

AFTER NOW,
WHAT COMES NEXT?

AFTER NOW, WHAT COMES NEXT?

REYNALDO PAREJA



After Now, What Comes Next?

Copyright © 2022 by Reynaldo Pareja. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any way by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the author except as provided by USA copyright law.

The opinions expressed by the author are not necessarily those of URLink Print and Media.

1603 Capitol Ave., Suite 310 Cheyenne, Wyoming USA 82001
1-888-980-6523 | admin@urlinkpublishing.com

URLink Print and Media is committed to excellence in the publishing industry.

Book design copyright © 2022 by URLink Print and Media. All rights reserved.

Published in the United States of America

Library of Congress Control Number: XXXXXXXXXXXX

ISBN XXX-X-XXXXXX-XXX-X (Paperback)

ISBN XXX-X-XXXXXX-XXX-X (Hardback)

ISBN XXX-X-XXXXXX-XXX-X (Digital)

20.05.22

This book is dedicated
to all that have asked, at
one time or another,
what happens when we
make the qualitative transition
at the end of our earthly life.
Is there another reality,
dimension or possibility of an
after-life?
Is there a certainty
on which we can base our
conviction that we will continue
living in another dimension?

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	xi
Introduction	xiii
Chapter 1: How do we know ancient men believed in some type of afterlife?	1
Archeological evidence of ancient burial practices in various cultures	2
<i>Possible reasons for burying the death with varying types of artifacts.....</i>	<i>4</i>
Relating death to some form of afterlife—role of the shamans.....	6
Social stratification expressed in burials and tombs.....	8
<i>Life after death depicted in the richest tombs of Egypt.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Some ancient key Myths about the Afterlife</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Mesopotamian Underworld</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Chinese afterlife belief</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Egyptian afterlife belief.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Greek afterlife belief.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Roman afterlife belief.....</i>	<i>15</i>
The Inca belief in the afterlife.....	16
Aztec afterlife belief.....	17
Mayan afterlife belief.....	18
Common components of most mythic the afterlife beliefs.....	18
Chapter 2: Religions’ explanations of the afterlife.....	22
Hinduism.....	24
Zoroastrianism	28
<i>Zoroastrianism belief in the afterlife</i>	<i>28</i>
Judaism	32
<i>Structure of the belief in the afterlife.....</i>	<i>34</i>

Buddhism.....	38
<i>Buddhist belief in afterlife.....</i>	39
<i>Dharma Data: Rebirth.....</i>	41
Christian belief in the afterlife	43
<i>Jesus presentation of the afterlife heaven</i>	44
<i>Afterlife as described by the Apostles.....</i>	49
<i>Hell per Catholic Church fathers.....</i>	52
<i>In modern Christian views</i>	52
Islam	53
<i>Heaven is a reality.....</i>	53
<i>The transition.....</i>	54
<i>To enter heaven the deceased must go through a judgment.....</i>	55
<i>Reward and Punishment</i>	55
<i>Character of the Hereafter life.....</i>	56
<i>Summarizing Islam’s teaching on the afterlife.....</i>	57
Value of past religions’ teachings on the Afterlife	57

Chapter 3: Insight of Near Death experiences 60

Definitions of a near death experience (NDE).....	61
Researchers that have done studies on multiple cases of NDE	63
How Science has studied Near Death Experiences.....	64
Common elements found in the research	67
Conclusion.....	73
Case studies of NDE	74
Raymond Moody	74
Eben Alexander	76
Dannion Brinkley	77
Pam Reynolds.....	79
Anita Moorjani.....	84
What has near-death experiences taught us about the afterlife?.....	92
<i>Real life after death</i>	93
<i>Not fully understandable</i>	94
<i>Yet, ineffable.....</i>	94
<i>Wishing they could have stayed in that new realm of existence.....</i>	95

Chapter 4: The immaterial reality of consciousness 96

Structure of the Mind.....	96
The Mind—the master organizer and interpreter	99

Clarification of the definition of “mind”	100
<i>Brief overview of the term “mind” in history</i>	101
<i>The mind as the producer of thoughts and knowledge</i>	104
<i>Conceptual knowledge</i>	106
<i>Logical Knowledge</i>	107
<i>Intuitive knowledge</i>	108
<i>Creative Mind</i>	109
<i>The Emotional Mind</i>	110
Mind and Consciousness.....	111
<i>Existential Consciousness</i>	112
Levels of Consciousness.....	114
<i>The conscious-I—the permanent, silent witness</i>	115
<i>The I-Witness exists in a non-space and timeless dimension</i>	118
<i>The unity of “I” expresses itself</i>	119
Chapter 5: Immaterial Reality of the Physical World	123
Immaterial property of physical reality	123
Chapter 6: Consciousness and Soul.....	130
Hinduism.....	131
Zoroastrianism	132
Judaism	132
Buddhism.....	133
Christianity	133
<i>Most well-known religions’ common concepts of the soul</i>	136
Islam	137
<i>Relation of Soul and Consciousness</i>	137
Chapter 7: A New Religion, a fresh perspective	139
The Spokespersons of God.....	140
<i>How does the Spokesperson express God’s Will?</i>	141
<i>The role of the Manifestation of God—a divine teacher with a new Revelation</i>	146
<i>The uniqueness of the Revelation of each Manifestation</i>	149
<i>Progressive Revelation—the permanent dialogue of God with Humanity</i>	149

Chapter 8: New teachings of the Bahá’i Faith on the soul and afterlife.....	154
Reality of human being according to the Bahá’i Faith.....	154
Origin and nature of the soul	157
<i>The Reality of the soul</i>	162
<i>The purpose of God in creating man</i>	164
<i>Death, a change of state of being</i>	166
<i>Difficulty of knowing what the next stage is like</i>	167
<i>The moment of transition</i>	171
<i>Personal Judgment</i>	172
<i>Are those that died in sin pardoned?</i>	176
<i>What is then Heaven?</i>	178
<i>Relationship of souls in the after life</i>	183
<i>We will be re-united with the friends that had gone before</i>	185
Chapter 9: Immortality of the soul.....	187
<i>The indescribable station of the soul</i>	187
<i>The soul is immortal</i>	188
<i>What does it mean to be immortal?</i>	189
<i>The soul will continue to progress in the next phase of existence</i> ...	191
<i>The purpose of the eternal Journey</i>	194
<i>To be in the Presence of God</i>	194
<i>Becoming aware of, and understanding God’s Master Plan of Creation</i>	196
<i>Becoming aware of being near God</i>	197
<i>Exhilarating, never ending experience of arrival at the source of our being</i>	199
<i>Fulfillment of all spiritual longings, needs and desires</i>	201
<i>Worship the Creator</i>	202
<i>Immersion in God’s Unity</i>	202
Conclusion	204
References	210
Bibliography	222
Appendix A: Short biographies of renown NDE researchers	225
Appendix B: Simplified explanations of quantum mechanics	251

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



As with every book that I have written, this one could not have seen the light of birth without the help of the friends that have accompanied me in my writing journey. They have been there every time I have required their suggestions, evaluations, critical thinking, and constant support.

Among the ones that contributed intensely to my finishing it, the one that did the most intense review-editing was Joseph Coblenz, a Baha'i colleague, friend, and very sharp mind that has been able to be very familiar with my Spanish mother tongue and the frequent sentence construction writing that I inadvertently introduce thus making the text a bit difficult to read easily. Thanks to his observations and corrections I am sure the reader will find quite a bit of ease in reading the content.

My wife, as usual every time I start a new book, has generously given me the space and peace to write by taking care of so many household and administrative tasks that otherwise would impede me from having the moments required for thinking, researching, and correcting. She even participated in the choosing of the cover design for the book.

As I write cover design, I must immediately have to give profuse thanks to Heitha Beane, another superb Baha'i friend whose artistic ability with the computer has no limits. She was the one that offer five possible alternatives for the cover that was selected. To her, once more I am indebted.

Lastly, the one I have to give profuse thanks is to Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'i Faith whose Revelation is the source of this book's content. Without it I could not have arrived at the clarity of the analysis presented of the nature of the soul, its ultimate reason of being and its journey toward its Creator.

INTRODUCTION



Two very emotional and powerful moments seem to frame most people's lives. One is the happy experience of being present at the birth of a baby—personal or somebody else's. To see the new bundle of innocence and dependence swaddled in a warm blanket with his or her round eyes open for the first time to life and existence takes one's breath away. It is like looking into the very face of innocence, of wonder, of total trust in you, and of needed unbound love to survive.

The second experience, probably the most dramatic, is being present at the moment of someone's death, be it a relative, a close friend, a colleague of arms, even a complete stranger. Regardless of who might that person be, the lifeless expression of his or her face, the coldness of her skin, the rigidity of his body, the absolute inertness that confirms that the vital energy is gone forever. These are images that one never seems to forget once they have become embedded in the memory neurons of our brain. They will appear fresh and vivid in dreams, in daytime distractions, in the moments when we spontaneously remember the loved one, the dear brother, the mother that cannot be replaced by any other woman, the exemplary father. It is at those moments that we experience mixed emotions of anger, frustration, sadness, and even spiritual rebellion.

Death's grip is inexorable, no matter how well we take care of ourselves, how we judiciously choose our healthy food, how much exercise we do to keep the body's functions at top efficiency, how well we manage stress, how deep our spiritual beliefs are, or how positively we create thoughts of wellbeing, peace, and happiness. There comes a time when disabling age takes away our most basic organs functions, an unforeseen car accident happens, a stray bullet

kills you; a tsunami, an earthquake, a storm, a cyclone, a hurricane, a flooding river unexpectedly takes away your life. When these events occur, we feel the devastating impact of realizing that we will not see our loved ones in this time-dimension developing to their full potential.

This experience of death as a permanent state has been present in our human reality since man took his/her first baby steps on our planet, and became aware that this reality was ever present among all his peers at one time or another; in nature as flowers shriveled and disintegrated, massive trees fell and decayed; animals were killed by bigger ones to be eaten, when water fountains dried up or when too much rain covered the land and drowned all living things. He also was witness to how physical things, even the strongest, like rocks, could crumble into pebbles.

This harsh reality of life's end, which was ever present, logically led our ancestors to pose multiple questions on what happens after death:

- Does it all end at the burial site when the dear one is covered with earth?
- If it is not the end of the individual, in what state of being does he continues to exist?
- If he continues to live, where does he go? How does he complete the trip? What does he need to make the trip, and to survive once he arrives there?
- Will she see her relatives there?
- What requisites must be fulfilled before arriving at this place?
- Is the next stage, does one continue living and never die again? How is that even possible?

These and many more spontaneous questions gave rise to the many explanations that humans have striven to find. Put simply, the answers have come from two distinct sources. One, probably the best known consists of descriptions elaborated by storytellers, shamans, or interpreters of the Unknown. They presented them in

such terms and allusions passed down to us as legends and myths and a belief evolving around what happens after physical death. The Baha'i teachings tell us that many of those myths may have had their distant origins, directly or indirectly, in the teachings of the Manifestations of God whose Names have been lost in the "mists of ancient history", but which were certainly present guiding humanity in its spiritual infancy, because Baha'is believe that God has always sent His Messengers to assist men in their spiritual development.

We will explore as many aspects of this undeniable experience we all humans must face with the aid of science, philosophy, and religion to see if we can find some reassuring and illuminating answers that will serve us as we steer through the undeniable experience of not knowing fully or clearly what happens after we make this earthly transition.

CHAPTER 1



HOW DO WE KNOW ANCIENT MEN BELIEVED IN SOME TYPE OF AFTERLIFE?

Imagine living in a cave community of primitive humans around 20,000 years ago. The life span of those humans was, at best estimates, around 30-35 years given the normal perils of those times, the lack of medicine to treat diseases or injuries, the uneven food supply, the deadly attacks from carnivorous animals, the aggressive groups seeking food supplies, lodging sites, and females to expand or sustain their own tribal number. All of these factors contributed to the improbability for three generations to live side-by-side, reducing the possibility of being a grandfather. The contrary was in fact a most common experience, that of having to witness the death of a parent, a friend, or a tribe member succumbing to any of the above-mentioned causes.

So, living through the death experience as a frequent event in the life of our ancestors as it was then, they must have asked the question about what happens when a person dies. It was the logical inquiry of the child that does not hear her mother talking to her anymore, feeding her, cuddling her; she then asks the father, older brother or other relative, "Where is mom? Where did she go?" The answers given to her at that time may have been as baffling as the ones we hear today from our peers and parents.

Archeological evidence of ancient burial practices in various cultures

To get a sense of the time frame to which we are trying to pinpoint the first burial practices it is necessary to identify the time frame in which archeologists made those discoveries. They divide human history into three major periods: Paleolithic (or Old Stone Age), Mesolithic (or Middle Stone Age), and Neolithic (or New Stone Age).

The Middle Paleolithic period occurred about 315,000 years ago, with the approximate date of appearance of Homo Sapiens as a distinct species.

The Mesolithic Period, or Middle Stone Age, covered specific cultures that fell between the Paleolithic and the Neolithic Periods. While the start and end dates of the Mesolithic Period vary by geographical region, it dated approximately from 10,000 BCE to 8,000 BCE

The Neolithic Era, also known as the New Stone Age, was the time after the stone or ice age and before the Copper Age in some areas and the Bronze Age in others. Depending on the region, the date it happened from around 9,000 B.C. to about 3,000 B.C. in the Middle East. (1)

These periods will give us a time reference to pinpoint archaeologists' most ancient tomb findings. The earliest undisputed cases of ancient human burials that were found were identified to have been made during the Upper Paleolithic, about the 12th to 11th millennium BCE, although there are disputed claims of intentional burials of Neanderthals as old as 130,000 years. Similar claims have been made for early anatomically modern humans as old as 100,000 years. (2)

Burial sites, similar to today's cemeteries, were found in the Natufian culture, which lived roughly 15,000 to 11,000 years ago in the Middle East, one of the world's first civilizations to not rely on a nomadic existence. During this period, the people of that group separated specific sites from their living space and reserved the non-residential areas for the burial of their dead. Their remains show that their dead were often carefully laid out at full length, and sometimes decorated with beads or pigments. (3)

Another well-known site with early modern human remains is the Qafzeh Cave, which dates back to the Middle Paleolithic period. It is located in the Yizrael valley of the Lower Galilee region of Israel, on the slope of Har Qedumim. In addition to human remains, the site is characterized by a series of hearths and stone tools. Qafzeh Cave contains some of the earliest evidence of burials in the world.

Human remains from Qafzeh cave include bones and bone fragments from a minimum of 27 individuals, including eight partial skeletons. Qafzeh caves 9 and 10 are almost completely intact with the burials dated to ~92,000 years ago (BP). Most of the human remains appear to have been purposefully buried: if so, these are very early examples of modern burial behavior. The remains are from anatomically modern humans, with some archaic features.

Qafzeh cave 11 showed the cranium of a juvenile aged between 12-13 years, who apparently suffered a traumatic brain injury about eight years before his or her death. The injury would likely have impacted the child's cognitive and social skills, and it appears as if the juvenile was given a deliberate, and special burial ceremonial with deer antlers. The burial and the survival of the child reflect an elaborate social behavior for the Middle Paleolithic inhabitants of Qafzeh cave. (4)

In a series of recently excavated graves near Mt. Carmel, Israel, dated 13,700 to 11,700 years ago, a team of archaeologists from the University of Haifa found impressions made by flowers and other plants apparently buried beneath the dead. Their findings, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, are likely the earliest instance of flowers being used in burials. One grave in particular seems to have been absolutely filled with them. In it were the remains of an adult (roughly 30 years old) and an adolescent (12 to 15 years old) dating back to about 12,550 and 11,720 years old, based on radiocarbon dating. (5) Given that flowers are used in a tremendous range of cultures worldwide to express sympathy, pride, joy, and other emotions, it is safe to infer that one or several of these emotions were the reason why these two corpses were buried with flowers.

One of the largest and most varied prehistoric cemeteries in Southeast Asia was discovered in the late 1950s in the West Mouth of the Niah Great Cave in Sarawak, Malaysia, on the north side of the island of Borneo. The Neolithic graves found showed prolific evidence of various types of remains such as human bones, stone tools, pottery, and animal bone fragments. The Harrissons, the archeologists who studied the site, found an extraordinarily rich cemetery dating between 5,000 and 2,500 years ago based on associated pottery, grave-goods, and radiocarbon dates. By the mid-1960s, Barbara Harrisson had discovered more than 200 graves, excavating them with great care and attention to detail. (6)

Mayans buried their dead underneath their houses. Analysis of objects and human remains embedded beneath ordinary Maya houses from the Classic period (250-900 A.D.) revealed that farmers and servants cached objects and buried relatives within their residences. Every 20-30 years, families destroyed and rebuilt their homes with new burials. (7)

Possible reasons for burying the death with varying types of artifacts

It is quite evident from the above data that ever since humans appeared on Earth, they dealt with death in quite a deliberate manner. They invested the effort to dig holes where they placed their departed relatives. They even took care to place them in the most natural sleeping positions that humans use to rest at night, that is, either curled up in a fetal position or stretched out lying face up. Alongside the corpses, which were alone or accompanied by other dead individuals that could have been their spouses, children, or very close relatives, were buried with different types of artifacts. These were found everywhere around the globe wherever ancient tombs were discovered.

The artifacts included everyday things such as pottery, stone ornaments, rudimentary tools and even early forms of weapons, such as knives and clubs, and in some cases, apparently valuable artifacts.

This behavior was not by far random. It showed a conscious consideration of treatment to be shown to the deceased person; the closer in kin the dead person was the more probable it was that the behavior was more carefully executed.

The immediate question arises as to why these were objects placed in the tomb. Analyzing this data, anthropologists and archeologists suggest two immediate interpretations. The first is that Neolithic graves showed equal distribution of the buried goods, which seem to suggest a more or less classless society, while other graves, in Chalcolithic and Bronze Age burials, showed rich grave goods concentrated in specific graves (barrows), suggesting that in them, “chief individuals” were placed who belonged to a higher social stratification. These artifacts do not necessarily represent an objective sample of the artifacts used daily in their culture, but neither does it exclude the possibility that some were. Because of their more evident ritual context, grave goods may be representing a special class of artifacts, in some instances produced especially for the burial. (8)

These artifacts—some of which had clear practical uses in their daily life—have suggested to anthropologists that those who buried the dead believed that the deceased was going to need them in what they believed was going to be some type of an afterlife journey. Another possible reason why the deceased were buried with artifacts was because these were judged to be the most cherished possessions that he/she had while alive, and this fact was known by the relatives and friends. To place such articles with the dead person was a way of recognizing this preference, and that she/he had the right to take it with him/her at this very special moment. No “inheritance rights” would have been more powerful to impede the placement of articles with the deceased.

In either case, this was probably the most primitive form of consciousness regarding a possible unknowable afterlife journey, or a place or state of being to reach that was intuited, desired, or aspired to, but not verifiable.

It is also plausible that these people were favored with the presence of a Messenger of God who taught them of this other dimension in terms that they could understand and relate to. This affirmation is

possible as a conclusion drawn from the Baha'i Teaching that there have always been Manifestations throughout human history even though we cannot know what They taught, especially on this subject. This is an alternative explanation for what we call today "myths". Many may have had their distant origins, directly or indirectly, in teachings of Manifestations of God whose Names have been lost in the "mists of ancient history", but which could have been the basis for elaborating such myths.

Relating death to some form of afterlife—role of the shamans

It is virtually impossible to understand how burying relatives would have had any connection with the belief of a potential after-life if one does not take into account the presence in most ancient tomb internment tribes of a powerful tribal figure, the shaman. This individual would be the parallel to present day priests, ministers, pastors, and mullahs in as much as they represented the bridge, the tribe's connection to the supernatural, and the transcendental, thus becoming the spokesperson for, and interpreter of such a realm.

Almost all ancient cultures and present-day primitive tribes throughout the world have had a shamanic tradition. The word *shaman* may have originated from the Evenki word *šamán*, most likely from the southwestern dialect spoken by the Sym Evenki peoples. The Tungusic term was subsequently adopted by Russians interacting with the indigenous peoples in Siberia, with whom Shamanism has been especially associated for centuries by Asian and Western visitors. It is an ideology that used to be widely practiced in Europe, Asia, Tibet, North and South America, and Africa. It centered on the belief in supernatural phenomenon such as the world of gods, demons, and ancestral spirits.

Shamans were and are still considered in some cultures to be intermediaries or messengers between the human world and the spirit worlds. Shamans are said to treat ailments and illness by mending the soul. Alleviating traumas affecting the soul or spirit are believed to restore the physical body of the individual to balance and wholeness.

Shamans also claim to enter a supernatural realm or dimension to obtain solutions to problems afflicting the community, to bring guidance to misguided souls and to lessen the effects of illnesses of the human soul caused by foreign elements. Shamans operate primarily within the spiritual world, which, they believe, in turn affects the human world. The restoration of balance is said to result in the elimination of ailments. He typically enters into a trance state during a ritual, and practices divination and healing. The shaman is also believed to have the power to communicate with spirits and has the task of *escorting the souls of the dead to the afterlife*. In some traditions, he is able to visit the “other side”, sometimes known as the underworld, while in a trance-like state. Shamans claim to gain knowledge and the power to heal in the spiritual world many times through the aid of spirit guides, who they believe guide and direct them in their travels in the spirit world. The spirit guide energizes the shamans, enabling them to enter the spiritual dimension. Shamans claim to heal within the spiritual dimension by returning lost parts of the human soul from wherever they have gone. Shamans also claim to cleanse excess negative energies, which are said to confuse or pollute the soul. (9)

Summarizing the different roles, the shamans played depending upon their respective cultures; they were healers, fortune tellers, and the one leading a sacrifice or preserving traditions by storytelling and songs. Their most important role was to act as a *guide for souls in their journey in the afterlife*. It was not unusual for a single shaman to fulfill several of these functions.

Belief in Shamanism has declined over the centuries, and only a few remote tribes still practice it. One such tribe is the Inuit people of the Canadian Arctic. Another can be found in the nomadic Tuvan (with an estimated population of just 3,000 people). The Tuvan are one of the most isolated tribes in Russia, where the art of shamanism has been preserved to this day due to their isolated existence, allowing them to be free from the influences of major religions. (10)

Within this context, it is not surprising to find that shamans played a key role in the ritual of interment of the tribe’s dead. The shaman became the articulator, the narrator, and the exponent of

what the tribe came to believe was the journey undertaken by the deceased into the unknown other world, which they claimed to have visited many times.

The presence of the shamans developed alongside the social structure of each group and evolved to become an essential unit next to the chief, the leader, or the king. In many ancient civilizations these shamans became the priestly cast that was present at all the major events of society, such as the crowning of leaders or kings, interpreting the royal dreams, consecrating monuments; presiding over rituals of adoration to the gods, making sacrifices to them, invoking the gods for specific favors; blessing and making marriages official, welcoming newborns; in short, presiding over most of the important social events of the tribe, the village, the city or the kingdom.

Such a powerful role was sanctioned by and revolved around their alleged connection to the spiritual world, as well as their ability to interpret the will of the gods, thereby giving the one and only correct interpretation of any religious writing or practice, including everything that had to do with the afterlife.

Their interpretations became the afterlife myths and beliefs of the great civilizations that left impressive testimonials in the most outstanding tomb caves, pyramids, and underground citadels where the rich and powerful of those kingdoms finally rested. These tombs also gave expression to the social stratification to which they belonged.

Social stratification expressed in burials and tombs

Humans evolved from a tribe-based organization to village, a town, a city, then to a kingdom, a country, and a nation. The path of growth involved the development of an ever more complex social stratification. It was characterized by a ruling class that developed slowly, but steadily. It was overwhelmingly a patriarchal structure in which the head of the community, the tribal leader, and the king/queen acquired a position of supreme authority, as well as personal wealth well above that of the commoner that was expressed in the richness of the ornaments that he/she wore daily, the fineness of the

clothes they put on, the exquisite level of the food they consumed, and the diverse whims and extravaganzas in which they indulged.

This social stratification was soon reflected in the burials and tombs of the governing elite. The delicacy of the burial dresses produced with the most exquisite fabrics to the richness of the ornaments, such as necklaces, rings, breast plates, hats, scepters, and other symbols of authority made with precious metals and embedded with jewels that were placed inside the tomb made an unmistakable statement that the buried person belonged to the rich social class.

As the royalty structure progressed and became ever more powerful, so progressed the manner in which its members were buried as the monumental massiveness of the pyramids in Ancient Egypt bear witness being are among the most elaborate burials in human history. The most striking feature is how the royal graves were constructed and ornamented with extreme forms of power symbols such as the gigantic statues in the Valley of the Kings in the temple city of Luxor. Two colossal statues of Pharaoh Amenhotep III are found there. One of them — its body weighing 250 tons — depicts the pharaoh seated, hands resting on his knees. The statue is 11.5 meters tall (over 37 ft), with a base 1.5 meters (almost 5 ft) high and 3.6 meters wide (almost 12 ft). (11)

The valley stands on the west bank of the Nile, opposite Thebes in the heart of the Theban Necropolis. It consists of two valleys, East Valley (where the majority of the royal tombs are situated) and the West Valley. This desert valley contains the ancient burial ground of many Egyptian pharaohs.

With the 2005 discovery of a new chamber and the 2008 discovery of two further tomb entrances, the valley is known to contain 63 tombs and chambers (ranging in size from KV54, a simple pit, to KV5, a complex tomb with over 120 chambers). Among over 60 royal tombs is the famous Tomb of Tutankhamen. It is located on the west bank of the Nile, directly across the river from the ancient city of Thebes (now known as Luxor).

The site was the principal burial place of the major royal figures of the Egyptian New Kingdom, as well as several privileged nobles. The royal tombs are decorated with scenes from Egyptian mythology and

give clues as to the beliefs and funerary rituals of the period. Almost all of the tombs seem to have been opened and robbed in antiquity, but they still give an idea of the opulence and power of the pharaohs.

No less impressive are the Pyramids of Giza (constructed over a span of 85 years between 2589 and 2504 BCE). There are three impressive pyramids there, each built for a different pharaoh — Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure. The northernmost and oldest pyramid of the group was built for Khufu (Greek: Cheops), the second king of the 4th dynasty.

Of the three most visible one, the Great Pyramid is the largest of the three. It stands at 147 meters tall, the length of each side at the base averaging 755.75 feet (230 meters) and its original height being 481.4 feet (147 meters). It took over 20 years to build and was completed in 2560 BCE. This meant it was the tallest man-made structure in the world for about 3,800 years.

The Great Pyramid's core is made of yellowish limestone blocks, the outer casing (now almost completely gone) and the inner passages are of finer light-colored limestone, and the interior burial chamber is built of huge blocks of granite. Approximately 2.3 million blocks of stone were cut, transported, and assembled to create the 5.75-million-ton structure, which is a masterpiece of technical skill and engineering ability. The internal walls as well as those few outer-casing stones that remain in place show finer joints than any other masonry constructed in ancient Egypt. (12)

These monuments show the extent to which the preoccupation with the afterlife had grown for the Egyptian Pharaohs, who did not hesitate to invest huge financial resources and manpower to assure themselves that their trip to the after world would have all the necessary luxury and comfort articles that they would need to continue their kingly lifestyle.

Life after death depicted in the richest tombs of Egypt

The majority of the royal tombs were decorated with Egyptian mythology texts and images. The royal tombs are decorated with scenes which offer clues as to the beliefs and funerary rituals of the

period. The early tombs were decorated with scenes from Amduat ('That Which is in the Underworld'), which describes the journey of the sun god through the twelve hours of the night. From the time of Horemheb, tombs were decorated with the Book of Gates, which shows the sun god passing through the twelve gates that divide the nighttime and ensures the tomb owner's own safe passage through the night. The tomb of Ramses IV, found in the Valley of the Kings, is one of the valley's largest and most sophisticated tombs. It is famous for its detailed decorations that depict the complete text of the netherworld Book of Caverns. The latter is the oldest tomb and dates back to approximately 1450 BCE. (13)

The Book of Caverns is one of the most important ancient Egyptian netherworld books of the After Kingdom. Like all other netherworld books, it is present on the inside of kings' tombs for the benefit of the deceased. It describes the journey of the sun god Ra through the six caverns of the underworld, focusing on the interaction between the sun god and the inhabitants of the netherworld, including rewards for the righteous and punishment for the enemies of the worldly order, those who fail their judgment in the afterlife. The Book of Caverns is one of the best sources of information about the Egyptian concept of hell as a form of punishment. (14)

This graphic account of the afterlife is probably one of the best complete expressions of the belief of the pharaohs in the afterlife and the reason for their preoccupation to have all the necessary implements to make the journey to that netherworld safely and with all the necessary artifacts to survive well. So, it is not surprising to find that the rich among the richest of the rich, the Pharaoh, was the one that enjoyed this level of luxury.

Some ancient key Myths about the Afterlife

After life myths are probably the best human effort to understand the transition, to rationalize death with the intention of finding an explanation of a possible life afterwards. This search for understanding does not exclude the notion that such myths were *developed* based on the original Teachings of unrecorded Manifestations of the past as

was explained at the beginning of the chapter. In order to capture the richness of this effort, the best way is to present several of the most compelling of those myths that we have inherited from the outstanding civilizations that preceded us.

Mesopotamian Underworld

The people of Mesopotamia originally consisted of two groups, East Semitic Akkadian speakers (later divided into the Assyrians and Babylonians) and the people of Summer. These peoples were members of various city-states and small kingdoms. The Sumerians left the first records and are believed to have been the founders of the civilization of the Ubaid period (6500 to 3800 BCE) in Upper Mesopotamia. By historical times they resided in southern Mesopotamia, which was known as Summer, and much later, as Babylonia. (15)

The ancient Mesopotamian underworld was a dark, dreary cavern located deep below the ground, where inhabitants were believed to continue “a shadowy version of life on earth” as described in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The only food or drink was dry dust, which led family members of the deceased to pour libations for them to drink. Unlike many other afterlives of the ancient world, in the Sumerian underworld, there was no final judgment of the deceased, and the dead were neither punished nor rewarded for their deeds in life. A person’s quality of existence in the underworld was determined by his or her conditions of burial. Much the same grim afterlife description was adopted by the Babylonians.

The ruler of the underworld was the goddess Ereshkigal, who lived in the palace Ganzir, sometimes used as a name for the underworld itself. Her husband was Nergal, the god of death. After the Akkadian Period (c. 2334—2154 BCE), Nergal sometimes took over the role as ruler of the underworld. The seven gates of the underworld are guarded by Neti, a gatekeeper. The dying god Dumuzid spends half the year in the underworld, while, during the other half, his place is taken by his sister, the scribe goddess Geshtinanna, who records the names of the deceased. The underworld was also the abode of various demons, including the hideous child-devourer Lamashtu, the

fearsome wing demon and protector god Pazazu, and Galla, who dragged mortals to the underworld. (16)

Chinese afterlife belief

The earliest textual evidence from China concerning an idea of an afterlife is in oracle bone inscriptions from the Shang dynasty (c. 1500–1050 BCE). Primarily divination records, the inscriptions mentioned that deceased kings dwelled in heaven together with the god on high. This was clearly a very special afterlife, available only for royalty. During the transition from the Warring States period (c. 403–221 BCE) to the Qin (221–206 BCE) and Han (206 BCE—220 CE) dynasties, when tomb style began to change, a detectable transformation in the perception of the afterlife occurred.

Evidence of human sacrifices, as well as accompanying tombs of servants and concubines, are found among Shang royal tombs and certain later tombs. These are corroborated by textual evidence from the *Book of Odes*, attributed to the Zhou period, which indicates that for a long-time people believed that deceased kings and rulers needed their servants after death.

The term *Dark City* (*youdu*) first appears in the *Chuci* (Songs of the south), written by the famous Chu poet Qu Yuan (c. 343–277 BCE). The Dark City was ruled by Lord Earth (Tu Bo), a sinister-looking horned python. Such a description betrays a certain aversion toward the afterlife, which was described as being in darkness.

Attitudes toward the afterlife were ambiguous and cannot be separated from attitudes toward death and the existence of the soul after death. The early Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (c. fourth century BCE) held a materialist and naturalist view of the essence of life, and he perceived that the physical being was merely a gathering of the *qi* ether of the universe. When a person, or indeed any life-form, died, the body decomposed and returned to the state of *qi*. There was therefore no life after death. The Confucians, on the other hand, took a conservative stand in accepting what had long existed in Chinese culture—ghosts and spirits. Yet Confucius himself did not

wish to discuss the unknown world of the spirits, and he gave little attention to the afterlife.

Tomb paintings and reliefs from the Han period often portray a happy afterlife: scenes of banquets, festivals, hunting, and traveling often occupy the central position. Inscriptions on bronze mirrors found in tombs often carry eulogies about a carefree life comparable to that of the immortals. However, other texts describing taxes and obliged unpaid labor in the afterlife as well as contracts concerning prayers and offerings to the deities betray a sense of anxiety and fear. Even the elaborate funerary paraphernalia could be seen as emerging from a sense of insecurity about an uncertain future. (17)

Egyptian afterlife belief

Egyptian religious doctrines included three afterlife ideologies: belief in an underworld, eternal life, and rebirth of the soul. The underworld, also known as the Duat had only one entrance that could be reached by traveling through the tomb of the deceased. The initial image a soul would be presented with upon entering this realm was a corridor lined with an array of fascinating statues, including a variation of the famous hawk-headed god, Horus. It must also be noted that the path taken to the underworld may have varied between kings and common people. After entry, spirits were presented to another prominent god, Osiris. It would determine the virtue of the deceased's soul and grant those deemed deserving a peaceful afterlife. The Egyptian concept of "eternal life" was often seen as being reborn indefinitely. Therefore, the souls who had lived their life elegantly were guided to Osiris to be born again.

In order to achieve the ideal afterlife, many practices must be performed during one's life. This may have included acting justly and following the beliefs of Egyptian creed. Additionally, the Egyptians stressed the rituals completed after an individual's life has ended. In other words, it was the responsibility of the living to carry out the final traditions required so the dead could promptly meet their final fate. Ultimately, maintaining high religious morals by both the living and

the dead, as well as complying to a variety of traditions guaranteed the deceased a smoother transition into the underworld. (18)

Greek afterlife belief

The Greeks had a definite belief that there was a journey to the afterlife or another world. They believed that death was not a complete end to life or human existence. The Greeks accepted the existence of the soul after death but saw this afterlife as meaningless. In the underworld, the identity of a dead person still existed, but it had no strength or true influence. Rather, the continuation of the existence of the soul in the underworld was considered a remembrance of the fact that the dead person had existed, yet while the soul still existed, it was inactive. However, the price of death was considered a great one. Homer believed that the best possible existence for humans was to never be born at all, or die soon after birth, because the greatness of life could never balance the price of death. The Greek gods only rewarded heroes who were still living; heroes that died were ignored in the afterlife. However, it was considered very important to the Greeks to honor the dead and was seen as a type of piety. Those who did not respect the dead opened themselves to the punishment of the gods. (19)

Roman afterlife belief

The Romans had a similar belief system about the afterlife, with Hades becoming known as Pluto. In the ancient Greek myth about the Labors of Heracles, the hero Heracles had to travel to the underworld to capture Cerberus, the three-headed guard dog, as one of his tasks.

In Book VI of Vigil's *Aeneid*, the hero, Aeneas, travels to the underworld to see his father. By the River Styx, he sees the souls of those not given a proper burial, forced to wait by the river until someone buries them. While down there, along with the dead, he is shown the place where the wrongly convicted reside, the fields of sorrow where those who committed suicide reside and now regret

it, including Aeneas' former lover. In the fields of Elysium the descendants of the divine and bravest heroes had their residence. Then there is Tartarus, where the Titans and powerful non-mortal enemies of the Olympians reside. Aeneas sees the river of forgetfulness, Lethe, which the dead must drink to forget their life and begin anew. Lastly, his father shows him all the future heroes of Rome who will live if Aeneas fulfills his destiny in founding the city. (20)

The Inca belief in the afterlife

The Incas (1100—1438 CE) believed strongly in the afterlife. They believed that the souls of its people were sent to live in heaven or in hell after the death of their earthly bodies. The people who obeyed the Inca rule

- Do not steal (power),
- Do not lie (about your own power),
- Do not be lazy (work your own ground)

were sent to live a good afterlife in heaven, in the part of the quarters where the warmth of the sun was present and where there was plenty of food and drink. Those who did not live by this rule spent their afterlife in the underworld where it was dark and cold, and they only had rocks to eat. This seems to express a clear sense of punishment for transgressing the Inca rule.

The Incas believed that the members of the ruling class were, at the point of death, subject of greater care by its subjects, in embalming and mummifying their bodies before burial. They were buried in above ground chambers, while commoners were buried in pits, caves, and other types of graves.

The body, then, was left in their palace or in a designated sacred place with numerous objects, in above ground chambers, to help them in the journey to their final destination known as "Pacari'Na". Upon reaching the Pacari'Na, the mummies were supposed to be able to mingle with the ancient ancestors that were also buried there. The Incas even kept some servants to watch over a dead emperor

as a symbol of continuity of its life force (mind power) towards the afterlife. The Incas believed in reincarnation, and this is the main reason why funerals were a very sacred event.

The funeral rites were held for eight days. Relatives would re-enter the tombs or palaces and consult the mummies on important daily affairs. The dead were considered a manifestation of spiritual powers that were able to be manifested through natural events and/or through dreams using symbols. The priests were the channel of interpretation.

The Incas believed in an existence of an overall supreme power, and that the course of history formed a succession of repetition and renewal. Each age was ruled over by the power of the Sun (Inti), and the general course of development was from the most primitive to the sophisticated. Each world was supposed to end by some sort of catastrophic event. (21)

Aztec afterlife belief

The Aztec civilization is considered to have existed between 1100—1403 CE. The cosmology of Aztec religion divides the world into thirteen heavens and nine earthly layers or netherworlds. The first heaven overlaps with the first terrestrial layer, so that heaven and the terrestrial layers meet at the surface of the Earth. Each level is associated with a specific set of deities and astronomical objects. The most important celestial entities in the Aztec religion are the Sun, the Moon and the planet Venus (both as “morning star” and “evening star”). The Aztecs were popularly referred to as “people of the Sun”.

The Aztec world consisted of three main parts: the earth world on which humans lived (including Tamoanchan, the mythical origin of human beings), an underworld which belonged to the dead (called Mictlan, “place of death”), and the upper plane in the sky. The earth and the underworld were both open for humans to enter, whereas the upper plane in the sky was impenetrable to humans. Existence was envisioned as straddling the two worlds in a cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth.

Thus, as the sun was believed to dwell in the underworld at night to rise reborn in the morning and maize kernels were interred to later sprout anew, the human and divine existence was also envisioned as being cyclical. To the Aztecs, death was instrumental in the perpetuation of creation, and gods and humans alike had the responsibility of sacrificing themselves in order to allow life to continue.

After death, the soul of the Aztec went to one of three places: the Sun, Mictlan, or Tlalocan. Souls of fallen warriors and women that died in childbirth would transform into hummingbirds that followed the Sun on its journey through the sky. Souls of people who died from less glorious causes would go to Mictlan. Those who drowned would go to Tlalocan. (22)

Mayan afterlife belief

The Mayan civilization is considered to have existed from 1800 B.CE. to 250 CE. They believed that people who died by suicide, sacrifice, complications of childbirth, perished in the ball game, or in battle were transported directly into heaven. The reason why a violent death allowed the souls to immediately enter the Mayan heaven is because the gods are thankful for their sacrifice to them. People who became sacrifices were paraded in litters by citizens before their death.

Before Spanish influence, there may not have been a common idea of the afterlife. The Yucatec Mayans believed that there were different routes after death. Mayans had several forms of ancestor worship. They built idols containing ashes of the dead and brought them food on festival days. Alternatively, a temple could be built over an urn. In those that were sacrificed, the most common way was cutting the abdomen, and taking out the heart. (23)

Common components of most mythic the afterlife beliefs

It is quite evident by the data presented that from the very beginning of human documentation of their history, they manifested their

beliefs and customs by various methods, such as artifacts, paintings, pottery, stone carved hieroglyphics, and instruments. They addressed profusely the question of what happens to loved ones when they die, where they went, whether they continued living in another plane, or had a similar continued existence as the one lived on earth.

The above excerpts of some of the best-known afterlife myths that humanity, when it organized itself into some form of stable social structure, it developed, worldwide and during many thousands of years, a series of myths regarding the afterlife. This collective effort tried to make some sense of what happened to those that died and never came back to tell us what their experience of such a place, condition, or state of being was. Thus, the ones that remained had no certainty of an objective reality of what could be the afterlife that they could express in intelligent, comprehensible terms to those listening, but not having the direct experience.

Regardless of the impossibility of verifying what the myth claimed happened, we can obtain from these myths several common elements that seem to be present in all the efforts to conceive adequately what that afterlife reality would be like. These elements can be expressed as:

- All the cited civilizations postulated the belief in some form of afterlife to which the deceased was ushered into after dying.
- Depending of the era and the civilizations' status, this place was either a wonderful place to aspire to, especially if one belonged to the royalty or heroes like the late Chinese dynasties, the Egyptian Pharaohs, or the Greek heroes. According to other myths, the netherworld was a bleak, dark inhospitable place reserved for the less revered members of society.
- The heaven and netherworld were divided into levels that were accessed by the deceased according to how correctly they had lived their lives, fulfilling a determined ethical code. If their life was not lived well, they were sent to a corresponding low level of the netherworld. In some myths

the netherworld was guarded by some type of god or beast that had to be overcome in order to enter.

- Burial rituals were very important because they helped the deceased arrive at the other side like the coin placed on the mouth of the Greek deceased to pay the ferryman Charon for the trip across the river Styx to enter the underworld.
- Burial rituals performed correctly were thus very important because they contributed to the success of arrival at the afterlife safely and in good standing.
- The priestly or shaman cast became the experts on the afterlife and had the responsibility of correctly performing the burial rituals for the successful journey of the deceased to happen. Their presence was an absolute must in any burial ceremony. They were the first gatekeepers between this world and the afterlife.
- There was the belief that a potential connection with the ancestors existed once the soul arrived at the destination point of the afterlife.
- Some myths postulated a process of reincarnation as an expression of “eternal life” (like the Egyptians) or as part of the cycle of life and as a way to correct mistakes.

These common beliefs of the afterlife myths and their corresponding practices can be considered to be an excellent historical record that man, ever since he became conscious of his temporal existence, has searched earnestly to find some appealing answers to the crucial and anguishing question as to what happened when one dies, what could possibly be the reality of that unknown, dark and foreboding netherworld that no dead person had come back to tell the sadden relatives what it was like.

It would take the development of revealed religions to give a clearer picture of the incredible and wonderful reality of the afterlife. We shall explore what the major best known religions of the world have to offer to clarify this soul wrenching quest based on their written belief system or Sacred Teachings. This in no way denies that previous Manifestations were with mankind since its beginnings; the

difference being that we have no clear records of when or where these Manifestations appeared and what their direct teachings were. Yet, when one study the commonalities found in the myths presented above, there are several that are also found in the religions that are presented in the next chapter. These give grounds for affirming that potentially the original source from which the myths were elaborated was in fact Teachings of unrecorded Manifestations present at the birth of those civilizations.

CHAPTER 2



RELIGIONS' EXPLANATIONS OF THE AFTERLIFE

Parallel to the afterlife myths of ancient civilizations that we briefly described in the previous chapter; major religions were developing. From the start, they provided a fuller explanation and more vivid imagery to their adherents' understanding of the reality of the afterlife. We will explore these explanations by taking a closer look at the religions that developed sequentially in about the same period as the myths.

Before presenting any explanation of the afterlife from the point of view of a specific ancient religion, a caveat must be stated. The records we have today of the teachings of the Prophet founders of those religions do not necessarily reflect the original teachings. The reason is rather a simple one. At the time that their Revelation was given to their followers, the capability to write and read was not as prevalent worldwide, nor was it practiced by millions of people as it is today. At that time, writing was not common at all, and the reproduction of books, if any, was done entirely by hand. Therefore, the teachings of the Prophet founders were memorized by his immediate followers, who in turn transmitted them orally to new followers. Much later, these oral teachings were finally written down and approved by the religious leaders of the time who already had a preference for some of the teachings, as well as how they were to be understood.

This prolonged timeframe between when the Teachings of the Prophet founder of the religion and the final written texts of His Teachings can be clearly seen in the case of Krishna, to whom the most reliable Teachings of Hinduism are attributed. For lack of reliable records, the date of birth and death of Krishna are estimated to be 3227 BCE—3102 BCE. The death of Sri Krishna was calculated to have happened in February 3102 BCE at the age of 125 years, 7 months. (1)

The core of Krishna's spiritual teachings is found in the Bhagavad-Gita ("The song of the Lord"). Although it is normally edited as an independent text, the *Bhagavad Gita* became a section of a massive Indian epic named "The Mahabharata", the longest Indian epic. There is a part in the middle of this long text, consisting of 18 brief chapters and about 700 verses: This is the section known as the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is also referred to as the *Gita*, for short. The Bhagavad Gita was written at some point between 400 BCE and 200 CE—about 2700 to 2900 years after Krishna's death. Like the Vedas and the Upanishads, the authorship of the Bhagavad Gita is unclear. (2)

The nearly 2,700-year process between Krishna's oral presentation of His Teachings and their final written version as they appear in the Gita, are likely to have included imprecisions and interpretations added by the religious leaders or scribes who finally wrote the Bhagavad Gita. Nevertheless, these were included in what became the approved Holy Book of that religion. Two good examples come to my mind (and thus my understanding) that opens the door to various interpretations. The first is how to elucidate the teaching of reincarnation as defended by the various Hindu gurus and interpreted by western scholars. Their interpretations can be questioned if they are the best explanation of that concept as it seems to be expressed in the Bhagavad Gita. The second one is the original teaching of God's presence in all things as its animating force and the common belief by most Hindus that each thing can have a god's name to identify its presence in it. Here is an example of those names as presented in the inventory of the gods' names found in Wikipedia: Agni, god of fire; Varuna, god of water; Vayu, god of wind; Indra, King of Devas and Heaven; Yamaraja, god of death and King of hell. (3)

Taking the above caveat into account, we will try to extract one fundamental tenet common to the ancient worldwide religions that was different from the myths presented in the previous chapter. That overall tenet is that everything that is part of our physical reality and man himself was created by the One God who took especial care in creating man in a special manner, “in His image and likeness”. This seems to have been a gradual movement toward monotheism and the idea of One Creator. The Baha’i Writings identify Abraham as the teacher of monotheism. Of course, the expressions of the nature of the One God are not the same in all religions. The reality of God as being the Only God is expressed in diverse terms, sometimes in what appears to be contradictory terms, yet keeping the essence of the affirmation that there is One and Only One Creator.

