

# Death and Soul Consciousness

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*'If the Doors of Perception were cleansed, everything would appear to Man as it is, infinite. For Man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern'.*

*William Blake 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'*

## Introduction

I'm going to presume that everyone reading this paper has a vested interest in a non-material reality that transcends the physical world, so I will aim to draw together a number of strands of enquiry, each of which suggests that physical death, far from being the end of the line, is but a platform for changing trains.

I will begin with how I came to be interested in 'other worlds'. Then, I want to show how such intuitions and experiences can be reconciled with science, though not the kind that was ever taught in Medical School. After that, I'm going to highlight some key areas of research into the survival of consciousness after death. Lastly, I'll describe how past life therapy powerfully suggests that consciousness extends way beyond the life one is experiencing right now.

## First enquiries

*Human beings are perceivers, but the world that they perceive is an illusion: an illusion created by the description that was told to them from the moment they were born. So, in essence, the world that their reason wants to sustain is the world created by a description and its dogmatic and inviolable rules, which their reason learns to accept and defend.*

*Carlos Castaneda 'Tales of Power'*

I was brought up in the Christian tradition, but my interest in other worlds was fired by 'The Tibetan Book of the Dead' <sup>1</sup>, which I read when I was about 16 years old. The author, Dr. Evans-Wentz was a scholar and anthropologist who first brought to the West the esoteric teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. Here, systematically described, was an account of the Bardo, the after-life realm, with clear guidance about what to expect. At the moment of death, one would be drawn towards the clear light of absolute consciousness. But then, unless one's spiritual attainment had reached liberation from the cycle of birth and death, one would be pulled towards less brilliant but alluring colours, a kind of downhill slide

leading to encounters with glorious and terrifying deities, and then last of all to the onset of sexual desire and the birth instinct, resulting in the next incarnation.

Aldous Huxley's book 'The Doors of Perception'<sup>2</sup>, written in 1954, and which described the effect of Mescaline, a hallucinogen similar to LSD, was another spur to my curiosity. I spent my last term at school in the chemistry lab trying to synthesize Mescaline (with the bemused consent of the chemistry master). The experiment finally yielded one small flask of a dark oily concentrate, which looked and smelled so awful that I reluctantly poured it down the sink.

However, during the early sixties LSD (lysergic acid diethyl amide) could still be obtained legally from the manufacturers, and so while a medical student I purchased some and took it several times. With the astonishing dissolution of the ego that ushers in an ecstatic oneness with the cosmos (or a terrible fear of being obliterated, probably depending on one's capacity for basic trust in the goodness of all things), I found myself enfolded in other worlds in which consciousness traverses all sense of space and time.

I didn't know it then, but the effects of LSD were already being systematically researched by the psychiatrist Stanislav Grof<sup>3</sup> who incidentally coined the term 'transpersonal', and whose pioneering work on altered states of consciousness remains unsurpassed.<sup>4</sup>

Events of the late sixties led to LSD getting a bad name. Then in 1968 Carlos Castaneda published *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*<sup>5</sup>, the first of an extraordinary series of books Castaneda wrote before his death in 1998. Castaneda, an anthropology field student, described being inducted into the ritual taking of the hallucinogen Peyote. There has been a furious debate about the validity of his fieldwork, but nothing I read there greatly surprised me after my own experiences with LSD.

Castaneda writes of 'the assemblage point', a somato-psychic point of attachment to our particular dimensional world, and how learning to move this point at will takes one literally into other worlds. He watched his friend and teacher, Don Juan, pass out of this world by making such a transit when the time came to leave. Castaneda's death, too, is something of a mystery - he seems to have vanished without trace.

I'll take just one further example, of the Amazonian vine Ayahuasca, taken by shamans to enter the spirit world. In his book 'The Cosmic Serpent'<sup>6</sup>, anthropologist Jeremy Narby gives a fascinating account of his own experience, which suggested to him that in the altered state of consciousness it is possible to receive information directly from DNA. The Amazon Indians told him they obtained their vast pharmacopoeia in this way, by communing directly with the plants under the influence of the drug.

Just these few instances, and there are many more, indicate that there continues to be a groundswell of opposition to the rigid constraints of Western science. The twentieth century will probably go down as the era in which materialist cosmology reached its zenith. Yet the mid-nineteenth century interest in the supernatural was never entirely subordinated and now, with a much stronger evidence base on which to draw, there is a renewed interest in soul

consciousness. The teachings of the faith traditions remain, but a new kind of scientific enquiry can be made of the spiritual self.

