when she and her husband were awakened by a loud crash. They dashed into the nursery and found the crib demolished by the chandelier, which had fallen directly into it. Amanda noted that the clock on the dresser read 4:35 a.m. and that the weather had changed. Now there was howling wind and rain. This time, her husband was not laughing.¹

Amanda's dream was a snapshot of the future—down to the specific event, the precise time it would happen, and the change in weather. Such a premonition is not unusual. Surveys show that about three-fourths of Americans experience what they call ESP, or extrasensory perception. Common among these events are premonitions, which often occur in dreams. They also happen in waking hours as a hunch, an intuition, or a gut feeling that something is going to happen.

The Pattern That Connects

Why do premonitions exist? Why does *any* human ability exist, such as our capacity to see, hear, smell, touch, walk upright, run, and think? When biologists want

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to understand why a trait has arisen, they always ask, "What is it good for? What purpose does it serve?" If a trait helps us to stay alive and reproduce, it is likely to become embedded in our genes and passed down through succeeding generations.

So it is with premonitions. "Premonition" comes from the Latin *prae*, "before," and *monere*, "warn." A premonition is literally a forewarning, usually of something unpleasant, such as a looming natural disaster or an impending threat to our health. Premonitions, therefore, help us survive, and survival is the great theme running through the premonitions that people experience. True, there are lesser themes. For example, people may see the winning lottery numbers in a dream; they may "just know" where to find the last remaining parking space in downtown Chicago; or they may intuit the exact moment when a long-lost friend is going to call on the phone. But incidents such as these are swamped by the jaw-dropping accounts of people whose lives were saved by their ability to see beyond the present. The actual premonition may be nothing more than a subtle feeling that something is not quite right, leading them to cancel a plane trip the day of its crash; or to anticipate a road hazard lying around a bend in time to avert it; to schedule a medical test that leads to the discovery of a problem that might have been fatal had it gone undetected; or to take innumerable other intervening actions.

In addition to helping us survive, premonitions deliver clues to something else: an element in the great "pattern that connects," as ecologist-philosopher Gregory Bateson put it. Premonitions suggest that we are linked with every other consciousness that has existed, does exist, or will exist, that we are part of something larger than the individual self.

Many outstanding scientists have realized this. The renowned physicist David Bohm, for example, said,

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“Each person enfolds something of the spirit of the other in his consciousness.” Nobel physicist Erwin Schrödinger believed that minds do not interact with one another like separate billiard balls but are in some sense united and one. “To divide or multiply consciousness is something meaningless,” he said. “There is obviously only one alternative, namely the unification of minds or consciousness . . . in truth there is only one mind.”

By linking minds across space and time, premonitions reveal the oneness of which these scientists speak. They suggest that in some sense we are *infinite* or *nonlocal* in space and time. When we deeply sense this, we may become “transparent to the transcendent,” as mythologist Joseph Campbell put it. The profound spiritual contribution of premonitions often goes unnoticed by those who regard them only as a nifty tool to glimpse the future.

People conceive the transcendent in a variety of ways, of course—God, Goddess, Allah, a universal intelligence, the Absolute, an all-pervasive sense of beauty and order, and so on. It is not important how we language the transcendent. What matters is that we recognize our identity with it. As physicist Freeman Dyson put it, “There is evidence . . . that the universe as a whole is hospitable to the growth of mind . . . Therefore it is reasonable to believe in the existence of . . . a mental component of the universe. If we believe in this mental component of the universe, then we can say that we are small pieces of God’s mental apparatus.” As Gregory Bateson said, “The individual mind is immanent, but not only in the body. It is immanent also in the pathways and messages outside the body, and there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a subsystem. This larger Mind is comparable to God and is perhaps what some people mean by ‘God,’ but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology.”

Today most scientists claim that our brain somehow produces consciousness (never mind how), which, they say, is confined to our physical body and limited to the present moment. Premonitions say otherwise; they suggest that our consciousness may work *through* our physical brain but that it is neither produced by the brain nor confined to it. Like a fish that considers his watery environment to be the full extent of his world, we have come to believe that the here and now defines the limits of our existence. The past, we say, has already happened and no longer exists; the future has yet to