Hinduism

In brief, Hinduism states that Brahma sprang from the cosmic golden egg (mythical symbolism) and then created good and evil, and light and darkness from his own person. He also created the four types of beings: gods, demons, ancestors, and men (the first being Manu). Brahma then made all living creatures upon the earth (although in some versions of this story, Brahma’s son Daksa was responsible for this). In the process of creating, perhaps in a moment of distraction, the demons were born from Brahma’s thigh. So, he abandoned his own body, which then became Night. After Brahma created good gods, he abandoned his body once again, which then became Day, hence demons, representing evil, ruled the night, and gods, the forces of goodness, ruled the day. Brahma then created ancestors and men, each time again abandoning His body, so that they became Dusk and Dawn, respectively. This process of creation repeats itself every eon. Brahma then appointed Shiva to rule over humanity, although in later myths, Brahma becomes a servant of Shiva. (4)

These images of God as Creator are difficult to accept for a western mentality accustomed to the biblical creation story that has fewer mythical elements, yet not exempted from symbolic metaphor as is the creation of Eve from a rib of Adam. Yet, the essence of the

religious message is saved in as much as God (Brahma), the Creator, is One, out of which all things are created. It is important to recognize that religious teachings are more often than not revealed in symbols, which are not intended to be understood literally.

The Hindi description of the existence of an afterlife is based on a fundamental belief, that *souls are immortal and imperishable*. A soul is part of *jiva*, the limited being, who is subject to the impurities of attachment, delusion, and laws of karma. Death is therefore not a great calamity, not an end of all, but rather a natural process in the existence of *jiva* (being) as a separate entity, a resting period during which it recuperates, reassembles its resources, adjusts its course and returns to the earth to continue its journey. In Hinduism, unless a soul is liberated, neither life nor after life is permanent. They are both part of a grand illusion.

The Bhagavad Gita describes two paths along which souls travel after death. One is the path of the Sun, also known as the bright path, or the Path of Gods, and the other is the Path of the Moon, also known as the dark path, and the path of the ancestors. When a soul travels along the Path of the Sun, it never returns, while those who travel along the Path of the Moon return. (8.24). How does one attain the Path of the Sun attained? Lord Krishna provides the clue in the following verses:

“Controlling all the openings of the body, with the mind established in the heart, fixing the prana in the self at the top of the head establishing oneself in the Yoga, uttering the monosyllable AUM, which is Brahman, who leaves the body remembering Me, he achieves the highest goal. (8.12-13)

In the same chapter we are also informed that all worlds including that of Brahma are subject to rebirth, but on reaching Him there is no more birth.

What happens to a soul after the physical death of an individual depends upon many factors, such as:

- *His previous deeds.* If a person has committed many bad deeds in his life, he will go to the lower worlds and suffer from the consequences of his evil actions. On the contrary if he performed good deeds, he would go to the higher Sun filled worlds and enjoy the life there.
- *His state of mind* at the time of death. The thoughts and desires that were predominant in his consciousness at the time of his death, decides in which direction the jiva will travel and in what form it will appear again. If he is thinking of God at the time of his death, he will go to the highest world.
- *The moment of his death.* It is believed that if a person dies on a battlefield, he will attain the heaven of the warriors.
- *The activities of his children;* that is whether they perform the funeral rites in the prescribed manner. There is a belief that if funeral rites are not performed according to the tradition, it will delay the journey of the souls to their respective worlds.
- *The grace of God.* God in the form of a personal deity may often modify the fate of an individual and change the course of his or her after life. There are instances where God rescued his devotees from the hands of the messengers of death and placed them in the highest heaven in recognition of their meritorious deeds.

A *jiva* that goes to heaven, will enjoy the pleasures of heaven and, in the end, will realize that seeking heavenly pleasures is not the ultimate goal since however intense these pleasures may be, they would not last long. A soul which falls into the darker world gets a taste of the horror of the evil it tried to promote on earth, with a multiplier effect and with an intensity and severity that would make it realize the horrors of evil. Thus, in either case, the purpose of heaven and hell is to impart an attitude of wisdom and detachment to the souls.

It is not necessary that after death a *jiva* should go to only one world. Depending upon its activities on earth, it may stay in many

worlds, one after another, before returning to the earth. It may stay in some hellish worlds before moving to the heavenly worlds or vice versa. Whatever may be the pattern, at the end of it, the soul should have learned some important lessons for its further journey on earth.

However, how far these lessons will leave their imprint upon the souls and mold their future lives, we do not know because once they return to the earth consciousness, because of the power of maya, may forget much of what they have learned or unlearned and revert to their old ways. Hence the need for many lives and learning and relearning the same lessons, until they become an integral part of a *jiva's* samskara (education). (5)

Extracting the essence of Hinduism's teaching on the afterlife these seem to be valid propositions:

- First, man is created with an *immortal and imperishable soul*.
- This is the true essence of any human. The soul is present as a component of the physical body, *jiva* (being), which limits its earthly experience submitting the individual to the laws of karma.
- Death is not an end of all, but a natural process in the physical existence of a *jiva*. It is experienced as a resting period during which the soul recuperates, adjusts its course and returns to the earth to continue its journey of subsequent learning experiences to be able to reach unity with Braham.
- The afterlife journey of all souls is conditioned to the good deeds or bad actions they freely made while incarnated in a physical body. They will thus experience a heavenly state as reward for their good actions or a taste of horror for their bad actions. These will be temporal moments of lessons learned that will help them purify their soul in the next reincarnation.
- The afterlife might be a succession of stages of spiritual growth until the soul is ready to become one with Brahma. At that stage there will not be need for a rebirth because it will be a heavenly constant state of being.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism's belief with respect to the afterlife went through a similar process of elaboration as Hinduism. Zoroaster, the Prophet founder (also spelled Zarathustra), was born around 628 BCE, possibly in Rhages, Iran— and died in 551 BCE.

The foundation of Zoroaster's view of the afterlife was based on his Teaching of one God, whom he referred to as Ahura Mazda, or the "Wise Lord". His teachings were set forth in the Avesta. It is believed to have been composed in Eastern Persia no later than 550 BCE. (6)

Another source proposes that the present Avesta was assembled from remnants of writings and standardized under the Sāsānian kings (3rd—7th century CE). The Sasanian Empire (also spelled Sassanian, Sasanid or Sassanid) was the last pre-Islamic Persian empire, established in 224 CE by Ardashir I, son of Papak, descendant of Sasan. The Empire lasted until 651 CE when it was overthrown by the Arab Caliphate. (7)

Research estimates that the teachings of the Avesta were written at the earliest a few years after Zoroaster's death; but more conservative estimate it was about 780 years after the passing of the Prophet. Parallel to Hinduism, many of the original Teachings of Zoroaster concerning the afterlife could have been modified or interpreted in a slightly different way from his original Teachings. We will identify some of the different interpretations and extract what appears to be a solid explanation of that new reality to which we all have to face one day.

Zoroastrianism belief in the afterlife

The first and foremost principle, as with Hinduism is that there is only One God named Ahura Mazda who was the Creator of heaven and earth—i.e., of the material and the spiritual world. He is the source of the alternation of light and darkness, the sovereign lawgiver, and the very center of nature.

In the Gāthās, the early hymns, many of which may have been written by Zarathustra, are eschatological (concerned with the last days). Almost every passage contains some reference to the fate awaiting individuals in the afterlife. Each act, utterance, and thought is viewed as being related to an existence after death. The earthly state is connected with a state beyond, in which the Wise Lord will reward the good *acst* (speech), and thoughts and punish the bad. This motive for doing good seems to be the strongest point in Zarathustra's teaching. (8)

The soul, created by Ahura Mazda, is immortal and will be judged immediately after the death of the body. At the time of death, the soul must pass over a narrow bridge, called the Chinvat Bridge, which separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. All souls must cross the bridge upon death. The bridge is guarded by two four-eyed dogs. A very "earthly" image in as much as a bridge is the medium that anyone must use if he wishes to cross over the gap that impedes the entrance.

The Bridge's appearance varies depending on the observer's *asha*, or level of righteousness. As related in the text known as the Bundahishn, if a person has been wicked, the bridge will appear narrow and the demon Vizaresh will emerge and drag their soul into the *druī-demana* (the House of Lies), a place of eternal punishment and suffering. If a person's good thoughts, words and deeds in life are many, the bridge will be wide enough to cross, and the Daena, a spirit representing revelation, will appear and lead the soul into the House of Song. Those souls that successfully cross the bridge are united with Ahura Mazda. (9)

At the entrance to the bridge stands the *daenā*, or conscience, a maiden who becomes identified with the individual soul. The good souls see a beautiful and dignified woman, while the evil souls see a witch. The good, led by the maiden, will pass over to the "House of Songs" or Paradise as angel-like beings who will serve as guardians of the living good people. The souls of those who have lived evil lives will be attacked by the witch and will fall as demons into the dark cold ravine or "House of Lies" that is Hell. According to some sources, it is the bridge itself, Chinvat, that decides on the fate of

souls. Other sources say Ahura Mazda himself makes the judgment, and still others say that Mithra presides over an actual trial of the individual, who must plead his or her own case. (10)

Zarathustra, goes beyond this, announcing an end phase for the visible world, “the last turn of creation.” In this last phase, Ahriman (the personification of evil) will be destroyed, and the world will be wonderfully renewed and be inhabited by the good, who will live in paradisiacal joy. Later forms of Zoroastrianism teach a resurrection of the dead, a teaching for which some basis may be found in the Gāthās. Through the resurrection, the renewal of the world bestows a last fulfillment on the followers of the Wise Lord. (11)

Another source adds the followings aspects to the above description that is worthwhile mentioning since they enrich the picture of the afterlife. To start it must be said that there are three basic moral principles that guide the life of a Zoroastrian:

- *Humata*, “Good Thoughts,” the intention or moral resolution to abide by Asha, the right order of things.
- *Hukhata*, “Good Words,” the communication of that intention.
- *Havarashta*, “Good Deeds,” the realization in action of that intention.

What happens after death? According to this version, after the death of the body, the soul remains in this world for three days and nights, in the care of *Sraosha*, one of the Yazatas or angels. During this period, prayers are said, and rituals performed to assure a safe passage of the soul into the spiritual realm. On the dawn of the fourth day, the spirit is believed to have crossed over to the other world, where it arrives at the allegorical Chinvat Bridge.

- At the *Chinvat Bridge*, the soul meets a maiden who is the embodiment of all the good words, thoughts, and deeds of its preceding life. If the soul has led a righteous life (one in accord with the divine Plan), the maiden appears in a beautiful form. If not, she appears as an ugly hag.

This image, fair or foul, confronts the soul, and the soul acknowledges that the image is an embodiment of its own actions and thereby judges itself, knowing whether it is worthy to cross over the bridge to the other side or must return to earth to learn further lessons.

- By another account, after the soul meets its own image, it appears before a heavenly tribunal, where divine justice is administered. Good souls go to a heaven called Vahishta Ahu, the Excellent Abode. Evil souls are consigned to a hell called Achista Ahu, the Worst Existence. One account reflects a belief in reincarnation; the other does not.
- In the oldest Zoroastrian scriptures, heaven and hell are not places, but states of mind that result from right or wrong choices. Zoroaster spoke of the “*drujo demana*” or “House of Lies” and the “*garo demana*” or “House of Song,” to which souls are sent. Some say that the fall of the soul into the House of Lies means a return of the soul to earth, the realm of unreality or lies. (12)

Extracting the essence of Zoroastrianism’s teaching on the afterlife, these seem to be valid propositions:

- There is only One God, Ahura Mazda, who is the creator of heaven and earth—i.e., of the material and the spiritual world. He is the source of the alternation of light and darkness, the sovereign lawgiver, and the very center of nature.
- The soul, created by Ahura Mazda is immortal and will be judged immediately after the death of the body.
- The judgment will be based on the evil lives or the good deeds the individual had done while alive.
- The persons that had lived evil lives will be sent to an undesirable place where the individuals must purify themselves from that evilness. In some versions it was considered to be hell, in others it was named the House of Lies.

- The good souls led by a maiden, will pass over to the “House of Songs” or Paradise as angel-like beings who will serve as guardians of the living good people.
- In the oldest Zoroastrian scriptures, heaven and hell are not places, but states of mind that result from right or wrong choices. Zoroaster spoke of the “*drujo demana*” or “House of Lies” and the “*garo demana*” or “House of Song,” to which souls are sent.

Summarizing the above propositions then we can conclude that Zoroastrianism proposed an afterlife that is based on the immortality of the soul created by God, Ahura Mazda. Depending on the evil life or righteous life lived on Earth, there will be a judgment by which the soul is sent to a place of bliss or darkness. Thus, the reward or punishment is based on the choices made that were turned into evil deeds or good actions. The next phase can be considered to be more a state of mind than a physical place.

Judaism

The belief of an afterlife in Judaism is based on the Hebrew Bible. The redaction of its books went through a process similar to that of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism. According to tradition, Moses wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, and Exodus were supposed to have been written probably around 1491 Bc), Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy later in time. These five first books are the foundation books of Judaism. New biblical researchers have found enough clues to qualify the belief that Moses was the direct author of these books by stating that he might have written portions of Genesis, and of Exodus, but that he inspired the other books of the Pentateuch in the spirit in which they were written because he either gave the instructions of the establishment of the Priesthood while the Hebrews were making their journey through the desert to the Promised Land as it appears in the book of Leviticus or that he expressed his choice of Joshua to succeed him as

it appears in the book of Numbers. Yet, Moses's own death could not have been written by him as it appears in the Deuteronomy.

A current within the Jewish scholars' state that the Oral Torah was given to Moses at Mount Sinai, which, according to the tradition of Orthodox Judaism, occurred in 1312 BCE. The Orthodox rabbinic tradition holds that the Written Torah was recorded during the following forty years, though many non-Orthodox Jewish scholars affirm the modern scholarly consensus that the Written Torah had multiple authors and was written over a period of centuries.

King David was considered by many scholars to have decreed that the oral traditions be written, and that his royal decree during his reign spearheaded the process of bringing together various renditions of the same oral tales into a uniform version. Finally, Deuteronomy is written in a form of Hebrew that belongs to a period much later than Moses's time, and shows evidence of having been compiled as a resume and correction of specific information from the other four books under the reign of the Persians who, after the defeat of Nebuchadnezzar, King of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, by Cyrus the Great of Persia, welcomed the Jews and allowed them to practice their faith, even including the leader of the Jewish community among his closest advisors. (13)

In fact, by the best estimates of scholars, the final complete version of the Pentateuch also took place after 539 BCE when Cyrus the Great conquered the Neo-Babylonian Empire. This consensus echoes a traditional Jewish view that gives Ezra and Nehemiah, two of the leaders of the Jewish community upon its return to the Holy Land from Babylon, a pivotal role in its promulgation. (14)

The rest of the books of which make up what is known today in Christianity and many non-Jews as the Old Testament were written over many years depicting the life of the Hebrews/Jews as they became a nation, and then fell to various conquering kingdoms. The Old Testament can be considered as the history of the Hebrew people of almost one thousand years as it lived its historical events and developed a religious collective consciousness of being God's chosen people, guided by Him in their victories and supported by Him in their defeats.

During the long period of composition of what is now considered the Old Testament, a belief in the afterlife develops gradually going through several distinct stages of understanding and incorporation into the daily lives of the Jewish nation.

Structure of the belief in the afterlife

The nature of this afterlife is not fully clear in the first books of the Old Testament. It appears that early Hebrews believed that the dead would have a shadowy kind of existence in an unknown next world, a ghostly realm referred to as “Sheol” (The Hole), whereas the prophets and leaders “slept with their Fathers” when they passed on.

Even though this was a progressive belief that gets clearer as the Old Testaments books are written, one statement is present from the very beginning of the story of the Hebrew people. That is, that God in only one, to whom all worship is given.

And God spake all these words, saying,² I *am* the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: ⁵ thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God. (Exo. 20, 1-5)

God presents Himself as the Lord, the one and only God of the people of Israel,

For **I am** the **Lord your** God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for **I am** holy. (Levi. 11:44)–(emphasis by author)

And that there is no other God beside him. He has no equal.

I *am* the Lord, and *there is none* else, *there is no God beside me*: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me. (Isaiah 45:5)–(emphasis by author)

If there is one teaching given to humanity by Judaism that has withstood millennia of persecution, it was the staunch belief and affirmation that there is only One God that has no rival and stands autonomous from all other gods, and from the creation itself.

Additionally, there is the unquestionable affirmation that God, besides being the creator of all physical reality, took special care in the creation of man as expressed in Genesis, the first book of the Bible:

And God said, Let us *make man in our image, after our likeness*: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (Gen. 1:26)–
(emphasis by author)

With this affirmation, the basis for the soul's immortality is given in as much as if man were created in the "image and likeness of God" he would receive, in some measure, the essential attribute of God of eternity, even though man lived it in a limited manner given his state of mortality. This did not deny the possibility that he would continue to live on in the afterlife after making the transition of death.

The earliest specific biblical mention of someone living in the afterlife is Enoch. After Enoch lived a life that was pleasing to God, the Bible says that God took him: "**Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away**". (Gen. 5:24) Because Enoch went to be with the Lord, he served as an example for others who were to follow. This was confirmed in the same book when referring to Abraham's future after his death: "**You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age**". (Gen. 15:15) Given the context, the expression "to be gathered with his people" does not seem to mean that he was buried in the family tomb. It contains the hope of a reunion with his ancestors beyond the grave. (15)

As the centuries progressed, however, the afterlife came into clearer focus, manifesting in a belief in bodily resurrection on the last day. The clearest passages referring to this belief are found in Daniel and 2 Maccabees. In the former, we read:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Dan. 12:2).

In Maccabees this passage is also quite explicit:

He [Judah] also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. (2 Macc. 12:43-45).

Job is the epitome of the just man put to the extreme test of losing all: his total wealth, his children, and his health. Yet he stands firm in his conviction that he will attain God's presence upon dying and this is the ultimate aspiration he can have. Through all his suffering, he still expressed hope that there was something better after this life:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end
He will stand upon the earth and after my skin has
been destroyed, then my flesh I shall see God, whom
I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, not
another My heart faints within me. (Job 19:25-27)

Yet, this afterlife existence is not clearly defined. The place of arrival, called the "*sheol*" is described, as mentioned above, as a rather bleak place, a "neutral" type of existence. The "*sheol*" was thought to be down in the lowest parts of the earth (Deut. 32:22). Unlike this world, *Sheol* is devoid of love, hate, envy, work, thought, knowledge, and wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:6,10). Descriptions are bleak: There is no light (Job 10:21-22 ; Psalms 88:6, 12), no remembrance (Psalm 6:5 ; Eccl 9:5), no praise of God (Psalm 6:5 ; Isa 38:18). Its inhabitants are weak, trembling shades (Job 26:5 ; Psalm 88:10-12 ; Isa 14:9-10) who can never hope to escape from its gates (Job 10:21 ; 17:13-16 ; Isa 38:10). *Sheol* is like a ravenous beast that swallows the living

without being sated (Isa 5:14). Some thought the dead were cut off from God (Isa 38:11); while others believed that God’s presence reached even to *Sheol* (Psalm 139:8). (16)

Some Psalms show a progression from having no belief in afterlife:

“The dead do not praise the Lord” (Psalm 115: 17)

to one of apparent everlasting nearness to the Lord:

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. (Psalm 16:10)

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. ... And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:4,6)

The progression in defining the afterlife goes from Enoch being taken away alive to be with God (Gen. 5:24) to the statements in Job, the Psalms, Isaiah, and Daniel, that gave individuals a hope of some type of life beyond this one. Those who died had immediate access to the presence of the Lord when He took them to Himself. They were waiting a future time when their bodies would be raised. The warnings of the Lord that the living should not attempt to contact the dead gives further testimony of existence in the afterlife. (17)

Toward the end of the Old Testament (OT), God revealed that there will be a resurrection of the dead. God will swallow up Death (Isa 25:8). The faithful will be rewarded with everlasting life while the rest will experience eternal contempt (Dan 12:2). This way of considering an afterlife presupposes some form of immortality of the soul for one cannot be with the Lord if the soul is not alive. Ps 23:4 proposes that such form of existence is to “**dwell in the house of the Lord forever**”. It was, however, the New Testament, that would reveal a more detailed description of the next world.

In summary, the review of the Hebrew texts and other writings seen as authoritative regarding the afterlife allows for the following propositions:

- There is no other God beside Him. He is the Only God, the Creator of all that is, including man's soul, which contains some form of immortality.
- When the person dies, he makes the transition into the afterlife, into a place called "*sheol*".
- Unlike this world, *Sheol* is devoid of love, hate, envy, work, thought, knowledge, and wisdom. There is no light, no praise of God. Its inhabitants are weak, trembling shades who can never hope to escape from it. *Sheol* swallows the living constantly. Some thought the dead were cut off from God, while others believed that God's presence reached even to *Sheol*.
- Toward the end of the Old Testament period, God reveals that there will be a resurrection of the dead as part of an end time and renewal/purification of humanity, although at first some Jewish leaders thought that the resurrection applied to each individual according to how he or she lived. During this event, "God will swallow up Death" (Isa 2:8).
- By the end of the OT period, the resurrection would come to mean a unique event relevant to all at some undefined point in history. As part of this event, the faithful would be rewarded with everlasting life while the rest would experience eternal contempt (Dan 12:2). This theology developed further during the inter-testamental period.

The next religion that was born and developed before Christianity was Buddhism. To avoid interrupting the chronology of development of the belief in the afterlife, we will now present the Buddhist belief in the afterlife.

Buddhism

Buddhism is a faith that was founded by Siddhartha Gautama ("the Buddha") more than 2,500 years ago in India. According to the most accepted tradition Buddha was born approximately 563–480 BCE in Lumbini, in present day Nepal and died approximately in 400 BCE.

His teachings were recorded as the Pali Canon, which was preserved in Sri Lanka where it was first written down in the first century BCE and the Theravaden Pali textual tradition developed there. The earliest known Buddhist manuscripts, recovered from the ancient civilization of Gandhara in north central Pakistan (just south west of the capital Islamabad) are dated to the 1st century CE. (18)

Similar to the previous religions, the teachings of Buddha were not written down until more than 500 years after His death. The teachings relied heavily on the oral memorization of the texts which could have influenced the precision of Buddha's teachings. As with other religions the formal and authorized interpretation of the teachings was made by the religious leaders, which became the norm of how to understand the teachings.

Buddhist belief in afterlife

To appreciate Buddha's teachings, it is helpful to understand his point of departure, which is a bit different from that of the other religions that gives them the context in which they are best understood. Buddha was interested in finding out the solution to the overwhelming reality that he saw everywhere that man suffered continuously and that it was a basic human condition. When he asks the reasons why man suffers, he finds that suffering (dukkha) is permanent in the human condition because birth is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; association with the unpleasant is suffering; dissociation from the pleasant is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering. (Samyutta Nikaya 56,11)

Another aspect of suffering comes from the fierce attachment humans have to things and people. This desire makes us want to "grab" or "cling" to things that can never give lasting satisfaction because they are transient; nothing is really permanent, the world we live in is not static; it is always changing. Ignorance in perceiving that the world is impermanent, devoid of a self and in constant changing leads to suffering. The Buddha proclaimed that, in fact, the whole of existence is suffering.

So, he set out to find how to deal with suffering so that man could obtain some form of tranquility. He proposed that man first acknowledge his suffering as the byproduct of his attachment to all things. The way to liberate oneself from the chains of these attachments is to enter into a state of permanent detachment. This is not easy. It requires a dedicated discipline of meditation to awaken the higher consciousness of who one truly is. This consciousness will allow one to become aware of the multiple attachments one has and the need to gradually give them up until one reaches the state of Nirvana. At this stage none of these cravings and desires will have any hold on you or will determine who you are and who you can become.

To achieve this state, one must practice meditation constantly to neutralize those cravings and attachments. Even an excessive attachment to self should be controlled because such attachment can lead to envy or hatred of rivals, to pride, cruelty and when feeling threatened, to violence and destruction. The fierce desire for the things of this world impedes our inner progress, and when coupled with hatred, it brings on evil and violence on the world. (19)

Death then appears as a natural part of the life cycle. Buddhists believe that death simply leads to rebirth. According to Buddhism, everything that happens is the result of Karma—the law of cause and effect. Every action throughout a person's lifetime, both good and bad, influences their future. The way a person lives his or her life also affects the way they die. So, it is very important for a Buddhist to prepare for death by living in a good and kindly manner. They are encouraged to be true to themselves and to care for and about those around them. This is how they can achieve calmness and control at their time of death.

Within the Buddhist community, death has an important religious meaning. It marks the moment when new life begins through rebirth. For those left behind, it is a powerful reminder of Buddha's teachings. Every Buddhist must be prepared for death, because it can happen at any time. Because of this, it is important to make every moment count. Human birth is precious, and life has great value. (20)

The nature of the Afterlife is encompassed within the belief that through enlightenment, acquired by the discipline of meditation, a person will arrive at the State of Nirvana, the stage where all *karma* that constitutes the self is extinguished. Significantly, the Buddha said little about Nirvana because he felt that the alleviation of suffering was far more important, and that focusing on the goal of ultimate salvation would only lead to more attachments, and with them, more suffering. So rather than focus on Nirvana as a goal, lay Buddhists were encouraged to give donations of goods, services, or money to monks or monasteries; to chant or copy *sutras*; and to engage in other activities in order to gain merit that could lead to a more desirable rebirth, which, in turn, would bring them closer to enlightenment.

Notions of heaven and hell eventually became a part of popular Buddhism throughout Asia. These range from ideal surroundings such as the Pure Lands to horrific worlds of punishment and suffering. Illustrated “hell texts” are popular in some Buddhist countries, depicting in detail the punishments one can expect for a host of specific misdeeds, ranging from wearing tight blue jeans to murder.

As should be evident, there is no single, consistent notion of the afterlife and salvation within Buddhism. There are diverse and contradictory ideas even within individual countries. This is the result of the merging of Buddhism with pre-existing conceptions, contradictions between scholarly and popular understandings, and the evolution of ideas within Buddhism throughout the life of the religion. (21)

Dharma Data: Rebirth

Buddhism teaches that when a person dies, they are reborn, and that this process of death and rebirth will continue until Nirvana is attained. This raises the question: “What is “the person?”” Most religions believe that the core of the person, the real person, is the soul, a non-material and eternal entity that survives in the afterlife. Buddhism, on the other hand, says that the person is made up of thoughts, feelings and perceptions interacting with the body in

a dynamic and constantly changing way. At death, this stream of mental energy is re-established in a new body. Thus, Buddhism is able to explain the continuity of the individual without recourse to the belief in an “eternal soul”, an idea that contradicts the universal truth of impermanence. Different Buddhist traditions explain the process of rebirth differently. Some say that rebirth takes place immediately; others say after 49 days. Some say that there is an intermediate state (*antarabhava*), and others that there is not. All agree, however, that the circumstances into which one is reborn are conditioned on the total karma created in the previous life.

Other critics claim that rebirth *was not a part* of the Buddha’s original teachings, or that the Buddha copied the idea of rebirth from the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation. Both these claims are contradicted by the evidence. The doctrine of rebirth is an integral part of the earliest records of the Buddha’s teachings as preserved in the Pali Tipitaka, and there is no evidence that it is a later interpolation. An examination of pre-Buddhist Hindu literature shows that the idea of reincarnation or rebirth was not widely accepted. It is not mentioned in either the Vedas or the Brahmana Sutras. Several Upanishads teach it while others condemn it as heresy. So, the idea was apparently current before the Buddha began promulgating His Teachings, but it was not widely accepted, and was certainly not a part of orthodox Hinduism, something that only happened much later, probably as a result of Buddhist influence. (22)

From a Buddhist perspective, what can be gleaned from so many diverse opinions of what happens after death? It is rather difficult to be precise given that there are widespread Buddhist scriptures embraced by Buddhists today. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that we cannot really know what Buddha taught, so I will avoid making definitive statements about what He actually taught.

Keeping this frame of reference, it seems safe to state that the present foremost Buddhist notion is that man’s goal in life is to become detached from all that creates suffering, which happens because humans are always craving to possess material things in the belief that possessing them will make him happy, and thereby not suffer.

But the reality of life is that everything is transient. Nothing is permanent and thus no matter how much one possesses, these treasures are transient and leave the individual suffering when he cannot cling to them when they are gone.

To avoid such suffering, Buddha proposes a way: total detachment that is achieved through the discipline acquired by constant meditation that will gradually take the individual to enlightenment that will permit him to reach Nirvana. At this stage, the person will have extinguished all karma from the past, which is created by the individual's free will decisions to not behave kindly or, the contrary, to behave such that others benefit. Any action that goes against the natural law creates such karma that needs to be expunged in the new rebirth.

Death is considered as a natural aspect of life since all things, including humans, eventually die. Death is a step that gives the person the possibility of being reborn and that this process of death and rebirth will continue until Nirvana is attained, which would be comparable to the "heaven" of other religions.

Keeping this frame of reference, present day Buddhism does not seem to support the view that there is an "eternal soul". If so, there is no heaven or hell to which one would go because rebirth into a different body happens very quickly. This will allow the individual to continue its journey of detachment in search of enlightenment, and eventually, attain Nirvana. Later, notions and diverse forms of heaven and hell eventually became a part of popular Buddhism throughout Asia.

Christian belief in the afterlife

Christianity's belief system was born mainly from the books that make up the New Testament. But since the majority of the early followers of Christ were originally Jews, they had deep roots in the perceived authority of the Hebrew Bible. The gospel writers and subsequent theologians did not do away with the Hebrew Bible, but added to it the Gospels and the letters of the Apostles. The Hebrew Bible became known as the Old Testament, and the Gospels and letters

became known as the New Testament; the fusion more commonly referred to as the Christian Bible, the foundation text of Christianity.

Christianity, now over 2,000 years old, elaborated over time a very complex afterlife belief. The original teachings of Jesus were set forth in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. The first one, Mark's Gospel, is documented to have been written around year 66 CE, the others following rapidly and by year 110 CE the four Gospels were completed. Compared to the previous religions, this is a remarkably short amount of time for these texts to have been written down making it possible to affirm that Jesus's teachings were basically the ones taught since there were only about 30 years difference between Jesus' death, around the year 33 CE, and the appearance of the first Gospel, Mark's.

The rest of the New Testament is composed of the Acts of the Apostles, also written by Luke; 13 letters of Paul to the Christian communities of Thessalonica, Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, Galatia, Philippi and to Timothy, Titus and Philemon. The letter to the Hebrews is long debated who wrote it, although it had been attributed to Paul. The last book of the New Testament, known as Revelation, is traditionally attributed to the apostle John, although the style points to a different form of writing, allowing biblical experts to conclude that the John of Revelation may have been a writer using the Apostle's name, or having the same name. Additional letters written by James, Peter, John and Jude are included as components of the New Testament text.

There is a perceptible elaboration of the afterlife description as it was presented by Jesus and then reflected upon by Paul and the other Apostle writers of the New Testament since their point of interpretation was based on the death and resurrection of Jesus and what that meant for the afterlife that any follower of Jesus would find when he would go through the death transition.

Jesus presentation of the afterlife heaven

Let us capture what Jesus added to the Old Testament belief on the afterlife that was new, encouraging and refreshing.

From the very beginning of His teachings, Jesus confirms the existence of an afterlife by referring to it as the Kingdom of Heaven. He clearly affirms its existence when He taught his disciples how to pray to the Father:

⁹After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in **heaven**, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in **heaven**. (Mat. 6: 9-10)

Jesus reveals that this place, heaven, is to be understood as the dwelling place of the Father, the One and Only God identified in the O.T., who is simultaneously the Lord of heaven:

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Mat. 5:16)

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. (Mat. 6:9)

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, (Lk. 10:21)

but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: (Mat.5:34)

Thus, heaven is presented as the natural dwelling place of the Father. If the image comes across as a physical place, it is qualified many times by Jesus that it is not, that it is a spiritual abode to which all souls can aspire to enter upon making the physical transition of death, and then receiving judgment on the lifestyle lived on earth. Then the individual will be allowed, or not, to enter into the spiritual heaven.

If the O.T., heaven was not presented as being a safe everlasting condition, Jesus's description allows us to develop an image of a safe place where there is no decay or loss of the spiritual treasures placed there,

but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: (Mat. 6:20)

Although heaven is the dwelling place where the Father resides, it is at the same time the dwelling place from where Jesus comes and where He sits at the right hand of power:

For I came down from **heaven**, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. (John 6:38)

And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of **heaven**. (Mk. 14:62)

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he (Jesus) was received up into **heaven**, and sat on the right hand of God. (Mk. 16:19)

Heaven is also the dwelling place from whence the Holy Spirit descends:

And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from **heaven** like a dove, and it abode upon him. (John 1:32)

A new aspect is introduced when Jesus said that heaven was the dwelling place of past prophets where they can be met once one attains heaven,

And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of **heaven**. (Mat. 8:11)

As well as being the spiritual residence of the angels,

For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in **heaven**. (Mk. 12:25) [correction per Review 10]

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into **heaven**, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see

this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. (Lk. 2:15)

To be able to enter into heaven, Jesus laid the foundation, when He explained that the condition of access is to do His Father's will, which was succinctly stated in the spiritual charter given by Yahweh in the ten commandments. To emphasize the point He presented Himself as the example to be followed when He affirmed that,

For I came down from **heaven**, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. (John 6:38)

But Jesus clarified that everyone is to do the Father's will regardless of how much people would like to praise Him,

Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Mat. 7:21)

Jesus also added a new, higher standard to the entrance in heaven, and that was following Him, which was the new additional way of doing God's Will. By following Jesus one can have a treasure in heaven:

Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in **heaven**: and come, follow me. (Lk.18:22)

Following Jesus in His invitation to live according to His teachings can bring forth suffering from those not wanting to hear the message and accept its life changing implications. Yet, those persecuted in His name will have a great reward in heaven,

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. (Lk.6:22-23)

Suffering imposed by those rejecting Jesus message and living in a sinful condition are bound to have a just punishment for their transgressions. If so, such punishment will come from heaven as in the days of Sodom,

but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from **heaven**, and destroyed *them* all. (Lk. 17:29)

Yet, in Jesus's new presentation, His heavenly Father is an ever-forgiving God who dispenses such forgiveness from heaven as an answer to a prayer of forgiveness made with a sincere heart,

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in **heaven** may forgive you your trespasses. (Mk. 11:25)

The event is of such importance that there will be great joy and celebration in heaven at one man's repentance of his sins,

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in **heaven** over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. (Lk. 15:7)

Heaven is also the dwelling place from which spiritual nourishment—the one that gives eternal life to humans—comes down, as bread from God,

For the bread of God is he which cometh down from **heaven**, and giveth life unto the world. (John 6:33)

I am the living bread which came down from **heaven**: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:51)

Afterlife as described by the Apostles

When Paul and the other Apostle writers reflected on the afterlife, they had to take into account the extraordinary experience of the death and Resurrection of Jesus that changed their lives forever. Although they had recognized Him as the so long waited Messiah, they had initially thought Jesus was the expected political Messiah that would liberate them from Rome's suffocating grip on the Jewish nation. After the Resurrection, they had to change their perception of what kind of Messiah Jesus was.

Paul, as well as Peter and James, had come to understand that Jesus reference to His Kingdom was not an earthly one, but a heavenly one. They also had acknowledged Jesus's divine origin as the Son of God, as was affirmed by Peter,

⁶⁸ Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. (John 6: 68-69)

Jesus's sacrifice on the cross must then have a deeper meaning than the physical event. Paul found the answer when he reflected on Jesus's divine origin and linked His death as obedience to His Father's Will with Adam's disobedience to God's commandment to not eat of the fruit of the tree which was in the midst of the garden (Gen. 3:3). The penalty, for such disobedience, according to the biblical story that Paul and the Jews at that time believed to have been a historical event, was death and suffering for all descendants of Adam.

Paul found in Jesus's complete obedience to the Father's will, the redemptive act by which humanity, born to spiritual death after Adam, was liberated from such destiny, that of bearing for all time the sin of disobedience. In this manner Paul laid down the bridge between the O.T. teaching of Adam's sin of disobedience whose price was death, to the one of salvation and redemption as obtained by Jesus's sacrifice on the cross as he expressed it in his letter to the Christian Romans.

¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. (Romans 5:18-20)

Jesus' death on the cross, being totally innocent of the crime of which He was accused, was interpreted as the redemptive act for humanity's sins committed since Eve's and Adam's transgression of God's Commandment to not eat of the tree of knowledge found in the Garden of Eden. The lost right to enter heaven is rescued by Jesus's sacrifice of perfect obedience. All humans regain the passage ticket to be able to enter heaven since the divine price has been laid down for all time to come. Yet, everyone must earn that passage ticket by living the life according to God's Will, and each one will be judged accordingly to the way he lives his life, in righteousness to be awarded entrance to heaven, or in hell if dying in sin.

This is one instance, in which Paul expressed this new reality,

For we must all appear before the **judgment** seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10)

The Apostle Peter backs Paul when he confirmed that,

But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of **judgment** and perdition of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:7)

John, in the book of Revelation, also offers a vivid image of such judgment day and the corresponding punishment:

"The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of

life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:13-15)

The interpreters after the Apostles added several new afterlife perspectives, especially in reference to the type of punishment or reward a Christian would receive if he died in sin or not. They based their reflections on the Gospel’s description of hell as being a place of fire, although according to Jesus, hell was originally intended for Satan and the demons (Matt. 25:41).

In the New Testament, the notion of hell is more clearly expressed, but still not in a systematic way. In many cases, “death” and “destruction” are the only penalties mentioned for rejecting God (Matthew 7:13, John 3:16, Acts 4:12, Romans 6:23, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, James 1:15). A few New Testament passages support the notion that hell as a place of fire, and in some cases of eternal torment:

⁴³ And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that *never shall be quenched*: (Mark 9:43)

“Then he [the King] will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the *eternal* fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” (Matthew 25:41)

“The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile...the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8)

On the other hand, meritorious deeds, such as suffering for the kingdom of God, bring on the reward of heaven,

⁵ Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer. (2 Thessalonians 1:5)

Hell per Catholic Church fathers

The Church theologians and writers of the period, known as the Church Fathers, were influential Christians who established the intellectual and doctrinal foundations of Christianity. Most recognized were Gregory I, Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome. There were also renown theologians among the Greek fathers, the Latin Fathers, and Syriac Fathers who all contributed to establishing the firm dogmas of Christianity that were to reign until today. The historical period during which they flourished is also referred to by scholars as the Patristic Era which ended around 700 CE. During the period they defined the doctrine of hell as a place of eternal torment, which was generally seen as physical in nature.

In modern Christian views

The period between the death of the individual Christian and his/her final resurrection as explained by the Church Fathers brought about the question of what happens then to the dead person. Two basic views were developed. One view is that of an individual judgment, which takes place immediately after death and brings the individual to an interim state, from which he enters into the realm of bliss or that of perdition. The idea of an individual judgment, however, cannot be readily harmonized with the concept of the general Last Judgment on the day of the general resurrection of the dead. It anticipates the decision of the general judgment and thus deprives the notion of the Last Judgment of its significance. A second view, therefore, also prevailed: the sleep of the soul—i.e., the soul of the dead person enters into a sleeping state that continues until the Last Judgment, which will occur after the general resurrection. At the Last Judgment the resurrected will be assigned either to eternal life or eternal damnation. This conception, accepted in many churches, contains many discrepancies, especially the abandonment of the fundamental idea of the continuity of personal life.

In many modern Christian views, hell is seen as a logical extension of the free will of mankind to reject God's gracious advances. Some

modern Christians question hell's eternal nature in favor of some form of universalism (i.e. that all are saved in the end) others prefer an annihilationist perspective (i.e. that wicked souls are eventually destroyed). (23)

Islam

The belief in the afterlife was declared to be real in the Qur'an, the book that compiled all the revelations made to Muhammad through the archangel Gabriel (Jibril) over a period of some 23 years, between December 22, 609 CE, when Muhammad was 40, and concluding in 632, the year of his death. (24)

The Qur'an as it is known in the present, was first compiled into book format by Zayd ibn Thabit and other scribes under the third caliph Uthman ibn Affan, the third leader of the Muslim community, in about A.D. 650, (644–56). For this reason, the Qur'an as it exists today is also known as the Uthmanic codex. The compilers used written fragments that were circulating in several cities, but the suras were mostly obtained from those that had memorized them. (25)

It must be noted that this is first time that such a short lapse of time occurred (about 18 years after the death of Muhammad) between the verbal teachings of the Prophet Founder of a religion and an official text of his teachings were approved. Such expedient process ensured that the teachings written down were the original teachings of Muhammad, thus avoiding misinterpretations or modifications introduced when writing down the teachings of the Prophet as it happened with previous Revelations.

Heaven is a reality

As with the previous religions, Islam's foundation for the belief in an afterlife is grounded on the affirmation that heaven is created by God (Allah) as is the whole universe, the earth and all that lives within and on it. A couple of quotes will suffice,

Say: “O **Allah! Creator** of the heavens and the earth!
(Chap. 39 The Troops- Az-Zumar: verse 46)

Such is **Allah**, your **Lord**, the **Creator** of all things,
there is no god but He: (Chap. 40 The Forgiver—
Ghafir: verse 62)

Similar to Judaism and Christianity, heaven is also the dwelling place of Allah, and of the angels,

It is He Who is Allah in **heaven** and Allah on earth;
and He is full of Wisdom and Knowledge (Chap. 43
Ornaments of Gold -Az-Zukhruf: Verse 84)

And thou wilt **see the angels** surrounding the Throne
(**Divine**) on all sides, singing Glory and Praise to their
Lord... “Praise be to **Allah**, the **Lord** of the Worlds!”
(Chap. 39 The Troops—Az-Zumar: Verse 75)

The reality of heaven is unimaginable. In comparing this world with the Hereafter, the Prophet Muhammad said: “**The value of this world compared to that of the Hereafter is like what your finger brings from the sea when you put it in and then take it out**”. The meaning is that, the value of this world compared to that of the Hereafter is like the drops of water compared to the sea. (26)

The transition

When a person dies, his soul is separated from his body. What happens before, during, and after death, is not clear and different Islamic schools of thought may end up with different conclusions. One canonical idea is that the angel of death (Arabic: Malak al-Maut) appears to the dying to take out their souls. The sinners’ souls are extracted in the most painful way while the righteous are treated easily.

To enter heaven the deceased must go through a judgment

Another belief, although appearing relatively late in Islamic traditions, adds that, after the burial, two angels—Munkar and Nakir—come to question the dead person in order to test his faith. The righteous believers that answer correctly will live in peace and comfort while the sinners and disbelievers will fail and punishments ensue.

Believing in an afterlife is one of the six articles of faith in Islam. Yet, the abode of the deceased is up for debate. They may either be in heaven/hell, in an intermediary state, or “sleep” until the arrival of the great resurrection. (27) It should be noted the similarity to Christianity’s several interpretations.

There will be a time period or stage between death and the end of the world. On that day the whole universe will be destroyed, and the dead will be resurrected to stand before God. This belief also follows closely Christianity’s Judgment Day at the end of times. That day will be beginning of a life that will never end, and on that day every person will be rewarded by God according to his/her good or evil deeds. Thus, a final reward or punishment will be given to those that lived righteous or evil lives.

In one, of many suras, it is expressed in this manner:

Say: “It is Allah Who gives you life, then gives you death; then He will gather you together for the Day of Judgment about which there is no doubt”: But most men do not understand. (Chap. 45 Crouching—Al-Jathiva: verse 26)

Reward and Punishment

In the following sura the reward and punishment are spelled out quite clearly:

That He may reward those who believe and work deeds of righteousness: for such is Forgiveness and a Sustenance Most Generous.

But those who strive against Our Signs, to frustrate them,- for such will be a Penalty,- a Punishment most humiliating. (Chap. 34 Saba—Verse 4, 5)

The reward will be forever,

And those who believe and do good deeds, they are dwellers of Paradise, they dwell their forever. (Chap. 2:82)

The Day of Resurrection will be the Day when God's attributes of Justice and Mercy will be in full manifestation. God will shower His mercy on those who suffered for His sake in the worldly life, believing that an eternal bliss was awaiting them. But those who abused the bounties of God, caring nothing for the life to come, will be in a miserable state. (28) Such persons will realize their folly only at the time of their death as expressed vividly in the following suras:

Then those whose balance (of good deeds) is heavy,- they will attain salvation: But those whose balance is light, will be those who have lost their souls, in Hell will they abide. The Fire will burn their faces, and they will therein grin, with their lips displaced. (Quran, 23: 102-104)

And if any of you Turn back from their faith and die in unbelief, their works will bear no fruit in this life and in the Hereafter; they will be companions of the Fire and will abide therein. (Chap. 2 The Cow-Al-Bagara: verse 217)

Character of the Hereafter life

Later interpreters affirmed that life in the Hereafter is not only spiritual but physical as well. In that perspective, it would be safe to affirm that the deceased would live in the afterlife with their souls and bodies. Very much the same way that Christianity affirmed what would be in the Final Judgment Day after the Resurrection

and Judgement of all. Those judged to have lived a righteous life will merit entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven with their resurrected body and soul to enjoy forever a state of bliss. Those judged to have lived an ungodly life will suffer in hell indefinitely.

Summarizing Islam's teaching on the afterlife

As with the beliefs of the previous religions, Islam coincides with several of their affirmations on the afterlife.

- The foundation for the existence of the afterlife is the same. God is the creator of all that is, including man. When he created man, God did it in a very special manner, He gave man a soul that expresses the "image and likeness of God".
- God dwells in heaven or hereafter where all souls are invited to return after going through the death transition.
- The hereafter is a station of bliss and everlasting proximity to God as the ultimate desire of the soul.
- The right to enter this heavenly state is achieved through the good deeds one does in the earthly life, in the acknowledgement of God's Will in the Revelation given by his Prophet and living according to His commandments.
- The soul receives an immediate judgment that decides if he/she can enter heaven or not. If the soul cannot enter, hell is the place where it will go.

Value of past religions' teachings on the Afterlife

To approach the subject on the possibility of an afterlife existence, religions of the past and the present offer a unique perspective: that the founders of those religions proved to be Messengers of God giving those that heard them a rich Revelation concerning the spiritual world, the existence of God, His Essence, His Creative power as the source of all that exists, including humans. These religions affirmed

categorically that when God created humans, He did it in a very special way: he created them “in His own image and likeness”.

This affirmation of the distinctive characteristic of humans imparted by God that makes them essentially different from the rest of physical reality is the source of reflection of what constitutes the essence of man and the overall conclusion that can be made from the content of religion is that in some mysterious way, every human being carries within a “spark of the divinity” of God when He created each one; that spark we call the soul. This activating principle and source of permanent energy of existence is the one that maintains all humans present in this time-space frame in which we live our earthly lives.

God has proclaimed Himself Eternal and Self-subsisting as stated by the multiple times that Bahá'u'lláh ends His prayers evoking these Attributes of God. They are, in a very modest and limited way, reflected in our human created essence. So, if we have a soul that reflects God's Attributes, in some manner, every soul is destined to live in a state of immortality, as a pale reflection of God's Eternal Being.