### **Medicine and the physicalist tradition**

*'Science no longer identifies reality with the physical universe, for mind and consciousness belong to the unseen world'*

*Sir Arthur Eddington, 'Science and the Unseen World'*

*'It is almost an absurd prejudice to suppose that existence can only be physical. As a matter of fact, the only form of existence of which we have immediate knowledge is psychic (i.e. in the mind). We might as well say, on the contrary, that physical existence is a mere inference, since we know of matter only in so far as we perceive psychic images mediated by the senses'.*

*Carl Jung 'Psychology and Religion: West and East'*

Altered states of consciousness are one line of enquiry among many. It just happened that my own researches started there. On qualifying as a doctor, I began to witness a lot of death, most of it highly traumatic. During cardiopulmonary resuscitation, I sometimes privately observed that a change would come over the eyes. They would cloud over - the life had gone out of them - and when this happened, the person never came back. It struck me that the soul was no longer in residence.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines death as 'the final cessation of vital functions, the ending of life'. But what, in turn, is life? The COD states that 'life is the condition which distinguishes active animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, functional activity, and continual change preceding death'.

So life and death are indissoluble, which we already knew. But here a linear system is being described, for there is no ending of death in life, only the ending of life in death. Nonetheless, a good many people continue to face death with equanimity, trusting that the universe, in its own ineffable way, will take loving care of them.

Such trust is generally based on the idea that soul and body must be entirely separate things. This is what the Abrahamic faiths teach, reinforced by the Cartesian worldview. Unfortunately this dualist position is a hostage to Newtonian science on two counts. Firstly, no one can explain how it actually works, since during life it would require a communication between mind and body that would violate the laws of conservation of energy and momentum. Secondly, the prospect of life beyond the grave is discounted by arguing that there can be no enduring identity if there is no brain. On this basis, reports of encounters with spirits are dismissed as nothing but mental projections clothed in human form.

## Quantum cosmology

*One windy day, two monks were arguing about a flapping banner. The first said, 'I say the banner is moving, not the wind'. The second said, 'I say the wind is moving, not the banner. A third monk passed by and said, 'the wind is not moving. The banner is not moving. Your minds are moving'.*

*Zen mondo.*

The Newtonian revolution advanced the view that one could take a thing, dissect it, analyse it and so find out all about it. In the West, this view permeated the arts too, as illustrated in this short poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson:

'Flower in the crannied wall  
I pluck you out of the crannies  
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand.  
Little flower, if I could but understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God is and man is'.<sup>7</sup>

The part is isolated from the whole. Yet we now know there is no such thing as a closed system independent of the greater system in which it is nested, including, in this case, the mind of the poet. Flower and poem cannot be separated. As I read it, I too become implicated, and so do you. Consciousness brings us into intimate relation with the object of study. If we widen and deepen the vision, as mystics have always known, we must eventually find the unity and the indivisibility of all things.

Thankfully, the canon of reductive scientism is counterbalanced by our instinctive, archetypal search for the living whole, the anima mundi or spirit. We go on wanting to know what happens to us when life is over, just as we want to know from whence we come. In the climate of material realism, neither concern can be addressed since consciousness is held to be a by-product of cellular activity, which comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. Yet astrophysicists studying our physical universe find themselves up against the same conundrum. Just what *was* there before the Big Bang? What *is* going to happen after the heat death of the universe, in 100 billion years time?

The big questions keep turning up at different orders of magnitude. This reminds us that the cosmos, physical and mental, is one coherent whole, a holoverse, as David Bohm put it, so that the same configurations are bound to recur again and again, no matter where the spotlight is pointed.<sup>8</sup>

This concept is not new. It is the basis of Traditional Chinese Medicine, which treats the human body as a microcosm of the macrocosm.<sup>9</sup> The part contains the whole, as can be illustrated by the acupoints on the ear.



