

Dream On, Old Man: An Original Idea Can Yet Appear!

In Essay 01 I reported a dream that has followed me for decades. In the recent past I had another one that was most unusual.

I was at the Los Alamos Lab in a room with several of my colleagues. The time was modern. We were discussing nuclear tests accomplished long ago.

The door to the room opened, and in walked Robert Oppenheimer. We were all astounded, for Oppie had been dead for decades. Without any introduction at all he went directly to the board and started writing equations. His first words were “Let me tell you what I have learned since I died.”

The equations were familiar ones, but his words about them were not. I was really straining to understand. He expounded at length on the fact that alive, he had devoted all of his time to the conversion of mass to energy. But he had learned that he should have been working on the problem of converting mass and energy to time and space.

I have no memory of every having heard anything like this discussed before. In the dream I was amazed, and when I awoke I continued to be amazed. My first reaction when I was awake was that if I could only remember and write down when I had heard, I could be a candidate for some big prize.

There was more to the dream. For in walked Richard Feynman and he started with the same words “Let me tell you what I have learned since I died!” But he emphasized the “I”. Using his hands, as I remember him doing in real life, he held them together to shape a ball, saying that mass, energy, space and time were all in a single glob, and were so intertwined that we were foolish to visualize one without comprehending that the other three were there also. He and Oppie then had an animated conversation, writing equations and enjoying each other, oblivious to those of us in the room.

In recent times I have spent quite a bit of my personal time thinking this matter over, and I have concluded that nothing in the dream is so silly that it should be dismissed out of hand.

Since the dream I have discussed it with a few colleagues, and I have heard a rumor that such things have been discussed at the Institute for Advance Study. If so, I'll bet they really did have a good time at it.

I sure would like to have that dream again so that I could take notes. There is a pencil by my bed.