The transition of our physical reality to a new state of being, when we cross over through the door we call “death” is intrinsically linked to what those Prophet founders of the past religions have told us in various ways, that our souls keep on living in a new stage of existence, in a “heaven or hereafter” that is glorious, indescribable, fulfilling and never ceasing. But entering heaven is not gratuitous. Earning that state of being depends on how we express our humanity in a way that reflects the heavenly attributes of God, such as generosity in sharing with those in need what we have, empathy with the pain of those suffering, forgiveness given to those that have offended or grieved us, patience with others' faults, dedication to the betterment of the living conditions of those who do not have the resources to live a dignified existence, refraining from hurting others because we dislike them, and sharing our knowledge and wisdom without expecting any reward.

The entrance to this new stage of spiritual growth is thus conditioned to how we live our lives according to the teachings of those spiritual Guides that have come to let us know what the most efficient behaviors are that we have to carry vis-a-vis our neighbors,

friends, relatives, and even our enemies, which will allow our souls to grow to the spiritual level, which they have been destined to grow.

That new level of spiritual growth is promised to be of unfathomable beauty, peace, and fulfillment. But each one has to make the effort; take on the struggle, the battle to overcome the egotistical self that is always prompt to bring down the other in order to be greater than the others, to control, to overpower, to demean the ones considered to be rivals, an enemy or an obstacle to obtain that which we deemed absolutely necessary to become who we want to be, regardless of how much harm it might inflict on the rest.

We can now ask if there has been any account given by anyone that such an afterlife exists, and if so, what can they tell us about it? This will be the subject of inquiry of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3



INSIGHT OF NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES

After reviewing what the major religions have to say about the existence of an afterlife for the soul, it is fair to ask whether there have been any testimonials from people that have gone through the process of enduring a clinical death, and have had an out-of-body experience of an alternate reality, and then have come back to corporeal life and reported what they had witnessed, seen, heard and felt.

Yes, there are multiple testimonials of people who have gone through a near death experience (NDE) and have come back to narrate what they have experienced. These NDE cases are now more abundant and recorded than previous years because the experience began to be documented and studied by researchers. Many doctors have become aware that those having undergone a NDE have not had a hallucination but have lived a rather vivid conscious experience. This shift in understanding has encouraged many to share their experiences in great detail with these doctors and researchers.

In order to achieve a solid understanding of what has happened to these people and determine the validity of their testimonials, it is imperative to clarify first what is understood as a near death experience and how different it is from similar paranormal experiences. It is then necessary to place those experiences within a scientific framework to be able to obtain from them valid data that can shed some objective understanding on the afterlife event experienced, what those people have learned, and how much has the episode changed them.

Definitions of a near death experience (NDE)

A rather simple definition of a near death experience presented by the Cambridge Dictionary is:

“an experience described by some people who have been close to death, in which the person feels as if they have left their body and are watching themselves from above”.

A more elaborate definition is presented by Wikipedia

A **near-death experience (NDE)** is a personal experience associated with death or impending death. When positive, such experiences may encompass a variety of sensations including detachment from the body, feelings of levitation, total serenity, security, warmth, the experience of absolute dissolution, and the presence of a light. When negative, such experiences may include sensations of anguish and distress. NDEs are a recognized part of some transcendental and religious beliefs in an afterlife.

Some general characteristics of an *NDE* include subjective impressions of being outside the physical body; visions of deceased relatives and religious figures; transcendence of ego and spatiotemporal boundaries. (1)

A more detailed and documented scientific definition of NDEs is offered by the International Association of Near-Death Studies, Inc. (IANDS) as:

An NDE may begin with an out-of-body experience—a very clear perception of being somehow separate from one’s physical body, possibly even hovering nearby and watching events going on around the body. An NDE typically includes a sense of moving, often at great speed and usually through a dark space, into a fantastic landscape and encountering beings that may be perceived as sacred figures, deceased family

members or friends, or unknown entities. A pinpoint of indescribable light may grow to surround the person in brilliant but not painful radiance; unlike physical light, it is not merely visual but is sensed as being an all-loving presence that many people define as the Supreme Being of their religious faith.

A near-death experience may include few or several of the common features. Many accounts of experiences include only one or two of the common features, but those were so powerful they created permanent changes in people's lives.

The emotions of an NDE are intense and most commonly include peace, love, and bliss, although a substantial minority is marked by terror, anxiety, or despair. Most people come away from the experience with an unshakable belief that they have learned something of immeasurable importance about the purpose of life. Overall, the entire experience is ineffable—that is, it is beyond describing; even art and metaphor cannot capture it. The effects of an NDE are often life-changing, and its details will typically be remembered clearly for decades.

No scientific explanation so far has satisfactorily accounted for all aspects of NDEs or their effects. For example, numerous patients who were being clinically monitored and were known to be well oxygenated have later reported having an NDE during that time; drugs are not a factor in all NDEs; the characteristics of sleep disorders and NDEs are not identical. Hallucinations are highly individual and produce confusion and hazy memories, exactly the opposite characteristics of near-death experiences, which tend to share characteristics and be remembered vividly for decades as being “realer than real.” For every medical cause that has been put forward, there are reasons the NDE researchers say, “Not quite right.”

Further, despite reports that scientists have been able to induce NDEs through the use of drugs or electrical stimulation to the brain, none of the

reports has been altogether convincing. The reports have been based on a partial similarity to a limited aspect of NDE, or they have involved very few people—sometimes only a single individual—in an experiment that does not really replicate a full NDE, or the aftereffects do not coincide with those of a true NDE. After decades of investigation, researcher and psychiatrist Bruce Greyson, MD, has reported, **“No one physiological or psychological model by itself explains all the common features of NDE.”**

Although no relationship has been found between religious orientation and the likelihood of having an NDE, numerous studies have reported a significant correlation between the depth of an NDE and the importance a person subsequently places on religion or spiritual activity. For some, this is because they believe they have had a glimpse of Heaven and now believe absolutely in the existence of God and life after death. For others, it is because the NDE convinced them beyond question of the purpose of life as expressed in religious or spiritual teachings about love, service, and the reality of “something more” beyond physical existence.

Curiously, there has been no major study of the relationships between near-death experiences and the origins and teachings of the major religions. (2)

Researchers that have done studies on multiple cases of NDE

The above comprehensive scientific definition of a NDE is partially the synthesis of many serious researchers that have done extensive studies on cases of NDEs to determine commonalities, specificity, and repercussions on the lives of those who have experienced an NED event.

An internet overview of some of the most known international researchers on NDE offered the following 17 names: Raymond Moody, Eben Alexander, Paul Perry, Pim van Lommel, Sam Parmia

, Dr. Melvin Morse, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Kenneth Ring, Danion Brinkley, Peter Fenwick, Howard Storm, Lisa Smartt, Bruce Greyson, Janice Holden, Jeffrey Long, P.M.H. Atwater, and Diane Corcoran.

Appendix A offers some of their brief biographies and research work. The reader will be able to get a sense of the multiple aspects of NDE studies by these serious researchers and how much effort has been put into clarifying the various forms of experiencing a NDE in order to understand the event from a rigorous examination of the physiological data gathered before the experience, the interviews done afterwards with the people that have had the experience, and the comparison of the conclusions from the various studies analyzed.

How Science has studied Near Death Experiences

Pim van Lommel is a Dutch author and researcher in the field of near-death studies. He studied medicine at Utrecht University, specializing in cardiology. He worked as a cardiologist at the Rijnstate Hospital, Arnhem, for 26 years. (3)

Dr. van Lommel is the first medical practitioner to have undertaken a full, systematic study of near-death experiences (NDEs). As a cardiologist, he was struck by the number of his patients who claimed to have near-death experiences as a result of their heart attacks. As a scientist, this was difficult for him to accept: Wouldn't it be scientifically irresponsible of him to ignore the evidence of these stories? Faced with this dilemma, van Lommel decided to design a research study to investigate the phenomenon under the controlled environment of a cluster of hospitals with a medically trained staff. For more than twenty years van Lommel systematically studied such near-death experiences in a wide variety of hospital patients who survived cardiac arrest. In 2001, he and his fellow researchers published a study on near-death experiences in the renowned medical journal *The Lancet*. The article caused an international sensation as it was the first scientifically rigorous study of this phenomenon.

The single best overview is *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*, an anthology published in 2009. As *The Handbook* outlines, by 2005 dozens of studies involving

nearly 3,500 subjects who reported having had NDEs had become material for some 600 scholarly articles.

Most of the NDE studies have been retrospective, meaning the researchers looked for people who had had such an experience to come forward and be interviewed. That poses a couple of problems, scientifically speaking. It means the subjects were self-selecting, so they might not be representative. For instance, people who'd had scary NDEs might have been less eager to tell their stories than people who'd had uplifting ones. Most of the interviews took place years after the fact, so memories might have been faulty. And most important, retrospective studies make it pretty much impossible to obtain reliable data on what was actually happening to the subjects' bodies and brains while they felt their souls were elsewhere.

As the only stage in an NDE that involves perceiving the physical rather than the spiritual world, an out-of-body experience has the most potential to convince skeptics. If you could prove that someone saw or heard things that brain science says they could not have seen or heard, you would have at the very least, evidence that our understanding of the brain is even more incomplete than we thought, and at most, a sign that a conscious mind can exist apart from a living body.

In a place where NDEs were likely to occur, the researchers planted some perceptual stimulus and then interview everyone who survived a near-death episode in the vicinity of that stimulus to determine whether they perceived it. The stimulus was placed so that it could be perceived by an NDEr but not by other people in the area; in fact, to rule out the possibility that an interviewer or others might intentionally or unintentionally convey the content of the stimulus to the NDEr through normal—or even paranormal—means, *the stimulus was not known even to the research team or associates.*

In many cases, the individuals having the NDE were able to identify the stimulus when describing their experience. Yet, the skeptics are not short on rebuttals to these testimonials. Ultimately, what the rebuttals boil down to is that while the explanations of the validity of the testimonials may look plausible, there's no evidence that they actually do explain what's going on. Many NDEs happen

without one or another of the above scientifically measurable conditions. And those conditions often happen without an NDE taking place. According to those skeptics, enough data simply haven't been recorded to establish correlation, let alone causation.

Yet, there is something about NDEs that makes them scientifically intriguing. While you can't rely on an alien abduction or a spiritual visitation taking place just when you have got recording instruments handy, many NDEs happen when a person is surrounded by an arsenal of devices designed to measure every single thing about the body that human ingenuity has made us capable of measuring.

Even if research ultimately shows—as most scientists assume it will—that NDEs are nothing more than the product of spasms in a dying brain, there is a good reason to pursue the investigation since they pose a challenge to our understanding of one of the most mysterious issues in science: consciousness.

There are several avenues of investigation of NDEs. The first line of investigation explores the question of whether the persons declared dead still manifest consciousness in some form. This evidence may include spontaneous or induced interactive apparitions of the deceased, communication held with the deceased through instrumental trans-communication or contact through physical (usually electromagnetic) devices, and the communication of keys to decipher messages encrypted by the deceased prior to death.

Another line of investigation explores the question of whether the mind can function independently of the brain, a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for postmortem survival. This evidence may include unexplained recovery of lost mental functions as the brain dies, near-death experiences with enhanced mental activity while the brain is demonstrably impaired, and out-of-body experiences with accurate perception from an extracorporeal perspective (sometimes accompanied by objective detection of a disembodied entity).

The convergent evidence from these lines of investigation provides empirical support for the scientific hypothesis of postmortem survival. (4)

Common elements found in the research

Not all studies reach the same conclusions. Some are more numerous depending on how the research study was designed; others show a smaller number of common conclusions, although the ones presented in this book are backed up by a research protocol.

Here are some common traits that have been reported by NDEers from various countries:

- A sense/awareness of being dead.
- A sense of peace, wellbeing, and painlessness. Positive emotions. A sense of removal from the world.
- An out-of-body experience. A perception of one's body from an outside position, sometimes observing medical professionals performing resuscitation efforts.
- A "tunnel experience" or entering a darkness. A sense of moving up, or through, a passageway or staircase.
- A rapid movement toward and/or sudden immersion in a powerful light (or "Being of Light") which communicates with the person.
- An intense feeling of unconditional love and acceptance.
- Encountering "Beings of Light", "Beings dressed in white", or similar. Also, the possibility of being reunited with deceased loved ones.
- Receiving a life review, commonly referred to as "seeing one's life flash before one's eyes".
- Approaching a border or a decision by oneself or others to return to one's body, often accompanied by a reluctance to return.
- Suddenly finding oneself back inside one's body.
- Connection to the cultural beliefs held by the individual, which seem to dictate some of the phenomena experienced in the NDE and particularly the later interpretation thereof. (5)

Even though this is a condensed, easy-to-grasp summary of the common elements found in an NDE, it is worth presenting an expanded version that is far more comprehensive. It is given by Ms. P.M.H. Atwater, L.H.D., Ph.D. (Hon.), who is one of the original researchers in the field of near-death studies, having begun her work in 1978 (shortly after moving to Virginia), and is a pioneer in the field of near-death experiences, the after effects of spiritual experiences, transformations of consciousness, reality shifts, future memory, and modern generations of children and how they differ from previous generations.

The following is P.M.H. Atwater's analysis of the common aspects among NDEs

They are available on her website. It is an analysis based on over twenty years of study and with a research base of over 3,200 NDEers:

1. Context of experience: either A or B must be met:
 - a. Symptoms or signs suggesting serious medical illness or injury, or physiological crisis/accident of some kind; or,
 - b. NDEer's expectation or sense of imminent death.

2. Content of experience: an intense awareness, sense, or experience of "otherworldliness"—whether pleasant or unpleasant, strange or ecstatic. Episode can be brief and consist of only one or two elements, or can be more involved, even lengthy, and consist of multiple elements. Elements commonly experienced are:
 - a. Visualizing or experiencing being apart from the physical body, perhaps with the ability to change locations.
 - b. Greatly enhanced cognition (thoughts very clear, rapid, and hyper-lucid).
 - c. A darkness or light that is perceived as alive and intelligent and powerful.
 - d. Sensation of movement and/or a sense of presence (hyperalert faculties).

- e. Sudden overwhelming floods of emotion or feelings.
 - f. Encounter with an identified deceased person or animal, or an encounter with an apparently nonphysical entity.
 - h. Information can be imparted, perhaps dialogue.
 - g. Life review (like a movie or in segments, or a reliving).
 - h. Information can be imparted, perhaps dialogue.
3. Typical to the experience:
- a. Near-death states can occur to anyone at any age, including newborns and infants, and remain vivid and coherent throughout one's life (unless societal or family pressure weakens memory clusters—repression more common with child NDEers than with teenagers or adults).
 - b. Children's episodes are usually brief and encompass few elements. The closer the child is to puberty, the greater the possibility of longer, more complicated scenarios.
 - c. The pattern of psychological and physiological aftereffects seems more dependent on the intensity of the experience, than on any particular imagery or length of exposure to darkness or light.
 - d. Attitudes and feelings significant others display after the NDEr revives directly influence how readily he or she can integrate the experience. Episode content is secondary to that initial climate of interest or disinterest.

She concludes the analysis by stating that no matter how long the individual is without vital signs, especially pulse or breath, there is little or no brain damage rather a noticeable brain and faculty enhancement. It is not unusual for NDEers to revive in the morgue hours later (average time without vital signs in my research base—between five to twenty minutes.). It is also possible to experience a NDE and not be near death.

Concerning these common elements found in NDE reports, a well-known researcher and author of NDEs is Dr. Jeffrey Long. Dr. Atwater quotes Dr. Long's conclusion regarding the commonalities of those experiencing a NDE:

NEDs are quite varied, but the consistency of the NED elements (OBE experience, tunnel, light, meeting other beings, etc.) is striking. There is no plausible biological explanation of NEDs. There is no plausible biological explanation of NDEs. There is no other human experience so dramatic, shared by so many people and so relatively consistent in its elements. (6)

Dr. Jeffrey Long is author of *Evidence of the Afterlife: The Science of Near-Death Experiences*, which appeared on The New York Times Best Seller list. In 2009 Long contributed to *The handbook of near-death experiences: thirty years of investigation*, published by Praeger. The book is a comprehensive critical review of the research carried out within the field of near-death studies and considered to be a relevant publication in the field.

In 1998, he founded the Near-Death Experience Research Foundation (NDERF, nderf.org) was, which is concerned with documenting and researching NDEs. The foundation maintains a website, also launched in 1998. At the current time there are over 3,700 NDEs posted on the NDERF website, which is the world's largest collection of near-death reports. He is on the board of directors of the American Center for the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences (ACISTE).

Jeffrey Long presents the following lines of evidence of the reality of the NED experiences as additional data to the common characteristics features presented above.

Line of Evidence #1: Lucid, organized experiences while unconscious or clinically dead

Near-death experiences occur at a time when the person is so physically compromised that they are typically unconscious, comatose, or clinically dead. Considering NDEs from both a medical perspective and logically, it should not be possible for unconscious people to report highly lucid experiences that are so often clear and logically structured.

Line of Evidence #2: Seeing on going event out of the body

A common characteristic of near-death experiences is an out-of-body experience. An out-of-body experience (OBE) is the apparent separation of consciousness from the body. About 45% of near-death experiences report OBEs that involve their seeing and often hearing ongoing earthly events from a perspective that is apart from, and usually higher than their physical bodies. Following cardiac arrest, NDEers may see, and later accurately describe, their own resuscitation.

Line of Evidence #3: Blind or people with impaired vision being able to see

There have been a few case reports of near-death experiences among blind people. The largest study of this phenomenon was by Dr. Kenneth Ring. This investigation included 31 blind or substantially visually impaired individuals who had NDEs or out-of-body experiences. Of the 31 individuals in the study, there were 14 individuals who were blind from birth in this study, and nine of them described vision during their experiences. This investigation presented case reports of those born totally blind that described in NDEs that were highly visual with content consistent with typical NDEs.

Line of evidence #4: Persons under general anesthesia having a near-death experience

Under adequate general anesthesia it should not be possible to have a lucid organized memory. Prior studies using EEG and functional imaging of the brains of patients under general anesthesia provide

substantial evidence that the anesthetized brain should be unable to produce lucid memories. As previously discussed, following cardiac arrest the EEG becomes flat in 10 to 20 seconds, and there is usually amnesia prior to and following the arrest. The occurrence of a cardiac arrest while under general anesthesia is a combination of circumstances in which no memory from that time should be possible.

Line of Evidence #5: Life review during a near-death experience

Some near-death experiences include a review of part or all of their prior lives. This NDE element is called a life review. NDErs typically describe their life review from a third-person perspective. The life review may include awareness of what others were feeling and thinking at the time earlier in their life when they interacted with them.

Line of Evidence #6: Encountering deceased loved ones

In dreams or hallucinations when familiar persons are present, they are much more likely to be living and from recent memory. This is in sharp contrast to near-death experiencers where familiar persons encountered are almost always deceased.

Line of Evidence #7: near-death experience of young children

Investigation of near-death experiences in very young children is important because at an early age they are less likely to have established religious beliefs, cultural understandings about death, or even an awareness of what death is. Very young children would be very unlikely to have heard about near-death experiences or understand them.

Very young children have near-death experience content that is strikingly similar to older children and adults. This is further evidence that NDEs are occurring independently of preexisting cultural beliefs, religious training, or awareness of the existence of NDE.

Line of Evidence #8: Cross-cultural study of near-death experiences

If near-death experiences were considerably influenced by pre-existing religious and cultural beliefs, it would be expected that there would be significant differences in the content of NDEs from different cultures around the world. However, in a review of over 500 NDEs from dozens of countries around the world, Dr. Long found impressive similarities in the content of these NDEs.

Line of Evidence #9: Near-death after-effects

Changes in beliefs and values following near-death experiences are often called after-effects. Given that a life-threatening event without an NDE might result in life changes, some of the best evidence for NDE-specific after-effects came from the largest prospective NDE study ever reported. This study, conducted by Pim van Lommel, MD, divided survivors of cardiac arrest into a group that had NDEs, and a group that did not. The after-effects of both groups were assessed two and eight years after the cardiac arrests. The group of cardiac arrest survivors with NDEs were statistically more likely have a reduced fear of death, increased belief in life after death, interest in the meaning of life, acceptance of others, and were more loving and empathic.

Conclusion

After over 35 years of scholarly investigation of near-death experience, the totality of what is observed in NDEs has not been adequately explained based on physical brain function. Over the years, there have been over 20 different “explanations” of NDE suggested that cover the gamut of physiological, psychological, and cultural causes. If any one or several of these “explanations” were widely accepted as plausible, then there would be no need for so many different “explanations” of NDE. Among those who believe that physical brain function must explain everything that is experienced in all NDEs,

there is no consensus whatsoever about how physical brain function produces NDEs.

The combination of the preceding nine lines of evidence converges on the conclusion that near-death experiences are medically inexplicable. Any one or several of the nine lines of evidence would likely be reasonably convincing to many, but the combination of all of the presented nine lines of evidence provides powerful evidence that NDEs are, in a word, real. (7)

To get the feeling, depth and amplitude of an individual's NDE, it is imperative to present a few vivid testimonials that communicate direct the in-depth feelings, emotions, and different moments of such an extraordinary and different experience.

Case studies of NDE

One thing is to read a distilled report of what multiple near-death experiences have in common and give sound ground of some level of objective experienced reality and another is to read the recount made by some of those who have experienced directly and have been able to give a credible and minute description of the life-changing event they went through.

A fast recount in Youtube presents, though several of internet pages, multiple testimonials of people that have undergone such an extraordinary experience. I will present a few of the best-known cases that have lived such an extraordinary episode.

Raymond Moody

The following is Raymond Moody's recount of his near-death experience when he took an overdose of Darvon:

As they loaded me into the ambulance the world around me began to fade. The concerned EMT was on my face, trying to keep me awake. Another EMT was drawing something into a very large syringe, probably adrenaline to inject into my heart. "Better

get going,” shouted one of the policemen as he slammed the rear doors. I could feel the ambulance accelerate, hitting speed bumps hard as we headed for the hospital. An elephant was sitting on my chest. My eyes were closed, or at least I think they were. Either way, I could see nothing. My heart stopped.

What happened next is almost indescribable, but I will do my best to make it less so. I could feel myself separate from the world around me. In a funny way it was almost like cellophane being pulled off a smooth surface, one reality separating from another. I sensed spirits around me, helpful presences, who were there to guide me through this separation. I tried to see these spirit guides, but I could not make them out because I was surrounded by a light that was not of this world. I could hear them speaking, and although I couldn't make out what was being said, their presence was soothing and calm and I felt a radiant love from them. I didn't have an opportunity to examine myself in this state to see what I looked like or was made of. And I didn't have the time I would have liked to try to make contact with the spirits either. Instead, I felt myself “startup” again as the doctors pumped my stomach and gave me a shot of a stimulant to the heart. The light went away, the spirits were there no more, and I came to in an emergency room.

That's what it's all about! I said to myself as I lay there on the bed. I didn't feel I'd been dead long enough to have a classic near-death experience, but at least I got close enough to see the city limits. I was oddly pleased. After defining, naming, and studying near-death experiences, I could now say I'd had one and, yes, it was real.

I lay in the bed reliving the experience. There was nothing unreal about it. If anything, it was almost mundane, as though I had opened a door and walked into a strange room. I wondered what would have happened if my heart had been stopped longer. Would the spirit beings around me have become visible? And

were they people I knew and loved? Would the light have changed and become that palpable and mystical light so many talk about? Would my life have come back to me in a review? Would I have been introduced into a life after life?

I puzzled over these questions for some time and then settled on what I knew — that an extraordinary transformation of consciousness had taken place at the point of death. I did not go into a blackness, as so many assume will happen. Rather, I found myself in a richer, deeper, and more real state of consciousness. I had gone somewhere that so many have described as heaven... (8)

Eben Alexander

Dr. Eben Alexander spent over 25 years as an academic neurosurgeon, including 15 years at the Brigham & Women's Hospital, the Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston. Over those years he personally dealt with hundreds of patients suffering from severe alterations in their level of consciousness. Many of those patients were rendered comatose by trauma, brain tumors, ruptured aneurysms, infections, or stroke. He thought he had a very good idea of how the brain generates consciousness, mind, and spirit.

In the predawn hours of November 10, 2008, he was driven into coma by a rare and mysterious bacterial meninge-encephalitis of unknown cause. He spent a week in coma on a ventilator, his prospects for survival diminishing rapidly. On the seventh day, to the surprise of everyone, he started to awaken. Memories of his life had been completely deleted inside of the coma, yet he awoke with memories of a fantastic odyssey deep into another realm—more real than this earthly one! His older son advised him to write down everything he could remember about his journey, before he read anything about near-death experiences, physics, or cosmology. Six weeks later, he completed his initial recording of his remarkable journey, totaling over 20,000 words in length.

Then, he started reading and was astonished by the commonalities between his journey and so many others reported throughout all cultures, continents, and millennia. His journey brought key insights to the mind-body discussion and to our human understanding of the fundamental nature of reality. His experience clearly revealed that we are conscious *in spite of* our brain—that, in fact, consciousness is at the root of all existence. (9)

In his book, *Proof of Heaven*, Eben Alexander describes his experience as beginning with him trapped in a dark place, a kind of semitransparent mud or “dirty Jell-O,” filled with “grotesque animal faces,” that comes to feel progressively more claustrophobic and frightening. Eventually, something pulls him up into “the strangest, most beautiful world I’d ever seen”—an idyllic countryside. There he encounters a beautiful girl riding on a butterfly’s wing, who tells him he is “loved and cherished, dearly, forever”, and accompanies him on a trip to a light-filled void where he meets a divine being who unlocks for him many secrets about the universe.

After spending some time going back and forth between the two realms, he descends one last time into the dark place where he began, only this time the grotesque creatures have been replaced by the faces of people praying for him.

It was Alexander who really upped the scientific stakes. He studied his own medical charts and came to the conclusion that he was in such a deep coma during his NDE, and his brain was so completely shut down, that the only way to explain what he felt and saw was that his soul had indeed detached from his body and gone on a trip to another world, and that angels, God, and the afterlife are all as real as can be. (10)

Dannion Brinkley

In 1975, when he was 25 years old, Dannion Brinkley was talking on the phone in his bedroom during a thunderstorm. A bolt of lightning hit the phone line, sending thousands of volts of electricity into his head and down his body. His heart stopped, and he died, but in the

process, he had an NDE. When Brinkley revived in the morgue after twenty-eight minutes of death, he had an incredible story to tell.

The first lighting strike radically changed his life, Dannon became a hospice and nursing home volunteer. For over 25 years of volunteer service, he has been at the bedside of over 340 people at the point of death, and 1,200 more during their final days, accruing more than 16,000 hours of service.

This is testimonial of what he experienced:

“...I heard a deafening roar of thunder and felt a searing pain in the side of my head, My entire body was then lifted just below the ceiling and momentarily suspended in the air. Then... an incredible force... slammed me onto my bed hard enough to break the frame. My body felt as though it was being incinerated from the inside out... Every inch of my body was in excruciating pain.”

Then, Brinkley writes, he was lifted out of his body and watched from above as medical personnel tried unsuccessfully to revive him.

Meanwhile, his intense pain evaporated, and he drifted through a tunnel toward a light. In the presence of a “Being of Light,” he experienced what he calls “a panoramic life review,” reliving his entire life and the happiness and sorrow that his actions created. Despite his obvious mistakes, there was no judgment or punishment.

“I was the only judge presiding over my day in court!” he writes. “I came to the realization that, more often than not, I had lived in a devastatingly selfish manner. My heart was filled with shame and remorse.”

Brinkley gradually understood that the review was not a rebuke but a loving instruction.

“...I had been given the knowledge of how to correct my life and use my power of love to make a difference in the world,” he writes.

Brinkley says he continued his journey through the heavens to a Crystal City, where he met 13 more beings, each with a special power, such as wisdom or strength. The beings revealed more than 100 visions of the future.

Then it was time to go back.

“But I did not want to leave this wondrous place of peace and love,” Brinkley writes. “I recall thinking how sad I was to be leaving.”

Almost immediately, he found himself back at the hospital, looking up at a white sheet covering his entire body. He tried to get up, but he couldn't move.

“So I began to blow on the sheet hoping someone would notice I was breathing again,” he says. “And someone did.” (11)

Pam Reynolds

Pam Reynolds (1956-2010) was an American singer-songwriter from Atlanta, Georgia, whose near-death experience is one of the most frequently cited in the literature.

In 1991 aged 35, Reynolds experienced symptoms of dizziness, loss of speech and difficulty moving her body. A CT scan revealed a giant aneurysm at the base of her brain. The neurologist to whom she was referred predicted little or no chance of survival. Because of its size and location, regular neurosurgical techniques to excise it would not work. She was then referred to Dr Robert Spetzler in Phoenix, Arizona, who had pioneered a surgical procedure, “hypothermic cardiac arrest”, that would make the aneurysm operable. This involved chilling her body to 60 degrees Fahrenheit, stopping the heartbeat, and breathing, and draining the blood from the brain. The cooling would prevent her cells from dying while deprived of oxygen. When the doctors restarted her heart and warmed her body back up, she was, in effect, rebooted.

To make absolutely sure that Reynolds's brain was completely inactive during the operation, the medical team put small speakers into her ears that played rapid, continuous clicks at 100 decibels—a sound level described as equivalent to that produced by a lawn mower or a jackhammer. If any part of her mind was working, that insistent clicking would show up as electrical signals in the brain stem, which the surgeons were monitoring on an electroencephalogram.

This is how she recounted the experience:

She was awake when she was brought into the operating room at 7:15 am, and felt a 'loss of time' blanking out as the general anesthesia took effect. Then she became aware of a musical tone that seemed to pull her out of the top of her head.

"The further out of my body I got, the more clear the tone became. I had the impression it was like a road, a frequency that you go on... I remember seeing several things in the operating room when I was looking down. It was the most aware that I think that I have ever been in my entire life... It was brighter and more focused and clearer than normal vision... There was so much in the operating room that I didn't recognize, and so many people."

She recalled being surprised that the team had only partially shaved her head. She also recalled seeing the bone-saw that Dr. Spetzler used to excise a section of her skull:

"The saw ... looked like an electric toothbrush and it had a dent in it, a groove at the top where the saw appeared to go into the handle, but it didn't... And the saw had interchangeable blades, too, but these blades were in what looked like a socket wrench case... I heard the saw cranked up.

The sound was unpleasant. 'Someone said something about my veins and arteries being very small,' Reynolds recalled, adding that it was a female voice."

At this stage in the operation, a female cardiac surgeon, having determined that the arteries in Reynolds's right leg were too small to handle the degree of blood flow required by the heart-lung machine; she opened the left leg as well.

Dr. Spetzler assessed the aneurysm and ordered hypothermic cardiac arrest to be performed. Commencing at 10:50am, blood was removed via tubes from the femoral arteries and veins, and then chilled in reservoir cylinders to be returned to her body afterwards. As Reynolds's core temperature fell, her heartbeat changed to fibrillation, then stopped entirely. Her brainwaves flattened, then, as her core temperature reached 60, the brainstem shut down. By standard definitions she was clinically dead.

At 11:25 the heart-lung machine was turned off; the operating table was tilted and blood was drained from her body. The sac of the aneurysm, now empty, was easily excised. The heart-lung machine was then reactivated, and warmed blood reinfused into Reynolds's body. The brainstem slowly began showing activity again, then her higher brain also, as the warming process continued. At noon it became apparent that her heart would not resume beating by warming alone; electrical jolts from a defibrillator were used to shock it into starting. Having been clinically dead for about an hour, Reynolds was returned to the recovery room in a stable condition at 2:10pm.

Reynolds's next recollections fall between the mention of her arteries being too small, and the time Dr. Spetzler's younger assistants were closing her incisions:

“There was a sensation like being pulled, but not against your will. I was going on my own accord because I wanted to go. I have different metaphors to try to explain this. It was like the Wizard of Oz—being taken up in a tornado vortex, only you're not spinning around like you've got vertigo. You're very focused and you have a place to go. The feeling was like going up in an elevator real fast. And there was a sensation, but it wasn't a bodily, physical sensation. It was like a tunnel, but it wasn't a tunnel”.

“At some point very early in the tunnel vortex I became aware of my grandmother calling me. But I didn’t hear her call me with my ears... It was a clearer hearing than with my ears. I trust that sense more than I trust my own ears. The feeling was that she wanted me to come to her, so I continued with no fear down the shaft. It’s a dark shaft that I went through, and at the very end there was this very little, tiny pinpoint of light that kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

“The light was incredibly bright, like sitting in the middle of a light bulb. It was so bright that I put my hands in front of my face fully expecting to see them and I could not. But I knew they were there. Not from a sense of touch. Again, it’s terribly hard to explain, but I knew they were there...

“I noticed that as I began to discern different figures in the light—and they were all covered with light, they *were* light, and had light permeating all around them—they began to form shapes I could recognize and understand. I could see that one of them was my grandmother. I don’t know if it was reality or projection, but I would know my grandmother, the sound of her, anytime, anywhere.

“Everyone I saw, looking back on it, fit perfectly into my understanding of what that person looked like at their best during their lives.

“I recognized a lot of people. My uncle Gene was there. So was my great-great-Aunt Maggie, who was really a cousin. On Papa’s side of the family, my grandfather was there... They were specifically taking care of me, looking after me.

“They would not permit me to go further... It was communicated to me—that’s the best way I know how to say it, because they didn’t speak like I’m speaking—that if I went all the way into the light something would happen to me physically. They

would be unable to put this me back into the body me, like I had gone too far and they couldn't reconnect. So, they wouldn't let me go anywhere or do anything.

"Then the deceased relatives were feeding me. They were not doing this through my mouth, like with food, but they were nourishing me with something. The only way I know how to put it is something sparkly. Sparkles is the image that I get. I definitely recall the sensation of being nurtured and being fed and being made strong. I know it sounds funny, because obviously it wasn't a physical thing, but inside the experience I felt physically strong, ready for whatever.

"My grandmother didn't take me back through the tunnel, or even send me back or ask me to go. She just looked up at me. I expected to go with her, but it was communicated to me that she just didn't think she would do that. My uncle said he would do it. He's the one who took me back through the end of the tunnel. Everything was fine. I did want to go.

"But then I got to the end of it and saw the thing, my body. I didn't want to get into it... It looked terrible, like a train wreck. It looked like what it was: dead. I believe it was covered. It scared me and I didn't want to look at it.

"It was communicated to me that it was like jumping into a swimming pool. No problem, just jump right into the swimming pool. I didn't want to, but I guess I was late or something because he [the uncle] pushed me. I felt a definite repelling and at the same time a pulling from the body. The body was pulling, and the tunnel was pushing... It was like diving into a pool of ice water... It hurt!

"The assistants finished the operation to the sound of rock music, Reynolds recalled:

They were playing 'Hotel California' and the line was 'You can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave.' I mentioned [later] to Dr Brown that that was incredibly insensitive, and he told me that I needed to sleep more. [laughter] When I regained consciousness, I was still on the respirator".

After her experience, Reynolds lost all fear of death. She said, as quoted in a MSNBC broadcast: 'If death is the worst thing that happens to us, what an incredible thing! If at the end of our lives, this is what's going to happen to everyone, I don't see the problem, I really don't get it. I fear pain, but I don't fear death'.

Pam Reynolds recovered fully from the operation and lived a healthy life until 2010, when she died aged 53 of heart failure. (12)

Anita Moorjani

Moorjani was born in Singapore to her Indian parents, Hargobind (father) and Neelu (mother) Shamdasani. Shortly after her birth, her family moved to Sri Lanka, and then at age two, moved to Hong Kong, where she and her older brother Anoop grew up. Moorjani and her brother both studied in British schools. As an ethnic minority in a majority British school, Moorjani says she was often the victim of bullying. Moorjani's parents are Indian, and because of her diverse cultural background, grew up multilingual, speaking Sindhi, Cantonese, and English simultaneously.

In February 2002, while living and working in Hong Kong, Moorjani was diagnosed with lymphoma after finding a lump on her neck. Initially, Moorjani rejected conventional medicine. She had watched several people close to her die of cancer, including her brother-in-law and her best friend, despite extensive conventional treatments. Over the months that ensued, Moorjani experimented with various alternative healing practices, but to no avail. She subsequently underwent several conventional cancer treatments. However, by that point, despite these treatments, her doctors

informed her and her family that it was “too late” to save her life. The lymphoma had spread throughout her body and had metastasized.

Moorjani went into a coma 30 hours later. During those 30 hours, Moorjani asserts that she experienced many characteristic details of a near death experience. Her account includes an out-of-body experience with observations and awareness of physical surroundings. Moorjani said she had a strong reluctance to return to her suffering and dying physical body but was encouraged to return by her father and best friend who told her that she needed to return and to “live her life fearlessly.”

Subsequent to coming out of her coma, Moorjani’s tumors shrank by about 70% within four days, and within five weeks, she was cancer-free and released from the hospital, although she had to spend a few months in physiotherapy to regain her strength and the use of all her muscles and limbs. (13)

This contemporary near-death experience is so remarkable that it deserves to be presented in a complete detailed account. In Anita’s own words:

“After four heart-wrenching years with cancer, my body had finally had enough, and I went into a coma. As my husband rushed me to the hospital, the world around me started to appear surreal and dreamlike, and I could feel myself slip further and further away from consciousness.

“The moment I arrived, and the oncologist saw me, her face visibly filled with shock. “Your wife’s heart may still be beating,” she told Danny, “but she’s not really there. It’s too late to save her.”

“The senior oncologist immediately ordered a medical team to wheel my gurney to the radiology lab so they could do a full-body scan. After they finished, I was brought to the ICU where staff administered treatments by way of needles and tubes.

“In this near-death state, I was more acutely aware of all that was going on around me than

I'd ever been in a normal physical state. I wasn't using my five biological senses, yet I was keenly taking everything in. It was as though another, completely different type of perception kicked in, and I seemed to encompass everything that was happening, as though I was slowly merging with it all.

“Although the medical team moved with great speed, and there was a sense of urgency in their actions, I also sensed an air of acceptance, as though they'd come to terms with that fact that it was too late to change my fate.

“There's nothing we can do for your wife, Mr. Moorjani. Her organs have already shut down. Her tumors have grown to the size of lemons throughout her lymphatic system, from the base of her skull to below her abdomen. Her brain is filled with fluid, as are her lungs. And as you can see, her skin has developed lesions that are weeping with toxins. She won't even make it through the night,” the doctor told my husband, Danny.

“I watched as Danny's face changed to anguish, and wanted to cry out to him, **“It's ok, darling—I'm okay! Please don't worry. Don't listen to the doctor. I actually feel great!”** But I couldn't. Nothing came out. He couldn't hear me.

“I felt no emotional attachment to my seemingly lifeless body as it lay there on the hospital bed. It didn't feel as though it were mine. It looked far too small and insignificant to have housed what I was experiencing. I felt free, liberated, and magnificent. Every pain, ache, sadness, and sorrow were gone! I felt completely unencumbered. I couldn't recall feeling this way before—not ever.

“I felt all of my emotional attachments to my loved ones and my surroundings slowly fall away.

What I can only describe as superb and glorious unconditional love surrounded me, wrapping me tight as I continued to let go. It didn't feel as though I had physically gone somewhere else—it was more as though I'd awakened. Perhaps finally being aroused from a bad dream. My soul was finally realizing its true magnificence. And it doing so, it was expanding beyond my body and this physical world. The feeling of complete, unconditional love was unlike anything I'd known before; it was totally indiscriminating, as if I didn't have to do anything to deserve it, nor did I need to prove myself to earn it.

“To my amazement, I became aware of the presence of my father, who'd died ten years earlier. **Dad, you're here. I can't believe it!** I wasn't speaking those words, I was merely thinking them—in fact, it was more like feeling the emotions behind the words, as there was no other way of communicating in that realm other than through emotions.

And then I recognized the essence of my best friend, Soni, who'd died of cancer three years prior. I seemed to know that they'd been present with me, long before I became aware of them, all through my illness.

“I was also aware of other beings around me. I didn't recognize them, but I knew they loved me very much and were protecting me. I realized that they too were with me all of this time, surrounding me with love even when I wasn't conscious of it. My heightened awareness in that expanded realm was indescribable, despite my best efforts to explain it.

“The universe makes sense! I realized. I finally understand—I know why I have cancer! I was too caught up in the wonder of that moment to dwell on the cause, although I'd soon examine it more closely. I also seemed to comprehend why I'd come into this life in the first place—I knew my true purpose.

“Why do I suddenly understand all this? I wanted to know. Who’s giving me this information? Is it God? Krishna? Buddha? Jesus?”

“I saw my life intricately woven into everything I’d known so far. My experience was like a single thread woven through the huge and complexly colored images of an infinite tapestry. All the other threads and colors represented my relationships, including every life I’d touched. There were threads representing my mother, my father, my brother, my husband, and every other person who’d ever come into my life, whether they related to me in a positive or negative way.

“I began to understand that while I may have only been a thread, I was integral to the overall finished picture. Seeing this, I understood that I owed it to myself, to everyone I met, and to life itself to always be an expression of my own unique essence. Trying to be anything or anyone else didn’t make me better—it just deprived me of my true self! It kept others from experiencing me for who I am, and it deprived me of interacting authentically with them.

“As I looked at the great tapestry that was the accumulation of my life up to that point, I was able to identify exactly what had brought me to where I was today.

“Just look at my life path! Why, oh why, have I always been so harsh with myself? Why was I always beating myself up? Why was I always forsaking myself? Why did I never stand up for myself and show the world the beauty of my own soul? Why was I always suppressing my own intelligence and creativity to please others? I betrayed myself every time I said yes when I meant no! Why have I violated myself by always needing to seek approval from others just to be myself? Why haven’t I followed my own beautiful heart and spoken my truth? Why don’t we realize this when we’re in our

physical bodies? How come I never knew that we're not supposed to be so tough on ourselves?

"I wondered at my newfound understanding in the other realm, enjoying and exploring that all-encompassing consciousness.

"Dad, it feels like I've come home. I'm so glad to be here. Life is so painful!" I told him.

"The essence of my father was communicating with me more directly. Sweetheart, I want you to know that it's not your time to come home yet. But it's still your choice whether you want to come with me or go back into your body.

"But my body is so sick, drained, and ridden with cancer! Why would I want to go back to that body? It has caused nothing but suffering—not only for me, but for Mum and Danny, too! I can't see any purpose in going back.

"What subsequently happened is incredibly hard to describe. First, it felt as though whatever I directed my awareness toward appeared before me. Second, time was completely irrelevant. It wasn't even a factor to consider, as though it didn't exist.

"Prior to this point, doctors had conducted tests on the functionality of my organs, and their report had already been written. But in that realm, it seemed as though the outcome of those tests and the report depended on the decision I had yet to make—whether to live or to continue onward into death. If I chose death, the test results would indicate organ failure. If I chose to come back to physical life, they'd show my organs beginning to function again.

"At that moment, I decided that I didn't want to return. I then became conscious of my physical body dying, and I saw the doctors speaking with my family, explaining that it was death due to organ failure.

“At the same time, my father communicated with me. **“This is as far as you can go, sweetheart. If you go any further, you cannot turn back”.**

“I became aware of a boundary before me, although the demarcation wasn’t physical. It was more like an invisible threshold marked by a variation of energy levels. I knew that if I crossed it there was no turning back. All my ties to the physical world would be permanently severed.

“But before I stepped towards this realm for good, I became aware of a new level of truth. I discovered that since I’d realized who I really was and understood the magnificence of my true self, if I chose to go back to life, my body would heal rapidly—not in months or weeks, but in days! I knew that the doctors wouldn’t be able to find a trace of cancer if I chose to go back to my body!

“How can that be? I was astounded by this revelation and wanted to understand why.

As I experienced my biggest revelation, it felt like a bolt of lightning. I understood that merely by being the love I truly am, I would heal both myself and others. I knew that was really the only purpose of life: to be ourselves, live our truths, and be the love that we are.

“And I knew that I had a bigger purpose to fulfill in the physical world. It involved helping lots of people—thousands, maybe tens of thousands, perhaps to share a message with them. But I wouldn’t have to pursue anything or work at figuring out how I was going to achieve that. I simply had to allow it to unfold. As though to confirm my realization, I became aware of both my father and Soni communicating with me: **“Now that you know the truth of who you really are, go back and live your life fearlessly”.**

“It was the afternoon of February 3rd, about 30 hours after I’d entered the coma.

My eyes started to flicker open around 4 p.m., and my vision was very blurred. I could barely see that the outline of the figure standing over me was Danny, and then I heard his voice: “She’s back!”

“Over the following days, I was slowly able to tell my family what had happened in the other realm, and also described a lot of the things that had taken place while I was in the coma. I was able to relay to my awestruck family, almost verbatim, some of the conversations that had occurred not only around me, but also outside the room, down the hall, and in the waiting areas of the hospital. I could describe many of the procedures I’d undergone, and I identified the doctors and nurses who’d performed them, to the surprise of everyone around me.

”About six days after coming out of the ICU, I began to feel a little bit stronger and was starting to walk up and down the hospital corridor for short periods of time before needing to rest. Every day the doctors reported on my latest test results. “I don’t understand. I have scans that show this patient’s lymphatic system was ridden with cancer just two weeks ago, but now I can’t find a lymph node on her body large enough to even suggest cancer,” I heard him say.

”To the amazement of the medical team, the arrangements they’d made with the reconstructive surgeon to close the lesions on my neck were unnecessary because the wounds had healed by themselves.

‘On March 9, 2006, five weeks after entering the hospital, I was released to go home. And I couldn’t wait to live my life with joy and abandon!’ (14)

What has near-death experiences taught us about the afterlife?

The most relevant lesson is that those that have come back from a near-death experience is that they have had a glimpse, an intense heart felt vision, a firsthand savory of a dimension that is beyond the constraints of space and time of our earthly and mundane time-bound daily reality.

This experience, as expressed by the majority of the people that lived it, have so many points of commonality with the others that have experienced it, that it cannot be a coincidence. Even though I have mentioned them before, it is appropriate to present them again because they offer a solid basis of validity of the experience that cannot or should not be attributed to coincidence:

- A sense of “other worldliness” that gives them an ecstatic sensation of being in the perfect place.
- Visualizing themselves outside of their bodies, completely aware of what is happening to them and the reactions of the people accompanying them, being relatives or medical staff.
- Experimenting enhanced cognition capability to understand many things of which they had no knowledge.
- Feeling that they could move without constrictions of space and time.
- A darkness or light (at the end of a perceived tunnel) that is felt to be alive, beckoning, and powerfully attracting.
- Encounter with known deceased person(s), and/or relatives recently deceased, or a long time ago.
- Encounter with the Divine. Those that reported expressed that such a Divine being was much in accordance to their belief system. Thus, some Christians said that they had met Jesus; the new age followers affirmed having encountered a divine being, as did atheists.
- Reception of unknown information, such as their life review, with a sense of understanding the purpose of their lives.
- An experience of unconditional love given to them without judgment.

Thus, the descriptions made of those that went through the near-death experience and came back to tell us about it, can be categorized as not being the product of a feverish imagination or the abnormal response of a brain at the verge of collapsing. The precision, the details and coherence of the descriptions made by these individuals indicate that there is a level of lucid awareness of the mind and consciousness of the ones experiencing the event that cannot be constructed by a brain that has been declared medically dead. What they experience is a reality that cannot be dismissed as not being real or as being imagined.