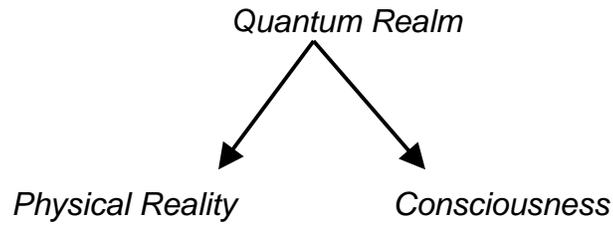
And fifty years before the invention of the hologram, Alice Bailey in endeavouring to bring the wisdom of the East to the West was to write:

*'Energy is now regarded as all that IS. The physical manifestation is the manifestation of the sea of energies, some of which are built into forms, others constitute the medium in which those forms live and move and have their being, and still others are in the process of animating both the forms and their surrounding, substantial media. It must also be remembered that forms exist within forms; this is symbolized in the intricate carved ivory balls of the Chinese craftsmen, where ball within ball is to be discovered, all elaborately carved and all free and yet confined'.<sup>10</sup>*

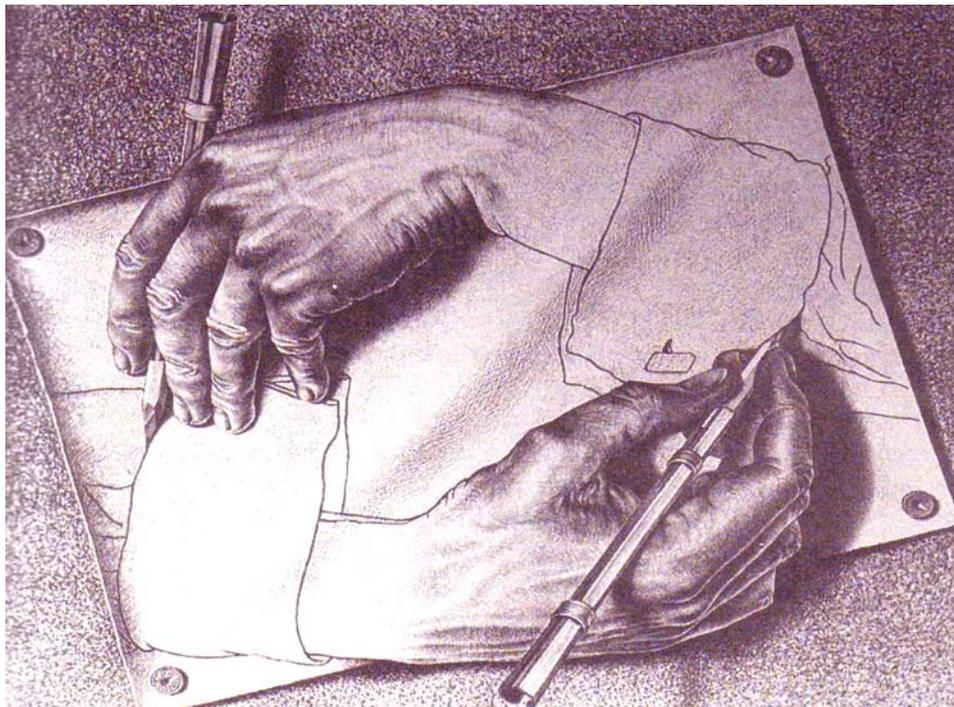
If a scale could be drawn from the atom to the known size of our universe, we humans would come about halfway between the two. We can look in one direction reductively, and in the opposite, holistically. Reductive science has shown that matter is nothing but energy, which manifests above a certain threshold as something solid and enduring. Yet on closer inspection, molecules dissolve into atoms that in turn dissolve into an array of particles called forth from the 'dark matter' that comprises 99% of space, an ocean of immense energy known as the zero point field. The physicist Richard Feynman once remarked that the energy in a single cubic metre would be sufficient to boil all the oceans of the world.<sup>11</sup>

Newton's laws deal with a mechanical universe situated in its own objective reality. The observer comes along and shines his torch on what was already there. What he illuminates is unmoved by his scrutiny and when the torch goes off, everything remains just as before. On the other hand, quantum mechanics tells us that what we call objective reality actually doesn't exist. There is no world of things out there that exists independently of consciousness. It is consciousness that brings about what is called the collapse of the wave function. In doing so, from out of a quantum realm of infinite potentia, we precipitate three-dimensional spacetime, and all it contains, not least ourselves.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, mind and matter are simultaneous products of the collapse of the

wave and as two sides of one coin they cannot be treated independently of each other.