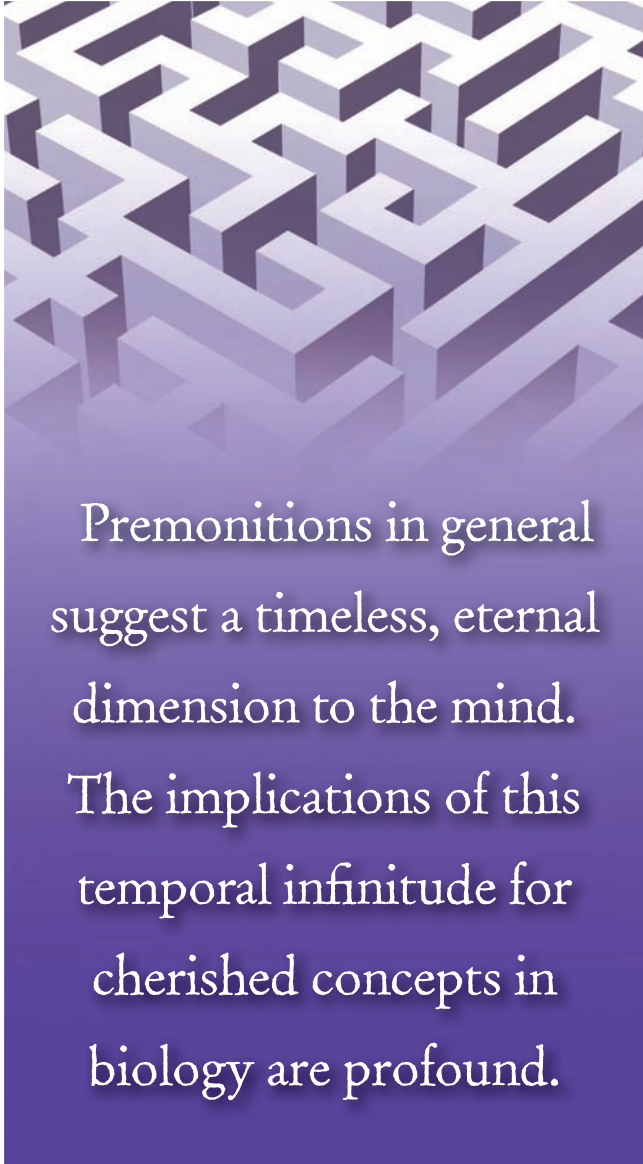
unfold. The present is all there is. To this, premonitions say, “Wake up. The evidence for a larger world is staring you in the face.”

Premonitions in general suggest a timeless, eternal dimension to the mind. The implications of this temporal infinitude for cherished concepts in biology are profound. As Nobel biologist George Wald says, “Mind, rather than emerging as a late outgrowth in the evolution of life, has existed always . . . the source and condition of physical reality.” Willis Harman, late president of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, agreed. As he once put it, “Consciousness was here first.”

Premonitions also reveal a “feeling side” to the world. Studies reveal that premonitions frequently link people who love each other—parents and children, siblings, twins, lovers, and very close friends. A classic example is the aforementioned case of Amanda, the young mother whose dream premonition prompted her to save her baby’s life. We see this pattern repeatedly: Love, empathy, compassion, and a sense of connectedness are an integral part of the pattern of premonitions.

We need desperately to heed the lessons of premonitions. Lester R. Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institute in Washington, DC, recently said that the worldwide food crisis may portend “the failure of civilization itself.” Brown believes that the food crisis is not temporary and that it is compounded by surface water shortages, aquifer depletion, drought, global warming, cropland losses, population explosions in poor countries, grinding poverty, and lack of educational opportunities. Social disorder has already broken out in some countries in the face of soaring food prices and spreading hunger. In 2008, food riots broke out in Egypt, Yemen, and Cameroon, and many were killed. In view of these pressing worldwide problems, the tendency of many of our leaders is to hunker down, close our borders, and protect our own interests. We can’t solve the world’s problems, they say; all those foreigners must sink or swim on their own efforts.

But secession from the rest of the world and its problems is not an option, because it violates “the pattern that connects” that is revealed in premonitions and other nonlocal operations of consciousness. Premonitions demonstrate a far-reaching global intimacy based in consciousness—that at some level, there really is only one mind, one consciousness, as Bohm, Schrödinger,



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and others have realized. If we attempt to pull the ladder up after we've saved ourselves, we shall fail. Neither the eye, nor the heart, nor the stomach can secede from the rest of the body, nor can we withdraw from the rest of the world, which is our collective body. Premonitions imply that in order to save ourselves, we must help others, because we *are* others. Premonitions suggest a revision of the golden rule, from "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" to "Be kind to others because in some sense they *are* you."

The challenges that confront us—climate change, drought, falling crop yields, water shortages, and population explosions—go beyond discovering clever ways to

engineer ourselves out of them, as important as technical measures are. Our survival is overwhelmingly a matter of learning to fit into the pattern that connects, to which the great lessons of premonitions are a guide.

The Evidence

Many critics dismiss premonitions as New Age mumbo jumbo, yet elegant studies by respected consciousness researchers compellingly suggest that we really can peer into the future. In "presentiment" studies, for example, such as those conducted by Dean Radin at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, it's been observed that the body's autonomic system responds more robustly to a violent or sexual image than to a calm, serene image even *before* that image has been randomly selected and shown by the computer. Thus far, various investigators have done around twenty such presentiment experiments. Nearly all of them yield evidence for future knowing, and half of them demonstrate statistically significant results.