The emotions of a NDE are intense and most commonly include peace, love and bliss, although a minority report terror, anxiety, or despair. Most people come away from the experience with an unshakable belief that they have learned something of immeasurable importance about the purpose of life. Overall, the entire experience is ineffable—that is, it is beyond description. Attempts to capture the event through art and metaphor have proved to be limited, insufficient and inadequate to capture the richness of what has been experienced.

The majority of those having the “privilege” of this experience (not at a small cost, physically and psychologically) is that they have come out of it renewed, renovated, transformed into beings dedicated to sharing freely their experience, dedicated to serving others with an enthusiasm they did not express before the event. This was well exemplified by Dannion Brinley, who after his near-death experience became a hospice and nursing home volunteer. In the past 25 years of volunteer service, he has been at the bedside of over 340 people at the point of death, and more than 1,200 during their final days, accruing more than 16,000 hours of service.

Real life after death

The fact that these near-death experiences were vividly lived at the conscious level and the brain had been declared clinically death does seem to postulate that consciousness, awareness is not a physical response depending on the brain to express itself. In Dr. Van

Lommel's opinion, the current views on the relationship between the brain and consciousness held by most physicians, philosophers and psychologists is too narrow for a proper understanding of the NDE phenomenon. The fact that our consciousness does not always coincide with brain function offers ground to propose that it can have an experience separate from the body.

If this is so, then the near-death event does not require the body or the brain to be actively present to experience any of the above commonalities. Accepting the veracity of those NDE experiences, it is possible to conclude that our conscious essence is not material and thus can exist in a realm of being that does not follow the rules of space and time, which implies that it is not constrained to a physical body (brain included) to be present in existence. When the near-death experience occurs, consciousness is liberated to experience another level of existence that surpasses the physical constraints of our earthly life. Yet, such a realm is as real as the air we breathe, but cannot see, as is the case of the wind; we feel its presence, but cannot see it as we see physical objects, as we perceive our thoughts/ideas to be real, but have no physical place in our brain where they can be found, and yet, the essence of these thoughts / ideas becomes a reality when we translate these thoughts / ideas into concrete objects.

Not fully understandable

It is then acceptable to conclude that this reality experienced by those that have had a near-death experience escapes our normal highly limited understanding of intangible realities that can be postulated to exist although they are not observable or fully comprehensible.

Yet, ineffable

Yet, even though we cannot fully apprehend the essence of a near-death experience, we can at least accept the testimonial given by those experiencing it that it is an ineffable episode not comparable to any other experience they have had. The closest similar experience,

although different, is the experience of being in the heavenly presence of the divine as reported by those having a mystical rapture.

Wishing they could have stayed in that new realm of existence

Those having a near-death experience have also reported that when they were told to go back to their bodies because their definite transition time had not arrived, their spontaneous reaction was to resist going back to the body that had suffered so intensely before the experience began. The fruition of the newfound level of existence was so delightful that they had no desire to come back to their harsh earthly reality. The heavenly environment they were experiencing was by far better than what they had lived on the earthly plane. Yet, they understood that they had to come back because they had a new objective to live for and an extraordinary experience to communicate to those that feared deeply the transition moment at the end of their lives because they had no hope, no certitude, no assurance, or belief that there is an after-life.

To have additional reassurance that we are not proposing a reality that has no further scientific basis than the one presented thus far, it is necessary to explore what ground-breaking scientists of various fields of human nature have stated as being the essence of the immaterial reality of consciousness. We will present an in-depth analysis of some of those scientists and their statements in the next chapter.

At this point, we must clarify that the Baha'i Faith does not rely on NDEs as a "proof" of the reality of an after-life. This certitude is based on the Revelation given by Bahá'u'lláh, which will be presented beginning in Chapter 7. Presenting these vivid testimonials of people who have had such an experience makes the reader aware that there are other avenues available for approaching the question of the reality of such a dimension. The seriousness of the documentation compiled by the research of the NDE phenomenon allows us to foster a very human perspective of this realm that would otherwise be quite inaccessible to everyday man's experience.

CHAPTER 4



THE IMMATERIAL REALITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

To present the immaterial reality of consciousness it is first necessary to clarify several functions of the mind that are involved in the process of creating thoughts, ideas and concepts. The mind as a mental process requires the infrastructure provided by the brain, which in itself, is organized by sections specialized in carrying out distinct mental functions as identified by the scientists dedicated to deciphering the mysteries of the brain.

Structure of the Mind

The brain—the physical foundation of the Mind

Let us start by stating that the human brain contains about 100 billion nerve cells. (1) and that it is divided into two halves or hemispheres: right and left. The right hemisphere controls the left side of the body, and the left hemisphere controls the right side. In most people, the left hemisphere regulates language and speech, and the right hemisphere controls nonverbal, spatial skills. If the right side of the brain is damaged, movement of the left arm and leg, vision in the left eye, and/or hearing in the left ear may be affected.

Injury to the left side of the brain affects speech and movement on the right side of the body. Each half of the brain is divided into

main functional sections, called lobes. There are four lobes in each half of the brain: the Frontal Lobe, Temporal Lobe, Parietal Lobe, and Occipital Lobe. Other important sections of the brain are the Cerebellum and the Brain Stem. Although not usually divided into lobes, the cerebellum and brain stem both have different parts. Each of the brain hemispheres and lobes, cerebellum, and brain stem has specific functions, and they all work together. Let us take a quick review of each one:

Frontal Lobe: The frontal lobe, located right under the forehead, controls intellectual activities, such as the ability to organize, as well as personality, behavior, and emotional control.

Parietal Lobe: Near the back and top of the head above the ears; the parietal lobe controls the ability to read, write, and understand spatial relationships.

Occipital Lobe: Most posterior, at the back of the head; the occipital lobe controls sight.

Temporal Lobe: Side of head above ears situated immediately behind and below the frontal lobes. The temporal lobe controls memory, speech and comprehension.

Even though the brain is the central organ of the nervous system, it is made up of additional organs: the spinal cord, and the nerves that run throughout the whole body from the brain, down the spinal cord to every organ of the body telling it what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. The nervous system monitors and coordinates internal organ function and responds to changes in the external environment.

Brain Stem: Lower part of brain, leads to spinal cord; the brain stem contains nerve fibers that carry signals to and from all parts of the body. It is often known as the brain's switchboard. The brain stem also regulates body functions such as fatigue, heart rate, and blood pressure. Damage to the brain stem can cause loss

of consciousness, movement disorders, and similar dramatic damage to movement, balance, and body operations.

Cerebellum: Located at the base of the skull; it is a curved mass of nerve tissues that regulates balance and coordinates fine motor skills; it enables us to move quickly and smoothly.

Grey and White Matter: The brain is made up of two types of tissue, grey matter and white matter. The grey matter contains about 86 billion nerve cells (neurons) and is involved in analyzing information. White matter contains billions of nerve fibers (axons and dendrites) and conducts information between grey matter areas. These neurons are connected by trillions of connections, or synapses. (2)

Without a master control system that tells our bodies what to do, none of the organ systems we have would work. This master control has two main parts: the central nervous system (CNS) and the peripheral nervous system (PNS). The central nervous system consists of the brain and the spinal cord, which serve as the main control centers for the body and processes all incoming and outgoing messages. The peripheral nervous system includes all the nerves in your body that bring messages to the central nervous system and from the CNS to the muscles and all organ systems. (3)

The above description of the complexity of the brain's structure and functions of its parts is no less than extraordinary, it is beyond amazing. The first thing to note is how many of the functions of the different organ systems of the body do not require any conscious intervention from us. The respiratory system takes in and processes over 20,000 breaths a day. It does it automatically, continuously, uninterrupted. The digestive system does not require a *conscious message* from us to produce the gastric juices needed to decompose the food and make it circulate through the small intestine, into the large intestine and the unused food expelled out of the body. The individual does not need to *consciously tell* the heart to beat 80 beats per minute, 4,800 times per hour. That is about 115,200 times per day. Over the course of a year, your heart would beat about

42,048,000 times! If you live to be 80 years old, your heart would have beaten approximately 3,363,840,000 times!—without having to worry once that you have to be consciously telling the heart to beat all those times. (4) If one would have to do it consciously, one would do nothing else during a lifetime because there would not be any time available to carry out any other mental function.

Yet, all of these automatic systems function together as a unified and coordinated set of functions designed to keep the body alive, thriving, growing, repairing itself, and offering every individual the optimal functioning physical structure that allows him/her to carry on its higher functions of thinking, creating, caring, loving, offering service, and doing heroic feats of unselfish sacrifice.

The Mind—the master organizer and interpreter

The brain with its incredible array of sections and performances unifying the multiple organisms of the body to perform harmoniously and in a constant state of incredible fine tuning is not what characterizes a human being. What it does is the incredible creative individual that he is: a creature with a superb faculty to continuously produce an astonishing diversity of concepts, ideas, theories, blueprints, inventions of all sorts, art expressions that dance as literature, paintings, music, sculptures, videos, films; engineer and architectural designs that defy gravity, gaping chasms covered by bridges, atmospheric pressure in airplanes, and defying crushing sea depths in submarines.

When we reach the level of the mind in the human reality, we are stepping into an area that goes beyond the physicality of the brain and enters into the dimensions of what defines a human being and puts him in a category above that of the sentient beings. We are referring to several new levels in man's total reality: that of his capability of creating thoughts anew from diverse perceptual and physical data entering into the brain. The mind is the constant creator of new realities (theoretical or physical) that did not exist until a person conceives them in his mind and gives them outward expression (verbal or visual) and then transforms them into a physical reality.

The mind's magnificent creative process is many a time mixed with profound feelings of empathy, love, sacrifice, as well as experimenting feelings of rage and destruction, lack of forgiveness, revenge and rejection of others based on the most superficial reasons of skin color, hair texture, eyes configuration, height, language, body type, beauty category or ethnicity.

Clarification of the definition of “mind”

Before such complexity of the human being at this level, it is imperative to come to agreement of what is meant by mind. It must be done because “mind” has had many (even opposing views) as what it means and how the term should be used.

Let us start with some common definitions presented by well-known dictionaries to start getting a panorama of how rich and varied the term, mind, is.

The Merriam Webster dictionary offers these definitions of mind:

- the element or complex of elements in an individual that feels, perceives, thinks, wills, and especially reasons.
- the conscious mental events and capabilities in an organism
- the organized conscious and unconscious adaptive mental activity of an organism. (5)

The Cambridge Dictionary defines mind as:

the part of a person that makes it possible for him or her to think, feel emotions, and understand things. (6)

The Wikipedia encyclopedia defines mind as:

The set of cognitive faculties including consciousness. Imagination, perception, thinking, judgment, language and memory, which is housed in the brain. It is usually defined as the faculty of an entity's thoughts and consciousness. It holds the power of imagination, recognition, and appreciation, and is responsible

for processing feelings and emotions, resulting in attitudes and actions. (7)

So far, these definitions allow us to conclude that the mind, although it depends on a normal, healthy brain to perform, transcends its physical composition. Some words give us the clue of the transcendence that the mind has over the brain such as: “elements in an individual that feels, perceives, thinks, wills, and especially reasons”. Thus, the mind is not just the elements, or even portions of a brain that perform specific functions, but it is a faculty that belongs to a person, not simply to the brain, but to the wholeness of an individual.

Thus, the explicit expression of—“the part of a person that makes it possible for him or her to think, feel emotions, and understand things”, although alluding to it as “the part” which gives the impression of a physical portion, still it is referred to “a person”, who has—“the set of cognitive faculties, including consciousness, imagination, perception, thinking, judgment, language and memory, which are housed in the brain”

Cognitive faculties is a term that implies a level above and beyond the physical components found in the brain, to a process that is, in essence, immaterial in as much as a thought, an idea or an emotion cannot be seen, studied under a microscope, touched, weighed, or grasped as a physical entity, even though its reality has an underlying physical expression as bioelectrical impulses flashing in the brain between neurons and releasing chemicals.

Brief overview of the term “mind” in history

The above modern dictionary definitions were not considered or expressed by our illustrious deep thinkers of antiquity. This is not surprising given that they did not have access to the research and findings concerning the brain’s composition and its specific roles in their relationship to the overall physical performance of every individual.

Thus, there was a long period of history in which philosophy, a relatively limited cognitive science, and religion defined their insights to describe what the mind is, its origin, its power, and its distinguishing properties.

Understanding the relationship between the brain and the mind—mind-body is one of the central issues in the history of philosophy. It is a challenging problem both philosophically and scientifically.

There were two major philosophical schools of thought concerning the answer: dualism, and idealism, which considered the mind somehow non-physical. Dualism held the belief that the mind exists independently of the brain; and idealism held that only mental phenomena exist.

Additionally, the concept of mind has being understood in many different ways by many different cultural and religious traditions. Some see “the mind” as a property exclusive to humans whereas others ascribe properties of mind to non-living entities (pan psychism, and animism), animals and deities.

Modern views (classified as materialistic) often center around physicalism and functionalism, which hold that the mind is roughly identical with the brain or reducible to physical phenomena such as neural activity, though dualism and idealism continue to have many supporters.

Modern studies, based on this intense link between neural activity of the brain and its physical expressions, pose the question of whether it is a strictly definable characteristic of all humans, or whether mind can also be a property of some types of human-made machines because artificial intelligence has been able to produce thoughts and ideas with the processing of raw data into a new and different paradigm from the one offered in its raw state. (8)

Mind thus becomes a term that has different meanings to people who are specialists with diverse and sometimes opposing points of reference when defining what constitutes a human being. To a strict scientist for whom reality is all the physical things we can perceive, weight, analyze and whose composition, reactions, behaviors, and performance can be discovered, the ultimate reality of man is the

incredible structure of the brain and how it guides and creates the multiple levels of expression that we humans have.

To them, these expressions are the composite combination of chemical and bioelectrical outputs because when portions of the brain are compromised, it will either have an impact on the person's behavior or altogether alter it. The best-case example is when a person ingests a hallucinatory drug that alters the chemistry of the brain. One potential effect is to firmly believe that he can fly. If completely convinced he can do it, he is liable to jump off the roof of a building to experience flying. This reaction happens because such types of drugs cause hallucinations by disrupting communication between chemical systems in the brain and areas of the spinal cord in charge of sensory perceptions. (9)

Yet, there are scientists, like modern gastroenterologist William B. Salt II, who has quite a different point of view when he states that:

“Brain and mind are not the same. Your brain is part of the visible, tangible world of the body. Your mind is part of the invisible, transcendent world of thought, feeling, attitude, belief and imagination. The brain is the physical organ most associated with mind and consciousness, but the mind nor consciousness is confined to the brain. The intelligence of your mind permeates every cell of your body, not just brain cells. Your mind has tremendous power over all bodily systems”. (10)

Dr. Salt presents a clear functional distinction between the brain and the mind at the same time that he presents the relationship that exists between the two. This will be included in our presentation because it is an elegant and easy way to understand the definition.

The mind then is the faculty and function beyond the intricate composition of the brain that allows a person to think, feel, and express desires. Dr. Linda Elderand and Dr. Richard Paul summarized this distinction well in their summary presentation of their book, *The Human Mind, How it learns, and how it Mislearns*.

To them, the three main functions of the mind are thinking, feeling and wanting. Our thinking shapes and determines how we feel and what we want. When we think well, we are motivated to do things that make sense and motivate us to act in ways that help rather than harm ourselves and others. At the same time, powerful emotions or desires influence our thinking, helping or hindering how well we think in a situation. At any given moment, our minds (that complex of inner thoughts, feelings and desires) can be under the sway of our native egocentrism or our potential reasonability. When we are ruled by our egocentric tendencies, we see the world from a narrow self-serving perspective. We are not truly concerned with how our behavior affects others. We are fundamentally concerned with getting what we want and/or with validating our beliefs and views. The key to understanding human thought then, is, to understand its essential duality: its capacity for egocentrism (being trapped in self-delusion, myth, and illusion) and its capacity for reasonability (freeing itself from self-delusion, myth, and illusion). (11)

The mind as the producer of thoughts and knowledge

Our five senses perform a series of physical-biological processes that ultimately end up in the brain and activate specific areas of it. The interpretation of those signals is not carried out by the brain *per se*. It is done by the “Mind”.

If we were to make a gross comparison of our brain and mind to a computer, the brain would be the hard drive, and the mind would be the computer program software that makes sense of the electrical impulses that are found on the hard drive. The computer program organizes the electronic information that is saved in the hard drive into a coherent whole, making it appear on the monitor screen as letters carrying a phrase, a concept, an idea, a proposal, a theory, as mathematical data or simple-complex graphics, visual symbols or icons, tables, indexes, colorful pictures, amazing scenery, intricate games, etc. Without the programs, the data on the hard disc is inert and meaningless because the language in which it is conveyed is not understandable until it is transformed into an intelligible pattern,

into a written or a visual language, which is done by the different programs that the computer has.

The five senses stimulate the brain in different areas, allowing the mind to do its interpretation of what those stimuli mean, what type of knowledge they transmit, what picture of the world they bring, and what meaning, and purpose they have for the personal life of the individual. The most salient aspect of this marvelous function is the mind's ability to process so much information as a unit of knowledge that otherwise would remain as dispersed stimuli with no comprehensive meaning, no useful or manageable information, and no discernible purpose.

In other words, the brain marvelously reacts to the bio-electrical impulses coming from the skin, the taste buds, the cochlea, the nose, and the optic nerve, and converts them into manageable information that the mind then interprets as a feeling, an idea, an object, a pleasurable meal; as a threat, a fear, a source of anguish or discomfort; as an exhilarating experience, an innovative perspective or a brand-new theory. All these interpretations are then recorded in the brain's memory banks to be available whenever the mind needs to revisit those interpreted images, feelings, or emotions.

Putting it in another way, the mind, the master program, brings unity to the dispersed information that each of the senses captures from the outside world in the form of light waves, sound waves, pressure points, or bioelectrical impulses, and converts them into the images that we call "objective reality, outside of ourselves reality, or external physical reality". To these we attach, according to the experience lived from having received those stimuli in the past and under specific circumstances, additional meanings such as fear, pleasure, reassurance, comfort, understanding, danger, avoidance, beauty, ugliness, unacceptability, rejection, empathy, protection, trustworthiness, and many more.

The continuous stream of thoughts that mind produces are organized by the master program into various types of knowledge: conceptual, logical, creative, and intuitive. A brief analysis of each type of knowledge will give us an appreciation for how the mind

jumps the threshold of stimuli and enters a new dimension, that of being the creative master program.

Conceptual knowledge

Man classifies, enumerates, and makes an inventory of the stimuli received by the senses using a word or descriptive phrase. These words or phrases replace the perceived reality, represent it, and express it in such a precise manner that anyone listening or reading that expression can relate it to a known reality. The specialists locate conceptual knowledge in the frontal portion of the brain. The mind takes the registered impulses and elaborates the concepts.

Let us take the word “dog”. The word, in itself, is generic since it represents any four-legged mammal that barks, has a pair of ears, nose, and a tail that it wags when in a happy state; it is generally friendly to man (although wild ones are aggressive), and enjoys and seeks his company. These characteristics apply to any “dog” found anywhere in the world. Any person who has seen an animal with those characteristics will call it “dog” and whoever hears the word “dog” will have in his memory banks the image of a four-legged mammal that has two ears, a nose, is generally friendly and expresses his joy by wagging his tail. This image will be independent of the form of the ears, the length of his tail, the color of his hair, its body size, or the friendly or aggressive nature of the animal. A person may even refer to a particular dog and exclaim, “I once had a dog that looked very much like this one”.

In a similar way that the conceptual knowledge function of the mind produces words or phrases of the principal characteristics of any object, it can produce symbols that represent ideas, mental constructions, or symbolic entities, such as a flag to represent a country, the code of arms to represent a military institution, or the drawing of smoke to represent a fire that is not visible.

The mind, through its capacity to process conceptual knowledge, is also capable of creating myths. They have been produced by men to try to understand unknown physical realities, interpreted as transcendent entities that seem to control the forces of nature and the

destinies of men. Lacking modern scientific knowledge, humanity in the past elaborated myths of creation of the world, of plants, animals, and men to have some grasp of that which it did not understand. Thus, we have inherited myths of liberators, archetype heroes and heroines, villains, and the presence of Evil and Good. Some were very popular during the time of the Greeks such as Medusa, a woman-beast that could transform humans into stone statues by looking into their eyes; Poseidon as the god of the seas capable of creating a storm to devour sailors that had ventured into his territories; or Pegasus, the winged-horse ridden by Perseus to combat the Chimera monster. (12)

Logical Knowledge

The mind can also process information converting it into logical knowledge characterized by deductions made from a premise (that can be expressed as a concept), and that is accepted as a relative truth. This occurs with greater frequency in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and ecology.

An example will permit us to capture the difference between logical knowledge and conceptual knowledge. The mind starts with a primary statement and from it, conclusions are derived as in the following:

all humans have rational, thinking minds; therefore,
all creatures that have rational, thinking minds are
human-like.

Among the different logical constructs there are syllogisms that can be expressed with the following example:

- If Leonard is sick, he will not go to school. If Leonard does not go to school, he will not be able to hear what the assigned homework is. If Leonard is sick, he will probably not do the homework because he will not know what it is.

This type of knowledge allows for the accumulation of logical deductions which can become the theoretical framework of reference

of a given topic. This type of knowledge is used constantly by science when it starts with a hypothesis that serves as the starting point of a given research project. If the hypotheses turn out to be valid, deductions are made from it, conclusions are drawn, laws are formulated, and projections are made. This process does not exclude the possibility that the hypothesis may turn out to be false and so will be whatever deductions, affirmations and conclusions are derived from it.

The enormous advances that modern science has made have been based on this type of knowledge. It has demonstrated repeatedly that it is science's best technical output. Without this logical knowledge most of the inventions that give us modern comfort would not have been invented. (13)

Intuitive knowledge

In this type of knowledge, the person's mind simply "knows", "understands" the answer to his inquiry. It is the "Aha" moment that Archimedes experienced in his bathtub when he suddenly understood that an object displaces its own body weight when placed in a bucket full of water as the way to determine if the crown of the king was of real gold or not. He used an equivalent amount of gold to that of the weight of the crown and used the overflow of water to compare with the amount of water displaced by the crown. A similar moment happened to Newton when sitting under an apple tree, an apple fell on his head and at that very moment he understood the law of gravity.

This type of knowledge does not seem to pass through the reasoning process, nor does it follow logical steps. It is an immediate, direct form of knowledge that taps into the heart of the issue at hand. This does not mean that afterwards the person having the intuition is excluded from having to explain that which he had understood using reasoning steps, and sometimes inventing concepts to define the reality that he has known directly, but without its having been named or explained. (14)

Creative Mind

There is an additional performance of the mind that appears as another category of its functioning power; that of creating reality that is not logical, conceptual, or intuitive. It is known as the creative mind that expresses itself as music, paintings, dramas, novels, children or fireside stories, science fiction adventures; in astonishing realistic sculptures, in elegant and magnificent architect designs, and in formidable engineering projects.

Before the mind springs into action as the master program, songs and music do not exist. A mind conceives the musical notes, the rhythm, the melody, the tempo, the lyrics, and the instruments that will play them. Until then, music remains only as a potential possibility.

The same can be said about a painting. Before the mind of the artist conceives the image that is going to appear on the canvas with its full splendor of colors combination, depth perspective, anatomical accuracy, imaginative scenarios or even a total abstract composition of colors, shades and luminosity, the canvas remains an inert white coated piece of cloth.

Dramas, novels, and science fiction do not exist until a writer conceives in his mind the plot, the scenario, the story, the characters, the intrigue, the climax, the resolution and then converts all those “mind images” into words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and finally a book. The same dynamic applies to the fireside stories that have enchanted thousands of eager youngsters while living a magical world or an adventure in their imagination.

A piece of stone, marble, wood, metal, or plastic remains as such until the creative mind of the sculptor imagines what the raw material can yield as a sculpture which is patiently carved out of the apparent inert material to give the life like expressions of Michelangelo’s “David” or the masterful expression of pain of Mary while holding Jesus on her lap after He is taken down from the cross on which He had expired. The same thing can be said of Rodin’s Thinker, or Botero’s fat metal people in the streets of New York or Medellin, Colombia.

The architectural elegance of the bullet-shaped structure of the 30 St. Mary Axe building in London is now an internationally recognized landmark of the city. Its creators took advantage of the IRA bombed Baltic Exchange and Chamber of Shipping building and replaced it with this innovative and imposing architectural design that did not exist until the minds of the architects conceived it. A similar process underwent the creation of the Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao by Frank Gehry, or the most imaginative composition of diverse symbols found in Barcelona's cathedral of the Sagrada Familia by Antonio Gaudi, to the defiant elegance of the tallest needle building of the world, the Burj Al Khalifa found in Dubai designed by Adrian Smith, or the majestic spiritual space created by the lotus flower structure of the Baha'i Temple in New Delhi. (15)

None of these multiple expressions of man's capability for creative thoughts is possible without the existence of an overarching faculty, the mind that, out of a thousand diverse stimuli produced by the brain, is able to organize them into these different types of knowledge and convert them into humanity's continuous and progressive accumulation of its intellectual heritage.

The Emotional Mind

There is still another area of the mind that merits a brief description given the impact it has on each person, the emotional mind. It is no secret to anyone how emotions play such a profound role in how we respond to pressure, relationships, and the work environment. It is now clearer that this is a function of the mind when it was found that it had a powerful link to the level of consciousness one has of its own emotions and how they play out in one's life.

This function of the mind became quite relevant when Daniel Goleman popularized the term in 1995 under the name of "emotional intelligence", based on the work done by Peter Salavoy and John Mayer. Emotional intelligence is presented as the ability to:

- Recognize, understand and manage our own emotions

- Recognize, understand and influence the emotions of others. (16)

In practical terms, this means that being aware that emotions can drive our behavior and impact people (positively or negatively), we can manage those emotions—both our own and others—especially when we are under pressure.

The fact that such a function of the mind is intimately linked to awareness of one's emotional state allows for the introduction of still another unique function of the mind, that of generating consciousness, which also involves several levels of performance.

Mind and Consciousness

Consciousness is one of the unsolved mysteries that great thinkers across many disciplines have attempted to understand and explain in a conclusive manner. In the process of defining consciousness, philosophers, physicians, psychologists, neuroscientists and scientific researchers have participated in the process. Each of these types of professionals has defined consciousness from the point of view of their area of expertise, thus opening new angles for understanding. Although these definitions seem to be in conflict, they are more complementary views of a human faculty that is too rich to be reduced to one definition.

Just to make the point, we can cite the Australian philosopher David Chalmers who divides the conundrum of consciousness into “easy” or “hard” problems in a paper published in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* in 1995. The “easy” problems are phenomena that can be explained by either neural or computational mechanisms. For example, the difference between being awake and asleep is a phenomenon that would be considered by Chalmers as an easy problem of consciousness, as it can be explained as a cognitive function. But, according to Chalmers, the “hard problem of consciousness” is the subjective nature of experience, which can neither be explained by neuroscience nor cognitive science. (17)

But since it has been stated previously that consciousness is one of the functions of the mind, we will use the Merriam Webster Dictionary definition that meets the criteria of clearness and conciseness. Consciousness according to the dictionary is: [per Martha's second observation]

-the quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself -the state or fact of being conscious of an external object, state, or fact -the totality of conscious states of an individual -the normal state of conscious life

I would like to use the first definition, which is practically the same as the third, because both refer to the fact that consciousness is an internal state of “being aware of something within oneself”. An excellent example is the emotional mind that we just presented since it is based precisely on awareness of one's own emotions. The important element to emphasize is that “mind-consciousness” offers that inner perception.

Existential Consciousness

Consciousness goes deeper and is more fundamental than just general “awareness of something within oneself”. We have found in the work of an exceptional contemporary thinker, Ken Wilber, an outstanding effort of mapping out the multiple levels of consciousness that individuals experience, as well as a community of individuals—be it a whole culture or a whole country.

Kenneth Earl Wilber II (best known as Ken Wilber) was born January 31, 1949. He is an American author on transpersonal psychology who has developed a full integral theory where consciousness acquires a place of crucial importance. His integral theory is a systematic philosophy that presents an integrated matrix that claims to provide a synthesis of the structure of human knowledge and experience.

In 1973 Wilber completed his first book, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, in which he sought to integrate knowledge from

disparate fields. He describes the fundamentals of “psychologia perennis” (perennial psychology), a universal view of the nature of consciousness, and outlines a model faithful to this Eastern doctrine, providing insights into Western disciplines such as ego-psychology, psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology, Jungian analysis, and interpersonal psychology. K. Wilber’s (1974) model of the “spectrum of consciousness” is based on the view that human personality is a multilevel manifestation of expression of a single consciousness. Psychotherapies and psychological disciplines are discussed at the ego, existential, biosocial, transpersonal, and mind spectrum levels. (18)

Using his frame of reference, here is an excellent explanation of the I-consciousness, which serves us well in discovering a pivotal principle of unity within the most intimate aspect of any person, his or her consciousness. But before presenting his rich point of view, I will start with the basic premise offered by the French philosopher Renee Descartes (1637) when he made the famous statement that is still valid today:]

“Je pense, donc je suis” (Latin: “Cogito, ergo sum”,
English: “I think, therefore I am”)—(19)

This view of an inner, immediate perception of self is also reflected by the British Oxford academic and philosopher, and medical researcher, John Locke (1632-1704), when he stated that:

“In every Act of Sensation, Reasoning, or Thinking,
we are conscious to ourselves of our own Being.” (20).

These philosophical statements, backed by Wilber’s analysis presented in several of his books¹, allows me to affirm that the mind offers, through the faculty of consciousness, the intuitive experience of existing, of being alive in a direct way without any mediation. One

¹ These books written by Wilber elaborate the concept of the unity of the I-Witness of awareness from various angles: *Spectrum of Consciousness*, *A Brief History of Everything*, *No Boundary and One Taste*. These books contribute to his integrated vision of reality and the role that consciousness plays in it.

is just aware that one exists, and this awareness requires no proof. It is experienced directly. Nobody needs to tell me, prove to me or make me understand that I am alive. I simply know it experientially, directly, and without the need for concepts or deductions. I know and feel that I am alive. I know it directly without any intermediary mechanism. This way of knowing myself is innate. It does not require formal learning. What it does demand, though, is a conscious act that affirms to myself that I exist and that I make it explicit and evident to the “I-that-knows itself”.

Furthermore, I experience myself alive at the same time that I am aware that I am alive. In this act of knowing myself as being alive, and existing, I also experience a consciousness that does not require a specific time or space to be aware of such an existential reality (with the exception of infancy during which there is an underdeveloped awareness).

Simultaneously, I am the silent witness to my own existence. In the same way that I cannot come out from inside of myself to observe myself from the outside, nobody can enter inside me to become the observer of the essence of who I am or confirm my perception that I exist. The only one that can become aware of my own existence is the silent-witness of who I am, as an “I” that is identical to itself in an intuitive unity.

Levels of Consciousness

The below presentation of the levels of consciousness is the author’s synthesis of Ken Wilber’s reflections on human consciousness and the different levels at which it operates, and manifests its innermost essence. The way it appears worded here is my effort to extract from the books identified in footnote 3 what best supports the immateriality of consciousness being as real as it is the physical brain yet being non-local.

What is commonly understood as self-consciousness? It is this ability that we all have to be aware that we are aware. I am aware that I am reflecting of being aware, at the same time that I am aware that I exist as was presented as the existential mind. This awareness

is a conscious identity moment. One cannot separate being conscious from the 'I' that perceives to be present at that instant of consciousness. The same individual that exercises this consciousness is simultaneously the same one that is aware of existing and being conscious of being conscious. This awareness gives the individual an identity and inseparable oneness turning him into an individual that is unique and non-replicable. Everyone carries out this act of consciousness by himself. Nobody can do it for him, and he cannot do it for another person. These are unrepeatable moments that every man and woman must experience by himself or herself. At the very instant of becoming aware that one is aware, he/she discovers himself/herself as the "I" that is conscious and the "I" that is a thinker and a sentient being.

Not only can we be aware that we are aware and that we are thinking beings, but that we have the possibility of expressing this awareness to others knowing that they understand what I experience directly, because they, too, are aware of their own awareness. When making the affirmation that one is aware of being aware, one is also being aware that one exists, and is present in those thoughts as the one who thought them.

The most remarkable aspect of this ability and reality of being one with oneself is that this awareness is not limited by space or time. Every man can be conscious of this act of awareness, even in the most inappropriate or expected moments, such as while taking a shower, being present at a seminar, having dinner with a significant other, getting dressed, playing with the dog. This act of consciousness does not require a specific time. It just requires the attention of being aware.

The conscious-I—the permanent, silent witness

If I am asked, "Who are you"? "Who is the real you"? "What is your fundamental identity?", it is highly probable that my spontaneous answer will be, "I am the totality of my emotions, my feelings, and my thoughts. They are what define me. They are the building blocks of who I am".

Although this is how most of the people define themselves, that is not who they ultimately are. Why not? Because one is not the accumulation of the activities that one executes on a daily basis. You are not even the work that you do, in the same sense that you are not the marital status in which you find yourself. When I say, “my car”, “my house”, “my work”, those things designated as “my” are out there, outside of me. In the same manner when I say, “my heart”, “my stomach”, “my liver”, “my lungs”, “my bones”, none of them, even though they are inside my body expresses who I am, and do not define who I am. Yes, they are my organs without which I cannot live, yet, I am not the sum of my organs, and I am more than what they are. This affirmation helps to define the distance between what I do, what I have and the “I” that observes it all.

At the moment you become conscious that you have feelings, you experience emotions, you create thoughts; in that instant, “your thoughts, feelings, and emotions” turn into “something”, into a “product” of your thinking process, and thus they are “something” of which you are conscious of experiencing. At that conscious moment, they are not you because you are the one “that testifies” to their existence. By being witness that they exist externally to the consciousness that I have of them, they are therefore not the “the I-Witness”. While thoughts “float in my mind”, feelings “float in my body”, I am not them. I am the witness of their very existence.

I can even question if the objects of my thoughts exist, if they are real and not imagined; if the feelings I experience exist, if my emotions are real, but what I cannot doubt is that there is a “witness” that must be present inside me that testifies to the existence of the doubt. This is why I am not one of the objects that exist in nature or the sensations of my body or the thoughts of my mind because I can be the Witness to their existence.

I am not what I observe. This is the ability of my mind to be aware that I am the individual that observes reality, but I am not the reality observed. I am independent of the reality observed to be able to perceive that I exist. I may have to depend on an objective reality to exist, such as food, water, or a dwelling to be protected from the

inclemency of the weather, but none of those things determine that I am conscious that I am, that I exist.

I am the observer. This is the ability of my consciousness to be aware that I, as an individual, am the one who observes, reflects, deduces, and affirms that what is “out there, outside of me” has its own existence independent of mine, but absolutely depends on my affirmation of its existence for it to become real for me.

I cannot observe myself as an object outside of me. This is a great paradox. I cannot come out of myself to observe myself from the outside as an observer. If I could, I would stop being the observer and would become the observed.

Now I can understand why I can say that I am not my body. My body may be tired or alert, sick or healthy, heavy or light, but that does not define the existence of my intimate “I”. I have a body, but I am not my body. I have desires, but I am not my desires. I can perceive these desires, but that knowledge is not the Knower that is present while I know them. Desires float in my consciousness, but they are not affecting my internal “I” that is the witness to their presence because while I have desires, I do not have to pin my “I-essence-identity” to those desires.

I have emotions, but I am not my emotions. I can be aware of my emotions. I am the Witness-that-feels-them. Emotions pass by my “I”. I am their witness, but I am not my emotions, nor do I exhaust myself in them. They come and go; the “I” remains whole.

I have thoughts, but I am not my thoughts. I can know and intuit my thoughts, but the known is not the Witness that knows. Thoughts come and go, but they do not alter the essence of the I-who-knows because I am not my thoughts, nor do I dissolve my “I” into them. (21)

Therefore, who are you? You are not the objects outside of you; you are not your sensations, nor the effortless thoughts that you witness as existent. If you can say I have sensations, but I am not them; I have thoughts, but I am not them, then, who am I? The answer is found in looking for the source of such consciousness, which is the pure-silent-Witness that is conscious that I am not any of those objects outside of me, none of those feelings-emotions

inside of me, nor those thoughts of which I can be a witness to their presence. (22)

What remains when we are conscious of this moment of being present as the I-witness of all that I feel, think and experience? What remains is a center of pure consciousness, a center witness to all those thoughts, emotions, feelings and desires. The silent-witness observes the current of internal and external events that the body experiences while it is unaltered in its essence, in its absolute identity as the witness that is present while the production of all those thoughts, emotions and sensations are occurring while I am aware that it is the total "I", and is not any one of them. In other words, the individual is aware that his mind and body can be perceived objectively, thus spontaneously being aware that none of them constitute the true and authentic "I-witness", the "I-identical" to itself. (23)

The I-Witness exists in a non-space and timeless dimension

While present as the pure I-witness, that I-witness is invisible. It cannot be seen because it is not an object. The body can be seen, nature can be seen, objects can be seen, but the "I-witness" is none of those objects. The "I" of that state is pure consciousness, the "I" is the fountain of such consciousness, but it is not any of those things that appear in the field of consciousness. It is thus, nonmaterial, not subject to decomposition.

I am conscious that my consciousness is not constrained by time or space, because "I am" in the very same act of being conscious of being and this does not require time nor space. It is direct, immediate. There is a perfect symbiosis between being and existing without the interference of time or space. This does not deny that I am conscious that there is a dimension of space and time in that experience, and that this dimension is present within me, in my consciousness. To the degree that this is true, and is present in my consciousness, I am conscious that this dimension is real, that it is not just a figment of my imagination; I directly experience its existence. The dimension of no-space and no-time is a reality that I experience first, and afterwards, I can express it as a postulate. (24)

This unity of self-consciousness is preset inside each woman and man in a virtual no-space, no-time dimension, and is real. It has been defined by the major religions of the world as *soul* or *spirit*. I will not expand now on how they define it because it is not the objective of this reflection. At this point, my objective is to establish that consciousness has a no-space and no-time dimension as Ken Wilber has repeatedly expressed in the books cited. It is real, even though it has the brain as its base, which permits it to carry out the act of appropriation of consciousness.

The unity of “I” expresses itself

The previous reflections allow us to conclude that this “I am who I am” is the silent witness who oversees all that is happening to the existential me at any given moment in time with a different level of awareness. This is a unique moment for all of us humans when we become aware that it is “I” the one that is aware of being aware, and it is “I” who is aware that I have this body, that I have these multiple organ systems, and that they all work in synchronous, unified whole such that I am in good health as long as I am aware that its proper functioning depends on how well I feed myself with all the nutrients that my body needs to maintain its health and well-being, how much exercise I regularly do, how well I keep up my relationships, and how well I manage my stress.

It is the “I” that interprets those stimuli and sorts them into meaningful ideas and concepts, and it is the “I” who interprets emotions and makes sense of positive and negative experiences. It is “I” who finds orientation to manage life even while experiencing traumatic events. It is “I” who interprets experiences, ideas, and concepts to find meaning and purpose in life. It is “I” who finds meaning in trials, experiences, and events, and with that meaning, it is “I” who constructs a complete outlook on the self and on life. Such meaning becomes the guiding principle of how I decide to live the rest of my life. It is thus, “I”, who reflects on mistakes and learns a lesson for the future. The one that does that learning is the “I” who operates and guides the mind in carrying out the conscious functions.

It is the “I” who feels the deep emotions that shake up my whole being, sometimes to the very core, leaving everlasting scars in my psychological being because they were traumatic emotions. At the same time, it is “I” who experiences the most rewarding emotions such as love, empathy, and sharing, and is able to construct with them the positive outlook on life and people.

It is the “I” who is willing to give up its own life in a life-threatening situation as long as another can survive. It happens frequently as a free and spontaneous response to help others who are in danger.

It is the conscious “I” who expresses love and affection for a dear one, a relative, a friend, even a stranger in need. It is “I” who learns to empathize with others, being able to offer support and help meet their needs.

It is “I” who finds a true balance between despair and hope because it is “I” who believes that hope and love can overcome any state of despair based on the conviction that the power of love is greater than the perceived despair.

It is “I” who learns the value of forgiveness and puts it into practice in real life situations that may be extremely trying. It is definitely “I” who understands that holding a grudge, that deciding never to forgive the one that has hurt you deeply, finally realizes that not forgiving does more harm to oneself than to the other who may not even be aware that you hold that resentment.

This silent witness is the one that orchestrates thoughts, interprets feelings and emotions, interacts with others, expresses opinions, even gets mad, feels pain and fear as well as love and empathy. This formidable and unique “I” is the one that unifies all the electromagnetic and bio-electrical stimuli that the senses channels to the specific areas of the brain, the one that unifies and interprets experiences that give joy or sadness, that one that expresses kind words that give encouragement, expresses mean phrases that hurt feelings, give insults that betray trust, shares sublime ideas that uplift the mind and the inner emotion to contribute, to give, to forgive, to extend a kind word to the one that needs it urgently.

My understanding of Wilber’s description is that the “I” appears as the one in charge of the self at the level of conscious options, of

free will decisions, abstract thoughts, inspiring ideas, and creative moments. This “I” is beyond the mind because it is the motor of the mind, the master program that synthesizes dispersed stimuli, formulates new ideas, finds encouraging words at the right moment, proposes alternative solutions and inspires others to respond according to the best of themselves. In Wilber’s own words, he defines the identity of consciousness as:

“... unity of consciousness is the natural state of awareness which acknowledges this reality. Unity of consciousness, in short, is no boundary awareness” (25)

This unity of consciousness that has no boundaries in its awareness allows me to say that it is Wilber’s way of expressing the characteristic of immortality that consciousness has once it is liberated from the temporal condition.

Ken Wilber’s extensive analysis of the I-Witness identical to itself, having no space-time constraint allows me to postulate that this innermost essence of who we are as humans is not subject then to decomposition as the parts of the body are subject to when the death transition occurs. If it is not subjected to the space-time dimension to exist and express itself, it is feasible then to affirm that humans have an essence that is not perishable, nor is it subjected to the rigors of decomposition, and thus is liberated from material restraints so that it can continue its existence in another dimension of being.

This is another way to explain the affirmation made by Dr. Van Lommel that was presented in the previous chapter:

the current views on the relationship between the brain and consciousness held by most physicians, philosophers and psychologists is too narrow for a proper understanding of the NDE phenomenon. The fact that our consciousness does not always coincide with brain function offers ground to propose that it can be experienced separate from the body.

This experience of consciousness perceiving itself as existing while separate from the body is what occurs when the individual reaches the

point when science declares that the temporal existence is finished, deceased. Yet, the essence of consciousness continues because it is not dependent for its existence at that moment on the brain to continue functioning as the I-Witness, aware of its consciousness identity. It continues its existence as described by those experiencing a near death experience when, afterwards, they are capable of describing, in full detail, all that she/he heard, saw, felt, reflected, and understood, as she communicated with other I-consciousness existing at the same level of being as the one he/she was experiencing.

Is there a parallel situation in physical reality that resembles the non-material essence of the I-Witness and consciousness that reinforces the possibility of its survival after the death transition? The answer is Yes. It has been given by what scientists have identified as “quantum reality”. This requires an in-depth exploration that will be done in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5



IMMATERIAL REALITY OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD

Immaterial property of physical reality

Is there a parallel situation in physical reality that resembles the immaterial essence of the I-Witness and consciousness that reinforces the possibility of its survival after the death transition?

The answer is Yes. It has been given by what scientists have identified in many repeated controlled laboratory settings and is now known as quantum mechanics, which we feel is best described as “quantum reality”. Since quantum mechanics is a rather complex topic that requires extensive technical information, we are inviting the reader to see these technical aspects in Appendix 2 if he/she desires to have a further comprehension of this new field of physics. For now, we are going to present a basic description of what quantum mechanics is about, and then the conclusions that scientists have drawn about the intimate dimension of physical reality that are pertinent to the question posed above.

Before quantum mechanics was elaborated as a new theory of the intimate reality of the physical world, scientists had arrived at the explanation that matter was composed of atoms, which were made up of protons, neutrons, and electrons. These were also conceived in physical terms by Niels Borh who in 1913 proposed

that the electrons revolved around the nucleus in constant orbits. The nucleus of an atom consists of a tightly packed arrangement of protons and neutrons. Of the two, the protons possess a net positive charge. Hence, the nucleus of an atom is positively charged, and the electrons that revolve around the central nucleus are negatively charged.

This vision of the atom was changed when scientists found that the nucleus was composed additionally of neutrons, neutrinos and quarks. The latter are a type of elementary particles that are a fundamental constituent of matter. Quarks combine to form composite particles called hadrons, the most stable of which are protons and neutrons, the components of the atomic nuclei. (1)

The behavior of light posed a problem since it propagated in waves, well documented by those studying optics and suggested in 1905, when Einstein published a paper, "*Concerning an Heuristic point of view toward the emission and transformation of light*" in which he envisioned light traveling not as a wave, but as some manner of "energy quanta." If so, how was it to be understood the fact that all matter seemed to be made up of atoms, which was described in concrete physical terms rather than in wave form?

In order to determine how this apparent contradiction existed, a refinement of Thomas Young's double slit experiment (1803) was done. A beam of light was shone unto an opaque barrier that had two slits equally distant from each other. Behind it was a sensitive photographic plate that recorded the arrival of the light. The results showed that the light beam produced an impression on the plate of alternate bright and dark bands.

This was explained that when the light wave passes though both slits, it essentially splits into two new waves, each spreading out from one of the slits. These two waves then interfere with each other. At some points, where a peak meets a trough, they will cancel each other out. At others, where peak meets peak, they will reinforce each other. Places where the waves reinforce each other give the brightest light. When the crests align with the troughs, a destructive interference occurs making a dark stripe. (2)

Then the experiment was done again, but this time individual electrons were fired at the opaque barrier instead of a steady beam of light. The result was that some of the electrons passed the open slit and struck the photographic plate and formed a strip roughly the same shape as the open slit that they went through. When the other slit was opened, the electrons build up to replicate the interference pattern exhibited by the light wave.

How can this be that electrons behaved the same way as a light wave?

One possibility might be that the electrons somehow interfere with each other, so they do not arrive at the same places that they would if they were alone. However, the interference pattern remains even when you fire the electrons one by one, so that they have no chance of interfering. Strangely, each individual electron contributes one dot to an overall pattern that looks like the interference pattern of a wave as the one presented with the light projected on the opaque barrier.

Could it be that each electron somehow splits, passes through both slits at once, interferes with itself, and then recombines to meet the second screen as a single, localized particle?

To find out, a detector was placed by the slits, to see which slit an electron passes through.

When they did that, the pattern on the detector screen turned into the particle pattern of two strips! The interference pattern disappears. Somehow, the very act of “looking at them” to make sure that the electrons travel like well-behaved particles had the effect of “making” them behave accordingly. It is as if they “knew” they were being spied on and decided not to be caught in the act of performing in a weird quantum fashion.

