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The CIA's Secret Plan to Build a Laser Beam Powered by the Human Mind
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There are even instructions for decoding consciousness and transcending spacetime.

By [Susan Lahey](<https://www.popularmechanics.com/author/263116/susan-lahey/> "Susan Lahey")Updated: May 30, 2023

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****I******* 1983, the** Central Intelligence Agency asked U.S. Army Lt. Col. Wayne M. McDonnell to report on a possible way for people to convert the energy of their mind and body into a laser beam that can transcend [spacetime](<https://www.popularmechanics.com/space/deep-space/a43431702/how-well-see-missing-ripples-in-spacetime/>). Called the Gateway Process, the procedure claimed to help people access the intuitive knowledge of the universe, as well as travel in time and

commune with other-dimensional beings. McDonnell's [28-page report] (<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP96-00788R001700210016-5.pdf>), declassified in 2003, outlines the Gateway Process's "scientific" underpinnings and provides instructions and technical assistance.

For many, hearing about this report was like finding out that the CIA [tested clairvoyance as a spying tool] (<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP96-00791R000200180005-5.pdf>), or that the U.S. Department of Defense [secretly collected data] (<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/latest-us-defense-intelligence-report-ufos-be-made-public-soon-2022-11-04/>) on unidentified flying objects, even as it labeled UFO spotters as crazy. But one crucial piece of the document, page 25, was missing. The contents of that page, finally made public in 2021, reveal the report's true nature.

****The Gateway Process**** was originally the brainchild of radio producer [Robert Monroe] (<https://www.monroeinstitute.org/pages/our-purpose>), who in the 1970s studied the effects of certain sound patterns on human consciousness. He claimed that his experiments led to out-of-body experiences through brain hemisphere synchronization, or "Hemi-Sync." Here's how it works: When a person listens to [binaural beats] (<https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/a39744526/these-sound-waves-could-make-you-feel-high-scientists-say/>) (created by hearing different sounds in each ear), the contrast confuses the brain, causing it to shift out of its normal, somewhat scattered wave pattern into a coherent pattern shared between the left and right hemispheres. In other words, it syncs the hemispheres of the brain into a single, powerful stream of energy, like a laser.

![technical illustration from department of justice report](./www.popularmechanics.com_files/pmxan323feagateway-003-646e2c419d584.jpg "technical illustration from department of justice report")

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The CIA's Process Gateway report relied heavily on the work of Robert Monroe, who claimed that his experiments syncing the left and right hemispheres of his brain led to out-of-body experiences.

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McDonnell's report for the CIA borrows heavily not only from Monroe's research but also from the biomedical models of [Itzhak Bentov] (<https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/1286127>), a Czech-born Israeli-American engineer. Bentov was known for such projects as designing a remote-controlled cardiac catheter, creating diet spaghetti, and writing detailed books about human consciousness. McDonnell uses various consciousness-altering methodologies—including

biofeedback, transcendental meditation, hypnosis, and a style of yoga called Kundalini, which is meant to activate spiritual energy—to explain Gateway methodology.

✓ ****Know Your Terms:******

Biofeedback** is a mind-body technique used to control physical processes like breathing patterns, heart rate, and muscle responses, according to the Mayo Clinic. Machines that monitor muscle tension, skin temperature, brain waves, and more collect data in order to help a person gain control over these functions.**

Transcendental mediation** is meant to “settle your body down to a state of restful alertness,” per the Cleveland Clinic. This is achieved by silently repeating a mantra in your head. The thought is that this type of meditation can help a person achieve “a state of pure consciousness.”**

Kundalini yoga** dates back to ancient Vedic texts from 1000 B.C., though its exact origin is unknown, per Healthline. Also known as “yoga of awareness,” this practice is meant to activate your Kundalini energy, or “shakti,” a spiritual energy believed to emanate from the base of your spine. Through breathing exercises, chanting, singing, and repetitive poses, Kundalini yoga is supposed to help you shed your ego—a concept aligned with transcendence.**

Hypnosis** is a method for achieving “a waking state of awareness, (or consciousness), in which a person’s attention is detached from his or her immediate environment and is absorbed by inner experiences such as feelings, cognition and imagery,” according to a 2019 review published in the journal *Palliative Care and Social Practice*. In other words, therapist and patient create a “hypnotic reality” in which what is being imagined feels real.

McDonnell packaged the document in physical science lingo to avoid any unwanted connections to the occult. He leaned on quantum mechanics sources to “describe the nature and functioning of human consciousness,” and on theoretical physics to explain the character of the time-space dimension and the means by which expanded human consciousness transcends it. According to McDonnell’s report, “the entire human body functions as a tuned vibrational system that transfers energy in a range of between 6.8 and 7.5 hertz into the earth’s ionospheric cavity, which itself resonates at about 7 to 7.5 hertz.”

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Some scientists call this ionospheric resonance “[the earth’s heartbeat](<https://bigthink.com/hard-science/schumann-resonance-earths-heartbeat/>)

#::~text=Schumann%20Resonance.&text=The%20Schumann%20Resonances%20are%
20a,heartbeat%2C(22%20to%2033.8%20Hz.).” Basically, this brain/body
energy connects with the sounds of the earth’s ionosphere and can
travel around the planet in one-seventh of a second.

Here's where some of the report's conclusions get dicey. In an attempt to explain the nature of the universe into which the brain sends these signals, McDonnell blithely layers accepted physics theories on top of statements so unsubstantiated that they sound made-up. For example: "Energy in infinity ... retains its inherent capacity for consciousness in that it can receive and passively perceive holograms generated by energy in motion out in the various [dimensions](<https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/environment/a42709141/what-the-fourth-dimension-looks-like/>) which make up the created universe."