The collapse of the wave function might still suggest a linear process and we should bear in mind that all matter, be it a stone, a blade of grass, or a sentient life form, is simply a temporary energetic structure vibrating with the life force of the cosmos. Like the uroboros, the ancient symbol of the snake swallowing its own tail, the cosmos is engaged in an eternal dance, the part endlessly dissolving into the whole, and the whole endlessly manifesting in the part. In this cosmology, complex life forms like us have a special role to play in the great scheme of things. On account of our faculty of self-awareness, we go about creating consciousness, just as consciousness creates us. We are involuntarily participating in what is called a tangled hierarchy. Maurits Escher's 'Drawing Hands' graphically portrays the concept.<sup>13</sup>



The physical substance of the universe furnishes us with brains to mediate the thoughts, feelings and memories that comprise the ego. But where the personal and temporal interleave with the transpersonal and infinite, we deeply and intuitively know we are eternal beings. This is what I mean by soul consciousness.

## **Time and eternity**

*Time is a way of stopping everything from happening at once. Anon.*

The Big Bang, which in the first few milliseconds synthesised all the matter that would beget our universe, exploded out of the quantum void with unimaginable force. Bearing in mind that we are part of this same Holoverse, every human conception is a singularity just like the Big Bang, but in this case a very small bang. With the birth of each human being a new microcosmos is formed, of consciousness and matter.

By maintaining a dynamic equilibrium based on the acquisition of energy, living organisms can briefly stay the flight of the arrow of time. But sooner or later, in the physical universe, all things must 'die', in the sense that energy disperses in accordance with the law of entropy. Yet we know that energy is at other times impelled towards a massive concentration, hence the Big Bang.

In 1948, Thomas Gold and Fred Hoyle came up with the Steady State Theory, which hypothesised that galaxies were continuously forming to take the place of those galaxies that were on the way out. The theory was discredited, but it would now seem the mistake was one of scale. Since the discovery of superstrings, we know we inhabit a multi-dimensional cosmos resonating with infinite harmonies. Subatomic particles flit between universes, and it is inevitable that universes, too, come and go, as they arise, and are absorbed back into the quantum void.

Where there is consciousness there is space. Where there is space there is movement and where there is movement there is time. Ego consciousness is grounded in the body and so is bound to chronological time. But for the soul, time has no fixed measure, as we know from states of enlightenment or samadhi, out-of-body experiences, the near-death experience, and communications with the deceased. The information that is relayed back is filtered through the mind/brain and so can never have an independent status - no one can know what it is truly like after we die until we are beyond making the return journey. But what evidence there is suggests that spacetime is fluid. Merge with the Godhead and spacetime altogether dissolves – past, present and future are one. Exit from one 'past life' into the Bardo or spirit world, and you may find yourself stepping across into another life as though all the lives were arranged like so many spokes of a wheel around the hub.<sup>14</sup> In post-mortem communications, as with reports of near-death experiences, travel takes no time – think yourself there and it is done, while contact with other souls transcends space by means of direct thought transference.

Here in our world, we regularly come across phenomena such as precognition, clairvoyance and telepathy, which fly in the face of Newtonian physics. Even so, their evidence base, about which I shall be saying more, is now well established and it is quite possible that in other worlds this kind of communication may be the rule rather than the exception.

Discussion of the quantum realm and other dimensions raises all kinds of paradoxes. Is there such a thing as free will, or is everything pre-determined, leaving us only the illusion of freedom? Are we living in a virtual reality, like a virtual computer game being played by others elsewhere, or even by ourselves in another dimension? Is there a multiplicity of virtual dimensions into which we venture? And what about the anthropic viewpoint, which suggests that humankind is involved in the evolution of a self-aware universe?

The physicist John Wheeler proposed the following thought experiment: imagine an observer some light years away from a quantum mechanical experiment. The experiment is carried out but the observer does not decide until later whether he wants to measure the momentum or the position of the particle released, for according to quantum theory, one cannot know both at the same time. When this decision is made, at some point in the future, it must retroactively determine the outcome of the experiment in the past. Can it be that the cosmos observes itself, with the emergence of consciousness retroactively determining precisely those initial conditions that millions of years later will allow it to evolve?

This may all seem far-fetched. But closer to home, take the recent study by Leibovici on the retroactive effects of prayer.<sup>15</sup> The medical records of 2000 patients with bloodstream infection between 1990 and 1996 were randomised in July 2000 to a control group and an intervention group. Intercessory prayers were said for the well-being and full recovery of the intervention group. Length of stay in hospital and duration of fever were found to be significantly shorter in the intervention group than the control group ( $P = 0.01$  and  $0.04$  respectively). I should mention that Leibovici, as a hardened sceptic, carried out this experiment tongue in cheek and no one was more surprised by the result than he.