Some conclusions can be drawn from of these experiments.

- A light wave can sometimes behave like a particle. This was initially met with harsh criticism, as it ran contrary to 200 years of experiments showing that light behaved like a wave; much like ripples on the surface of a calm lake. Light behaves similarly in that it bounces off walls

and bends around corners, and that the crests and troughs of the wave can add up or cancel out. Added wave crests result in brighter light, while waves that cancel out produce darkness.

- Electrons, considered traditionally to be one of the smallest expressions of matter, can also behave like a wave. This ran counter to the roughly 30 years of experiments showing that matter exists as particles.
- The extraordinary discovery and affirmation made by scientists was that light could behave both as a wave and a particle, placing light's "wave-particle duality" into the foundation of quantum mechanics. It also suggests that the act of observing, of measuring, a quantum system has a profound effect on the system. The question of exactly how that happens constitutes the *measurement problem* of quantum mechanics. (3)
- Quantum particles can behave like particles, located in a single place; or they can act like waves, distributed all over space or in several places at once.
- In quantum mechanics, subatomic particles exist in a haze of probability; they have a certain chance of being at point A, another chance of being at point B and so on.

This odd behavior was best expressed by the German physicist Werner Heisenberg, who postulated that we cannot simultaneously know both the position and momentum of a quantum system with absolute precision. If we try to know a particle's position precisely, we will be completely uncertain of its momentum. Today scientists call matter wave functions that can be described in terms of position or momentum as a traveling sound wave can be expressed in terms of time or frequency. This allows any particle or any wave function to be represented as a combination of many locations in space with accompanying intensities. This explanation became known as the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. The uncertainty principle therefore tells us that the particles must be completely unconstrained in position. So, a perfectly specialized particle is equally an infinite

number of momentum particles that themselves occupy all locations in the universe. (4)

Multiple experiments at the subatomic level show that the everyday world we perceive does not exist until observed, which in turn suggests a primary role for the mind in nature. According to quantum mechanics, the world exists only as a cloud of simultaneous, overlapping possibilities—technically called a “superposition”—until an observation brings one of these possibilities into focus in the form of definite objects and events. This transition is technically called a “measurement.” One of the keys arguments for a mental world is the contention that *only conscious observers* can perform measurements. (5)

Thus, quantum mechanics describes nature in a way that is different from how we used to describe the structure of physical reality at its smallest known unit, the atom. Quantum mechanics tells us how likely things are to happen rather than how they will happen, or even that they certainly will. Quantum **physics** predicts very strange things about how matter works, all, which are completely at odds with how things seem to work in the real world.

How then is this quantum reality related to consciousness?

The question is a bit tricky to answer. Our understanding is the following. If reality at the quantum level requires the input of an observer, that is a conscious mind thinking what the outcome might be, and in fact that is what occurs under laboratory conditions, then it is possible to affirm that the immateriality of consciousness, as presented in the previous chapter, is able to interact with the immateriality of the subatomic reality that is pure potentiality “waiting” to manifest itself when it receives the immaterial input of the observer. We thus have two immaterial realities, one dependent on the other to express itself.

This is a scientific way to reaffirm that consciousness is a reality independent of time and space in as much as it can operate and create a relationship with sub-atomic reality that exists in the realm of possibilities, that is, beyond time and space, since it is a pure potentiality that has not entered into the physical dimension. It does so only when a parallel influx, that of the mind-consciousness, interacts with its potentiality and responds to the creative power

of the mind-consciousness by expressing itself in the time-space continuum of the observer.

The afterlife cannot be a space-time dimension because once the body of any human dies, it disintegrates into its component elements. Thus, the reality of an afterlife must be in the realm of a no space-time dimension that can be experienced by the individual when he/she makes the transition. This dimension has been amply described by those that have had a near-death experience and have narrated it after they have returned into their bodies.

The essence of the mind-consciousness is not temporal or spatial as it has been previously explained. This form of existence enables it to make the transition to that no-time, no-space dimension. There is a parallel dimension of being that has been confirmed by scientists to exist in the quantum field of physical reality, and by the researchers that have carefully and exhaustibly documented the near-death experiences. In them, the ones that have experienced it tell us that their temporal existence ceased to be at the very same time that their space-timeless consciousness took over and continued to operate and express itself as the individual that once was bodily present with self-awareness, with a specific set of memories, a well-defined psychological profile, an individual with emotions, feelings, desires, imagination, and a life purpose. This coherent way of existing in the near-death experiences restates the notion that such a state of being—even when a person has been declared clinically dead—continues in a non-space-time dimension that religions have expressed as being the afterlife that one experiences once this short temporal way of being ceases to have such a space-time expression.

Afterlife, not being a space-time dimension as the one to which we are subject because we are human, must not be in the space-time dimension because once the body of any human dies, it disintegrates into its component elements. Thus, the reality of an afterlife must be in the realm of no space-time as testified by those that have had a near-death experience. The essence of the mind-consciousness is not temporal or spatial. This form of existence enables it to make the transition to that no-time, no-space dimension. A parallel dimension

of being that has been confirmed by scientists to exist in the quantum field of physical reality.

We are now better equipped to address the essence of consciousness and that inner spiritual reality religions have called the soul, which is the permanent core of any human that transcends time and space in a manner and way that it can continue its existence in a non-time-space dimension. This will be done from the new perspective given by the most recent Revelation, the Bahá'í Faith. Since it is a complex, well-documented, wide-ranging new teaching, it requires a full in-depth presentation. We will do it in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6



CONSCIOUSNESS AND SOUL

It was concluded in previous chapters that man's consciousness exists in a non-space-time dimension that continues to function independent of the brain, even when an individual is clinical dead, as documented by those who have had a near-death experience and the researchers of that experience. Then I proposed that this non-space-time consciousness was capable of interacting with the sub-atomic dimension of matter in its state of potentiality as expounded by quantum physics, and that this interaction is possible precisely because both realities exist in a non-space-time dimension.

Religion affirms that man is composed of a non-space-time dimension called a soul. Religions have categorically affirmed that this human dimension is considered real and essential when defining the total reality of man.

If this is so, is it valid to ask: How is the relationship of human consciousness with the soul to be understood? Are they different, the same, or integrated? Which, then, makes the transition to the afterlife?

All of them are valid questions that have been asked by philosophers, poets, and writers of antiquity. They have approached the topic from different angles, with different conceptions of what constitutes man's inner nature and have thus formulated different conceptions as to what the soul is. I will skip the philosophers and thinkers of the past to concentrate on how religions have described and expounded on the nature of the soul how it is created, what its essence is, and how it is related to the body and mind of the individual.

All the major known and documented religions of the world have affirmed that man's innermost essence and its very life source springs from a potentiality, a faculty, and a spiritual reality called the "soul". This religious truth has been systematically given to humanity through the Prophet-Founders of worldwide religions. These extraordinary beings have appeared throughout humanity's history and have given a specific Revelation related to this topic to the people with whom they spoke at the time of their appearance.

They also revealed key aspects of the human condition, one of which has been that all humans are created in the "image and likenesses" of its Creator. This "image and likeness" is imbedded in the very essence of our souls, which is the very source of life that constantly animates and sustains the body, mind, and consciousness every minute, and every second of the day.

The way the soul comes into existence has been presented by these Prophet-Founders in a creation story that frequently used images of existing creation stories of the surrounding cultures under which their countries were subject or were highly influenced. Yet, a constant teaching was that man was directly created by God. The way this was taught was through a creation story that frequently used images of existing creation stories, as noted, but conserving the same spiritual teaching, namely, that man was created by God in a very special way: in the "image and likeness" of Him.

This fundamental affirmation has various levels of understanding with respect to what the soul is, as well as presenting several other nuances attributed to it. The following is my summary of what the major religions have said about the soul.

Hinduism

Hinduism affirms that man is created (by God) with a *soul that is immortal and imperishable*. A soul is part of *jiva*, the limited being, who is subject to the impurities of attachment, delusion and laws of karma. (1) The cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*) is eternal according to some Hindus, but others say it persists only until the

soul has attained karmic perfection, thus merging with the Absolute (*Brahman*). (2)

Zoroastrianism

The soul, created by Ahura Mazda (word used by Zoroaster to refer to God), is immortal and will be judged immediately after the death of the body. (3)

The teachers of this religion that a soul has nine parts: three physical ones, three subtly material ones and three spiritual ones (the link between sensation and soul is the divine spark). During life the nine elements work together on three “planes” to keep a human being alive and functioning. After death, the elements go their separate ways, the first six ultimately dissolve, leaving behind the last three, which unite and become immortal. (4)

Judaism

In Judaism the soul was believed to be given by God to Adam as mentioned in Genesis, **“Then the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”**. (Gen.2:7)

The Old Testament presents the word “soul” 72 times with various nuances. In the book of Deuteronomy the soul appears to be additional, different from one’s own heart as expressed in this text **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might”**. (Deut. 6:5) The content seems to point to a higher reality in man, although it represents the totality of man.

In the book of Job, the soul is also presented as having the capability of feeling “bitterness” due to the physical condition that Job finds himself. This nuance seems to suggest that the “soul” is equal to the totality of a man who feels. The same image is given by the soul that anguishes, that feels refreshed (Ps. 6:3, Ps. 18:17, 23:3); that rejoices (Ps 35:9); and that thirsts (Ps. 42:2).

When the word “spirit” is used in similar terms as soul, the original Hebrew word was “ruah” which is the principle of life expressed as “breath” (Gen. 6:17; 7:15) as was used in the text describing how God created Adam.

Buddhism

To avoid interrupting the chronology of the understanding of religion on what the soul is, we will now present the Buddhist belief, which was developed before Christianity.

Buddhism says that the person is made up of thoughts, feelings and perceptions interacting with the body in a dynamic and constantly changing way. At death, this stream of mental energy is re-established in a new body, to continue its path of liberation of past karma. In this manner, Buddhism is able to explain the continuity of the individual without recourse to the belief in an “eternal soul”, because that would contradict the fixed universal law of impermanence as was explained by Buddha.

Buddha was more interested in liberating man from suffering. He therefore regarded soul-speculation as unimportant, useless, and illusory. In regard to this position, he once said,

“Only through ignorance and delusion do men indulge in the dream that their souls are separate and self-existing entities. Their heart still clings to Self. They are anxious about heaven and they seek the pleasure of Self in heaven. Thus they cannot see the bliss of righteousness and the immortality of ‘truth.’ Selfish ideas appear in man’s mind due to his conception of Self and craving for existence”. (5)

Christianity

The New Testament was written in Greek. The word to represent the soul used was *psyque* and it appears 23 times, although in most English Bibles the word used is “soul”. The *psyque* is associated with

life. It leaves the body at death (Lk. 12:20). The *psyque* is the seat of desire and satisfaction (Lk. 12:19). It experiences sorrow (Mt. 26:38), pain (Rm. 2:9), doubt (Jn. 10:24), and love (Mt. 22:37; Mk. 12:30). It is also conceived as seat of supernatural life. The loss of the *soul* is a total loss for which the entire world is no compensation as expressed by Mark in 8:36.

³⁶ For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

In the words of Jesus, the soul is different from the body, in as much as it participates in adoring God aside from the heart. The affirmation suggests that the soul exists beyond the conception that a man was basically composed of heart and mind.

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your **soul**” (Mat. 22:37)

Although Paul follows traditional usage of the word as used in the Gospels, he also uses *pneuma* (soul- Spirit) referring it to the mind as the “spiritual minded”. This assertion presupposes spiritual consciousness that gives life and peace (Rom 8: 5-6). (6)

Additionally, Paul acknowledges that man has a natural body and a spiritual body,

“It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15: 44), which, once more, presupposes that man has another dimension from the physical, that of the spirit, which is another way of referring to the soul. He goes further to exalt the state of “spiritually minded” as the way to have life and peace, **“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace”**. (Rom 8: 5-6) In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul once more refers to the reality of man as being “of spirit, soul and body” allowing for the affirmation that the soul is integral to the individual, but it is not to be identified as his body reality.

The soul is susceptible of salvation according to the Apostle Peter, which implies that it is different from the body and is related to the

realm of Heaven through a salvation perspective, “**Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls**”. (1 Peter 1:9)

The concept of the soul being separate from the body-self was firmly introduced into Christian theology by Gregory of Nyssa (335–to 395) at an early date and then by St. Augustine (354—430). St. Augustine spoke of the soul as a “rider” on the body, making clear the split between the material and the immaterial, with the soul representing the “true” person. However, although body and soul were separate, it was not possible to conceive of a soul without its body. In the Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas returned to the Greek philosophers’ concept of the soul as the animating principle of the body, independent, but requiring the substance of the body to define an individual. Scholasticism created the definition of the **rational soul** in which the **soul** has an independent existence apart from the body and that its characteristic is that of being the animating principle of human life as distinguished from the animal **soul** or the vegetable life (soul). (7)

Islam Muhammad also affirms the same transcendental truth of previous religions that the soul is a creation of Allah (God) much in the same manner as the biblical narration. The Qur’an expresses it with these verses:

(It is He) Who made good everything that He has created, and He began the creation of man from dust. Then He made his progeny of an extract of water held in light estimation. Then He made him complete and breathed into him of His spirit, and made for you the ears and the eyes and the hearts; little is it that you give thanks. (32:7-9)

Muhammad also alludes to the soul going back to its origin, Allah, after the earthly death, which infers that the soul has an independent existence of the body.

Islam elaborated this fundamental affirmation into a more complex explanation. God is believed to endow humans with *rūh* and *nafs* (نفس, psyche, i.e. ego or “(inner) soul”). The *rūh* “drives” the *nafs*, which comprises temporal desires and sensory perceptions.

The *nafs* can assume control of the body if the *rūh* surrenders to bodily urges. The *nafs* is subject to bodily desire, whereas the *rūh* is a person's immaterial essence, beyond the emotions and instincts shared by humans and other animals. *Rūh* makes the body alive. *Rūh* is thus the life source of the body being an immaterial essence which will not be constrained by time or space making it susceptible to a permanent form of existence. (8)

Most well-known religions' common concepts of the soul

In Hinduism, man is created (by God) with a *soul that is immortal and imperishable*. To some Hindus, the soul will eventually obtain karmic perfection, thus merging with the Absolute (*Brahman*).

Zoroastrianism also affirms that the soul, created by Ahura Mazda (God), is immortal. It will attain such a state when, after death, the first six earthly elements ultimately dissolve, leaving behind the last three, which unite and become immortal.

Judaism also believes that God created man when He breathed into Adam's nostrils **"and man became a living soul"**. God additionally made man, **"in our image, in our likeness"**. The soul thus represents the totality of man which has a spark of divinity in virtue of having a **"likeness and image of God"**.

The New Testament affirms that God created man with a soul. The *psyque* (soul) is presented as being different from the body. To lose the soul is the worst thing that can happen to a human.

Although Paul follows traditional usage of the word as used in the Gospels, he also uses *pneuma* (soul- Spirit) when referring to the mind as the "spiritual minded". He is clear in stating that man has both a natural body and a spiritual one (1 Cor 15: 44) that it is not to be identified as being solely his body reality.

The soul is capable of salvation according to the Apostle Peter, which implies that it is different from the body and is related to the realm of Heaven from the salvation perspective.

The concept of the soul being separate from the body-self was firmly consolidated by the Church Fathers—Gregory of Nyssa (335—to 395), St. Augustine (354—430), and then by St. Thomas

Aquinas who affirmed that the soul is the animating force of the body, independent but requiring the substance of the body to define an individual.

Islam

Muhammad also affirms that the soul is a creation of Allah (God) much in the same manner as the biblical narration. Muhammad also alludes to the soul going back to its origin, Allah, after the earthly death. Later on, Islam elaborated this affirmation into a more complex explanation. God is believed to endow humans with *rūh*. *Rūh* is thus the life source of the body's being an immaterial essence, not constrained by time or space, making it open to a permanent form of existence.

Relation of Soul and Consciousness

Christianity has probably provided the most elaborate explanation of this relationship. It was stated above that Christianity, through its theologians, clarified and affirmed that the soul is the animating force of the body, independent, but requiring the substance of the body to define an individual. Scholasticism created the definition of the **rational soul** in which the **soul** has an independent existence apart from the body, and its characteristic is that of being the animating force of human life as distinguished from the animal **soul** or the vegetable life.

By defining it as a rational soul, there is an immediate relationship with man's capacity for rational thinking, which in turn is linked to the mind that has an indissoluble unity, and an intrinsic bond with consciousness, as established in the analysis I have done of how the mind has consciousness as one of its fundamental functions. Through consciousness, the "I" identical to itself is conscious of itself and its existence. The "I" is, at the same time, the silent witness of the knowledge acquired, the memories, the emotions, the feelings and the experiences lived as a permanent record of the life lived. It is the

“I” that constitutes the totality of who we are as conscious beings. As such, this “I-consciousness” exists outside the space-time limitation, as illustrated by those having had a near-death experience.

In my interpretation it is possible to bridge the religions’ conception of the soul as being the life source of the individual, which is the sustainer of the life of the body, without which the individual’s body simply perishes, to the reality of his consciousness as being space-timeless. The soul, created by God in His “own image and likeness”, is the element, capacity or faculty that can know and relate to the Creator, precisely because it has that “image and likeness” of the Creator. That reality of man being created by God is imperishable, reflecting His Eternity. It will continue to live after the death transition in a state that has been called “Heaven” by the cited religions.

I conclude that the rational soul is at the same time the “I-consciousness”, as well as the life source of the body, which is outside time and space constraints as I have tried to explain in previous chapters. The “I-consciousness” that is not constrained by a physical organ, the brain, can be liberated to continue its existence in another dimension of being. It happens at the moment of transition we call death. Religion calls that new dimension, heaven. It is reached by our souls as an energy-unit that does not require space or time to continue its conscious existence along with the memories, emotions, feelings, and knowledge that it experienced while present in a physical body.

Religion affirms that the soul, created by God, is thus destined to continue its existence in a different dimension, where time and space do not exist. Since this is the condition that the soul has when it crosses over as pure spiritual energy conscious of its existence, the soul has the required condition of being to continue to exist in the new dimension, the one called heaven.

How this unit of pure spiritual energy continues to live in that other dimension will be the object of our next chapters. We will appeal to the Bahá’í Faith’s new interpretation of the soul, its journey and final destination to elucidate how the soul will continue to exist in that new phase of being.

CHAPTER 7



A NEW RELIGION, A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

We have presented the best-known religions' belief in the existence of an afterlife once we make the transition that we gloomily call "death" because when it happens, the body disintegrates and the person(s) we used to see, touch, talk to and whose company we enjoyed are gone in an apparently permanent manner. We do not get to see them anymore and they become painfully absent from our lives.

We then explored how religions defined the entity called the soul, which goes to the afterlife. Religion has given the best definition of the soul since science at the time that those religions came into existence did not have much understanding of that life energy-source, its nature, its composition, or its origin. The science of the brain, even at this early stage of its potential development, has given us a new understanding of consciousness as a no-time, no-space-bound faculty (strongly manifested in those that have had a near death experience) as well as in those experiments done by quantum research which has shown that scientists are able to affect the no-time, no-space dimension of the sub-atomic level of physical reality in a way that it can elicit the wave or particle behavior of an electron by anticipating its manifestation in one of the two potential end behaviors.

All these scientific advances and new knowledge of "objective reality" obviously spurs us to ask the question as to whether there

might be a connection to a religious explanation that is basically in agreement with the new-found postulates.

In fact, there is a new religion that claims to have fresh answers to these perennial questions of humanity. It is called the Bahá'í Faith, which we would like to present to the reader in a summary fashion so that he/she can receive a broad picture of where it came from, who started it and why it offers a new perspective.

Let us start by clarifying a basic premise. A religion is not presented, expounded, and put out into the world by a common person who one day decided he was going to start such a religion. The founders of world-embracing religions have many aspects in common, but one that is essential is to be conscious of—and to express categorically—that he is a Spokesperson for God, speaking in His Name, chosen by Him. The new Faith I am presenting has this very same foundation as did Hinduism with Krishna, Judaism with Abraham and Moses, Christianity with Jesus, Islam with Muhammad, and now the Bahá'í Faith with Bahá'u'lláh.

The Spokespersons of God

It is common knowledge that the Sacred Teachings of the most widespread religions of the world were given by an individual who presented himself as a Spokesperson for God. On behalf of God, he revealed a particular Revelation containing specific aspects or Attributes of God that can give us minimal way of understanding and relating to Him. It is important to remember that *most* of the actual “Sacred Writings” in existence now, as explained earlier, were written generations later after the passing of the Manifestations and are not reliably their exact words with the exception of the Qur'an and the Bahá'í Writings, which were consigned during the lifetime of the Manifestation of God, as in the case of Mohamed, or directly written/dictated by the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh. This has been one of the main reasons why there are imprecisions in the interpretations of the nature of the soul made by the clergy and scholars of those other religions.

Additionally, the Revelation presents what should be the relationships among believers, as well as what their relationship with God as their Creator should be. Such a relationship was normally expressed in a Covenant that was to guide everyday life behaviors, calling upon all believers to follow some specific guidelines and laws. Such a Revelation also presents God's Plan for the specific social group addressed by the Spokesperson. This Spokesperson proves, by his impeccable lifestyle, that he lived in accordance with what he revealed. He also reiterated that he was chosen by God for that mission. It was not a self-appointed role.

How does the Spokesperson express God's Will?

The Messengers have expressed God's Will in a very human way, using the words of the spoken language of the people they were addressing. For the ancient religions, the Revelation was done verbally since most of the people at that time did not know how to read or write. So, the Spokesperson's teachings became an oral tradition passed from generation to generation that sometimes took hundreds of years before such teachings were written down to become the Sacred Books or Writings of that religion.

One of the most important characteristics of these Messengers is that each one has acknowledged the validity of one or several teachings of the previous Spokespersons, or Manifestations of God, as the Bahá'í Faith often calls them. They have done so by showing the continuity that Revelations have when a new Spokesperson confirms what the previous Manifestation had revealed pertaining to the Unknowable Essence of God or has added a new aspect that had not been presented before because we would not have been capable of comprehending such an infinite reality. They have all presented a path for a lifestyle to follow that is the best guide as to how to relate to the Creator, as well as the path of how best to relate to others.

Although not as well-known as the other worldwide religions, there has been a recent new Revelation made to humanity through such a Spokesperson / Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh. This Prophet Founder of the Bahá'í Faith had the authority to speak in

the name of God. He was born in 1817 in Teheran, Iran. His birth name was Mirzá Husayn-‘Ali. His father was highly regarded because he was one of the chief counselors to the King of Persia, as Iran was known at that time. Much the same way that Jesus is known today by the title of “the Messiah” and Muhammad as “the seal of the Prophets”, Mirzá Husayn-‘Ali is known as “Bahá’u’lláh” (which means ‘the Glory of God’ in Arabic).

Nineteen years before Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed Himself as Manifestation of God, a 25-year-old young man, known by His followers as The Báb, declared on May 22, 1844, that He was the promised Qá’im of Shiite Islam, the return of the Twelfth Imam. Qá’im means “He who has arisen” and was awaited by Shiite Muslims for over 1,000 years. Baha’is believe Him to have been the forerunner of Bahá’u’lláh much as Elijah would be for Jews awaiting the Messiah, or John the Baptist was for Jesus Christ. In 1844, this Messenger-known as the Báb (meaning “The Gate”, in Arabic)—proclaimed Himself to be the return of the Q’aim. He also announced the coming of the Promised one of all religions, Bahá’u’lláh, more eminent than The Báb himself, whose Mission would be to lay the groundwork for the promised world order to be governed by peace and justice, as proclaimed by Islam, Judaism, Christianity and all the other major religions. He left a record of this announcement in his best-known book, *The Bayan*. His proclamation started a full-fledged spiritual revolution in Iran. The Bab and his followers were immediately persecuted as heretics of Islam, and over 20,000 were killed.

After The Báb’s execution on July 9, 1850, instigated by the Muslim religious leaders of Iran, Bahá’u’lláh’s extraordinary personality, intelligence, leadership, deep spirituality, lofty virtues of compassion, detachment, and generosity attracted many of the Báb’s followers, who turned to Him for guidance. This unexpected turn of events angered the religious leaders and government officials of Iran, who redoubled their efforts to extinguish the flame of the new religion as soon as possible.

To accomplish it, in 1852, they arrested Bahá’u’lláh and incarcerated him in a dungeon prison made from deep storage wells for Teheran’s public baths. It was known as the “Black Pit” because

it was so dark that no light reached the prisoners, the reason been that it was three stories underground. The prisoners were shackled to the walls and to each other without access to any hygienic facilities, forcing them to share the dark enclosure with vermin and their own body wastes.

It was in this prison that Bahá'u'lláh received God's Revelation from the Celestial Maiden, who announced to Him that He was the Promised One. In his own words:

“Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden — the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord — suspended in the air before Me”... Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive. This is He Whose Presence is the ardent desire of the denizens of the Realm of eternity, and of them that dwell within the Tabernacle of Glory, and yet from His Beauty do ye turn aside. (1)

Bahá'u'lláh did not mention this Revelation to anyone, until it was the right moment, which was ten years later at the end of his exile in Baghdad, before He was forced to go as a prisoner to Constantinople.

After four months in the Black Pit, the Persian authorities decided it would be best to expel Bahá'u'lláh from the country to halt the growth of the movement. They believed that if they removed him, the followers of The Báb would soon disperse. Therefore, He was exiled to Baghdad, Iraq, forcing Him and His family to traverse the Zagros Mountains on foot and on horseback in the middle of the winter of 1853 with the intention that He would perish under such strenuous conditions. Despite the hardships, Bahá'u'lláh,

his relatives and friends accompanying Him did not die. The trip lasted from January through April before they arrived at Baghdad. Bahá'u'lláh lived in Iraq for the next ten years, during which time His reputation as leader of the Bábís grew. As new followers flooded into the movement; the number increased. They came to visit and consult Him, coming from many regions of Iran.

The Prime Minister of Iran, not pleased that the new Faith was growing in Baghdad, managed to convince the Ottoman Turkish government that ruled Iraq to exile Bahá'u'lláh once more. This time, He was sent to Constantinople (Istanbul today).

Before leaving Baghdad, in April-May 1863, Bahá'u'lláh had a 12-day farewell meeting with his followers on an island in the Tigris River, during which He revealed that He was the Manifestation of God proclaimed by The Báb, that He was the Promised one of all religions and ages, and that He was inaugurating officially the start of the Bahá'i Faith.

His exile in Constantinople lasted only four months. From there, He and His family were again forced to continue the exile to Adrianople (today known as Edirne), located at the intersection of the Turkish, Greek and Bulgarian borders in Northwest Turkey, where He resided for four years and four months. During this time, He sent personal letters to the kings and rulers of the world announcing that He was God's next Manifestation requesting that they acknowledge Him as such. It's no coincidence that historians have noted that Muhammad did something similar when, during his seventh year of wandering, He had his emissary, Abdullah Huzafah Sahmi Qarashi, deliver a letter to the king of Sassania, Khusro Perviz, inviting him to join Islam. It is said that when Muhammad learned that Perviz had scornfully torn up the letter, He pronounced, "Let his kingdom fall", which did happen at the hands of Byzantine troops, who imprisoned and subsequently executed him. (2)

After Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh was banished even further, to the prison-town of Akka, on the Bay of Haifa (located in present day Israel), the furthest point of the Ottoman Empire on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. He was sent there under the assumption that He would die due to the terrible jail conditions, such as the lack

of basic sanitation, very poor nourishment, the presence of mortal diseases such as cholera, and no protection in the cells from the cold or rain since there were only barred, open holes serving as windows with no protective glass. Nevertheless, the enormous distance and formidable obstacles did not stop many of Bahá'u'lláh's followers from making the trip from Iran and Iraq to Akka to be in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, even if it was only standing in front of his cell window from the outside of the prison wall, to see His waving hand. Later, other visitors were able to be in His presence during His house arrest.

For the next 24 years, Bahá'u'lláh continued to give an uninterrupted Revelation that was either written by Him or dictated to His amanuensis (literary assistant) and then revised the text for accuracy. These have become the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith. It was during the latter part of His life (about 1873) that Bahá'u'lláh wrote this most important book of His Revelation, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, known as the Most Holy Book. In it, are recorded the laws of life given by Bahá'u'lláh to His followers as the most effective means of reaching their ultimate goal, being in the Presence of God.

Additionally, He created the outline of what would become the foundation of the Bahá'í Administration and the new world order to come, the arrival of God's Kingdom on Earth. His Writings also included a multitude of letters addressing many diverse topics from spiritual advice to clarifications of the meaning of specific difficult verses of the Qur'an and the Bible, the revelation of multiple prayers for various needs; the exposition of spiritual truths such as life after death, the nature of the soul, the equality of man and woman from the moment of their creation, and the relationship of the soul with God.

Bahá'u'lláh's earthly life ended on May 29, 1892. He left behind a handwritten Will and Testament naming His oldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as His successor, the Center of the Covenant (i.e., he was God's Covenant with humankind renewed, the perfect model of the Bahá'í life, and the sole authoritative interpreter of His Writings). Following the example of his Father, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in his own hand, wrote a will naming as his twin successors His grandson, Shoghi Effendi (Guardian of the Faith) and the Universal House of Justice.

Because Shoghi Effendi was childless, there was no family successor. Instead of naming one, Shoghi Effendi left behind additional guidance for the establishment and functioning of the ruling body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, as was outlined by Bahá'u'lláh and expounded by Abdu'l-Bahá. The first election of this supreme body took place in 1963.

Even though the Bahá'í Faith is young (177 years at the time of this writing) as compared to the about 5,500 or more years of Hinduism, 3,700 years of Judaism, 2,000 years of Christianity, and 1,430 years of Islam, it can still be considered as a worldwide religion in as much as there are approximately 6 million Baha'is present on all the continents; in 235 countries and many territories with representation of all the ethnic groups, indigenous peoples and worldwide religions. The Bahá'í Faith is recognized as the second-most geographically widespread religion after Christianity, and the only religion to have grown faster than the population of the world in the last century. (3) The members of the Faith are committed to the transformation of the planet into the image of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth as desired and promised by Bahá'u'lláh if humanity is willing to accept His teachings as the new divine guidance for humans to interact with each other and to relate to their Creator.

*The role of the Manifestation of God—a divine teacher
with a new Revelation*

As noted above, when God speaks to us, He normally does it through an individual, chosen by Him to be His Spokesperson. This chosen one, although speaking in the name of God and representing Him, he is not God, the Infinite, the Uncreated that is appearing in human form. He is but a Manifestation, who becomes the resplendent mirror in which God's attributes, as His Creative Word, become visible and audible for humans to see and hear. The Baha'i Faith calls this historical presence a Manifestation of God.

Let us now see how one can understand the role that the Manifestation of God plays in the history of humanity. Being God's Spokesperson, a Manifestation is God's presence among the people

addressing them in human form. This is why we can say that the Manifestation is the closest that men can come to being able to “see” God, and “hear” His voice, and “listen” to His Revelation. Since the Manifestation is in perfect communion with God, He understands perfectly what God wishes to communicate to humanity at the time He speaks to them. At that moment, the Manifestation speaks God’s Word to mankind. What the Manifestation reveals is, genuinely, the Word of God. Because, at that moment, God is speaking to humanity through His chosen one and that Word has the authority of God’s Will. (4)

The Manifestations share the same Mission: to make man continuously conscious of the reason why he was created; that is, to know and love God, carry forward an ever-advancing civilization, and attain His Presence. Bahá’u’lláh clearly reminds us that this objective has been recorded in all sacred texts:

“The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness”. (5)

The fact that this goal of humanity has been recorded in the sacred books of the past religions implies the existence of previous Manifestations because, as it was explained above, the Manifestation is the author of the sacred text, regardless of whether His teachings were dictated or written by Him, or they were transmitted by oral traditions.

Another aspect common among Manifestations is the delivery of a new Revelation that God wants His followers to hear and put into practice. Generally, this new Revelation redefines the agreement carried out by the previous Manifestation between God and the people He addressed. It is a reiteration of what has already been revealed about God by previous Manifestations, but at the same time it introduces one or various new aspects of God’s “Unknowable Essence”. It also proposes a series of laws for daily living, which

address how to relate to God, and an ethical and moral code when relating to others.

Another element common to all Manifestations is the fact that God has two purposes in mind when sending His prophets to mankind. The first is to liberate the sons of man from the darkness of ignorance and guide them towards the light of true understanding. The second is to assure the peace and tranquility of the human gender, providing all the means by which they can be established. In this sense, the Manifestations act as the physicians of Humanity being capable of identifying the illness that mankind is suffering at that moment. As a spiritual physician, He can prescribe the best medicine to cure the illness. Again, Bahá'u'lláh states it in a way that requires no further explanation:

“The Prophets of God should be regarded as physicians whose task is to foster the well-being of the world and its peoples, that, through the spirit of oneness, they may heal the sickness of a divided humanity... It is towards the inmost essence of these Prophets, therefore, that the eye of every man of discernment must be directed, inasmuch as their one and only purpose hath always been to guide the erring and give peace to the afflicted.... (6)

Each new Manifestation that appears in history always has a link to the one that preceded Him because **“in every subsequent Revelation, the return of the former Revelation is a fact, the truth of which is firmly established”**. (7)

With respect to the content of the Revelation made by its predecessors, the new Manifestation validates what the previous Manifestations have revealed, in human terms, how God should be comprehended, and what are the moral laws that will not fade away because they are eternal.

As each Manifestation brings a new Revelation, generally it renews the prior Revelation, modifying it, enlarging it, repealing portions of it and creating new directives. This is possible and necessary according to the words of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith,

“Every Prophet Whom the Almighty and Peerless Creator hath purposed to send to the peoples of the earth hath been entrusted with a Message and charged to act in a manner that would best meet the requirements of the age in which He appeared”. (8)

The uniqueness of the Revelation of each Manifestation

At the same time that there are these common elements to all Manifestations, there are also concrete differences among them. They arise by the fact that each Manifestation is a different individual from the other Manifestations. Not only does each Manifestation differ in physical features, personality, psychology, but also in the Mission that He must complete. Additionally, each Manifestation has a predestined Revelation to deliver as part of God’s Great Plan for mankind. Bahá’u’lláh clearly states it when He says that:

“...each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, is characterized by a special attribute, fulfills a definite mission, and is entrusted with a particular Revelation”. (9)

The Manifestation is the beacon that allows us to see what God’s will is for those to whom the Revelation is given. The specific Revelation that the Manifestation delivers becomes the guide and the new course to be followed by those receiving it in order to grow spiritually and materially.

Progressive Revelation—the permanent dialogue of God with Humanity

How to understand Progressive Revelation? Why progressive? Because man evolves gradually, and in the course of his evolution, he apprehends objective reality in new levels, understands the intimacy

of the physical world, captures the essence of his own being, discovers his respectful relationship to nature and to others, identifies his role in the cosmos. All these advances have a corresponding evolutionary spiritual stage.

Man also experiences Life as a natural cycle (infancy, childhood, youth, adulthood, senior age) much the same way that Nature has its own cycle (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter). If all reality evolves through its natural cycles, why can't God's Revelation have its own cycle of birth, growth, splendor, and finality? In fact, Revelation has its own "natural cycle" which is adapted to the level of spiritual maturity that people have when it is given to them.

This is precisely how Bahá'u'lláh addresses the appearance of a Revelation. He places it within the context of a natural growth cycle based on man's tempo of internal growth. One of the many ways He describes such process is as follows:

“And now concerning thy question regarding the nature of religion. Know thou that they who are truly wise have likened the world unto the human temple. As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom. Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God. Whenever this robe hath fulfilled its purpose, the Almighty will assuredly renew it”. (10)

From the above explanation, we can understand that Revelation appears continuously throughout the history of mankind, but that its content is given according to the capacity for understanding of its recipients, and the state of spiritual, intellectual, and material evolution of the people receiving it. This is how Bahá'u'lláh explains this idea:

“For every age requireth a fresh measure of the light of God. Every Divine Revelation hath been sent down in a manner that befitted the circumstances of the age in which it hath appeared”. (11)

This means that each Revelation is not final, that its contents can be presented in a higher level of comprehension. Revelation is not given once and forever, impeding a subsequent Revelation from appearing. Divine Revelation is relative in its content because it is adapted to the capacity of the listeners at the time of its disclosure. Therefore, a new Revelation can bring new interpretations, deeper meanings, and new levels of comprehension.

Stated in another way, because each Revelation is not definitive and closed, it is, therefore, subordinate to the new Revelation and the new changes it might bring. These changes and these differences are especially evident with regards to individual and social behavioral practices, rather than to the content of Who God is. Social norms are more susceptible to change because they are continuously modified according to the pace of mankind's cultural, technical, and intellectual evolution, normally faster in change than his spirituality.

What is most impacted when a new Revelation arrives and offers a new perspective on beliefs that until then were considered fixed and immovable? The dogmas established by priests, religious leaders, ministers, pastors, and mullahs are the most affected. These dogmas are presented as the official and only valid interpretation of the Revelation received. The dogmas attempt to make clear those aspects or details of the Revelation that do not appear to be that transparent or easy to understand, such as the dogma of the Trinity in Christianity. According to the religious leaders, these dogmas cannot be questioned or revised. Once established, these dogmas are to be accepted and defended by their followers in order to be acknowledged as members of that religious community.

Yet, in the context of Progressive Revelation, such dogmas can be revised, even abolished. This can happen when the next Revelation clarifies aspects of the previous Revelation that were misinterpreted or not understood at all. Such was the case of the dogmatic belief that the Jewish priests had developed that the Messiah would come and establish a powerful earthly kingdom liberating them from the Roman oppression. Jesus rectified such a dogmatic belief by defining His Kingdom as the Kingdom of the Spirit (Heaven), not the expected earthly kingdom. (Mathew 5: 3—John 18: 36) This was

precisely what the priests accused Jesus before the Roman governor that He had proclaimed to be King, and therefore He should be put to death.

Only God can change His Revelation, clarify it, enhance it, or modify it, according to His view on how well prepared its listeners are to enter into their next stage of spiritual evolution. God can and does make those changes through His revealed Word presented by each of His Manifestations. The authority to effect the change comes from God but the Manifestation is the one that makes the change visible, audible, and known to those He gives the new Revelation.

Generally, the majority of people are born, raised, and socialized within a Revelation they firmly believe in. Hearing something different other than the Revelation learned since infancy requires an open heart and mind because, surely, what the new Manifestation proposes will be at a higher level of knowledge and understanding of God, a slightly different spiritual relationship with Him, and others. When the Manifestation reveals changes to the dogmas, beliefs and truths on which a person's faith is based, that individual is forced to view those dogmas in a different perspective, under a different optic. This implies he must modify his beliefs based on the certainty and confidence that what the most recent Manifestation has revealed is the vision and perspective that God wants him to have now.

This gradual disclosure of Revelation that God offers man is His recognition that humanity has a slow spiritual growth rate. It is called "Progressive Revelation" because each new Revelation utilizes new concepts that are more profound, richer in meaning and in revealing Who God is, as well as letting us know how best we can achieve a personal and collective relationship with Him. It is the gradual manner by which God has revealed Himself to humanity. God directs the spiritual, intellectual, and even material evolution of man. We have stated that God, since the beginning of man on Earth, has been there directing his evolution, especially his spiritual development, although it seems that man has made little progress in this area due to the astonishing atrocities he continues to inflict on his relatives, neighbors, and enemies. The daily level of violence, hate, persecution, and exploitation is such that we can easily agree

with the philosophical maxim, “the fiercest predator man has to face is other men.”

Using the above historic frame of reference of the Bahá’í Faith as the expression of its validity as its authentic Revelation made by Bahá’u’lláh, we can now ask if it has brought a new teaching on the core question we are investigating throughout this book, the comprehension of the essence of the soul present in every individual and its journey into the reality of the afterlife.

In the next chapters we will tackle first what Bahá’u’lláh revealed as being the nature of the soul and then what constitutes the afterlife that every soul is destined to reach. This will offer us with a new and fresh, but an unfinished picture of how we will continue to exist in that dimension.

CHAPTER 8



NEW TEACHINGS OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH ON THE SOUL AND AFTERLIFE

Reality of human being according to the Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith reaffirms the same teaching of past religions when it confirms that men have a dual nature, physical and spiritual. This fundamental verity has been a key tenet in all religions, and they have advocated repeatedly in favor of the notion that the spiritual dimension is more important than the physical one since the spiritual dimension or nature is the one that defines the essence of the human being as created in “the image and likeness” of the Creator, God.

As His life was ending, Bahá'u'lláh delegated his son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the all-important role of being the sole authoritative interpreter of His Writings and Teachings. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Paris (1911, 1913), he had the opportunity to expound upon the above key teaching of the dual nature of man. In his own words, he clearly explains how the spiritual nature is the one that impels man to express the best of his divine qualities, whereas the lower nature is the one that expresses the basest and most ugly forms of human behavior:

In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he

approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature. Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man's spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature. If a man's Divine nature dominates his human nature, we have a saint. (1)

In a compilation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings, he once more offers the qualitative difference in the outputs of each of these natures present in humankind. It is striking how he underscores that the spiritual nature is the creator of the civilizations that have adorned humanity as expression of the best of his potential, found in his faculty of creativity.

In short, man is endowed with two natures: one tendeth towards moral sublimity and intellectual perfection, while the other turneth to bestial degradation and carnal imperfections. If ye travel the countries of the globe ye shall observe on one side the remains of ruin and destruction, while on the other ye shall see the signs of civilization and development. Such desolation and ruin are the result of war, strife and quarrelling, while all development and progress are fruits of the lights of virtue, co-operation and concord. (2)

The spiritual nature of man gives him a unique quality that not only places him well above the rest of creation, but it actually gives him an unsurpassed radiance in as much as he mirrors the names and attributes of God that were given to him at the moment of creation. In Bahá'u'lláh's own words:

Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty. (3)

This affirmation of Bahá'u'lláh allows us to capture a level of spiritual grandeur that is not found in any other created creature or thing because none has within itself all the names and attributes of God. Only man has been so endowed. To make such a monumental affirmation is to give the biblical phrase that we are created “in God’s image and likeness” its full meaning and opens our understanding of the dignity and loftiness in which God has created us.

To be the receptacle of all of God’s Attributes is almost beyond our comprehension. How is this possible when we are constantly taken aback by the ferocity with which man destroys other men endowed with the same level of dignity and loftiness as he is. And yet, such a man is able to behave and express himself as the very incarnation of evilness. To be the walking vessel of God’s image in our soul, carrying the imprint of all of His Attributes, places each one of us in a level of dignity and spiritual splendor that is very difficult to comprehend and respect when we are confronted by the limitations of a wicked character, a malevolent individual, a reprehensible authoritarian, an unforgiving relative, or a vengeful person considered to be your friend. The expression of these limitations is the result of following our lower nature; not a defect of the soul or our higher nature.

Having expressed this fundamental truth of the human condition, we can now explore that spiritual dimension in terms of the nature of the soul that imprints man with a divine dimension, because, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expressed it, the spiritual nature of man “**is connected with God**”. (4)

Origin and nature of the soul

According to Abdu'l-Bahá's designated successor, Shoghi Effendi, known as the 'Guardian' of the Bahá'í Faith, the soul starts with the formation of the human embryo, but it is not dependent of it for its continued existence as it is implied in this quote:

“With regard to the soul of man: according to the Baha'i Teachings the human soul starts with the formation of the human embryo, and continues to develop and pass through endless stages of existence after it separation from the body. Its progress is thus infinite” (5)

This association is not material; the soul does not enter or leave the body and does not occupy physical space. The soul does not belong to the material world, and its association with the body is similar to that of a light with a mirror that reflects it. The light that appears in the mirror is not inside it; it comes from an external source. Similarly, the soul is not in the body; there is a special relationship between it and the body, and together they form a human being. At death the soul separates and crosses over to the afterlife.

In Bahá'u'lláh's own words, He proposes a deeper understanding of the essence of the soul as expressed in the following quote in his book, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*:

LXXXII. Thou hast asked Me concerning the nature of the soul. Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel. (6)

This explanation of the origin of the soul is filled with fresh nuances that allow us to get a glimpse of the marvelous constitution of the soul. The most striking revelation is that the soul's essence is in fact a mystery so deep that no man is able to unravel. So, to pretend that we can fully describe the essence of the soul is not possible. At least, not in this dimension of our temporal existence, regardless

of how much effort has been done by philosophers, theologians, psychologists, illumined minds, and poets to comprehend the essence of the soul. When Bahá'u'lláh describes it as a “**heavenly gem**”, he offers a poetic perspective since a gem of any kind always seems to have an angle, an unknown aspect that is hidden from man's first perception of its external appearance, until he starts to “unravel” its inner reality. The mystery of the soul remains a mystery until we reach the other dimension where we will be endowed with the outstanding clarity of spiritual vision to understand many of the spiritual realities that we barely grasp now, including the divine mystery hidden in the essence of the soul.

What we can safely say is that whatever Bahá'u'lláh teaches us regarding the soul's essence is far more truthful than whatever effort has been made by the deep thinkers of the past and present to understand its full magnificence.

In this perspective, Bahá'u'lláh reveals another unknown aspect of the soul that had not been stated before in previous Revelations. In his own words:

LXXXII. Verily I say, the human soul is, in its essence, one of the signs of God, a mystery among His mysteries. It is one of the mighty signs of the Almighty, the harbinger that proclaimeth the reality of all the worlds of God. Within it lieth concealed that which the world is now utterly incapable of apprehending. (7)

What is relevant to emphasize is that Bahá'u'lláh affirms that the soul is “**the harbinger that proclaimeth the reality of all the worlds of God**”. To what reality is Bahá'u'lláh referring when he affirms “**all the worlds of God**”? I think it is valid to say that this phrase can encompass both physical worlds (because we now affirm that there are possible trillions and trillions of planets existing out there in space), and spiritual worlds of God of which we have little or no notion as to how many they might be, and in what stage of being they might exist. In the afterlife, we will be able to grasp and

understand the full meaning of Bahá'u'lláh's affirmation with regard to those spiritual worlds of God of which we are unaware.

For Bahá'u'lláh to tell us that the soul is “**the harbinger that proclaimeth the reality of all the worlds of God**” is an extraordinary revelation. No one had given the soul before such a potentiality, such a lofty capacity, such an extraordinary mission of being the proclaimer of “**the reality of all the worlds of God**”. Such purpose implies that the soul must be freed from his mortal vessel to be able to play such a tremendous role in the worlds of the spirit.

Bahá'u'lláh adds yet another quality of the soul that is in accordance with what we have been able to conclude in previous chapters, that is, that the soul is not constrained by the limitations of time and space, as demonstrated by the soul's capacity to be above “egress and regress” (ability to leave a place, or to return to it). Thus, the soul exists and “moves” in a world that is contingent, at the same time that it partakes of the dimension that has no beginning or end. This potentiality is fully manifested when the soul dissociates from the physical body at the end of the temporal life of the individual.