Hundreds of studies on "precognitive remote viewing," performed at the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Lab and elsewhere, indicate that individuals can presage detailed events up to a week before they occur. Psi researchers Charles Honorton and Diane Ferrari, for example, examined 309 precognition experiments carried out by 62 investigators, involving 50,000 participants in more than 2 million trials. Thirty percent of these studies were statistically significant in showing that people can describe future events. The odds that these results were not due to chance were greater than 10^{20} to 1. That's like flipping seventy coins and having all of them come down heads!²

As 14-year-old Lilly says in *The Secret Life of Bees*, "The body knows things . . . before the mind catches up to them." The cumulative evidence supporting foreknowledge is irrefutable to most people whose opinion hasn't clotted into hardened skepticism. Radin suggests that these findings reveal that single minds are "entangled" with all others.³ This leads to the conclusion that, in the tradition of Bohm, Schrödinger, and others, a unified, global consciousness exists within which all individual consciousnesses are embedded.

The Risk of Denying Premonitions

The findings described above, along with the results of other presentiment experiments being carried out

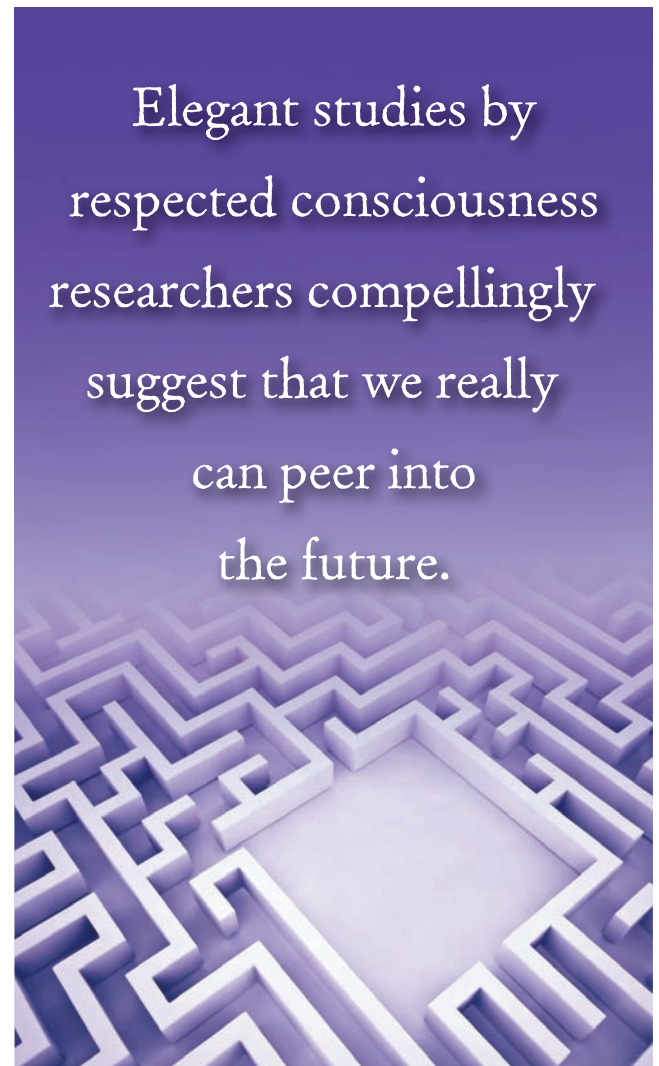
around the world, suggest that premonitions operate at an unconscious level and that they may be present to some degree in everyone. As such, they are not optional but are part of our natural endowment, as innate as our heartbeat. This situation reminds me of the bumper sticker that says, “Gravity. It’s not just a good idea. It’s the law.” So it seems with premonitions. If they are as natural and ubiquitous as gravity, there may be a price to pay for denying them, just as surely as if we ignored gravity. What might the risks look like?

I had such a firsthand experience while on tour for my 1999 book, *Reinventing Medicine*, in which I divulged a precognitive dream about a patient that proved to be uncannily precise. On one occasion, I was invited onto a live radio talk show. Unbeknownst to me, the host had also invited a well-known cardiologist, whose role was to debunk my book. While waiting for the show to begin, the physician turned to me and said coldly, “I must tell you that I disagree with nearly everything you’ve written.” I took a deep breath and tried mentally to prepare myself for the onslaught.

The host, wanting to stir up disagreement as quickly as possible, immediately asked me to relate my precognitive dream. After I finished, he turned to the cardiologist and said, “Now, Doctor So-and-So, what do *you* think about this dream stuff?” Then he leaned away from the microphone and waited for the fireworks to begin.