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The CIA report pulled from quantum mechanics, physical theories, spiritual philosophies, and some seemingly made-up statements. The Gateway Process tried to align them all through the concept of an “Absolute” energy field.

****Much of the Gateway**** theory rests on what McDonnell calls the “Absolute”: an energy field that exists in all dimensions, has uniform energy throughout, and is infinite. It has no location and no momentum and is therefore outside of [spacetime](<https://www.popularmechanics.com/space/a42593019/traveling-faster-than-speed-of-light/>). Hemi-Sync aspires to connect people with the Absolute through a wavelength of consciousness that “clicks out” of spacetime at certain frequencies.

The world in which this process takes place is a giant cosmic egg, which McDonnell depicts in the document. From a white hole in the egg's nucleus, the Absolute emits matter that travels around one side of the shell and exits through a [black hole](<https://www.popularmechanics.com/space/deep-space/a43234387/how-astronomers-are-looking-for-primordial-black-holes/>) back at the nucleus. As McDonnell writes, "time begins as a measure of the cadence of this evolutionary movement as 'reality' goes around the shell of the egg on its journey to the black hole at the far end."

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The Gateway Process, as described in the CIA report, relies on a giant conceptual cosmic egg with a black hole at its center.

This activity creates an interference pattern that "constitutes the universal hologram or Torus," McDonnell writes. "Since the Torus is being simultaneously generated by matter in all the various phases of 'time,' it reflects the development of the universe in the past, present, and future (as it would be seen from our particular perspective in one phase of time)."

This Torus hologram seems to be based on string theorists' views about a [holographic universe](<https://www.vox.com/2015/6/29/8847863/holographic-principle-universe-theory-physics>). String theorists are inspired by equations showing that, while objects might fall into a black hole and be forever gone, the information about those objects must be retained, and is preserved in 2D form on the event horizon. When projected onto a surface, all the properties and information about the 3D object would be represented in a [hologram](<https://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/gadgets/a16141/holograms-are-people-too/>). Likewise, all that happens with matter in one side of this egg-shaped universe is projected as a holographic experience.

Meanwhile, the document states that the human brain—which is a binary system like a computer—similarly projects itself as a 3D hologram. The interaction of our holograms with the universal hologram allows us to reflect back on ourselves with information from the Absolute, gaining a more complete understanding of ourselves.

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Another pillar concept of the Gateway Process is the idea that the universe is a giant hologram, called a Torus, that reflects the past, present, and future.

McDonnell writes: "The out-of-body state involves projection of a major portion of the energy pattern that represents human consciousness, so that it may move either freely throughout the terrestrial sphere for purposes of information aquisition \[sic\] or

into other dimensions outside of time-space, perhaps to interact with other forms of consciousness.... Consciousness is the organizing and sustaining principle that provides the impetus and guidance to bring and keep energy in motion within a given set of parameters so that a specific reality will result. When consciousness reaches a state of sophistication in which it can perceive itself (its own hologram), it reaches the point of self-cognition."

In other words, the Absolute knows itself. Consciousness knows itself. When the material, physical reality plays out in spacetime, consciousness returns to the Absolute.

In the meantime, a small percentage of people can successfully use Hemi-Sync to slip the bounds of their own bodies and spacetime and check out other dimensions and consciousnesses. Though, like meditation, it requires a lot of practice.

****As McDonnell's report**** nears the infamous page that conspiracy theorists and CIA watchers speculated about for decades, he makes a sharp turn from spiritual ideas dressed in scientific language to explicit religious doctrine, comparing his findings to Christian concepts—and then cuts off mid-sentence, leaving a 38-year cliffhanger on page 24. But when [page 25](<https://www.vice.com/en/article/v7e4g3/found-page-25-of-the-cias-gateway-report-on-astral-projection>) finally surfaced in 2021, the contents weren't all that astonishing.

"And the eternal thought or concept of self which results from this self-consciousness serves the Absolute as the model around which the evolution of time-space revolves to ultimately attain a reflection of and union with Him," McDonnell wrote in the missing page's first paragraph.

Let's face it—even physicists don't know whether many of their most revered mathematical equations and theorems actually describe the universe we live in, just as many spiritual traditions might be mistaken on the nature of consciousness. Nonscientists have understandably been frustrated by scientists claiming the exclusive right to pose inconceivable theories—like multiverses, [dark matter] (<https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/a43274464/dark-matter-research-funding/>), or string theory—with impunity.

Yet physicists tend to dismiss attempts to use scientific information to explain the meaning of human existence. It's one thing to say, under quantum field theory, that [energy fields](<https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/a43337132/what-is-nothingness/>) connect everything in the universe. But it's something else when the concept is applied to the idea of humans communing with trees.

Scientists' theories are the result of mathematical equations that can be replicated. Human experience, on the other hand, can be easily

faked or imagined. As far as many physicists are concerned, the answer to "Why are we here?" is the same for "By what process did we come into being?"

So a project like Gateway that marries science with the human yearning for meaning seemed awfully promising. But, as it turned out, the process was not a gateway between materialistic science and experiential [consciousness](<https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/a40898392/quantum-physics-consciousness/>); it was more like an effort to write a technical manual for the ineffable.

Maybe one day, the CIA will figure it all out.

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Susan Lahey is a journalist and writer whose work has been published in numerous places in the U.S. and Europe. She's covered ocean wave energy and digital transformation; sustainable building and disaster recovery; healthcare in Burkina Faso and antibody design in Austin; the soul of AI and the inspiration of a Tewa sculptor working from a hogan near the foot of Taos Mountain. She lives in Porto, Portugal with a view of the sea.

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