Verily I say, the human soul is exalted above all egress and regress. It is still, and yet it soareth; it moveth, and yet it is still. It is, in itself, a testimony that beareth witness to the existence of a world that is contingent, as well as to the reality of a world that hath neither beginning nor end. (8)

Bahá'u'lláh presents yet another aspect of the soul's essence that deserves emphasis because it points to the very act of creation of the soul in the “image and likeness of God”. In his own poetic words, this is how Bahá'u'lláh tells us how this creation takes place:

12. O SON OF BEING!

With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else, for **My work is perfect**

and My command is binding. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof. (9)—[emphasis by author]

In this spiritual statement, Bahá'u'lláh proclaims the level of perfection by which God creates the soul when he states, in God's name, that the soul is perfect—“**My work is perfect**”. This straightforward affirmation implies that the soul, at its moment of origin, is unblemished, pure, and whole, as is all of Creation. Thus, the dignity, the loftiness and perfection of the human being is brought into Existence at the moment of conception, when the soul is created by God.

This quality of the soul is reinforced by another revelation given by Bahá'u'lláh when he addresses the limited human condition that makes the individual susceptible to becoming sick, broken and suffering. He teaches us that the soul is exalted above all the infirmities that the body may experience, remaining unaffected by any ailment, which does not mean that such infirmities may hinder the soul's potentiality for manifesting its sublime essence:

LXXX. Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments... every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting its inherent might and power. When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal. Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness. (10)

To explain this sublime form of being of the soul, Bahá'u'lláh refers often to the reality of the Sun that keeps on shining in all its splendor regardless of how much it is hidden by the clouds, giving us the impression that “the Sun has become hidden from our sight”.

Consider again the sun when it is completely hidden behind the clouds. Though the earth is still illumined with its light, yet the measure of light which it receiveth is considerably reduced. Not until the clouds have dispersed, can the sunshine again in the plenitude of its glory. Neither the presence of the cloud nor its absence can, in any way, affect the inherent splendor of the sun. The soul of man is the sun by which his body is illumined, and from which it draweth its sustenance, and should be so regarded. (11)

This explanation allows us to understand the magnificence of our being because no matter how sick, how mentally impaired, how bed-ridden or forced to use a wheelchair, how one is tied to a ventilator to breathe; these conditions in no way diminish or tarnish the luster of the soul, which continues to hold its original integrity regardless of such transient and oppressive health conditions. This affirmation will give us a fresh perspective to understand how the soul maintains its integrity and perfection once it makes the transition from this life to the next.

But, before proceeding, this is the best place to address a natural question that might be in your mind, *Are all souls equal?* since it has been made clear by Bahá'u'lláh that all souls are perfect at their moment of creation. This is how 'Abdu'l-Bahá addresses the question:

As for what is meant by the equality of souls in the all-highest realm, it is this: the souls of the believers, at the time when they first become manifest in the world of the body, are equal, and each is sanctified and pure. In this world, however, they will begin to differ one from another, some achieving the highest station, some a middle one, others remaining at the lowest stage of being. Their equal status is at the beginning of their existence; the differentiation followeth their passing away. (12)

Based on this clarification, it is quite logical to affirm that at the moment of creation, all souls are equal in their level of perfection and capacity to reflect God's Attributes as they have been impressed in their very essence. But once the individual personalities are defined, their behaviors are structured and value systems are adopted, there is a clear differentiation among individuals. Those who will allow their lower nature to take hold and direct their way of being will eventually turn into undesirable humans, tyrants and greedy hoarders willing to step on the dignity and rights of others as long as they can satisfy their egotistical desires. On the other hand, those that will allow their spiritual nature to flourish will become luminaries that embark on a path of service, and shine in how they share, contribute to build just and inspiring organizations, and engage in improving the conditions of those less favored by society. These differences will produce the appearance of humans that in popular language are commonly referred to as "godly souls" or "evil souls".

The Reality of the soul

To apprehend the transition made into the afterlife, it is necessary to understand the soul's essential reality as explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

5. The human spirit, which distinguishes man from the animal, is the rational soul, and these two terms—the human spirit and the rational soul—designate one and the same thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is called the rational soul, encompasses all things and as far as human capacity permits, discovers their realities and becomes aware of the properties and effects, the characteristics and conditions of earthly things. (13)

'Abdu'l-Bahá explanation is clear in defining the unity between the "human spirit and the rational soul" as being "one and the same thing" meaning that they are not different, but it is rather a different terminology to refer to the same reality. They can be considered as

one entity, especially when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continues his explanation and clarifies that “the mind is the power of the human spirit”:

6. As for the mind, it is the power of the human spirit. The spirit is as the lamp, and the mind as the light that shines from it. The spirit is as the tree, and the mind as the fruit. The mind is the perfection of the spirit and a necessary attribute thereof, even as the rays of the sun are an essential requirement of the sun itself. (14)

The soul is thus, the unifying principle of every human. His mind, along with all its functions, has an indissoluble bond with the soul. This means that all the mind’s functions of memory, feelings, and emotions are embraced by the soul’s unity with the mind. This unified soul is the one that will make the transition to the afterlife carrying within it the personality traits of the individual, his or her accumulated knowledge, emotions, feelings and memories, and the most important element being the merit of all those actions in favor of the wellbeing of others, both physical as well as spiritual.

The soul is described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as not being composed of perishable elements, thus giving it the characteristic of a unit that has no parts. An entity that has no building elements cannot decompose. It is free of the constraints of space and time where all decomposition occurs. In ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words,

29.12 The whole physical creation is perishable. These material bodies are composed of atoms; when these atoms begin to separate decomposition sets in, then comes what we call death. This composition of atoms, which constitutes the body or mortal element of any created being, is temporary. When the power of attraction, which holds these atoms together, is withdrawn, the body, as such, ceases to exist.

29.13 With the soul it is different. The soul is not a combination of elements, it is not composed of many atoms, it is of one indivisible substance and therefore

eternal. It is entirely out of the order of the physical creation; it is immortal! (15)

In the above quote, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gives the logical conclusion of his analysis, that is, that the soul is composed of one indivisible substance, which implies that its essence is beyond time and space constraints in a state of immortality—understood precisely as the condition of imperishability. We will remember this condition when we analyze later the condition of the soul in the afterlife.

The purpose of God in creating man

Now is the best moment to introduce the purpose of God in creating man because clarifying this goal will give us the foundation to minimally understand the quality of the afterlife that we will find when we make the critical transition at the end of our earthly life.

Previous religions have stated in diverse terms what this purpose has been. The way that Bahá’u’lláh has expressed such divine purpose is so concise and precise that it merits reading as he wrote about it.

XXIX. The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness. (16)

XXVII. Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him — a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... (17)

This assertion leaves no doubt as to God’s double purpose in creating man. First and foremost is to give him the opportunity to

recognize his noble and magnificent origin, that of being created by God Himself. This recognition is the fundamental assertion that acknowledges that he did not give himself the gift of existence. This was a free gift of God who simply wanted to share His divine loving creating power with the created individual making him in “His own image and likeness”. This formidable reality, that of having been created in God’s “image and likeness”, should be enough reason to precisely carry out God’s first purpose, that we acknowledge our divine origin and the sublime reality that we can shine as blazing beings because we have, in the essence of our souls, all the Attributes of God in a potential state.

No surprise when in another place of his Writings, Bahá’u’lláh amplifies this purpose when he declares that the soul,

“... is the first among all created things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him”. (18)

The capability of the soul to “declare the excellence of its Creator” presupposes a soul that is associated with a human body that can actually verbalize such excellence and that can “**bow down in adoration before Him**”. This is the image of how all souls should fulfill God’s purpose in creating them with such an ineffable essence. This is also what we humans do constantly in our earthly condition, we bow in respect and recognition before the dignity of a king, a holy man, a sage, an extraordinary scientist, a superb poet, a blazing artist, a formidable fighter, an elegant visual creator, an even a humble teacher. How natural and necessary is then our need to recognize and bow before the One that has given us our very existence, out of pure love. The key difference is that we should not only bow in recognition, but also worship the Creator as the sign of the best expression of our gratitude for such a formidable gift of immortality.

The second purpose that God has for creating us is to give each one the possibility of attaining His Presence as the ultimate goal and reason for having been created. This aspect will be elaborated further when we address the nature of the afterlife in the next chapter.

Death, a change of state of being

Now that we have a thorough description of the essence of the soul, we can take the leap into the next step we call “death” towards the afterlife. What must be clarified is that the term we so pessimistically use. It immediately gives us the image, the feeling of finality, of disappearance, of never to be seen again, of separation and enormous grief, especially if the one making the transition is a loved one.

Let us dissect the reality behind the term, in doing so, we discover that the word is very imprecise because it disguises a process of transition that is present in all nature without the connotation of sadness; rather it contains an everyday reality of transformation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once more comes to our rescue by making a scientific clarification of how “death” is transformation in all of nature’s processes of continuous evolution. Let us analyze his reasoning.

So, to speak, when the atom entered into the composition of the tree, it died to the mineral kingdom, and when consumed by the animal, it died to the vegetable kingdom, and so on until its transference or transmutation into the kingdom of man; but throughout its traversing it was subject to transformation and not annihilation. Death therefore is applicable to a change or transference from one degree or condition to another. In the mineral realm there was a spirit of existence; in the world of plant life and organisms it reappeared as the vegetative spirit; thence it attained the animal spirit and finally aspired to the human spirit. These are degrees and changes but not obliteration; and this is a rational proof that man is everlasting, ever living. Therefore, death is only a relative term implying change. (19)

When anything of a lower kingdom ceases to be in its natural state, it is because it has transitioned to a next higher kingdom, as the minerals do when they disaggregate in their atomic or chemical composition and become components of the soil. Then they enter into the roots of the trees and are assimilated in that new level of

existence. They have not been annihilated since their components have not ceased to exist. They have definitely been transformed, assimilated into a new level of being, that of the plant kingdom.

The process continues when the plants are consumed by animals. They are transformed as vital energy in the animal kingdom. The process is again repeated when humans either eat plants, fruits, vegetables, or animals. Each of these is transformed into vital components of the human kingdom giving every person life sustaining element that are converted into human organs, each one performing magnificent functions that keep the individual alive manifesting the potential that she/he has as created being in the “image and likeness of God”.

We can, therefore, conclude that “death”, as we have just analyzed, does not exist as the Webster dictionary defines it: “**the state of being no longer alive: the state of being dead**”. This definition implies that whatever the being is, it is no longer alive. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s analysis made it quite clear that there is no death of the being, there is a transmutation of its essence into something else. When it is from a lower kingdom the elements of the being are transformed into the component elements of the higher kingdom.

If this is so, how should we understand what we call human death? The first thing we should accustom ourselves, as a new generation of humans evolving spiritually, is to consciously change the term “death” into “transition”, to “achieving the next stage of spiritual development”. In this way we will contribute to a better understanding of the journey of the soul, as one of its most important phases of its evolution. When entering Existence as babes, we start our spiritual journey; at the transition moment, we are transformed into a new level of existence, similarly to when babes are born from the womb of the mother to begin the journey of discovering the immensity of the outer world and what it has to teach and offer.

Difficulty of knowing what the next stage is like

There is an inherent difficult for us humans to conceive, imagine or visualize a different dimension of existence that is not time-space

bound. We are so immersed in it as our natural environment that we cannot think nor do anything that is not related to either dimension. Both dimensions are translated into our everyday language, the channel that allows us to affirm who we are and what we do, with common phrases such as:

- I have an appointment with the doctor at 10:00 am tomorrow.
- To get to the office I will either take the bus or the metro.
- Do you want to go outside to play?
- My dog always manages to show me that it is time to go for our walk.
- Mom, are we there, yet?
- It took me two hours to finish the brownies for my daughter's girl scouts group.
- I dreamt that I was freely flying over the trees. Wow, it was so real!
- When you get home remember girls and boys to finish reading the chapter for tomorrow.
- Please son, get me the tv remote. I left it in the kitchen.
- Dad, can I hang out with the boys after school? I promise I will be at home at six.
- Honey, please take Richie to the dentist on your way to the office. I will pick him up when the doctor is finished working on his fillings.
- Darn, how long is this homework going to take? I am too tired to continue.
- Susan, please watch the water that is not supposed to boil for more than two minutes. Then place in it two eggs and let them sit there for five minutes.

I am sure the reader gets the hang of it. No matter what you do during the day, it either implies referring the activity to an hour or minutes when it should be accomplished, or it requires moving through space to carry it out. We are literally space-time travelers in our own dimension.

But to get the real difficulty to imagine the afterlife, there is an excellent real-life analogy that portrays such difficulty. When we are inside our mother's womb and we are slowly developing during those nine months the body we need to survive outside of her body, we live in a placenta-reality that has all the comfort and protection needed for us to develop our little bodies. There, everything is taken care of. The placenta has the perfect temperature to feel just right; we are fed constantly through the umbilical cord without having to worry about purchasing food or preparing it; we have an acclimatized amniotic fluid that serves as a permanent private pool giving us freedom of movement that is weightless. The membrane of the placenta and the abdominal wall protects us from intense noise or bright blinding light too strong for our underdeveloped eyes and ears. Time and space are two dimensions that are not really important because we are not aware of an alternate dimension where both are critical and essential. In short, we live those nine months in an authentic paradise where all is taken care of and our only job is to keep developing all our organs so that we will be fit to survive in that outer dimension outside our mother's womb.

For a developing child inside the womb, it is impossible for him/her to even come close to imagine what she/he will experience outside of the womb. To even have an imperfect understanding of what that outside dimension is like, the child would have to have some form of experiential contact with such a world, and the developed capacity of his/her brain to be conscious of it. The most an unborn child can perceive of the world outside the womb is imprecise impressions of sounds, some loud like screams while others are soft and comforting like the sound of his mother singing a lullaby; there are also brusque movements of the mother, and alterations of her mood and physical condition that produce discomfort or agreeable sensations. All these stimuli give the unborn child an imprecise image of what that outside is really like. Regardless of these "recognizable" moments, if we could ask that unborn child if she/he can describe what they think the outside looks like, there is no answer that can come close to describing this magnificent outside reality. If we ask her/him if she/he would like to come out of that environment, they probably will

answer that they were quite comfortable being there and that she/he does not have any powerful motive to come out. They feel too good in it to want to change such a splendid environment.

These impressions do not include, even remotely, the huge dimension of space that is first experienced inside our crib, or when we are taken outside the house to see the grass and trees of the backyard, when we are taken in a car ride or in some cases, even in a boat or airplane ride that glides over the ocean or flies the sky distance to arrive in a different country. Those are all new, unimaginable parameters that the unborn child will have to learn once he/she has finally arrived at this time-space dimension where we all are immersed since day one of our birth.

The absolute requirement needed to come out of the womb to be dazzled by such marvelous and incredible realities out here is to arrive at the moment of birth. The transition is tough, sometime perilous, and even fatal. Yet, what is constant is that one must “die” to the intrauterine way of existing to be able to enter into the magnificent world outside of the womb. This is not a physical death; it is a literal transformation in the way of being that allows the newborn to enjoy the magnificent stage of life that will require many progressive transformations, both physical, intellectual, and emotional as he/she pass from infancy to toddlerhood, then childhood, on to adolescence, and then to young adulthood, taking charge of their own life as a fully mature grown-up.

Thus, there is no surprise to find a succinct quote from Abdu'l-Bahá that affirms that the Kingdom of God is a completely new reality that is outside time and space, and thus so difficult for us to grasp, comprehend or even imagine,

For the Kingdom of God is sanctified (or free) from time and place; it is another world and another universe. (20)

Once we cross over, many events or situations occur. The Bahá'í Writings do not present them in a sequential way as we are accustomed to follow a progression stage by stage. We perceive different scenarios playing out in a no-time-space dimension. We will present them in

the way that they themselves suggest may be the sequence in which they might occur.

The moment of transition

Of one thing, we are sure. No one knows how or when the transition will happen for certain. One can come close to guessing when it might happen because of the life style or profession that one has that is filled with high risk moments such as a firefighter, a member of a special force team, a combatant in a war far away from home in an unknown terrain, a stunt man carrying out dangerous feats, a daredevil defying gravity, a high speed car racer, a SWAT team member assaulting a terrorist cell, a body guard of a high profile individual that is surrounded by attackers hired for that job, a drug dealer defending its territory or taking over the competitor's organization, a professional steep mountain climber slipping into the void, a test pilot trying a new unfamiliar plane and losing control. These and hundreds of other possibilities created by any risky endeavor can be the cause of a highly probable moment of transition.

There are other multiple instances in which the transition occurs by unforeseen, unexpected circumstances such as an automobile accident cause by a drunk driver, slipping in the shower and hitting yourself on the head at the precise angle that provokes a fatal brain hemorrhage, a completely unannounced heart attack, a last stage cancer that grew silently giving no worrisome symptoms, a fall down the stairs that crushes key spine vertebrae and one is put in an irreversible coma.

In any of those real-life scenarios, the "death" transition becomes definite when it is clinically stated that the brain (and sometimes the heart included) have stopped functioning completely and there is no more continuous bioelectrical activity as manifested in a normal life situation.

These inevitable circumstances give the perception that one is not in control of the death transition. Many, too many times, it seems, it just happens and there is not much one can do about it. Yet, there is a possibly different way of considering the transition phase different

from believing that it is happening as a result of external factors over which we have little or no control.

An alternate perspective is offered in Neale Walsh's book, *Home with God, In a life that never ends*, that is quite thought provoking. (21) His point of reflection is based on the common belief that we all come into this life dimension with a spiritual purpose to achieve. This being so, he proposes that every one of us creates this transition when, consciously or unconsciously, the soul knows it has completed the purpose of having become a human, that is having a temporal experience of remembering who he really is and what she/he came to learn in this temporal dimension. In this manner of understanding the transition, "death" becomes a creative moment of the soul that is ready to change to its true spiritual stage in which it can become fully aware of Who the Source of his being is. This full recognition of not having really left home is the beginning of the new Journey, in which there is no fear, anguish or sense of loss because one has "died". On the contrary, it will be the experience of having fulfilled the purpose of having been placed in this temporal dimension for a specific purpose that fits into a grand scheme.

Our life's ultimate purpose is spiritual, and thus terrestrial life has its fulfillment when that spiritual purpose has been achieved. It happens when we continue our existence in the afterlife.

Personal Judgment

Many of us were taught that one of the first things to occur right after the transition takes place is that the soul goes through some form of personal judgment that is based on how one has lived and expressed its spiritual capabilities with loved ones, with neighbors, co-workers, partners, friends, and strangers. It is the way we have exercised with them patience, support in difficult and emotional moments, comfort given when in distress, forgiveness when injured by them, financial aid when we could offer it, or just being there with them as silent empathizers.

On the other hand, we will also be judged on how much grief we caused those closest to us, how much physical or emotional hurt

we inflicted on loved ones; how much envy we harbored in the heart against those that seem to have it all; how much one might have swindled others of their savings; how intensely one has maintained a grievance or an unforgivable resentment against another who has intentionally or unintentionally hurt you; how many times one has taken financial advantage at the cost of the salaries of the employees or from government funds, which have little or no oversight; how many times one abused the authority status making miserable the lives of the ones below.

This at the level of our relationship with others, but there is also another aspect that will be judged and that is how we have expressed our relationship with God. Has it been one of disdain, contempt, anger, arrogance, and outright defiance of His laws, His Kingship, or Power as the Creator? Has that relationship been one of ungratefulness for all the blessings one has received, indifference at the multiple invitations from Him to become the brilliant spiritual being one is?

All these aspects of how we lived and constructed our world and reality for others will be exposed with such clarity that one cannot deny them or try to justify them when they were negative and hurtful. They will be so evident that one cannot do anything other than recognize having been the protagonist in all of them. Bahá'u'lláh summarized this notion when he concisely affirmed that:

It is clear and evident that all men shall, after their physical death, estimate the worth of their deeds, and realize all that their hands have wrought. (22)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá left us the key to understand why it will not be possible to be unaware of all our past deeds when he stated that we take all our memories to the other dimension,

Likewise, thou wilt not forget (there) the life that thou hast had in the material world. (23)

This affirmation confirms our reasoning in Chapter 4 in as much that if one is able to remember everything that one has done in the

temporal life, it is because the unity of the soul and mind allows for all memories to be present in the individual that has made the transition to the afterlife. It confirms the testimonials given by those that have had a near death experience in as much as they are able to remember everything of their life that was in relationship with those that had passed away before the experience. Remembering implies consciousness of the mind that evokes those memories.

Based on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s affirmation, that **“thou wilt not forget (there) the life that thou hast had in the material world”**, we offer the following imaginative interpretation. Since we will not forget the life we have had, we suggest that in that instance, we will “see” our whole life in a “180 degree screen” and every act of goodness that we ever did, and every act of evilness that we ever committed by hurting someone will appear with such clarity and force that it will be rewarding to know that one has accumulated good deeds as well as it will be impossible to deny those evil actions that did so much harm to others. In that sense, one judges oneself with total honesty and humbleness. There is no need to be shown a celestial record of your life activities. Your own personal record is accurate enough to know at what level you will continue your journey of spiritual development and at what level you will have to work spiritually to atone for the harm done to others, or even to yourself.

Those memories are accumulated as we carry out actions and deeds while on this earthly dimension. Thus, it is not surprising to hear ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explaining that this should be one of our primary tasks while we live our temporary stage,

Therefore in this world he must prepare himself for the life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, so likewise the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world. (24)

The Entrance to the Kingdom will be gained by the accumulation of those meritorious deeds that are the expression of the divine

qualities imbedded in our souls, such as forgiveness, empathy, compassion, justice, no-resentment, willingness to share, spontaneity in doing service for others, patience to bear insults or unwanted trials, accompaniment of others in their grief and pain. Bahá'u'lláh's description of this individual effort needs no further comment,

“If God had pleased, He had surely made all men one people.” His purpose, however, is to enable the pure in spirit and the detached in heart to ascend, by virtue of their own innate powers, unto the shores of the Most Great Ocean, that thereby they who seek the Beauty of the All-Glorious may be distinguished and separated from the wayward and perverse. (25)

The moment of entrance into Heaven is expressed by Bahá'u'lláh as being one of such joy that it cannot be described. Yet, those that *have not* accumulated any worthwhile actions will, on the contrary, experience fear and trembling in great measure, as he succinctly described,

They that are the followers of the one true God shall, the moment they depart out of this life, experience *such joy and gladness as would be impossible to describe*, while they that live in error shall be seized with such fear and trembling, and shall be filled with such consternation, as nothing can exceed. (26)–[emphasis by author]

In other passages, Bahá'u'lláh was even more expressive in how intense the experience of those will be if they are not equipped at all with the desired virtues that should adorn him/her when the time comes, regardless of the positions of wealth, power, and social status that he/her might have had in this world before the transition,

Whoso hath failed to recognize Him will have condemned himself to the misery of remoteness, a remoteness which is naught but utter nothingness and the essence of the nethermost fire. Such will be his fate, though to outward seeming he may occupy

the earth's loftiest seats and be established upon its most exalted throne. (27)

If it be faithful to God, it will reflect His light, and will, eventually, return unto Him. If it fail, however, in its allegiance to its Creator, it will become a victim to self and passion, and will, in the end, sink in their depths. (28)

It appears quite clear in these last quotes that the soul that has undergone its own judgment and is aware of the sinful actions committed against others or even God, such soul will have to endure a transition stage of separateness from the presence of God as a just purification passage expressed symbolically as a "remoteness" that is felt as the "nethermost fire". The Bahá'í Faith assures us that this is not a physical fire, but the symbol of how the soul might subjectively experience its separation from God.

Are those that died in sin pardoned?

The above affirmation made by Bahá'u'lláh appears to be in accordance with the generalized belief among Christians that if one dies in sin, eternal condemnation is the only expected outcome. Yet, there is a clear alternative given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that gives us much hope and certainty that such condition can be modified. J.E. Esselmont, a prominent author of the Baha'i Faith at the time of the Guardian, gives the basis, when quoting Abud'l-Baha's reflection:

It is even possible that the condition of those who have died in sin and unbelief may become changed; that is to say, they may become the object of pardon through the bounty of God, not through His justice; for bounty is giving without restriction, and justice is giving what is deserved. As we have power to pray for these souls here, so likewise we shall possess the same power in the other world, which is the Kingdom of God. (29)

It is important to highlight the core of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reasoning with regard to God’s bounty and His justice. Justice is given when it is deserved to whoever transgresses. But God’s bounty is given to all of us without restriction, and so He gives us the power to pray for those souls that have arrived at the Kingdom in a state of sin, so that their transgressions may be erased by God’s acceptance of our supplications.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá expounded on this basic idea when asked the universal question: Are not all of us creatures of God? If so, when they reach the afterlife, they should be able to receive the bounty of God as forgiveness for those transgressions. Yet, the possibility of those souls receiving forgiveness is aided to our pleas to God for such pardon. In ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own words:

As the spirit of man lives forever after casting off this elemental frame, it is, like all existing things, undoubtedly capable of progress, and thus one may pray for a departed soul to advance, to be forgiven, or to be made the recipient of divine favours, bounties, and grace. That is why, in the prayers of Bahá’u’lláh, the forgiveness and pardon of God are implored for those who have ascended to the next world. Moreover, just as people are in need of God in this world, so too are they in need of Him in the next. (30)

So, according to this explanation there is no eternal condemnation of souls passing over to the afterlife in a state of sin. This does not mean that there is an automatic forgiveness without any earnest spiritual work, carried out by us remaining on this plane, as well as the ones that have reached the other side. From our part, it is an earnest supplication for their forgiveness as well as they humbly ask for that pardon. This would seem to imply that they would have to do it with an imperturbable belief that God will grant the pardon.

What about those monsters that have caused so much pain, anguish, dread and suffering unto others as the well-recognized historic evil-doers such as Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Nero, Caligula and

so many more. How can there be pardon for them? Should they not suffer forever because their created evilness were so abhorrent?

Our judgment of the merits or lack thereof that a person must have to be worthy or not to receive forgiveness is as limited in correctness as is the lack of knowledge we have of the limitations that the individual has been subjected to by multiple uncontrollable factors that contributed to creating the personality that behaved in like-monster way. What Abdu'l-Bahá has told us is that we have the power to contribute to the obtention of their forgiveness when we make selfless, nonjudgmental prayers for those souls:

“As the spirit of man lives forever after casting off his elemental frames, it is, like all existing things, undoubtedly capable of progress, and thus one may pray for a departed soul to advance, to be forgiven or to be made the recipient of divine favors, bounties and grace.” (31)

It demands from us that we recognize that the soul of that individual is not tarnished in its redeemable essence. This requires an extraordinary spiritual effort from our part in as much as we should forgive their created evilness that did so much harm and hurt on so many people. It requires that we trust in God's level of forgiveness that only He can dispense.

This does not deny that there are consequences in the next world for every soul based on their actions in this life, that there is hope in the next world for every soul to progress, and that only God can judge what is best for the soul's progress regardless of the harm and the evilness that such individual displayed on his earthly journey.

What is then Heaven?

The description of what Heaven is has been provided by Bahá'u'lláh far more explicitly in spiritual terms. Even though the Bible and the Qur'an present heaven in symbolic terms, tradition nevertheless has interpreted them literally. There is some symbolism and metaphor used in the Bahá'í writings as well. Bahá'u'lláh does not present

Heaven as a physical place as was so vividly expressed in the Bible and the Qur'an. It is not surprising given the historical moment in which those descriptions were made by the corresponding Manifestations—Moses, the Prophets, Jesus, and Muhammad. Their description of Heaven was adapted to the capacity of understanding of their listeners and their intellectual and spiritual development. Being “babes” in both areas, the description of Heaven of those ancient Sacred Writings relies strongly on palace images of luxury, abundance, precious jewelry, exquisite foods and wine, and an ambiance of tranquility and total relaxation with nothing to worry or do that demands work. All of these images were the ones most people associated as being the dreamed reward of any earthly effort. Since only the royalty and the wealthy were able to indulge in such a level of comfort, the poor majority could only desire arriving at that level after the transition, if they met the conditions required.

Bahá'u'lláh elaborates the image of Heaven in complete spiritual terms and images. He lays the basis when he proclaims that Paradise (Heaven) is not a physical place, it is a state of being near to God as He so poetically expressed it in these terms,

6. O SON OF BEING!

Thy Paradise is My love; thy heavenly home, reunion with Me. Enter therein and tarry not. This is that which hath been destined for thee in Our kingdom above and Our exalted dominion. (32)—[emphasis by author]

Paradise is defined in terms of *love and reunion* with God. One could legitimately ask, and why not a physical place of leisure and tranquility? The answer is implied in Bahá'u'lláh's description. Who crosses over to the other dimension are not us with our physical bodies, its needs and limitations. It is the soul-conscious-mind, which is immaterial and thus any relationship with God will occur in the spiritual plane, not in the physical.

The soul, liberated after the transition, is capable of perceiving, comprehending and loving God with its own purest essence, that

of a spirit who can then comprehend, in a gradual process, the absolute greatness of being created by the All Powerful, All Knowing, All Loving, Self-subsisting, the Merciful, the Most Compassionate God. Being in His Presence is the greatest most satisfying and fulfilling experience that any soul could ever aspire to have since the comprehension of the gratuitous gift of Existence given by God surpasses all possible aspirations and desires. So, Paradise is the nearness to God recognizing Him as the source of one's own creation being able to have a continuous ever-increasing apprehension of such an incredible free gift given by the Creator. The "savoring" of this ineffable gift cannot be quenched; it is open to a permanent discovery of its limitless richness. No time-bound limitation is imposed on such a quest; if it did, it would turn it into a finite experience.

To make sure that we receive reassurance that previous physical images of heaven are but a symbol, and that being in the Presence of God is the true Paradise, Bahá'u'lláh made the following clarification:

Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the *real Paradise*, and of which *the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol*. (33)—[emphasis by author]

There is an additional recompense given to the soul that has attained His Presence by having walked in the ways of God, that of attaining a station with such power that all the worlds can benefit from him. This is how Bahá'u'lláh expressed it.

The soul that hath remained faithful to the Cause of God, and stood unwaveringly firm in His Path shall, after his ascension, be possessed of such power that all the worlds which the Almighty hath created can benefit through him. (34)

Bahá'u'lláh explains in the same text how to understand such power and the benefits that such a soul can have. In his own words,

Such a soul provideth, at the bidding of the Ideal King and Divine Educator, the pure leaven that leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. (35)

We can conclude that such souls have a formidable capacity of inspiring the “arts and wonders of the world” to become manifest. Their influence is like leaven that stimulates the manifestation of arts and wonders as the leaven makes the bread grow. This power of the soul to do this is the crown earned for having been firm in God’s Path.

Hell, the opposite of Heaven, as interpreted especially by Christianity and reiterated by Islam is described as a physical place where souls that have died in sin go to burn for their sins, forever. Three frequently cited Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark and John’s book of Revelation—present hell as a physical place and fire as its punishment. These are some examples:

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in **hell**. (Matthew 10:28)

And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into **hell**, into the fire that never shall be quenched: (Mark 9:45)

And death and **hell** were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Revelation 20:14)

The Qur’an offers similar images:

Among them are those who believed in it, and among them are those who held back from it. Hell is a sufficient Inferno. [4:55]

Whoever kills a believer deliberately, the penalty for him is Hell, where he will remain forever. And God

will be angry with him, and will curse him, and will prepare for him a terrible punishment. [4:93]

That God may distinguish the bad from the good, and heap the bad on top of one another, and pile them together, and throw them in Hell. These are the losers. [8:37]

On the Day when they will be heated in the Fire of Hell, then their foreheads, and their sides, and their backs will be branded with them. [9:35]

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is quite explicit in letting us know that Hell is not a physical place with burning fire. Our soul, being conscious of its faults at the moment of personal judgment, will be fully aware of how much we hurt others, how many times we did not accept to do the good taught by the Manifestation because we preferred to satisfy our whims, desires, passions, and unbridled desire for power and wealth. We will also recall the times we denied God the recognition of the blessings He rained upon us; at that instance we will fully become aware how all these faults keep us distant from God. This is the real Hell, to feel spiritually that separation and distance from the source of our very being, and how much our soul yearns to be in God's proximity as the greatest possible bliss. This felt separation will be experienced as the most soul wrenching pain that one can endure. It is a pain that is not physical, but rather deeply spiritual because one is conscious of the self-imposed impediments that have kept one from being near to God's Presence.

If one needs to make a comparison with our earthly experience probably the best and most easily apprehended is the pain that one feels in the middle of our being when the life companion or a child dies in one's arms. Our heart is ripped apart while our mind is keenly aware that we will not get to see them again in this time-space dimension. The pain is so profound and deep that no words of comfort can ease it.

The advancement of the soul in the spiritual dimension will depend on a twofold level. The Baha'i Faith affirms that the prayers made by those loved ones that remain on this earth-dimension will

contribute to the advancement towards God's Presence. In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words:

“As the spirit of man lives forever after casting off his elemental frames, it is, like all existing things, undoubtedly capable of progress, and thus one may pray for a departed soul to advance, to be forgiven or to be made the recipient of divine favors, bounties and grace.” (36)

The second instance of progress of the soul happens because the departed can also contribute to their progress when they

“plead there for forgiveness and seek illumination through prayer and supplication” and “progress through their own prayers and supplications, particularly if they become the object of the intercession of the holy Manifestation.” (37)

Relationship of souls in the after life

This is a constant question that all religions and myths about the afterlife address in one way or another. We have stated that they have in common the belief that there is a potential relationship with their ancestors, friends and people with whom they had some significant relationship. Additionally, the people that have had a near death experience affirm in their account of it that they had encountered loved ones and friends who were welcoming and assured them that what they were going through was all right, and that they did not have to fear what was happening. The encounter was characterized as being warm, welcoming, reassuring, and full of unconditional love.

Bahá'u'lláh gives us the certainty that a similar encounter will happen when we enter the afterlife. He further explains that those relationships with other souls will be of such quality, intensity and deep communion that they will strive to be as one soul.

LXXXVI. And now concerning thy question whether human souls continue to be conscious one of another

after their separation from the body. Know thou that the souls of the people of Bahá, who have entered and been established within the Crimson Ark, shall associate and commune intimately one with another, and shall be so closely `associated in their lives, their aspirations, their aims and strivings as to be even as one soul. (38)

Such a possibility of communion is quite comforting to know now, while we are here in this plane of existence. If there is one human characteristic that identifies us, it is our need to be in constant relationship with those we live with, those with whom we work side by side, those with whom we have shared moments of leisure, and those that are present at the most important events of our lives, like birthdays, marriages, graduations, getting a job, being congratulated for excellence in performance, obtaining a medal in sports, in a dancing or singing contest; as well as in the trying moments of sickness, accidents, terminal illness, a devastating divorce, loss of a job, and in moments of depression. Friends and acquaintances are the ones that make the difference in multiplying the joy of the occasion or diminishing the pain of the tragedy.

To lose a friend or a relative, with whom you have shared these intense emotional moments, is a heartbreaking experience. To have the fear that you will never see them again is agony for many; to have the assurance of Bahá'u'lláh that we will encounter them in the afterlife in a possible even more intense level of intimacy than the one we had here in this world is not only hopeful but a goal to pursue with a lifestyle of service in this world that will grant us this promise.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá qualifies that such union is a spiritual one, not physical, which is quite understandable given the clarification that in the afterlife we will not have the physical body that we were clothed with and through which we expressed our love to those that were close to our hearts. The union will thus be, of a unique spiritual character:

And know thou for a certainty, that in the divine worlds, the spiritual beloved ones (believers) will

recognize each other, and will seek union (with each other), but a spiritual union. Likewise, a love that one may have entertained for anyone will not be forgotten in the world of the Kingdom. (39)

Those that have gone through a near death experience also recount meeting some form of a celestial being. Depending on each person's religious belief, that being was felt to be the Manifestation of God / Prophet-Founder of their religion, e.g., for Christians, it would be perceived as being Jesus. When not associated with a Manifestation, the being was some celestial entity that gave them a welcoming reception and assurance that everything was all right, and they did not have to fear anything in what they were experiencing. This "anticipation" of what we might experience after our transition is very well backed-up by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

We will be re-united with the friends that had gone before

When asked about the permanence of the union of two persons, 'Abdu'l-Bahá answered that this would depend upon the quality of the union that they had while living. If husband and wife were united as one soul, the union of heart and soul would remain unbroken even if one of the would happen to pass away,

Replying to another questioner, he said that when two people, husband and wife for instance, have been completely united in this life their souls being as one soul, then after one of them has passed away, this union of heart and soul would remain unbroken. (40)

We have elucidated what the Bahá'í Faith affirms as being the nature of the soul, its unity and its freedom from the limitations of space and time, at the same time that it is fully conscious of the life led that gives the soul a clear exposition of the merits and faults accumulated before the transition, and how the faults become the reason for being separate from God, which becomes the experience of "hell", not as a physical place of torment, but rather the consciousness

of being separated from the source of spiritual happiness, the nearness to God. We also learned the relationship that the souls can have with loved ones and how profoundly that relationship can grow.

We are ready to explore in the next chapter the nature of the immortality of soul as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

CHAPTER 9



IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

The previous chapter represented an effort to understand what the Baha'i Faith affirms as being the nature of the soul, its unity, and its freedom from the limitations of space and time when it passes over to the next dimension. We clarified the teaching that Heaven is being near to God, and hell is the soul being conscious of why it is distant from Him due to the person's transgressions in their temporal life. We also learned the relationship that the souls can have with loved ones and how profoundly that relationship can grow. We now need to carry out an in-depth analysis of what is meant by the soul's immortality.

The indescribable station of the soul

It is befitting to, once more, repeat Bahá'u'lláh's description of the indescribable nature of the soul to lay down the foundation of the greatest goal that all souls have, that is to display their immortality in the afterlife. This is Bahá'u'lláh's description:

The movement of My Pen is stilled when it attempteth to befittingly describe the loftiness and glory of so exalted a station. The honor with which the Hand of Mercy will invest the soul is such as no tongue can adequately reveal, nor any other earthly agency describe. (1)

If Bahá'u'lláh, with His innate knowledge of spiritual reality, expressed the stillness of His Pen when attempting to describe the exalted station of the soul, how much less a description of the soul can we humans make when we are so limited in our understanding of the greatness of the spiritual world?

For this very reason it is best to let Bahá'u'lláh give us the description of how best to understand how the soul manifests its immortality.

The soul is immortal

Let us start by allowing Bahá'u'lláh's very vivid description of the soul's immortality as the optimum point of reference:

106. Having, in this journey, immersed himself in the ocean of immortality, rid his heart from attachment to aught save Him, and attained unto the loftiest heights of everlasting life, the seeker will see no annihilation either for himself or for any other soul. He will quaff from the cup of immortality, tread in its land, soar in its atmosphere, consort with them that are its embodiments, partake of the imperishable and incorruptible fruits of the tree of eternity, and be forever accounted, in the lofty heights of immortality, amongst the denizens of the everlasting realm. (2)

The same clear description of the essence of the soul's immortality was declared by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a presentation he made in Paris in 1911:

29.13 With the soul it is different. The soul is not a combination of elements, it is not composed of many atoms, it is of one indivisible substance and therefore eternal. It is entirely out of the order of the physical creation; it is immortal! (3)

What does it mean to be immortal?

The answer that springs from both quotes is quite obvious. Immortality means, in straight forward terms, the condition of not experiencing the termination of existence. On the contrary, it is the state of being in a never-ending mode of existence.

In our way of reasoning, this affirmation springs from the most far-reaching biblical declaration that man was created by God. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen.1:26). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clarifies how to understand the Biblical declaration correctly

In a word, the “image and likeness of God” constitute the virtues of God, and man is intended to become the recipient of the effulgences of divine attributes.
(4)

Bahá’u’lláh had previously explained the loftiness of the soul’s creation when he affirmed that when God created men, He:

Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty. (5)

Let us reflect for a moment what this means in terms of the soul’s immortality. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expresses this same reasoning with a slightly different nuance, that those divine virtues are reflected or revealed in the human reality,

This indicates that man is of the image and likeness of God—that is to say, the perfections of God, the divine virtues, are reflected or revealed in the human reality.
(6)

The other is that in order to mirror God’s image within himself, every person must develop the latent divine attributes with which

he is born. At birth, these attributes are but potential, waiting to become visible through the words, actions, and constant meritorious behaviors that allow such attributes to shine forth.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá provided a detailed explanation of what this implies. Let’s read it first before commenting:

It is self-evident that the image and likeness mentioned do not apply to the form and semblance of a human being because the reality of Divinity is not limited to any form or figure. Nay, rather, the attributes and characteristics of God are intended. Even as God is pronounced to be just, man must likewise be just. As God is loving and kind to all men, man must likewise manifest loving-kindness to all humanity. As God is loyal and truthful, man must show forth the same attributes in the human world. Even as God exercises mercy toward all, man must prove himself to be the manifestation of mercy. In a word, the image and likeness of God constitute the virtues of God, and man is intended to become the recipient of the effulgences of divine attributes. (7)

To have all of God’s Attributes imprinted in our souls is to carry the “image and likeness of God” in a potential state to be developed by each individual, thus manifesting a likeness of /resemblance to God inasmuch as he/she can be kind to all humanity like God is loving to all men, to be just as God is Just, and merciful to all those in need as God is always merciful. In similar fashion, all the other attributes, such as creativity, intelligence, truthfulness, compassion, forgiveness, patience, sharing, and other attributes of God that we have as the essence of our soul are made manifest and developed as man makes efforts to display them.

The temporal experience that we all have is that we are in a constant tug of war between our two natures, the physical and the spiritual, with the physical having such a strong pull and apparent power that the overall presence of evilness created by men seems to override the goodness of the attributes that we have as the essence of our souls. Our temporal lives seem to be spurred by our egotistical

desires to the point that we suffocate the goodness that our soul is capable of manifesting. One life seems to appear as not being enough to develop fully our potential of becoming truly spiritual beings as we were created.

This reality begs the question as to if we cross over to the afterlife with God's Attributes that were given to us at the moment of our creation underdeveloped, how can we even have the possibility of developing them any further unless we are in an immortal state of being, which would allow us all the "time" required for that development to happen?

The soul will continue to progress in the next phase of existence

How and why is that possible? Bahá'u'lláh comes to the rescue with the following answer:

LXXXI. And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God and His attributes, and will reveal His loving kindness and bounty. (8)

The first thing to note is that Bahá'u'lláh is telling us that crossing over to the afterlife is not the arrival of a soul at a static stage, where no further change is possible. On the contrary, it is the continuation of a journey that was started here on Earth and will continue over there, in another dimension, in another state of being, but basically pursuing the same goal: that the soul will continue its journey of progressing until it attains the Presence of God. The remarkable

difference is that no matter what changes may occur in this world, they will not alter that reality.

The next quote gives us a clue about the journey's endurance. "**It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure**". This means that the journey has no time limit, for it will endure as long as the Kingdom of God will endure, which in terms of God's Existence, it will have no end since God is Eternal, without beginning, without end, as firmly set forth by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Therefore, as the Essence of Unity, that is the existence of God, is everlasting and eternal — that is to say, it has neither beginning nor end — it is certain that this world of existence, this endless universe, has neither beginning nor end. (9)

Bahá'u'lláh made this assertion several times. The one below reinforces the previous ones as it reassures us that the condition of progress of the soul in the afterlife will be for all eternity. In his own words,

LXXXI. And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue *to progress* until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. *It will endure* as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. (10)—[author's emphasis]

The last phrase merits to be underscored because it reaffirms the immortality of the soul in terms of an eternal progression towards the Presence of God.

Our limited time-space-bound imagination cannot easily imagine a Journey that is eternal. It simply escapes our capability of conceiving of such a reality when we are so immersed in the double

dimension of time-space as the permanent way of existing while here on Earth.

Bahá'u'lláh gives us an unfamiliar and quite difficult to comprehend point of reference when he proposes that we think of a dimension in which, “**The worlds of God are countless and infinite in their range**”. This is certainly a completely new way of imagining a spiritual and physical dimension populated by worlds of God that are not only countless, but infinite in their range. This is how Bahá'u'lláh describes them:

LXXIX. As to thy question concerning the worlds of God. Know thou of a truth that the worlds of God are countless in their number, and infinite in their range. None can reckon or comprehend them except God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. (11)

So, it is possible to conceive of a journey of the soul in the afterlife that has an infinite number of spiritual worlds available that will allow it to be able to do the spiritual work required to fully develop the attributes of God, which are still in a state of latent development in the soul, and they need a dimension where they can be brought out to their full effulgence. How this is done and through which means it can be accomplished, Bahá'u'lláh did not specify, probably because of our incapacity to comprehend such a reality, as he suggested when he affirmed:

The honor with which the Hand of Mercy will invest the soul is such as no tongue can adequately reveal, nor any other earthly agency describe. (12)

What can be ascertained is that the soul will have all the necessary “spiritual time” to carry out this task because, as Bahá'u'lláh has affirmed, “**the soul, after its separation from the body, progresses for all of eternity**”. In that no-time-space dimension, eternity becomes immortality and the perfect scenario where the soul can carry out its task of mirroring God's Attributes because, as Bahá'u'lláh has stated: “**Upon the reality of man, however, [God] hath focused**

the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self". (13)

The purpose of the eternal Journey

Now we are equipped to answer as to what the purpose of the endless journey of the soul after leaving this world is. Again, it is best to let Bahá'u'lláh set the scenario of understanding:

XXIX. The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. (14)

How long that Journey will last is a question made by us humans in human terms, which are the only ones with which we make any affirmations of reality. Time in that spiritual reality is non-existing and thus irrelevant. What is important is for the soul to do the spiritual work it has to do to be able to be in the Presence of God, the ultimate reason for which he was created.

How that spiritual work will be done was not clarified by Bahá'u'lláh. This does not impede our ability to imagine various scenarios. One could be that we can spiritually accompany a friend or relative left behind in his/her process of cultivating a specific attribute when he "feels" he cannot do it alone. In that instance, the spiritual work would be in becoming "a support buddy", inspiring him or her to continue the spiritual work that is required to allow that attribute to shine forth. Another probable scenario is the possibility of supplicating God's grace to be shed upon the "spiritual buddy" so that he would be able to surmount a spiritual difficulty.

To be in the Presence of God

"When" will that happen?

Again, the question is placed in human terms. Bahá'u'lláh's answer is given in spiritual terms, not in "time-terms" because the soul's ability to be in the presence of God will depend on its

spiritual development. This is how Bahá'u'lláh presents that stage of development of the soul,

When the soul attaineth the Presence of God, it will assume the form that best becometh its immortality and is worthy of its celestial habitation. (15)

How best to understand what Bahá'u'lláh is saying?