Instead of attacking, however, the cardiologist lapsed into an awkward silence—“dead air” in radio terminology, which is not a good thing. I had no idea what he was thinking and neither did the host, who appeared to be near panic. Finally, the physician said thoughtfully, “I think there may be something to Dr. Dossey’s dream.” The host nearly fainted; this was not what he had in mind. After another long pause, the cardiologist said meekly, “I think I’d like to relate a dream of my own.” Then he said, almost tenderly, “I’ve never told this to anyone before.”

The cardiologist described how he once had an elderly female patient who required a cardiac catheterization. The night before the procedure, the doctor dreamed that while he was performing the cath, the patient became speechless, unconscious, and paralyzed on one side—a severe stroke. On waking, the cardiologist was rattled and wondered whether he should cancel the test. Assuring himself that dreams mean nothing, he decided to go ahead. Later that day, during the actual catheterization,



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the woman experienced a stroke in precisely the same pattern he had dreamed the night before. Although the woman fully recovered, the experience shook the doctor profoundly. And for the rest of the radio program, the cardiologist and I found nothing on which we disagreed—to the chagrin of our host.

Listening to the Body

Premonitions, of course, are not confined to dreams. Sometimes they occur in full conscious awareness, and occasionally they are accompanied by physical symptoms. Larry Kincheloe, an obstetrician-gynecologist in Oklahoma City, gives us a remarkable example. I received a letter from him, in which he described how both premonitions and bodily sensations can influence patient care.

After completing his training in obstetrics and gynecology, Kincheloe joined a traditional medical group and practiced for about four years without any unusual events. Then one Saturday afternoon, he received a call from the hospital that a patient of his was in early labor. He gave routine orders, and since this was the patient's first baby, he assumed that delivery would be hours away. While sweeping leaves, he experienced an overwhelming feeling that he had to go to the hospital. He immediately called in but was told by the nurse that everything was going fine: His patient was only five centimeters dilated, and delivery was not expected for several more hours.

Even with this reassurance, the feeling got stronger, and Kincheloe began to feel a pain in the center of his chest. He described it as similar to the feeling of losing your first love as a teenager—an achingly sad, melancholy sense. The more Kincheloe tried to ignore the sensation, the stronger it grew, until it reached a point where he felt he was drowning. By this time, he was desperate to get to the hospital. He jumped into his car and sped away. As he neared the hospital, he began to feel better, and as he walked onto the labor unit, there was an overwhelming sense of relief.

When Kincheloe reached the labor and delivery area, the nurse was just walking out of his patient's room. She asked why he was there, and Kincheloe admitted that he didn't know, only that he felt he was needed and that his place was with his patient. The nurse gave him a strange look and told him that she had just checked the woman, who was only seven centimeters dilated. At that moment, a cry came from the labor room. Anyone who has ever worked in labor and delivery knows that there is a certain tone in a woman's cry when the baby's head is on her perineum and the baby is nearing delivery. Kincheloe rushed to the room just in time to deliver a healthy infant. Afterward, when the nurse asked how he knew to come to the hospital after being told that delivery was hours away, Kincheloe had no answer.

Implications for Health Care

Kincheloe's experience shows how physical sensations can alert us that something important is about to happen—an early-warning premonition system. Physical symptoms are like psychic cell phones uniting distant individuals. The cell-phone metaphor is appropriate because our reliance on electronic gadgets for communication may be

one reason why our psychic connections have withered. But they have not totally atrophied. Individuals such as Kincheloe still operate like human antennae, able physically to sense when someone else is in need. They are proof that the old abilities still exist.

I envision a day when our professional schools honor our distant connections and teach young physicians and nurses how to cultivate them. Then the healing professions will be transformed and humanized, for it will be obvious that healing is not dependent solely on drugs, scalpels, and mechanical devices but on human consciousness as well.

As psychosocial researcher David Spiegel of Stanford University School of Medicine says about the role of consciousness in health, "Good science answers questions and questions answers. But it does not declare certain questions off limits. To do so is unscientific . . . this is not the time to close the door on an important and developing area of scientific investigation."

And what is more important than consciousness? 

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This essay is based on the book The Power of Premonitions: How Knowing the Future Can Shape Our Lives by Larry Dossey, MD, published by Dutton/Penguin (2009).
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NOTES

1. Sally R. Feather and Michael Schmickler, *The Gift: ESP, the Extraordinary Experiences of Ordinary People* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006).
2. Charles Honorton and Diane Ferrari, "Future-Telling: A Meta-Analysis of Forced-Choice Precognition Experiments," *Journal of Parapsychology* 53 (1989), pp. 281–289.
3. Dean Radin, *Entangled Minds* (New York: Paraview/Simon & Schuster, 2006).



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