We understand this verse to mean that the spiritual development of the soul is not the same for everyone. To be in the Presence of God will depend on the capacity of the soul to assume that form of immortality that it is capable of achieving.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave us an explanation of this stage in the following terms,

But man when he has reached this state can still make progress in perfections but not in state, because there is no state higher than that of a perfect man to which he can transfer himself. He only progresses in the state of humanity, for the human perfections are infinite. Thus, however learned a man may be, we can imagine one more learned. Hence, as the perfections of humanity are endless, man can also make progress in perfections after leaving this world. (16)

There are quite a few deep ideas in his explanation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá first makes a precise distinction that man in the afterlife cannot make progress in “state” because he is a perfect man at the moment of creation by God. Yet, he can experience progress in the “state of humanity” because human perfections are underdeveloped. These are the ones that the soul will be able to develop incessantly as it passes through the infinite worlds of God as Bahá'u'lláh affirmed their existence,

LXXIX. As to thy question concerning the worlds of God. Know thou of a truth that the worlds of God are countless in their number, and infinite in their range. None can reckon or comprehend them except God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. (17)

When Bahá'u'lláh states that the soul “**will assume the form that best befiteth its immortality and is worthy of its celestial habitation**”, we reason that he is referring to the fact that not all souls develop their “human perfections” at the same rate, intensity, or level. This development is in accordance with the capacity of the soul to “**assume the form that best befiteth its immortality**”. This “form that best befiteth” is different for everyone as not all individuals on Earth are the same. The richness of our humankind lies in its diversity and degrees of development. So, it is highly probable that the evolution of the soul in the afterlife will be conditioned upon the capacity of each individual to have evolved on this time-space dimension. The lifestyle, the good actions, the sacrifices made on behalf of others, the level of compassion, the degree of selfish service will be the measure by which the soul will be able to become “**worthy of its celestial habitation**”.

What it means to be in the Presence of God is completely beyond our comprehension. Yet for the sake of having a possible image I offer the reader a personal vision of what is to be in the Presence of God as the ultimate goal of each and every human who will be making the transition to the non-temporal existence.

Becoming aware of, and understanding God's Master Plan of Creation

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained in the quote above that man will be able to progress in his human perfections. He even mentions how there can always be an even more learned man than we are. It seems to be that there are two attributes immersed in our souls that makes us in God’s image as no other attribute can—they are knowledge and our creativity capacity. It is impossible to conceive that God does not have all the knowledge necessary to create this and other universes, each one showing the complexity of their millions and millions of galaxies, and the trillions and trillions of stars within each galaxy, and in the thousands or millions of planets the million and billions of diverse humans. God creates all the wonders of each universe and

us from His knowledge and capacity of bringing forth life from His own Self-subsistence.

We imitate Him in-as-much as we conceive ideas which have their origin in our minds, and from those ideas we translate them into physical things that were not existent before our creative process imagined them such as bridges, skyscrapers, airplanes, high speed trains, automobiles, refrigerators, dams, hydroelectric power, robotic arms, automated production in factories, computers, lab tops, smart phones, diagnostic tools, electronic microscopes, particle accelerators, pictures of incredible beauty, inspiring music, folkloric dances, ballet pieces, theater presentations charged with emotional scenes, movies that defy all known realities making virtual reality of non-existent worlds as vivid as if we were having an adventure in one of them; in short we are continuously creating reality that did not exist before we conceived it in our minds.

Imagine the level of knowledge that we will be able to acquire in the afterlife since we will not be constrained by our limited understanding of the spiritual reality as we are now. In that dimension, we will be able to gradually understand the magnificence of God's Plan for all of Creation, and the role we were assigned in that plan that we could not fully comprehend due to our limitations in understanding the big picture of our lives. We will then understand that from the very moment this universe was set in motion, there was a master plan in its evolution, and that the one in charge of designing and setting it in motion is our Creator. We will then understand the purpose of our personal appearance, and the role we carried out in His Plan. The beauty, the elegance of the whole Plan will appear crystal clear and our sense of gratitude to have been included in it will have no bounds.

Becoming aware of being near God

Normal human experience teaches us that each one of us is unique. No two human beings are identical, not even "identical" twin brothers. They may have an uncanny physical resemblance that can make it very difficult to distinguish one from the other. But at the same time, it is very likely that they have quite distinct personalities,

tastes, and desires, IQs, inclinations for different type of professions, and even mean or destructive tendencies, unbearable character, and a constant negative outlook on life.

This experience of having this unique individuality, both physical and psychological, gives us the firm conviction that we are different from every other individual and separate from all other humans. This is replicated at the community, regional, national and international levels. The other person identical to me can become a threat because she or he is out to take the greatest advantage of me or my possessions, my business, my family, my land, or my country. Living in harmony and with a sense of belonging to a welcoming community becomes a desired goal, but highly improbable as an everyday experience.

How we feel and experience separation from others is too many times projected in how we feel and relate to God. We perceive Him either too far away in a heaven that I cannot reach, too distant from my everyday reality, too silent for me to dialogue with, too detached from my everyday survival, too badly represented by those religious leaders that have made God an infuriated Being out to punish me for my transgressions, or worse, as the reason for destroying those that cannot accept the interpretation of Who He is according to those same religious leaders.

Our intuition, however limited it is, tells us that one of the most rewarding, comforting discoveries we will make in that Journey is becoming aware of, and experiencing that we and the rest of humanity were never separate from God. We could not be separate from Him simply because we came into existence as a free gift from God that did not require from anyone having accumulated any merit whatsoever before being born to become a meritorious candidate for that generous free gift of existence given by the Creator. We will have an outstanding clear consciousness that the free gift was given to me from God's boundless Love; that it came out from His simple desire to share His Eternal Existence with me.

The very essence of my existence depends on my soul's permanent connection to Him as the very source of its existence. Without God's permanent presence in it as the very life source, there is no possibility of the soul's existence. Becoming enlightened by this unsurpassed

reality is not only the reassurance that we were never distant nor separate from God. If we ever felt distant from God at any time, Bahá'u'lláh reassures us that God is never distant from us because He is closer to us than we are to our own self:

XCIII. Consider, moreover, how frequently doth man become forgetful of his own self, whilst God remaineth, through His all-encompassing knowledge, aware of His creature, and continueth to shed upon him the manifest radiance of His glory. It is evident, therefore, that, in such circumstances, He is closer to him than his own self. (18)

Exhilarating, never ending experience of arrival at the source of our being

If we want to obtain an image, a feeling, or an intuition into what will be experienced in God's Presence, there is no better place to look for that image than in the records of the mystics. In a limited manner, they experienced being out of their bodies and in the Luminescent Presence of God. What transpires from their accounts is that they felt an overwhelming sense of peace, unconditional love and a desire for that experience to not end, such was the bliss they were experiencing. Common to that narrative is their confession that there are no human words that can adequately express the rapture in which they felt immersed. Paul expressed it in this manner over two thousand years ago when he declared that he had had a mystical experience in the presence of a resurrected Jesus,

It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. ²I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. ³And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) ⁴how that he was caught up into paradise,

and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (2 Cor. 12:1-4)

Before the overwhelming presence of Divinity, the tongue goes mute; the mind finds no adequate language to express what it is experiencing. The soul is compelled to burst in silent adoration and explosive gratitude for having the privilege of minimally experiencing the Greatness, Holiness, Sanctity and privilege of having such a close encounter with the ineffable Royalty of the Creator.

St. Teresa of Avila, a Spanish mystic (1515 -1582), described the stage of Rapture as being lost in God in a way and intensity that she had evident difficulty describing it,

During Rapture, all your faculties fade away and are suspended. The Lord gathers up your soul. Your soul no longer seems to animate your body. Your hearing and thinking are dimmed. And you are carried away. Gently. Joyfully. Silently. Ecstatically.

There is no power left in your body. Your eyes involuntarily close. Your breath diminishes. Your pulse slows. You can hardly move your hands without great effort. You feel such bliss and consolation that you would never abandon it. (19)

If this is the magnificence of the experience of the mystics of the Divine while still here on our world, we can extrapolate to the afterlife, and propose that in the Presence of God, we will be enabled to experience being immersed in the sea of never ending bliss because we will experience the unconstrained Love of the Creator that wishes nothing less than to keep partaking His Subsistence with me, as an expression of His shared Infinite Love.

In the Presence of God there is no such thing as time. Thus, it is safe to affirm that this bliss experienced at the very core of our being will last forever. Then we will fully understand what Bahá'u'lláh said when he proclaimed, on behalf of God, how we should understand what Paradise really is:

6. O SON OF BEING!

Thy Paradise is My love; thy heavenly home, reunion with Me. Enter therein and tarry not. This is that which hath been destined for thee in Our kingdom above and Our exalted dominion. (20)

Paradise, must be emphasized once more, is not a physical place, since we will not have a physical body. It is our soul's being in the Presence of its maker, enjoying spiritually the bliss of complete peace and love that can only be experienced before the source of Unconditional Love. Nothing, nothing can give us a greater sense of completeness than to be at the very loving source of our inextinguishable existence, destined for immortality.

Fulfillment of all spiritual longings, needs and desires

Becoming aware of the true nature of our souls, being in the Presence of God will be the fulfillment of all the spiritual longings that we experienced at one time or another while we were trying to figure out who we really were in this world, but because of so many daily chores to do, obligations to meet, and obstacles to overcome, we just do not seem to be able to fulfill any of those spiritual longings.

One spiritual longing that we have that will be constantly fulfilled is that of forever becoming conscious of our divine origin, which, in turn, will permit us to be in a constant state of gratitude, and uttering praise to God for having given us that ineffable gift of existence. This gift surpasses all the other blessings received in this world because the foundation for experiencing any blessings is existing so as to be able to receive them.

Having received our state of existence as the freest gift that God offers is the ultimate reason for being able to fulfill any other pent-up spiritual longing, but in the Presence of God, there is no reason why any spiritual longing will not be totally and completely satisfied.

Worship the Creator

One of the most authentic appreciations that we can express to an extraordinary individual, a just king, a sage, or an outstanding spiritual guide is the public recognition of his merits, accomplishments, and guidance. We do it with pride, with a sense that he is worthy of the praise offered, and normally we do it in a public event before all those that admire this kind of individual.

If we do this with a limited individual who is essentially not different from us, what can be the response that we would have before the very Creator of who we are?

A similar but far more powerful and truthful acknowledgment will be given by the soul as an effervescent proclamation to all other souls of God's Omnipotence, Sovereignty, Self-subsistence, Inaccessibility, Bounty, and Mercifulness; as well as the recognition that God is the All-Healing, the All-Abiding, the All Sufficing, the All-Wise, the All-Knowing, the Ever-forgiving, the All-Generous and the All-Powerful. This celebrated recognition will be the worship that the soul will give God by adoring Him for having received the splendorous brilliance of all His Attributes as the essence of his soul.

Immersion in God's Unity

The sense of separateness that we mentioned above will dissolve in the Presence of God. Before the Creator, being filled with His overflowing Presence, any sense of being distant from Him will vanish, to be replaced by the overpowering sense of completeness, of having arrived at the Source of our being.

At that instant, the understanding of God's intrinsic Unity will be the overriding feeling of being immersed in it. The sensation will be that of a drop of water from the ocean becoming one with the immensity of that reality, losing forever the feeling of being separate from the Source of who we are. It will be the fulfillment of the desire to be one forever with the Loved One, to never be separate or away from Him, to be connected to the only Source that can fulfill our deepest longings of being loved without restriction by the

Unconditional Love that seeks nothing in return. We will be totally and completely “satisfied” with our limited capacity for loving Him.

We can now conclude that Immortality will be the Journey that will have its complete fulfillment when arriving in God’s Presence, assured that being in that Presence will ensure that nothing can separate us from Him. It will be a spiritual embrace that will endure as God’s Eternity will endure.

CONCLUSION



What this book-essay has attempted to do is extract from historical records, Holy Writings, descriptions of scientific advances, poets and philosophers what might be the reality of an afterlife that has been present as a question in human consciousness from the dawn of its appearance on the planet. The following is my summary of the teachings that I believe give us an unequivocal affirmation of the reality of an afterlife and how we will have the chance to keep on evolving in the version of immortality with which we were born.

All civilizations of the past have created and left recorded mythical descriptions of life after death. This intuition was born from the direct experience of relatives and loved ones that eventually died, affecting profoundly the ones left behind. Their grief and sorrow gave them grounds to postulate and believe that the departed loved ones must be on a journey towards an abode of rest, peace, and happiness. So, they created a place, or imagined a condition to which people went after passing over. What they what they aspired to find they expressed in imaginative symbolic language; we call those descriptions, myths. Such myths were the human effort to try and make sense of such a transcendent moment, a way of minimally comprehending that which they did not understand nor had any certainty of what that afterlife was really like; they just had an intuition expressed in those myths. The myths were very much tinted with images of a *man-dreamed physical* afterlife.

The religions of the past, as taught by the Messengers of God, who showed ample proofs that they had been chosen by God, affirmed unequivocally that there was an afterlife and that the immortal soul continued on living in Paradise. The description of such an afterlife underwent the normal process of any religion that builds on what

the previous ones had announced. The new religions that appeared did it on a progressive timeline. As the Manifestations offered a new Revelation, they slowly refined the first descriptions of such a Paradise, which at the beginning was presented using physical images. It was done because those hearing the Revelation were in a spiritual infancy that still required a familiar frame of reference to imagine such a wonderful place. This is why past descriptions of Heaven were basically made in images similar to the physical reality that humans lived daily but projected into a timeless imagined Paradise of bliss without the suffering experienced on this earthly plane.

Modern science studying the composition and performance of the brain and mind has offered illustrative descriptions of an afterlife by discovering that the mind has functions beyond the brain in a non-space-time dimension, such as meticulous visualized dreams, premonitions of future events, telepathic transmission of thoughts, experiencing consciousness of personal existence in an alternate state of awareness, or suspending the time-space dimension while meditating. Those who have undergone near death experiences and documented them have described, with remarkable detail and vivid images, how the persons see themselves leaving their broken dead bodies, fully aware and conscious of what they are experiencing. Their descriptions of a state of bliss experienced while in their “dead” stage come very close to the experience mystics have left recorded, endorsing the existence of the potential afterlife we will be able to live.

Bahá’u’lláh, the most recent Messenger of God, has brought a new and renewed Revelation. It addresses each of the above reflections and places them into a fresh perspective, summarized in the following key points:

- The soul is created by God in a perfect state. In its essence, God has placed all His Attributes. Man, then has to spiritually work to allow these Attributes to shine forth with such luminosity that they can show others the divine imprint that is within all of us and reflects the “image and likeness” of our Creator that we have been given at the origin of our existence.

- The soul's origin is spiritual and exists within the realm of spiritual reality; it is thus not physical. It associates with the body at conception, but it is not dependent on it for its existence. At death, it detaches itself from the body, and crosses over to a spaceless-timeless spiritual afterlife.
- Once this happens, the soul is made aware of both its good and bad actions. This becomes the basis of its journey of immortality. Hell is not a physical place; it is rather the soul's own recognition of how far he/she is from the Presence of God, which becomes a "spiritual torment".
- The soul's journey is described by Bahá'u'lláh as one that will traverse through the infinite spiritual worlds of God as needed to enter in the Presence of God.

LXXXI. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God and His attributes, and will reveal His loving kindness and bounty. (21)

- Once in the Presence of God, the experience of nearness to God will be recognized as being the true Paradise so long desired in this world. It will be a state of endless awareness of the magnificence and gloriousness of being in the presence of God.

The above expressions of the greatness of the afterlife are more than ample reasons to not fear death when it is understood, believed and embraced as the next transition-birth of our soul in the realm of a new spiritual dimension. Below is Bahá'u'lláh's invitation how to envision death with gladness since it is a messenger of joy. From this perspective, there is nothing to fear when the moment arrives for

each one of us to make the formidable transition into that which we really are: spiritual beings having a temporal experience destined to an immortal way of being in the spiritual realm:

CLXV. Death proffereth unto every confident believer the cup that is life indeed. It bestoweth joy, and is the bearer of gladness. It conferreth the gift of everlasting life. (22)

Having received a revealed certainty that there is an afterlife that is so stupendous that there are not enough concepts, images, or language skills to describe its magnificence, eternal reality, and unimaginable spiritual fulfillment being in the Presence of God, one is confronted with two options.

The first one, a rejection in which such a magnificent Paradise does not exist, that it is the creation of our deepest desires confronting the brutal reality that when one exhales his/her last breath, the person is buried and decomposes, and that is the end of our existence. The so-called Messengers of God are good intentioned individuals that make an extraordinary effort to give us some hopeful aspiration of an excellent continuation of existence conditioned to ethical and moral behavior. The final outcome of this position-belief is an existence that has no purpose, a senseless effort to behave ethically, a deep conviction that we are pawns in an absurd scenario where we have no control, no reward for the good a person has done, and probably no punishment for the harm inflicted on others.

This rejection implies that one does not recognize the spiritual nature of humans and that we are simply the composite of multiple organs, which allow us to breath, walk, think, have feelings, aspirations and desires that are either fulfilled or never realized. Existence is then reduced to a struggle to survive, acquire the commodities that make life easier to bear, hopefully find a good paying job, a complementary companion and the fulfillment of some dreams and projects without any survival after death and thus the impossibility of any additional evolution.

Since death is the closure of a natural cycle that is present throughout the physical world, humanity is not exempt from it since

we are the physical product of an evolutionary process that has arrived at the present stage of development. Thus, from this perspective, life in itself has no purpose other than being forced to live it as it comes, with or without any control of the external factors that determine how we respond. Having no future expectation of an afterlife that is intimately linked to our good deeds, there is little or no motivation to make an extra effort to serve others, or make the world a better place to live.

The second alternative is to ponder what has been presented in this book. We lay the foundation by stating and clarifying that God has always spoken to the pinnacle of His Creation, us. He has done it historically through His Messengers who have constantly addressed the most profound questions since the first humans posed them, being death one of the most crucial; what happens after one ends up cremated, buried directly in the ground or, if the family can afford it, inside a coffin? The categorical answer given by those Messengers is that there is an afterlife to which all souls can have access.

To accept this second alternative, we have presented enough clues making evident from the scientific and spiritual points of view that such reality is not only possible, it is inevitable since it was designed by the same Creator that gave us our formidable capability of reasoning, feeling, sensing, hoping, loving, caring and aspiring to share the best of ourselves with all those that we appreciate, even strangers that we will never see again.

To accept the second alternative is to find the answer to our deepest existential anguish: is the end of our physical bodies also the end of our thoughts, memories, feelings, emotions, and consciousness?

The answer is a categorical NO. The temporal “death” event is just a transition as it is the “death” of our intrauterine temporal life before birth. Each transition is a stage in our progressive spiritual evolution that is destined for immortality. The assurance that this transition opens the “door” to the next level of existence is the most comforting truth given by all the Revelations of the past and present. The guarantee comes from the Spokespersons that, representing the Creator, have affirmed it to be so. The Creator of our souls, and permanent sustainer of our existence, wishes no less than we never perish. On the contrary,

He has repeatedly told us that what He desires for us is to have a never-ending relationship of Love and Intimacy that He is the only one capable of satisfying our deepest spiritual aspirations.

Such reassurance of been able to arrive at that longed for Paradise is the profound reason for being capable of confronting, consciously and happily, the unstoppable reality that one day we will make the transition, with the certainty that at the other side the “gates” of that Paradise will be opened to receive us back into the “home” from where we were born into existence.

Before such a glorious perspective there is no reason to fear, anguish, or to try to flee from temporal death. On the contrary, it is the announcer, the harbinger of our next step of spiritual evolution that will be the fulfillment of our inherited spiritual potential.

Thus, truly believing in this Revelation, we should be glad when the moment arrives and we have to make the transition. At that moment, with a gladdened heart, we should be able to communicate to all close to us nothing but peace and assurance that we are progressing to our next stage of spiritual evolution. This conviction will be able to diminish the pain of those loved ones that do not want to accept our departure. This belief should also be able to transform the burial of the inert corpse into a moment of celebration for the departed since she/he will be entering the Paradise we are promised by God and so powerfully aspired to as our innermost desire.

The conviction of this ultimate revealed truth is the crown of the purpose of our lives here on Earth. How we experience it and communicate to all that know us, is what makes us the spiritual giants that we were created to be.

With this unmovable conviction that we need not fear for a moment what comes next, we can make ours the good tidings that Bahá'u'lláh gave us when he proclaimed for God:

32. O SON OF THE SUPREME!

I have *made death* a messenger of joy to thee.
Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed
on thee its splendor. Why dost thou veil thyself there
from? (23) [author's emphasis]

REFERENCES



Chapter 1: How do we know ancient men believed in some type of afterlife?

- (1) Google. timeline of neolithic and paleolithic Timeline of human prehistory—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Timeline_of_human_prehistory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_human_prehistory)
- (2) Grave goods—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Grave_goods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grave_goods)
- (3) Google. [https://www.smithsonianmag.com › science-nature › archaeologists-find-ev](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/archaeologists-find-ev).
- (4) Qafzeh Cave, Israel: Evidence for Middle Paleolithic Burials By K. Kris Hirst—Updated November 18, 2019
- (5) Google. why people were buried with artifacts in ancient times Archaeologists Find Evidence of Flowers Buried in a 12,000... [https://www.smithsonianmag.com › science-nature › archaeologists-find-ev](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/archaeologists-find-ev)..
- (6) Google. Great Cave in Sarawak. Niah National Park | Sarawak Forestry Corporation [https://www.sarawakforestry.com › parks-and-reserves › niah-national-park](https://www.sarawakforestry.com/parks-and-reserves/niah-national-park)
- (7) Ancient Maya Buried Relatives, Artifacts Under Homes—Seeker [https://www.seeker.com › ancient-maya-buried-relatives-artifacts-under-ho](https://www.seeker.com/ancient-maya-buried-relatives-artifacts-under-ho).
- (8) Grave goods—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Grave_goods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grave_goods)

- (9) Google. date of oldest recorded Shaman's presence is a tribe. Shamanism—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Shamanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamanism)
- (10) Idem
- (11) Massive statues of Egyptian Pharaoh Amenhotep III in the... [https://www.news.com.au › technology › science › news-story](https://www.news.com.au/technology/science/news-story)
- (12) Goggle. Giza pyramids Pyramids of Giza | History & Facts | Britannica [https://www.britannica.com › topic › Pyramids-of-Giza](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pyramids-of-Giza)
- (13) Valley of the Kings—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Valley_of_the_Kings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valley_of_the_Kings)
- (14) Google. Book of Caverns. Book of Caverns—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Book_of_Caverns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Caverns)
- (15) Google. Babylonian afterlife beliefs Ancient Mesopotamian religion—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Ancient_Mesopotamian_religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Mesopotamian_religion)
- (16) Google. Mesopotemian underworld. Ancient Mesopotamian underworld—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Ancient_Mesopotamian_underworld](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Mesopotamian_underworld)
- (17) Chinese conception of afterlife. Afterlife: Chinese Concepts | Encyclopedia.com [https://www.encyclopedia.com › environment › afterlife-Chinese-concepts](https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/afterlife-Chinese-concepts)
- (18) Google. Ancient key Myths of the Afterlife. Ancient Egyptian afterlife beliefs—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Ancient_Egyptian_afterlife_beliefs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egyptian_afterlife_beliefs)
- (19) Google ancient key Myths of the Afterlife. Greek underworld—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Greek_underworld](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_underworld)
- (20) Google. Roman afterlife belief. Afterlife—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Afterlife](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afterlife)
- (21) Google. Inca beliefs in afterlife. .the inca belief about the afterlife.—the empire of the children of... [https://solarilynych.blogspot.com › 2018/03 › the-inca-belief-about-afterlife](https://solarilynych.blogspot.com/2018/03/the-inca-belief-about-afterlife)
- (22) Google. Aztec belief in afterlife. Aztec religion—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Aztec_religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_religion)

- (23) Google. Aztec belief in afterlife. Maya death rituals—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Maya_death_rituals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_death_rituals)

Chapter 2—Religions’ explanations of the afterlife

- (1) Krishna—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Krishna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna)
- (2) date when the Gita was written. Bhagavad Gita—Ancient History Encyclopedia [https://www.ancient.eu › Bhagavad_Gita](https://www.ancient.eu/Bhagavad_Gita)
- (3) Google. Indian names of nature gods.List of nature deities—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › List_of_nature_deities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_nature_deities)
- (4) Google. God creator in Hinduism. Brahma—Ancient History Encyclopedia [https://www.ancient.eu › Brahma](https://www.ancient.eu/Brahma)
- (5) Google. Hinduism belief in the afterlife. Death and Afterlife in Hinduism—HinduWebsite [https://www.hinduwebsite.com › hinduism › h_death](https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h_death)
- (6) Google. date of Zoroaster’s teachings written. Zarathustra—Ancient History Encyclopedia [https://www.ancient.eu › zoroaster](https://www.ancient.eu/zoroaster)
- (7) Google Date the Avesta written. Avesta | Zoroastrian scripture | Britannica [https://www.britannica.com › topic › Avesta-Zoroastrian-scripture](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Avesta-Zoroastrian-scripture)
- (8) *Franz Cardinal König* *The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica*
- (9) Google. Zoroastrianism belief in afterlife. Chinvat Bridge—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Chinvat_Bridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinvat_Bridge)
- (10) Zoroastrian belief in afterlife. Zoroastrian Afterlife in A Dictionary of Asian Mythology »Afterlife—oi [https://oxfordindex.oup.com › view/overview](https://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/overview)
- (11) Zoroastrian belief in afterlife. *Franz Cardinal König* *The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica*
- (12) Zoroastrianism: History, Beliefs, and Practices—Theosophical ...[https://www.theosophical.org › publications › quest-magazine › 1231-zoro..](https://www.theosophical.org/publications/quest-magazine/1231-zoro..)

- (13) Google, date of redaction of the Pentateuch Torah—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Torah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah)
- (14) Google. Idem
- (15) Old Testament belief in the afterlife What Hope Did the Old Testament Give for Death? [https://www.blueletterbible.org › faq › don_stewart › don_stewart_109](https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_109)
- (16) Sheol bible. What is Sheol and Where is it? Bible Meaning and Definition [https://www.biblestudytools.com › dictionary › sheol](https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/sheol)
- (17) Old Testament belief in the afterlife. What Hope Did the Old Testament Give for Death? [https://www.blueletterbible.org › faq › don_stewart › don_stewart_109](https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_109)
- (18) Dates of Buddha's teachings written. Buddhist texts—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Buddhist_texts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_texts)
- (19) Karen, *Buda*, pg. 2, 74, 112, 127
- (20) Buddhist belief in after life. Buddhist Funeral Traditions Buddhists believe death is a... [https://www.alexanderlevittfunerals.com › download › BuddhistFuneral](https://www.alexanderlevittfunerals.com/download/BuddhistFuneral)
- (21) Buddhist belief in the afterlife. Buddhism—Afterlife and Salvation—Patheos [https://www.patheos.com › library › buddhism › beliefs › afterlife-and-sal..](https://www.patheos.com/library/buddhism/beliefs/afterlife-and-sal..)
- (22) Google. Buddhist belief in afterlife. **V.F. Gunaratna, *Rebirth Explained*. Kandy, 1980; K.N. Jayatilleke, *Survival and Karma in the Buddhist Perspective*. Kandy, 1980.**
- (23) Google Christian belief in afterlife. Christianity on the Afterlife—Religion Facts [www.religionfacts.com › christianity › afterlife](http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/afterlife)
- (24) Google. Date Qur'an was written. Quran—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Quran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quran)
- (25) Google. Date Qur'an was written. History of the Quran—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › History_of_the_Quran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Quran)
- (26) What Does Islam Say about the Day of Judgment?—Islam Guide <https://www.islam-guide.com>

- (27) Google. Islamic afterlife belief. Islamic view of death—Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Islamic_view_of_death](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_view_of_death)
- (28) Life After Death—Islam Guide [https://www.islam-guide.com › life-after-death-by-wamy](https://www.islam-guide.com/life-after-death-by-wamy)

Chapter 3—Insight of Near Death experiences

- (1) [en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Near-death_studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Near-death_studies) Near-death studies—Wikipedia
- (2) Google. Definition of NED. What is an NDE?—IANDS [iands.org › ndes › about-ndes › what-is-an-nde](https://www.iands.org/ndes/about-ndes/what-is-an-nde)
- (3) Google Pimvan Lommel. Wikipedia Pim van Lommel [en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Pim_van_Lommel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pim_van_Lommel)
- (4) Gideon Lichfield, The Science of Near Death Experiences—The Atlantic—*Quartz*
- (5) definition of near death experience. [en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Near-death_experience](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Near-death_experience) Near-death experience—Wikipedia
- (6) near death experiences. [www.near-death.com › science › evidence › common-elements-are-fo...Common Elements are Found in Near-Death Experiences](http://www.near-death.com/science/evidence/common-elements-are-found-in-near-death-experiences)
- (7) Idem. Near death experiences. [www.near-death.com › science › evidence › common-elements-are-fo...Common Elements are Found in Near-Death Experiences](http://www.near-death.com/science/evidence/common-elements-are-found-in-near-death-experiences)
- (8) Google. Raymond Moody recount of his NDE Raymond Moody's Suicide & Near-Death Experience—The *...the-formula.org* › [raymond-moodys-suicide-near-death](https://www.the-formula.org/raymond-moodys-suicide-near-death).
- (9) [ebenalexander.com › about](http://ebenalexander.com/about) About Eben Alexander, M.D.—Read the Biography
- (10) [www.theatlantic.com › magazine › archive › 2015/04 › the-science-of... The Science of Near-Death Experiences - The Atlantic](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/04/the-science-of-near-death-experiences-the-atlantic)
- (11) [www.near-death.com › science › evidence › some-people-receive-veri... Dannion Brinkley—Near-Death.com](http://www.near-death.com/science/evidence/some-people-receive-verification-from-the-dead)

- (12) Pam Reynolds (Near-Death Experience) | Psi Encyclopedia <https://psi-encyclopedia.spr.ac.uk> › articles › pam-reynolds-near-death-exp.
- (13) *en.wikipedia.org* › *wiki* › *Anita_Moorjani* Anita Moorjani–Wikipedia
- (14) 4NDE | Anita Moorjani <https://anitamoorjani.com> › about-anita › near-death-experience-description

Chapter 4—The immaterial reality of consciousness

- (1) Google. Human organ systems The Human Body: Anatomy, Facts & Functions—Live Science
- (2) Google. Brain structure Brain Structure and Function—Northeastern University www.northeastern.edu/nutraumaticbraininjury/braintbi-anatomy/brain-functions
- (3) Google. Human organ systems. What Are the Organ Systems of the Human Body?—Video & Lesson... <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-are-the-organ-systems-of-the-human-body.html>
- (4) Google. how many beats does a heartbeat in a day. How Many Times Does Your Heart Beat in a Lifetime? | Wonderopolis <https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/how-many-times-does-your-heart-beat-in-a-lifetime>
- (5) Merriam-Webster dictionary on line
- (6) The Cambridge Dictionary on line
- (7) Mind, The Wikipedia encyclopedia on line
- (8) Google. Functions of the mind and the brain. Mind—Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org> › *wiki* › Mind
- (9) Google. Effect of hallucinatory drugs on brain and behavior. Hallucinogen Effects | Short- and Long-Term Side Effects <https://www.drugrehab.com> › Addiction › Drugs › Hallucinogens
- (10) Google, The relation between mind and brain. What is the difference between the mind and the brain? | Teen ... <https://www.sharecare.com> › ... › *Teen Perspective: Learning and Memory*

- (11) Based on Critical Thinking Concepts & Principles. The Foundation for Critical Thinking. The Miniature Guide to The Human Mind How it Learns How It Mislearns, by Dr. Linda Elder and Dr. Richard Paul. 2004 Foundation for Critical Thinking www.criticalthinking.org
- (12) Google. Greek mythology
- (13) Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2010
- (14) Idem. Intuitive knowledge
- (15) Google, innovative modern architectural buildings.
- (16) Goleman, Daniel: *Inteligencia emocional*. Kairós. Barcelona, 1996.
- (17) Google, history of consciousness explanations. The Science and Philosophy of Consciousness | Psychology ...<https://www.psychologytoday.com> › blog › the-future-brain › the-science-..
- (18) Google. Wilber.Spectrum of consciousness. Psychologia perennis: The spectrum of consciousness. <https://psycnet.apa.org> › record
- (19) René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, 1637
- (20) John Locke, *Book IV*, 1700
- (21) Ken Wilber. No Boundary, 546-547
- (22) Ken Wilber. One Taste, pg. 358-360
- (23) Ken Wilber. Psychologia Perennis, pg. 19
- (24) Ken Wilber. Ken Wilber. No Boundary, pgs. 57, 58
- (25) Ken Wilber. No Boundary, Eastern and Western approaches to personal growth, pg.41
- (26) Google. Quantum mechanics explained simple. Simple.wikipedia.org › wiki › Quantum_mechanics Quantum mechanics–Simple English Wikipedia, the free .
- (27) Youtube: PBS Digital Studios. The Great Courses Plus. Understanding the Uncertainty Principle with Quantum Fourier Series | Space Time

- (28) *blogs.scientificamerican.com › observations › coming-to-grips-with-t...* Coming to Grips with the Implications of Quantum Mechanics ...

Chapter 5—Immaterial Reality of the Physical World

- 1) Google. Structure of the atom. Atom—Wikipedia *en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Atom*
- 2) Google. Double slit experiment. Physics in a minute: The double slit experiment | *plus.maths.org plus.maths.org › content › physics-minute-double-slit-experiment-0*
- 3) Google. Simple explanation of quantum mechanics. *simple.wikipedia.org › wiki › Quantum_mechanics* Quantum mechanics—Simple English Wikipedia, the free
- 4) Youtube: PBS Digital Studios. The Great Courses Plus. Understanding the Uncertainty Principle with Quantum Fourier Series | Space Time
- 5) Google. Implication of quantum mechanics. *blogs.scientificamerican.com › observations › coming-to-grips-with-t...* Coming to Grips with the Implications of Quantum Mechanics ...

Chapter 6—Consciousness and Soul

- (1) The Bhagavad-Gita (8.24).
- (2) Google. God creator in Hinduism. Brahma—Ancient History Encyclopedia <https://www.ancient.eu> › Brahma
- (3) Google. Zoroastrianism belief in afterlife. Chinvat Bridge—Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org> › wiki › Chinvat_Bridge
- (4) ZOROASTRIANISM | Facts and Details *factsanddetails.com › world › cat55 › sub350 › item1921*
- (5) Is there an Eternal Soul?—What Buddhists Believe *www.budsas.org › ebud › whatbudbelieve*
- (6) Soul: Christian Concepts | Encyclopedia.com *www.encyclopedia.com › environment › soul-christian-]*

- (7) *Franz Cardinal König* *The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica*
- (8) Rūḥ–Wikipedia *en.wikipedia.org* › wiki › Rūḥ

Chapter 7–A New Religion, a fresh perspective

- (1) Bahá'u'lláh. *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, pg. 4
- (2) Google. Abdullah Huzafah Sahmi Qarashi *The Holy Prophet's Ambassador Arrives in Iran || Imam Reza (A.S. ...<https://www.imamreza.net/old/eng/imamreza.php?id=11063>*
- (3) Google. Bahai statistics. Bahá'í statistics—Wikipedia *en.wikipedia.org* › wiki › Bahá'í_statistics
- (4) Pareja, *Who are the authoritative interpreters of Sacred Writings*, , pg. 11
- (5) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXIX. p. 70
- (6) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*”, XXXIV p. 79
- (7) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 154
- (8) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXXIV p. 79
- (9) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXII, p. 51
- (10) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXXIV, p. 80
- (11) Idem

Chapter 8–New teachings of the Bahá'í Faith on the soul and afterlife

- (1) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60
- (2) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 288

- (3) Baha'ullah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'ullah, p. 65
- (4) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 41
- (5) From a letter dated 31 December 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi published in Lights of Guidance, n. 680 p.. 204
- (6) Baha'ullah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'ullah, p. 158
- (7) Ibidem, p. 160
- (8) Ibidem, p., 161
- (9) Bahá'u'lláh, The Arabic Hidden Words, 12.
- (10) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'ullah, p. 153
- (11) Idem Baha'ullah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'ullah, p. 153
- (12) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 171
- (13) 'Abdu'l-Bahá Some Answered Questions. New version, No. 55—Spirit, Soul, and Mind, 5
- (14) Idem, 6
- (15) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 90
- (16) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'ullah, p. 70
- (17) Idem, XXVII, p. 64
- (18) Idem, LXXXII, par 1.
- (19) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal peace, Talks in Chicago ,1912. Theosophical Society
- (20) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of v1, p. 205
- (21) Neale Walsh's, *Home with God, In a life that never ends*, pg. 170-173
- (22) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'ullah, p. 170
- (23) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, v1, p. 205
- (24) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 63
- (25) Baha'ullah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'ullah, p. 70

- (26) Idem, p. 170
- (27) Idem, XXIX, p. 70
- (28) Idem, LXXXII. p. 158
- (29) (J.E. Esselmont , Bahau'llah and the New Era, 11, Various Ordinances and Teachings)
- (30) 'Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, no. 62.3 , pg. 340-41
- (31) 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Some Answered Questions, no.62.3
- (32) Bahá'u'lláh, The Arabic Hidden Words, 6
- (33) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, IV, p. 8
- (34) Idem, p. 70
- (35) Idem, LXXXII, p. 161
- (36) 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Some Answered Questions , no. 62.3
- (37) Idem, p. 62, par. 7
- (38) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXXVI, p. 169
- (39) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answerer Questions (2014), ch. 67, para. 7
- (40) 'Abdu'l-Baha, Abdu'l-Baha in London, p. 74

Chapter 9–Immortality of the soul

- (1) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 155
- (2) Bahá'u'lláh, Gems of Divine Mysteries, p. 71
- (3) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, Talks delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His visit to Paris in 1911 & 1913, p. 92
- (4) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'i World Faith–Abdu'l-Baha Section, p. 223
- (5) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 65
- (6) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 69
- (7) Idem, p. 403
- (8) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 155

- (9) J.E. Esselmont , Bahauallah and the New Era, 12, Religion and Science
- (10) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 155
- (11) Idem, LXXIX
- (12) Idem, p. 155
- (13) Gleanings p. 65
- (14) Idem XXIX. p. 70
- (15) Idem, LXXIX, p. 157
- (16) J.E. Esselmont , Bahauallah and the New Era, 11, Various Ordenances and Teachings
- (17) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 151
- (18) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XCIII, p. 186
- (19) Google. St. Teresa's Nine Grades of Prayer–The Catholic Reader *thecatholicreader.blogspot.com* › 20SAS13/06 › *st-teresas-n...*
- (20) Bahá'u'lláh, The Arabic Hidden Words, 6
- (21) Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXXI, p. 155
- (22) Idem, CLXV., p.345
- (23) Bahá'u'lláh, The Arabic Hidden Words, 32

BIBLIOGRAPHY



- ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Baha’i World Faith—Abdu’l-Baha Section, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, Sixth Printing of 1956 Edition, 1976.
- ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Foundations of World Unity, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois Fourth Printing, 1968,
- Abdu’l-Baha, Foundations of World Unity, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, 1945, Fourth Printing, 1968.
- ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Abdu’l-Baha in London, Address given by Abdu’l-Bahá at the City Temple Sunday, September 10th, 1911.
- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, Talks delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His visit to Paris in 1911 & 1913,
- ‘Abdu’l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace. Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. During His Visit to The United States and Canada in 1912 Compiled by Howard MacNutt.
- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Baha. Compiled by the Research Department of The Universal House of Justice Translated by a Committee at the Bahá’í World Centre and by Marzieh Gail Bahá’í World Centre, Haifa, The Universal House of Justice, 1978.
- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Some Answered Questions. Collected and Translated by Laura Clifford Barney. Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, 2014 edition. [to address Review observation 59]

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu’l-Baha*, v1, Translated by Edward G. Browne. Bahá’í Publishing Committee, New York, 1980 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States.
- Words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from Diary of Mírzá Ahmad Sohráb, February 1914 ,SOW–Star of the West, Star of the West . v1 [to address Review observation 60]
- Armstrong, Karen, *Buddha*, Penguin Group, USA, Inc. New York, New York, 2004.
- Bahá’u’llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*. Bahá’í World Centre, 1992 by the Universal House of Justice.
- Bahá’u’llah, *The Arabic Hidden Words*. Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1994
- Bahá’u’llah, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, Bahá’í World Centre, Haifa, 2002 by the Universal House of Justice. Bahá’í World Centre, Haifa.
- Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1983 Edition.
- Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán (The Book of Certitude)*. Translated by Shoghi Effendi Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1983 edition by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States.
- Bahá’u’lláh. *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, Bahá’í World Centre, Haifa, 2002 by the Universal House of Justice.
- Descartes, René. *Discourse on the Method*, 1637. Translator: John Veitch
- Release Date: July 1, 2008 [EBook #59]. Updated: February 14, 2016
- Encyclopædia Britannica. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago
- Esselmont, J.E. , *Bahauallah and the New Era*, 11, *Various Ordinances and Teachings*
- GOLEMAN, Daniel: *Inteligencia emocional*. Kairós. Barcelona, 1996.

- Locke, John, *Book IV*, 1700. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Last amended: October 2007. Copyright © Jonathan Bennett.
- Pareja, Reynaldo. Who are the authoritative interpreters of Sacred Writings. XLibris.com 2019,
- The Bhagavad-Gita. The Bhagavad Gita, 2nd Edition Paperback, by Eknath Easwaran. Blue Mountain Center of Meditation. Tomales, California. May 17, 2007
- Walsh, Neale. Home with God, In a life that never ends. Atria Books. New, New York, 2006
- Wilber, Ken. No boundary. Eastern and Western Approach to Personal Growth. Boston and London. Shambhala Publications, Boston. Massachusetts, 2001.
- Wilber, Ken. The Simple Feeling of Being, embracing your true nature. Shambhala Publications. Boston. Massachusetts, 2004
- Wilber, Ken. A Brief History of Everything. Boston and London. Shambhala Publications, Boston. Massachusetts, 1996.

APPENDIX A



SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF RENOWN NDE RESEARCHERS

(The source where these biographies were found appears at the end of each recount. The text presented here was copied from those sources)

Raymond Moody

Raymond A. Moody, Jr. (born June 30, 1944) is a philosopher, psychologist, physician and author, most widely known for his books about life after death and near-death experiences (NDE). He is also the one that named the event as a near-death experience.

Moody began documenting people who had experienced clinical death and discovered that many of these experienced shared common features, such as the feeling of being out of one's body, the sensation of traveling through a tunnel, encountering dead relatives, and encountering a bright light. In 1975, Moody published many of these experiences in his book, *Life After Life*, in which he coined the term "near-death experience."

In an interview with Jeffrey Mishlove, Moody shared his personal conclusions about his research into near-death experiences:

I don't mind saying that after talking with over a thousand people who have had these experiences, and having experienced many times some of the really baffling and unusual features of these experiences, it has given me great confidence that there is a life after death.

His research methods have drawn criticism from the scientific community as many of the personal reports he collected on NDEs were given by the patients themselves, months and even years after the event. (Raymond Moody—Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raymond_Moody)

Dr. Eben Alexander

Dr. Eben Alexander spent over 25 years as an academic neurosurgeon, including 15 years at the Brigham & Women's Hospital, the Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston. Over those years he personally dealt with hundreds of patients suffering from severe alterations in their level of consciousness. Many of those patients were rendered comatose by trauma, brain tumors, ruptured aneurysms, infections, or stroke. He thought he had a very good idea of how the brain generates consciousness, mind and spirit.

In the predawn hours of November 10, 2008, he was driven into coma by a rare and mysterious bacterial meningo-encephalitis of unknown cause. He spent a week in coma on a ventilator, his prospects for survival diminishing rapidly. On the seventh day, to the surprise of everyone, he started to awaken. Memories of his life had been completely deleted inside of the coma, yet he awoke with memories of a fantastic odyssey deep into another realm—more real than this earthly one! His older son advised him to write down everything he could remember about his journey, before he read anything about near-death experiences, physics or cosmology. Six weeks later, he completed his initial recording of his remarkable journey, totaling over 20,000 words in length. Then he started reading, and was astonished by the commonalities between his journey and so many others reported throughout all cultures, continents and millennia. His journey brought key insights to the mind-body discussion and to our human understanding of the fundamental nature of reality. His experience clearly revealed that we are conscious *in spite of* our brain—that, in fact, consciousness is at the root of all existence.

His latest book on the subject of consciousness and reality, *Living in a Mindful Universe: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Heart of*

Consciousness, was co-authored with Karen Newell. His first book, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (2012), debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* Bestseller list and remained in the top ten for over a year. His second book, *The Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion and Ordinary People are Proving the Afterlife* (2014), explores humankind's spiritual history and the progression of modern science from its birth in the seventeenth century, showing how we forgot, and are now at last remembering, who we really are and what our destiny truly is. His story was featured in a series of peer-reviewed medical articles about near-death experiences (NDEs) in *Missouri Medicine* (2015), now published as the book *The Science of Near-Death Experiences* (edited by John C. Hagan III, 2017). It concludes with his chapter, "Near-Death Experiences, The Mind-Body Debate, and The Nature of Reality."

Since his NDE, Dr. Alexander has dedicated himself to sharing information about near-death experiences and other spiritually-transformative experiences, and what they teach us about consciousness and the nature of reality. He continues to promote further research on the unifying elements of science and spirituality, and together with Karen Newell, regularly teaches others ways to tap into our greater mind and the power of the heart to facilitate enhancement of healing, relationships, creativity, guidance, and more. (ebenalexander.com › *about* **About Eben Alexander, M.D.—Read the Biography**)

Dr. Pim van Lommel

He is a Dutch author and researcher in the field of near-death studies. He studied medicine at Utrecht University, specializing in cardiology. He worked as a cardiologist at the Rijnstate Hospital, Arnhem, for 26 years. (Pim van Lommel. Wikipedia Encyclopedia)

For more than twenty years cardiologist Pim van Lommel has studied near-death experiences (NDEs) in patients who survived a cardiac arrest. In 2001, he and his fellow researchers published a study on Near Death Experiences in the renowned medical journal *The Lancet*. He, then, wrote the Dutch bestseller **Consciousness**

Beyond Life, The Science of the Near-Death Experience in 2007; over 100.000 copies were sold in the first year.

The NDE is an authentic experience which cannot be attributed to imagination, psychosis or oxygen deprivation. After such an profound experience, patient's personalities underwent a permanent change. In Van Lommel's opinion, the current views on the relationship between the brain and consciousness held by most physicians, philosophers and psychologists is too narrow for a proper understanding of the NDE phenomenon. The author provides examples and ways that our consciousness does not always coincide with brain functions; that consciousness can even be experienced separate from the body.

It is an authentic experience which cannot be simply reduced to imagination, fear of death, hallucination, psychosis, the use of drugs, or oxygen deficiency, and people appear to be permanently changed by an NDE during a cardiac arrest of only some minutes duration. According to these studies, the current materialistic view of the relationship between the brain and consciousness held by most physicians, philosophers and psychologists is too restricted for a proper understanding of this phenomenon. There are good reasons to assume that our consciousness does not always coincide with the functioning of our brain: enhanced consciousness can sometimes be experienced separate from the body. Van Lommel has come to the inevitable conclusion that most likely the brain must have a facilitating and not a producing function to experience consciousness. By making a scientific case for consciousness as a nonlocal and thus ubiquitous phenomenon he questions a purely materialist paradigm in science. (*pimvanlommel.nl* › *consciousness-beyond-life* **Consciousness Beyond Life—Pim van Lommel**)

Kenneth Ring (born 1936)

Kenneth Ring is Professor Emeritus of psychology at the University of Connecticut, and a researcher in the field of near-death studies.

Ring's book *Life at Death* was published by William Morrow and Company in 1980.[3] In 1984, the company published Ring's second book, *Heading Toward Omega*. Both books deal with near-

death experiences and how they change people's lives.[3] Other books by Ring include *The Omega Project: Near-Death Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind at Large* (1992), *Mindsight: Near-death and out-of-body experiences in the blind* (1999) and *Lessons from the Light* (2000).

Kenneth Ring (born 1936) (www.kenring.org) is Professor Emeritus of psychology at the University of Connecticut, and a highly-regarded researcher within the field of near-death studies. Dr. Ring is the co-founder and past president of the International Association of Near-Death Studies (IANDS) and is the founding editor of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. In 1977, Kenneth Ring, a brilliant young professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut, read Raymond Moody's book, *Life after Life*, and was inspired by it. However, he felt that a more scientifically structured study would strengthen Moody's findings. He sought out 102 near-death survivors for his research. The following article documents some of Ken Ring's basic insights based on his meticulous research. Dr. Ring's research also involves the groundbreaking work of investigating near-death experiences among blind persons. His findings are detailed in his latest book, *Mindsight* which is bound to become a classic in the annals of near-death research much like his previous books, *Lesson from the Light*, *Heading Toward Omega*, *Life at Death*, *The Omega Project*, and *Waiting to Die: A Near-Death Researcher's Reflections on His Own Game*. Visit Ken Ring's Amazon Author Page for more books by Ken Ring. Dr. Ring researched NDEs that involve the experiencer witnessing events while out of their body which is later proven to have taken place.

Dr. Kenneth Ring's NDE Research Conclusions

- (1) Those cases who came closest to death, or were clinically dead, just as Moody's cases reported, told of being outside of their bodies, of moving through a void or dark tunnel toward a luminous light, of meeting with departed relatives and friends, of having a feeling of great comfort and bliss and of being surrounded by compassionate love, a feeling so beautiful they longed to remain, and when

they returned to the “earthly” realm, they were affected by this feeling the rest of their lives.

- (2) No one type of person was especially likely to have this experience. It cut across race, gender, age, education, marital status, and social class.
- (3) Religious orientation was not a factor affecting either the likelihood or the depth of the NDE. An atheist was as likely to have one as was a devoutly religious person.
- (4) Regardless of their prior attitudes—whether skeptical or deeply religious—and regardless of the many variations in religious beliefs and degrees of skepticism from tolerant disbelief to outspoken atheism—most of these people were convinced that they had been in the presence of some supreme and loving power and had a glimpse of a life yet to come.
- (5) Drugs, anesthesia and medication did not seem to be a factor in inducing these impressions and exquisite feelings of an NDE. Indeed, drugs and anesthesia seemed to be more likely to cause a person to forget memories of an NDE.
- (6) He definitely concluded that NDEs are not hallucinations because hallucinations are rambling, unconnected, often unintelligible and vary widely, whereas NDEs tend to have similar elements of a clear, connected pattern.
- (7) Based on the information of those who had reported such incidents, the moment of death was often one of unparalleled beauty, peace and comfort—a feeling of total love and total acceptance. This was possible even for those involved in horrible accidents in which they suffered very serious injuries. Dr. Ring found there was a tremendous comfort potential in this information for people who were facing death.
- (8) After going through an NDE, people reported a loss of fear of death as well as a greater appreciation of life. They also reported stronger feelings of self-acceptance and a greater concern and sense of caring for other people.

They had less interest in material things for their own sake. Many tended to become more spiritual—though not necessarily more involved in organized religion.

- (9) Almost all subjects who experienced an NDE found their lives transformed and a change in their attitudes and values, and in their inclination to love and to help others. Dr. Ring was convinced that these were absolutely authentic experiences and noted that since returning, many of them had occasion to think about ‘what might have been.’ And their subsequent lives were powerful testimony to our common ability to live more deeply, more appreciatively, more lovingly, and more spiritually. (www.near-death.com › science › experts › kenneth-ring **Dr. Kenneth Ring’s Near-Death Experience Research**)

Sam Parmia

Sam Parnia M.D., Ph.D, is a British associate professor of Medicine at the NYU Langone Medical Center where he is also director of research into cardiopulmonary resuscitation. In the United Kingdom, he is director of the Human Consciousness Project at the University of Southampton

While at University of Southampton, Parnia was the principal investigator of the AWARE Study, which was launched in 2008. [12] This study which concluded in 2012 included 33 investigators across 15 medical centers in the UK, Austria and the USA and tested consciousness, memories and awareness during cardiac arrest

A review article analyzing the results reports that, out of 2060 cardiac arrest events, 101 of 140 cardiac arrest survivors could complete the questionnaires. Of these 101 patients 9% could be classified as near-death experiences. 2 more patients (2% of those completing the questionnaires) described “seeing and hearing actual events related to the period of cardiac arrest”. One of the two patients was too sick, and the accuracy of her recount could not be verified. For the second patient instead, it was possible to verify the accuracy of the experience and to show that awareness occurred paradoxically

some minutes after the heart stopped, at a time when “the brain ordinarily stops functioning and cortical activity becomes isoelectric.” The experience was not compatible with an illusion, imaginary event or hallucination since visual (other than of ceiling shelves’ images) and auditory awareness could be corroborated.

In a review article published in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Parnia admits that the nature of consciousness is still an uncharted territory for science. Two different major models have been postulated about the nature of consciousness:

1. one envisages the psyche/consciousness/mind (self) as the result of neuronal activity. So, a causative relationship exists between cortical activity and consciousness.
2. the other instead considers that consciousness is separate from the brain and can influence brain activity independently of the brain.

Parnia explains that the observations that “the human mind, consciousness, or psyche (self) may continue to function when brain function has ceased during the early period after death” (such as during the AWARE study, but not only) points to the possibility that the second model may have to be taken into account. (*en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Sam_Parnia Sam Parnia—Wikipedia*)

Dannion Brinkley

In 1975, Dannion Brinkley was talking on the phone during a thunderstorm. A bolt of lightning hit the phone line, sending thousands of volts of electricity into his head and down his body. His heart stopped, and he died, but in the process, he had an NDE. When Brinkley revived in the morgue after twenty-eight minutes of death, he had an incredible story to tell.

Having survived numerous brushes with death, Dannion is an expert in the dying process. He was struck twice by lightning and has since survived heart failure, open heart surgery, ruptured subdural hematomas, brain surgery, and a massive mal seizure. The first

lighting strike radically changes his life. Dannion became a hospice and nursing home volunteer. In the past 25 years of volunteer service, he has been at the bedside of over 340 people at the point death, and more than 1200 during their final days, accruing more than 16,000 hour service. (www.near-death.com › science › evidence › some-people-receive-veri... **Dannion Brinkley–Near-Death.com**)

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D.
(July 8, 1926—August 24, 2004)

She was a Swiss-born psychiatrist, a pioneer in Near-death studies and the author of the groundbreaking book *On Death and Dying* (1969), which identified the five stages that most terminally ill patients experience. In this work she proposed the now famous Five Stages of Grief as a pattern of adjustment. These five stages of grief are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In general, individuals experience most of these stages, though in no defined sequence, after being faced with the reality of their impending death. Some of her quotes give excellent images to the NDE's experience that allows us to get a sense of the intensity of that experience and what is learned from having it:

I've told my children that when I die, to release balloons in the sky to celebrate that I graduated. For me, death is a graduation.

And after your death, when most of you for the first time realize what life here is all about, you will begin to see that your life here is almost nothing but the sum total of every choice you have made during every moment of your life. Your thoughts, which you are responsible for, are as real as your deeds. You will begin to realize that every word and every deed affects your life and has also touched thousands of lives.

Death is simply a shedding of the physical body like the butterfly shedding its cocoon. It is a transition to a higher state of consciousness where you continue to perceive, to understand, to laugh, and to be able to grow.

It is not the end of the physical body that should worry us. Rather, our concern must be to live while we're alive—to release our inner selves from the spiritual death that comes with living behind a facade designed to conform to external definitions of who and what we are.

Those who learned to know death, rather than to fear and fight it, become our teachers about life.

After an NDE, the survivor finds a new lease on life; she/he is more willing to try new things and to fit as many things as possible into it because she/he is no longer so afraid of what will happen at death. After the NDE, life is more cherished, and the relationships that gave that life more meaning are emphasized upon. The NDE encourages growth and exploration; its acknowledgment helps for those in a society to desire continued testing of the limits and possibilities of life. (Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Biography—EKR Foundation <https://www.ekrfoundation.org> › [elisabeth-kubler-ross](https://www.ekrfoundation.org))

Jeffrey Long MD

Long completed medical school and a residency in radiation oncology at the University of Iowa. Early in his medical career, Long became interested in NDEs after reading a journal article about them. While working as a physician in Las Vegas, Long was influenced by speakers who had been invited by Raymond Moody, a physician and a pioneer NDE researcher who coined the term Near Death Experience.

Jeffrey Long is now a researcher into the phenomenon of near-death experiences (NDEs). Long is the author of *Evidence of the Afterlife: The Science of Near-Death Experiences*, which appeared on The New York Times Best Seller list. In 2009 Long contributed to *The handbook of near-death experiences: thirty years of investigation*, published by Praeger. The book is a comprehensive critical review of the research carried out within the field of near-death studies and considered to be a relevant publication in the field.

In 1998, he founded the Near Death Experience Research Foundation (NDERF, nderf.org) was, which is concerned with documenting and researching NDEs. The foundation maintains a website, also launched in 1998. At the current time there are over 3,700 NDEs posted on the NDERF website, which is the world's largest collection of near-death reports.[4] He is on the board of directors of the American Center for the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences (ACISTE).

It is NDERF policy that all NDE accounts shared with NDERF are posted on the website if the NDErs give permission to do so. Nearly all NDErs allow their experiences to be posted on the NDERF website. Portions of the NDERF website, including the NDE questionnaire, have been posted in over 20 different languages. The NDERF website has consistently been at or near the top of websites listed from a Google search for the term "near-death experiences." This prominence of the NDERF website provided a unique opportunity to conduct a large-scale study of NDEs, including NDEs from around the world., which is by far the largest collection of publicly accessible NDE accounts in the world.

While no two NDEs are the same, there are characteristic features that are commonly observed in NDEs. These characteristics include a perception of seeing and hearing apart from the physical body, passing into or through a tunnel, encountering a mystical light, intense and generally positive emotions, a review of part or all of their prior life experiences, encountering deceased loved ones, and a choice to return to their earthly life.²

The following lines of evidence present additional data to the common characteristic features present in NED experiences.

Line of Evidence #1

Lucid, organized experiences while unconscious, comatose, or clinically dead

Near-death experiences occur at a time when the person is so physically compromised that they are typically unconscious,

comatose, or clinically dead. Considering NDEs from both a medical perspective and logically, it should not be possible for unconscious people to often report highly lucid experiences that are clear and logically structured. Most NDErs report supernormal consciousness at the time of their NDEs.

Line of Evidence #2

Seeing ongoing events from a location apart from the physical body while unconscious (out-of-body experience)

A common characteristic of near-death experiences is an out-of-body experience. An out-of-body experience (OBE) is the apparent separation of consciousness from the body. About 45% of near-death experiences report OBEs which involves them seeing and often hearing ongoing earthly events from a perspective that is apart, and usually above, their physical bodies. Following cardiac arrest, NDErs may see, and later accurately describe, their own resuscitation.

The first prospective study of the accuracy of out-of-body observations during near-death experiences was by Dr. Michael Sabom.⁸ This study investigated a group of patients who had cardiac arrests with NDEs that included OBEs, and compared them with a control group of patients who experienced cardiac crises but did not have NDEs. Both groups of patients were asked to describe their own resuscitation as best they could. Sabom found that the group of NDE patients was much more accurate than the control group in describing their own resuscitations.

The high percentage of accurate out-of-body observations during near-death experiences does not seem explainable by any possible physical brain function as it is currently known. This is corroborated by OBEs during NDEs that describe accurate observations while they were verifiably clinically comatose.¹² Further corroboration comes from the many NDEs that have been reported with accurate OBE observations of events occurring far from their physical body, and beyond any possible physical sensory awareness.¹³ Moreover, NDE accounts have been reported with OBEs that accurately observed

events that were completely unexpected by the NDErs.¹⁴ This further argues against NDEs as being a result of illusory memories originating from what the NDErs might have expected during a close brush with death.

Line of Evidence #3

Near-death experiences with vision in the blind and supernormal vision

There have been a few case reports of near-death experiences in the blind. The largest study of this was by Dr. Kenneth Ring.¹⁵ This Investigation included 31 blind or substantially visually impaired individuals who had NDEs or out-of-body experiences. Of the 31 individuals in the study, 10 were not facing life-threatening events at the time of their experiences, and thus their experiences were not NDEs. There were 14 individuals who were blind from birth in this study, and nine of them described vision during their experiences. This investigation presented case reports of those born totally blind that described in NDEs that were highly visual with content consistent with typical NDEs.

The NDERF website has received additional case reports of near-death experiences among those legally blind. For illustration, the following NDE happened to Marta, a five-year-old blind girl who walked into a lake:

“I slowly breathed in the water and became unconscious. A beautiful lady dressed in bright white light pulled me out. The lady looked into my eyes asked me what I wanted. I was unable to think of anything until it occurred to me to travel around the lake. As I did so, I saw detail that I would not have seen in “real” life. I could go anywhere, even to the tops of trees, simply by my intending to go there. I was legally blind. For the first time I was able to see leaves on trees, bird’s feathers, bird’s eyes, details on telephone poles and what was in people’s back yards. I was seeing far better than 20/20 vision. 16

An NDERF survey question asked 1,122 near-death experiencers, “Did your vision differ in any way from your normal, everyday vision (in any aspect, such as clarity, field of vision, colors, brightness, depth perception degree of solidness/transparency of objects, etc.)?” In response, 722 (64.3%) answered “Yes”, 182 (16.2%) said “Uncertain”, and 218 (19.4%) responded “No”. A review of narrative responses to this question revealed that vision during NDEs was often apparently supernatural. Here are some illustrative examples from NDEs:

“Colors were beyond any I had ever seen.”

“Everything seemed so much more colorful and brighter than normal.”

“My vision was greatly increased. I was able to see things as close or as far as I needed. There was no strain involved it was almost like auto zooming a camera.”

“I had 360 degree vision, I could see above, below, on my right, on my left, behind, I could see everywhere at the same time!”

Vision in near-death experiencers that are blind, including totally blind from birth, has been described in many case reports. This, along with the finding that vision in NDEs is usually different from normal everyday vision and often described as supernatural, further suggests that NDEs cannot be explained by our current understanding of brain function. This is also further evidence that NDEs are not a product of what NDErs would have expected to occur during a life-threatening event.

Line of Evidence #4

Near-death experiences that occur while under general anesthesia

Under adequate general anesthesia it should not be possible to have a lucid organized memory. Prior studies using EEG and functional imaging of the brains of patients under general anesthesia provide substantial evidence that the anesthetized brain should be unable to produce lucid memories.^{17,18} As previously discussed, following

cardiac arrest the EEG becomes flat in 10 to 20 seconds, and there is usually amnesia prior to and following the arrest. The occurrence of a cardiac arrest while under general anesthesia is a combination of circumstances in which no memory from that time should be possible. Here is an illustrative example of an NDE that occurred under general anesthesia during surgery for a heart valve replacement:

I reviewed 613 near-death experiences shared with NDERF, and found 23 NDEs that appeared to have occurred while under general anesthesia. Cardiac arrest was the most common life-threatening event that was described in association with the occurrence of these NDEs. I compared the responses of these 23 NDEs to the 590 non-anesthesia NDEs by reviewing how both groups responded to 33 survey questions that asked about the content of the NDEs. Chi-square statistics was used for this comparison. Due to the large number of questions asked, statistical significance was set at $p=0.01$. The only statistically significant difference between the two groups was that the anesthesia NDEs were more likely to describe tunnels in their experiences.

An NDERF survey question asked, “How did your highest level of consciousness and alertness during the experience compare to your normal everyday consciousness and alertness?” For the NDEs occurring under general anesthesia, 19 (83%) of the respondents answered, “More consciousness and alertness than normal,” to this question, compared to 437 (74%) for all other NDEs. The responses to this question by the two groups were not statistically significantly different. This suggests, remarkably, that the level of consciousness and alertness in NDEs is not modified by general anesthesia.

Other near-death experience investigators have reported NDEs occurring while under general anesthesia. Dr. Bruce Greyson, a leading NDE researcher at the University of Virginia, states:

NDEs due to cardiac arrest while under general anesthesia occur and are medically inexplicable.

Line of Evidence #5

Near-death experiences and life reviews

Some near-death experiences include a review of part or all of their prior lives. This NDE element is called a life review. NDErs typically describe their life review from a third-person perspective. The life review may include awareness of what others were feeling and thinking at the time earlier in their life when they interacted with them. This previously unknown awareness of what other people were feeling or thinking when they interacted with them is often surprising and unexpected to the NDErs

Line of Evidence #6

Encountering deceased loved ones in near-death experiences

Near-death experiences may describe encounters with people that they knew during their earthly life.

In dreams or hallucinations when familiar persons are present they are much more likely to be living and from recent memory. 25 This is in sharp contrast to near-death experiences where familiar persons encountered are almost always deceased.

Line of Evidence #7

Near-death experiences of young children

Investigation of near-death experiences in very young children is important because at an early age they are less likely to have established religious beliefs, cultural understandings about death, or even an awareness of what death is. Very young children would be very unlikely to have heard about near-death experiences or understand them.

Very young children have near-death experience content that is strikingly similar to older children and adults. This is further evidence that NDEs are occurring independently of preexisting cultural beliefs, religious training, or awareness of the existence of NDE.

Line of Evidence #8

Cross-cultural study of near-death experiences

My investigation of NDEs from around the world that has been translated into English shows that their content is strikingly similar. 29 If near-death experiences were considerably influenced by pre-existing religious and cultural beliefs, it would be expected that there would be significant differences in the content of NDEs from different cultures around the world. However, in my review of over 500 NDEs from dozens of countries around the world I found impressive similarities in the content of these NDEs.

I investigated 19 non-Western NDEs, where a “non- Western country” was defined as areas of the world that are predominantly not of Jewish or Christian heritage. 30 These 19 non-Western NDEs were compared to a group of NDEs shared in English from Western countries that were predominantly English speaking. This investigation concluded:

Line of Evidence #9

Near-death experience aftereffects

Changes in beliefs and values following near-death experiences are often called aftereffects. Given that a life-threatening event without an NDE might result in life changes, some of the best evidence for NDE-specific aftereffects came from the largest prospective NDE study ever reported. This study, conducted by Pim van Lommel, MD, divided survivors of cardiac arrest into a group that had NDEs, and a group that did not. 12 The aftereffects of both groups were assessed two and eight years after the cardiac arrests. The group of cardiac arrest survivors with NDEs was statistically more likely have a reduced fear of death, increased belief in life after death, interest in the meaning of life, acceptance of others, and was more loving and empathic

Conclusion

After over 35 years of scholarly investigation of near-death experience, the totality of what is observed in NDEs has not been adequately explained based on physical brain function. It is beyond the scope of this article to review the many proposed “explanations” of near-death experience. Over the years, there have been over 20 different “explanations” of NDE suggested that cover the gamut of physiological, psychological, and cultural causes. If any one or several of these “explanations” were widely accepted as plausible, then there would be no need for so many different “explanations” of NDE. Among those who believe that physical brain function must explain everything that is experienced in all NDEs, there is no consensus whatsoever about how physical brain function produces NDEs.

The combination of the preceding nine lines of evidence converges on the conclusion that near-death experiences are medically inexplicable. Any one or several of the nine lines of evidence would likely be reasonably convincing to many, but the combination of all of the presented nine lines of evidence provides powerful evidence that NDEs are, in a word, real.

Peter Fenwick

Fenwick was born 25 May 1935. He is a neuropsychiatric and neurophysiologist known for his studies of epilepsy and end-of-life phenomena. Fenwick’s interest in near-death experiences was piqued when he read Raymond Moody’s book *Life After Life*. Initially skeptical of Moody’s anecdotal evidence, Fenwick reassessed his opinion after a discussion with one of his own patients, who described a near-death experience very similar to that of Moody’s subjects. Since then, he has collected and analyzed more than 300 examples of near-death experiences.

He has been criticized by some in the medical community for arguing that human consciousness can survive bodily death. Fenwick argues that human consciousness may be more than just a function of the brain.

The plain fact is that none of us understands these phenomena. As for the soul and life after death, they are still open questions, though I myself suspect that NDEs are part of the same continuum as mystical experiences.

Fenwick and his wife are co-authors of *The Art of Dying*, a study of the spiritual needs of near-death patients. The Fenwicks argue that modern medical practices have devalued end-of-life experiences, and call for a more holistic approach to death and dying.^[15] In 2003, Fenwick and Sam Parnia appeared in the BBC documentary “The Day I Died”. In the documentary Parnia and Fenwick discussed their belief that research from near-death experiences indicates the mind is independent of the brain. According to Susan Blackmore the documentary misled viewers with beliefs that are rejected by the majority of scientists. Blackmore criticized the documentary for biased and “dishonest reporting”.^[1]

Fenwick and Parnia have claimed that research from NDEs may show the “mind is still there after the brain is dead”. The neurologist Michael O’Brien has written “most people would not find it necessary to postulate such a separation between mind and brain to explain the events,” and suggested that further research is likely to provide a physical explanation for near-death experiences. Robert Todd Carroll has written that Fenwick has made metaphysical assumptions and dismissed possible psychological and physiological explanations for near-death experiences. (*en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Peter_Fenwick_(neuropsychologist)* **Peter Fenwick (neuropsychologist)—Wikipedia**)

Lisa Smartt

Lisa Smartt is a 51-year-old woman who loves to laugh! She lives on 16 wooded acres on the outskirts of Dresden, Tennessee, with her more-than-wonderful husband of 26 years, two teenage sons (who sometimes fight).

Lisa Smartt, MA, is a linguist, educator, and poet. She founded The Final Words Project, an ongoing study devoted to collecting and interpreting the mysterious language at the end of lives.

She does a good job explaining how she became interested in the words of the dying because of her father's death process that lasted over several weeks. It is interesting how her father felt like there was going to be a big event, and that he was seeing angels. I like how various things that happen to us in life take us in different directions and provide us with new experiences and interests. I appreciate the discussion about how a person's words and actions can foreshadow death happening soon. Lisa Smartt also has a great point that when someone is near death and saying things that are strange and don't make sense, we should just listen without judgment instead of trying to correct what the person says. At this point in the dying process, the person's mind is in a different state, so it is good to just listen. (www.millionairemedium.com › 2019/04/24 › words-at-the-threshold-wi... Words At The Threshold With Lisa Smartt–Episode 73–Lisa...)

Bruce Greyson

Bruce Greyson is Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia. He is co-author of *Irreducible Mind* and co-editor of *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences*. Greyson has written many journal articles, and has given media interviews, on the subject of near-death experiences.

Dr. Bruce Greyson, leading researcher on near-death experiences at the University of Virginia, Division of Perceptual Studies, at the 2018 IANDS Conference in Bellevue, WA. Greyson is one of the first researchers to gather empirical data on near-death experiences, using accepted scientific methods

He was a founder and Past President of the International Association for Near-Death Studies, and for the past 26 years has edited the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. His research for the past three decades has focused on near-death experiences and has resulted in more than 70 presentations to national scientific conferences, including an international symposium at the United Nations last year, more than 100 publications in academic medical and psychological journals, three edited books, and several research

grants and awards. He has been given Lifetime Achievement Awards by the International Association for Near-Death Studies and the Parapsychology Association, and is a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association.

Dr Greyson is co-author of *Irreducible Mind* (2007) and co-editor of *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences*. Greyson wrote the overview of Near Death Experiences for the Encyclopædia Britannica and was the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Near-Death Studies from 1982 through 2007. He is co-author of *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century* and co-editor of *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*.

Ideas of Greyson regarding NDE:

So “if you are trying to bring about a near-death experience — and people have tried this with drugs, with various other means — you are not actually letting go, you’re not giving up control, you’re trying to maintain control. And I think that works against actually having the experience.”

One of the most profound effects Dr. Greyson has observed is a loss of the fear of death. No longer afraid of death, NDEers are also no longer afraid of living life to the fullest.

While some generalizations can be made about NDEs, they also vary widely. For example, depending on a person’s social or cultural background, he or she may frame the description of the experience differently. This may be because NDEs are so outside of the normal range of experiences that it is hard to describe them accurately in words. People grasp for familiar terms to describe something utterly unfamiliar.

A Christian may say he saw Jesus or angels. Someone from another culture may say he saw the God of death. Some people describe entering a tunnel, but a truck driver once described himself entering something like a tail pipe! (the-formula.org › nde-researcher-dr-bruce-greyson **NDE Researcher Dr. Bruce Greyson—The Formula for...**)

Janice Holden

Since completing her EdD in 1988, Janice Miner Holden has been a member of the University of North Texas Counseling Program faculty where she is currently professor of Counseling. Beginning with her doctoral dissertation, Jan's primary research focus has been counseling implications of near-death experiences, after-death communication, and other transpersonal experiences—those that transcend the usual personal limits of space, time, and/or identity. In this research area she has over 40 refereed journal publications and over 100 national and international presentations. She served as lead editor of the 2009 *Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*, and she co-edited the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling's (ASERVIC's) 2017 *Connecting Soul, Spirit, Mind, and Body: A Collection of Spiritual and Religious Perspectives and Practices in Counseling*. She is a Texas LPC-Supervisor, a National Certified Counselor, and an American Center for the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences (ACISTE) Certified Mental Health Professional. For her career-long research on and advocacy for people who have had transpersonal experiences, Jan was awarded the ASERVIC 2013 Research Award and the American Counseling Association's 2015 Gilbert and Kathleen Wrenn Award for a Humanitarian and Caring Person.

Dr. Janice Holden made a compendium of 107 cases in thirty-nine studies by thirty-seven authors in 2007, in which veridical (verifiable) experiences were reported. She concluded as follows:

Using the most stringent criterion—that a case would be classified as inaccurate if even one detail was found to not correspond to reality—Holden found that only 8 percent involved some inaccuracy.

In contrast, 37 percent of the cases—almost five times as many—were determined to be accurate by an independent objective source, such as the investigation of researchers reporting the cases.

The other 55% did not involve inaccuracies but could not be completely independently verified by other sources. Therefore, of the 48 cases (45% of Dr. Janice Holden's sample) qualifying as veridical (an unusual or unique report corroborated by an independent

source), 8 cases (17%) had some inaccuracy while 40 cases (83%) were reported completely accurately (using the strictest criteria)

It is difficult to believe that this degree of verifiably accurate reporting which occurred at a time when there was no electrical activity in the cortex can be attributed to a physical or physiological cause.

In view of this, as well as the fact that many of the reported incidents reached beyond bodily capabilities of the patient, it is not unreasonable to conclude that these perceptions (as well as the self-consciousness which accompanied them) existed independently of bodily function, and could therefore, persist after bodily death. (*magiscenter.com* › *dr-janice-holdens-assessment-of-39-nde-studies* Dr. Janice Holden's Assessment of 39 NDE Studies—Magis...)

Diane Corcoran

Diane Corcoran, R.N., Ph.D. Col. USA, the current president of the International Association for Near-Death Studies organization in 2012. She received her Ph.D in Nursing management from the University of Texas in 1981. Corcoran's interest in near-death experiences developed from her combat nursing experience during the Vietnam War.

"I came to believe that many soldiers were having near-death experiences as bombs exploded and gunfire nearly took their lives. But many were uncomfortable sharing what happened, and felt they had no one to talk to. I knew they needed an outlet—someone to share their life-transforming experience with—who wouldn't be dismissive or think they were crazy." ~ Dr. Diane Corcoran. NDES Are REAL Experiences A Near-Death Experience (NDE) is a profound psychological event that may occur to a person close to death or, if not near death, in a situation of physical or emotional crisis. Because it includes transcendental and mystical elements, an NDE is a powerful event of consciousness; it is not mental illness. (*en.wikipedia.org* › *wiki* › *Diane_Corcoran* Diane Corcoran—Wikipedia)

She has lectured on the implications of NDEs for the military and nursing professions on topics such as supporting terminal

patients, grief and bereavement, SIDS deaths, and other issues related to death and dying. She has started a research fund for exploring NDE's in the military and how we might help these service members. She has published several articles on the NDE and combat NDEs and continues to counsel people who have NDEs. Dr. Corcoran is President Emeritus of The International Association for Near-Death Studies. (explore.scimednet.org › [index.php](#) › [veterans-and-near-death-experie...](#) Dr Diane Corcoran–Scientific and Medical Network)

Dr. Melvin Morse

Dr. Melvin Morse, M.D., (www.melvinmorsemd.com) is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Washington. He has studied near-death experiences in children for 15 years and is the author of several outstanding books on the subject: *Closer to the Light*, *Transformed by the Light*, *Parting Visions*, his latest book, *Where God Lives*. He is primarily interested in learning how to use the visions that surround death to heal grief. The stories that children have told him about what it is like to die have lessons for all of us, especially those attempting to understand the meaning of death or the death of a child.

In 1982, while a Fellow for the National Cancer Institute, Dr. Morse was working in a clinic in Pocatello, Idaho. He was called to revive a young girl who nearly died in a community swimming pool. She had had no heartbeat for 19 minutes, yet completely recovered. She was able to recount many details of her own resuscitation, and then said that she was taken down a brick lined tunnel to a heavenly place. When Dr. Morse showed his obvious skepticism, she patted him shyly on the hand and said: “Don’t worry, Dr. Morse, heaven is fun!”

The photo on the left is a drawing which depicts this young girl being resuscitated by his partner, Dr. Christopher, the doctor who is working on her. She has floated above her body, and met the seated figure. She told him that the seated figure “was Jesus. He is very nice.”

He wrote up her case for the American Medical Association’s *Pediatric Journal* as a “fascinoma”, meaning a strange yet interesting

case and returned to cancer research. One night he saw Elizabeth Kubler-Ross on television describing to a grieving mother what her child went through when she died. She said that the girl floated out of her body, suffered no pain, and entered into heaven. He thought this was quite unprofessional of a psychiatrist, and vowed to prove her wrong.

He and his colleagues at Seattle Children's Hospital designed and implemented the first prospective study of NDEs, with age and sex matched controls. He studied 26 children who nearly died. He compared them to 131 children who were also quite ill, in the intensive care unit, mechanically ventilated, treated with drugs such as morphine, valium and anesthetic agents, and often had a lack of oxygen to the brain, BUT, they were not near-death.

He found that 23/26 children who nearly died had NDEs whereas none of the other children had them. If NDEs are caused by a lack of oxygen to the brain, drugs, hallucinations secondary to coma, or stress and the fear of dying, then the control would have been expected to also have NDEs. They did not, indicating that NDEs happen to the dying.

He then completed the Seattle Study, a long term follow-up of children who had an NDE and documented their transformation as adults. He again used control groups, including children who nearly died but didn't have an NDE.

He found that having an NDE is good for you, resulting in a love for living. One girl summed up the transformation as learning that "life is for living and the light is for later."

Adults who had NDEs gave more money to charity than control subjects, volunteered in the community, were in helping professions, did not suffer from drug abuse, use many over-the-counter medications, and ate more fresh fruit and vegetables than control populations.

He also found that they often could not wear watches as they would mysteriously break, and often had electrical conduction problems such as shorting out lap top computers and erasing credit cards.

Finally, Dr. Morse studied the entire range of death related visions. He studied parents who had infants die of SIDS, and found that 25% of parents had a vivid premonition of the event which they

often documented in a journal or diary, or by telling their doctor. He also has studied cases of shared dying visions and after-death communications.

His most recent research is on the mind-body healing aspects of NDEs. He is currently working on a project of studying immune system changes triggered by NDEs. He also is working on localizing which areas of the brain are linked to spiritual visions, and has a particular focus on the right temporal lobe as a communication link with an interactive universe.

He is currently working with parent bereavement groups to learn how to best use spiritual visions to help to heal grief. Dr. Morse feels strongly that by understanding that there is a scientific and biological component to NDEs, we can understand that the experiences are “real”, at least as real as any other human perception and experience. We must stop trivializing and dismissing death related visions as hallucinations of a dysfunctional brain, and start to understand that they are a normal aspect of the human experience. We all have spiritual intuitions and visions, now we must learn to listen to them and trust what they have to say.

APPENDIX B



SIMPLIFIED EXPLANATIONS OF QUANTUM MECHANICS

What Is Quantum Mechanics?

By Robert Coolman—Live Science Contributor September 26, 2014

Quantum Mechanics or QM, describes how the Universe works at the level smaller than atoms. It is also called “quantum physics” or “quantum theory”. *Quantum* is the Latin word for ‘how much’, and *mechanics* is the area of science concerned with motion. A **quantum** of energy is a specific amount of energy, and Quantum Mechanics describes how that energy moves and interacts at the sub-atomic level.

Atoms used to be considered the smallest building blocks of matter but modern science has shown that there are even smaller particles, like protons, neutron and electrons. QM is the part of physics that describes how the particles that make up atoms work.

In quantum mechanics, subatomic particles exist in a haze of probability; they have a certain chance of being at point A, another chance of being at point B and so on.

Multiple scientists contributed to a foundation of three revolutionary principles that gradually gained acceptance and experimental verification between 1900 and 1930. They are:

Quantized properties: Certain properties, such as position, speed and color, can sometimes only occur in specific, set amounts, much like a dial that “clicks” from number to number. This challenged a fundamental assumption of classical mechanics, which said that such properties should exist on a smooth, continuous spectrum. To describe the idea that some properties “clicked” like a dial with specific settings, scientists coined the word “quantized.”

Particles of light: Light can sometimes behave as a particle. This was initially met with harsh criticism, as it ran contrary to 200 years of experiments showing that light behaved as a wave; much like ripples on the surface of a calm lake. Light behaves similarly in that it bounces off walls and bends around corners, and that the crests and troughs of the wave can add up or cancel out. Added wave crests result in brighter light, while waves that cancel out produce darkness.

Waves of matter: Matter can also behave as a wave. This ran counter to the roughly 30 years of experiments showing that matter (such as electrons) exists as particles.

The extraordinary discovery and affirmation made by scientists was that light could behave both as a wave and a particle, placing light’s “wave-particle duality” into the foundation of quantum mechanics. ([simple.wikipedia.org › wiki › Quantum_mechanics](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_mechanics) Quantum mechanics–Simple English Wikipedia, the free...)

The uncertainty principle proposed by the German physicist Werner Heisenberg, postulated that we cannot simultaneously know both the position and momentum of a quantum system with absolute precision. Trying to perfectly know a particle’s position, we will have a complete uncertainty of its momentum. Today scientists call matter waves functions, and they can be described in terms of position or momentum as a traveling sound wave can be expressed in terms of time or frequency. This allows for any particle or any wave function to be represented as a combination of many locations in space with accompanying intensities.

To restate in a simpler manner the uncertainty principle is a statement about how much a quantum systems information is accessible

at a fundamental level. It is a statement of describing particle as the superposition of waves that can be represented in terms of position or momentum. The fact that both can't be known simultaneously with perfect precision is a property of the nature of wave function itself. Precision in one is constructed by uncertainty in the other. A single particle, a quantum field vibration perfectly localized at one spot in space can also be described as infinite oscillations in momentum space, spanning all possible momenta. But each of these oscillations in momentum space are equivalent to particles with highly specific momenta. The uncertainty principle therefore tells us, that they must be completely unconstrained in position. So a perfectly specialized particle is equally an infinite number of momentum particles that themselves occupy all locations in the universe. (Youtube: PBS Digital Studios. The Great Courses Plus. Understanding the Uncertainty Principle with Quantum Fourier Series | Space Time)

One example is Young's double-slit experiment. If we shoot single photons (single units of light) from a laser at a sheet of photographic film, we will see a single spot of light on the developed film. If we put a sheet of metal in between, and make two very narrow slits in the sheet, when we fire many photons at the metal sheet, and they have to go through the slits, then we will see something remarkable. All the way across the sheet of developed film we will see a series of bright and dark bands. We can use mathematics to tell exactly where the bright bands will be and how bright the light was that made them, that is, we can tell ahead of time how many photons will fall on each band. But if we slow the process down and see where each photon lands on the screen we can never tell ahead of time where the next one will show up. We can know for sure that it is most likely that a photon will hit the center bright band, and that it gets less and less likely that a photon will show up at bands farther and farther from the center. So we know for sure that the bands will be brightest at the center and get dimmer and dimmer farther away. But we never know for sure which photon will go into which band.

One of the strange conclusions of QM theory is the "Schrödinger's cat" effect. Certain properties of a particle, such as their position, speed of motion, direction of motion, and "spin", cannot be talked

about until something measures them (a photon bouncing off of an electron would count as a measurement of its position, for example). Before the measurement, the particle is in a “superposition of states,” in which its properties have many values at the same time. Schrödinger said that quantum mechanics seemed to say that if something (such as the life or death of a cat) was determined by a quantum event, then its state would be determined by the state that resulted from the quantum event, but only at the time that somebody looked at the state of the quantum event. In the time before the state of the quantum event is looked at, perhaps “the living and dead cat (pardon the expression) [are] mixed or smeared out in equal parts.”[3]

Double slit experiment explained

Physics in a minute: The double slit experiment

February 5, 2017

(Physics in a minute: The double slit experiment | plus.maths.org
plus.maths.org › content › physics-minute-double-slit-experiment-0)

Imagine a wall with two slits in it. Imagine throwing tennis balls at the wall. Some will bounce off the wall, but some will travel through the slits. If there’s another wall behind the first, the tennis balls that have travelled through the slits will hit it. If you mark all the spots where a ball has hit the second wall, what do you expect to see? That’s right. Two strips of marks roughly the same shape as the slits.

Now imagine shining a light (of a single color, that is, of a single wavelength) at a wall with two slits (where the distance between the slits is roughly the same as the light’s wavelength). As the wave passes through both slits, it essentially splits into two new waves, each spreading out from one of the slits. These two waves then interfere with each other. At some points, where a peak meets a trough, they will cancel each other out. And at others, where peak meets peak they will reinforce each other. Places where the waves reinforce each other give the brightest light. When the light meets a second wall placed behind the first, you will see a stripy pattern, called an *interference pattern*. The bright stripes come from the waves reinforcing each other

Now let's go into the quantum realm. Imagine firing electrons at our wall with the two slits, but block one of those slits off for the moment. You'll find that some of the electrons will pass through the open slit and strike the second wall just as tennis balls would: the spots they arrive at form a strip roughly the same shape as the slit.

Now open the second slit. You'd expect two rectangular strips on the second wall, as with the tennis balls, but what you actually see is very different: the spots where electrons hit build up to replicate the interference pattern from a wave.

How can this be?

One possibility might be that the electrons somehow interfere with each other, so they don't arrive in the same places they would if they were alone. However, the interference pattern remains even when you fire the electrons one by one, so that they have no chance of interfering. Strangely, each individual electron contributes one dot to an overall pattern that looks like the interference pattern of a wave.

Could it be that each electron somehow splits, passes through both slits at once, interferes with itself, and then recombines to meet the second screen as a single, localized particle?

To find out, you might place a detector by the slits, to see which slit an electron passes through. And that's the really weird bit. If you do that, then the pattern on the detector screen turns into the particle pattern of two strips! The interference pattern disappears. Somehow, the very act of looking makes sure that the electrons travel like well-behaved little tennis balls. It's as if they knew they were being spied on and decided not to be caught in the act of performing weird quantum shenanigans.

What does the experiment tell us? It suggests that what we call "particles", such as electrons, somehow combine characteristics of particles and characteristics of waves. That's the famous *wave particle duality* of quantum mechanics. It also suggests that the act of observing, of measuring, a quantum system has a profound effect on the system. The question of exactly how that happens constitutes the *measurement problem* of quantum mechanics.

What Does Quantum Theory Actually Tell Us about Reality?

Scientific American

([blogs.scientificamerican.com](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/what-does-quantum-theory-actually-tell-us-about-reality/) › observations › what-does-quantum-the...

What Does Quantum Theory Actually Tell Us about Reality ...)

At a **basic** level, **quantum physics** predicts very strange things about how matter works that are completely at odds with how things seem to work in the real world. **Quantum** particles can behave like particles, located in a single place; or they can act like waves, distributed all over space or in several places at once.

In the modern quantum form, Young's experiment involves beaming individual particles of light or matter at two slits or openings cut into an otherwise opaque barrier. On the other side of the barrier is a screen that records the arrival of the particles (say, a photographic plate in the case of photons). Common sense leads us to expect that photons should go through one slit or the other and pile up behind each slit.

They don't. Rather, they go to certain parts of the screen and avoid others, creating alternating bands of light and dark. These so-called interference fringes, the kind you get when two sets of waves overlap. When the crests of one wave line up with the crests of another, you get constructive interference (bright bands), and when the crests align with troughs you get destructive interference (darkness).

But there's only one photon going through the apparatus at any one time. It's *as if* each photon is going through both slits at once and interfering with itself. This doesn't make classical sense.

Mathematically speaking, however, what goes through both slits is not a physical particle or a physical wave but something called a wave function—an abstract mathematical function that represents the photon's state (in this case its position). The wave function behaves like a wave. It hits the two slits, and new waves emanate from each slit on the other side, spread and eventually interfere with each other. The combined wave function can be used to work out the probabilities of where one might find the photon.

The photon has a high probability of being found where the two wave functions constructively interfere and is unlikely to be found in regions of destructive interference. The measurement—in this case the interaction of the wave function with the photographic plate—is said to “collapse” the wave function. It goes from being spread out before measurement to peaking at one of those places where the photon materializes upon measurement.

This apparent measurement-induced collapse of the wave function is the source of many conceptual difficulties in quantum mechanics. Before the collapse, there’s no way to tell with certainty where the photon will land; it can appear at any one of the places of non-zero probability. There’s no way to chart the photon’s trajectory from the source to the detector. The photon is not real in the sense that a plane flying from San Francisco to New York is real.

Werner Heisenberg, among others, interpreted the mathematics to mean that reality doesn’t exist until observed. “The idea of an objective real world whose smallest parts exist objectively in the same sense as stones or trees exist, independently of whether or not we observe them... is impossible,” he wrote. John Wheeler, too, used a variant of the double-slit experiment to argue that “no elementary quantum phenomenon is a phenomenon until it is a registered (‘observed,’ ‘indelibly recorded’) phenomenon.”

But quantum theory is entirely unclear about what constitutes a “measurement.” It simply postulates that the measuring device must be classical, without defining where such a boundary between the classical and quantum lies, thus leaving the door open for those who think that human consciousness needs to be invoked for collapse. Last May, Henry Stapp and colleagues argued, in this forum, that the double-slit experiment and its modern variants provide evidence that “a conscious observer may be indispensable” to make sense of the quantum realm and that a transpersonal mind underlies the material world.

Also, there are other ways of interpreting the double-slit experiment. Take the de Broglie-Bohm theory, which says that reality is both wave and particle. A photon heads towards the double slit with a definite position at all times and goes through one slit or the other; so each photon has a trajectory. It’s riding a pilot wave, which

goes through both slits, interferes and then guides the photon to a location of constructive interference.

In 1979, Chris Dewdney and colleagues at Birkbeck College, London, simulated the theory's prediction for the trajectories of particles going through the double slit. In the past decade, experimentalists have verified that such trajectories exist, albeit by using a controversial technique called weak measurements. The controversy notwithstanding, the experiments show that the de Broglie-Bohm theory remains in the running as an explanation for the behavior of the quantum world.

Roger Penrose has his own version of a collapse theory, in which the more massive the mass of the object in superposition, the faster it'll collapse to one state or the other, because of gravitational instabilities. Again, it's an observer-independent theory. No consciousness needed. Dirk Bouwmeester at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is testing Penrose's idea with a version of the double-slit experiment.

Conceptually, the idea is to not just put a photon into a superposition of going through two slits at once, but to also put one of the slits in a superposition of being in two locations at once. According to Penrose, the displaced slit will either stay in superposition or collapse while the photon is in flight, leading to different types of interference patterns. The collapse will depend on the mass of the slits. Bouwmeester has been at work on this experiment for a decade and may soon be able to verify or refute Penrose's claims.

Roger Penrose has his own version of a collapse theory, in which the more massive the mass of the object in superposition, the faster it'll collapse to one state or the other, because of gravitational instabilities. Again, it's an observer-independent theory. No consciousness needed. Dirk Bouwmeester at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is testing Penrose's with a version of the double-slit experiment.

Conceptually, the idea is to not just put a photon into a superposition of going through two slits at once, but to also put one of the slits in a superposition of being in two locations at once. According to Penrose, the displaced slit will either stay in superposition or collapse while the photon is in flight, leading to different types of interference patterns. The collapse will depend on the mass of the

slits. Bouwmeester has been at work on this experiment for a decade and may soon be able to verify or refute Penrose's claims.



Coming to Grips with the Implications of Quantum Mechanics

Scientific American - By Bernardo Kastrup, Henry P. Stapp, Menas C. Kafatos on May 29, 2018

For almost a century, physicists have wondered whether the most counterintuitive predictions of quantum mechanics (QM) could actually be true. Only in recent years has the technology necessary for answering this question become accessible, enabling a string of experimental results—including startling ones reported in 2007 and 2010, and culminating now with a remarkable test reported in May—that show that key predictions of QM are indeed correct. Taken together, these experiments indicate that the everyday world we perceive does not exist until observed, which in turn suggests—as we shall argue in this essay—a primary role for mind in nature. It is thus high time the scientific community at large—not only those involved in foundations of QM—faced up to the counterintuitive implications of QM's most controversial predictions.

According to QM, the world exists only as a cloud of simultaneous, overlapping possibilities—technically called a “superposition”—until an observation brings one of these possibilities into focus in the form of definite objects and events. This transition is technically called a “measurement.” One of the keys to our argument for a mental world is the contention that *only conscious observers* can perform measurements.

Let us be more specific. In the well-known double-slit experiment, electrons are shot through two tiny slits. When they are observed *at* the slits, the electrons behave as definite particles. When observed only *after* they've passed through slits, the electrons behave as clouds

of possibilities. In 1998, researchers at the Weizmann Institute in Israel showed that, when detectors are placed at the slits, the electrons behave as definite particles. At first sight, this may seem to indicate that measurement does not require a conscious observer.

However, the output of the detectors only becomes known when it is *consciously observed* by a person. The hypothesis of a measurement before this conscious observation lacks compelling theoretical or empirical grounding. After all, as discussed above, QM offers no reason why the *whole* system—electrons, slits and detectors combined—wouldn't be in an entangled superposition before someone looks at the detectors' output. As such, a conscious observer may be indispensable. ([blogs.scientificamerican.com › observations › coming-to-grips-with-t...](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/coming-to-grips-with-t...) **Coming to Grips with the Implications of Quantum Mechanics...**)