Looking forwards through time brings us to the body of evidence for precognition. Anecdotally, there is no shortage of astonishing predictions. It is well known that Abraham Lincoln dreamed of his death shortly before he was assassinated.

An event of interest to psychotherapists comes in Carl Jung's autobiography, 'Memories, Dreams, Reflections'. Freud was arguing with Jung about the validity of precognition when, Jung writes, 'I suddenly had the sensation of my diaphragm becoming 'a glowing vault' immediately followed by a loud report in the bookcase, which stood right next to us that we both started up in alarm, fearing the thing was going to topple over on us'. I said to Freud, 'There, that is an example of a so-called catalytic exteriorisation phenomenon. 'Oh come', he exclaimed, 'That is sheer bosh'. 'It is not, I replied. 'You are mistaken, Herr Professor. And to prove my point I now predict that in a moment there will be another loud report!' Sure enough, no sooner had I said the words than the same detonation went off in the bookcase...Freud only stared aghast at me. I do not know what was in his mind, or what his look meant. In any case, this incident

aroused his mistrust of me and I had the feeling I had done something against him'.<sup>16</sup>

One-off events can always be discounted as chance. But now there are consistent laboratory findings such as Dean Radin's research on presentiment. Radin showed his experimental subjects a series of pictures flashed up in random order on a computer screen. Some pictures were soothing in nature, others violent or erotic. At the same time, he recorded electro-dermal activity, as used in the lie detector test. Radin found that subjects responded with increased arousal when the picture was violent or erotic, which is hardly surprising. But here is the point - he found that this physiological change consistently takes place about one second *before* the picture actually appears on screen.<sup>17</sup>

### **Space and infinity**

*'All real living is meeting...Meeting is not in time and space but space and time in meeting'.*

*Martin Buber 'I and Thou'*

I have dwelled on the subject of time because I want to challenge how we allow chronological time to limit our view of reality, one that deadens us while we are still alive! Now let us put the dimension of space to the same kind of test by looking briefly at telepathy and clairvoyance.

Telepathy means feeling, or sensing, at a distance. A commonly reported instance is to know who is on the line before picking up the 'phone. Another is of suddenly becoming aware of the death of a loved one, even though he or she may be on the other side of the world – information, incidentally, that frequently comes in dreams.

The first systematic research on telepathy was conducted by Joseph Rhine at Duke University in the nineteen twenties and continued for more than forty years.<sup>18</sup> Playing cards were used to see if information could be transmitted from a sender to a receiver and over thousands of trials, significant positive correlations were found. Then in the sixties, dream studies were carried out by Montague Ullman, which showed that symbolic imagery could be sent by the experimenter to the dreamer.<sup>19</sup> Meta-analysis of twenty-five studies showed a 'hit' rate of 63% (as against the chance finding of 50%). This may not sound like a lot, but statistically the odds are millions to one against. Other experiments employed the Ganzfeld technique of using sensory screening to filter out 'mental noise' in the subject and yielded even higher 'hit' rates, findings that have been replicated in a large number of trials.<sup>20</sup>

Clairvoyance, also called remote viewing, was the subject of a US military programme established in 1973 by Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff at Stanford University and funded to the tune of \$20 million. Remote viewers have been shown to be able to provide information about target locations at any distance when supplied with the coordinates of latitude and longitude. In 1988, the

database of 16 thousand trials was analysed with results showing a billion billion to one against chance.<sup>21</sup>

Linking space and time, research at the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Laboratory (PEAR) has been carried out along similar lines, except that the viewer was asked to identify the target *before* the target was known to the experimenter. This might be an object, a drawing, or a location to which the experimenter would be travelling. Odds against chance of a billion to one against were obtained.<sup>22</sup>

Lastly, there is psychokinesis (PK) or mind-matter interaction. This is not just about bending spoons. Since Helmut Schmidt began studying PK in the sixties,<sup>23</sup> research at Princeton has shown that by thinking 'high' or 'low', the experimenter can alter the mean value of numbers being churned out by a random number generator or RNG, an effect that becomes clearly discernable over thousands of trials.<sup>24</sup> It has also been shown that the field effect of group consciousness can impact on RNGs. Half a billion people watched the O. J. Simpson trial live on television and as the verdict was announced, five independent RNGs at different geographical sites peaked simultaneously.<sup>17</sup>

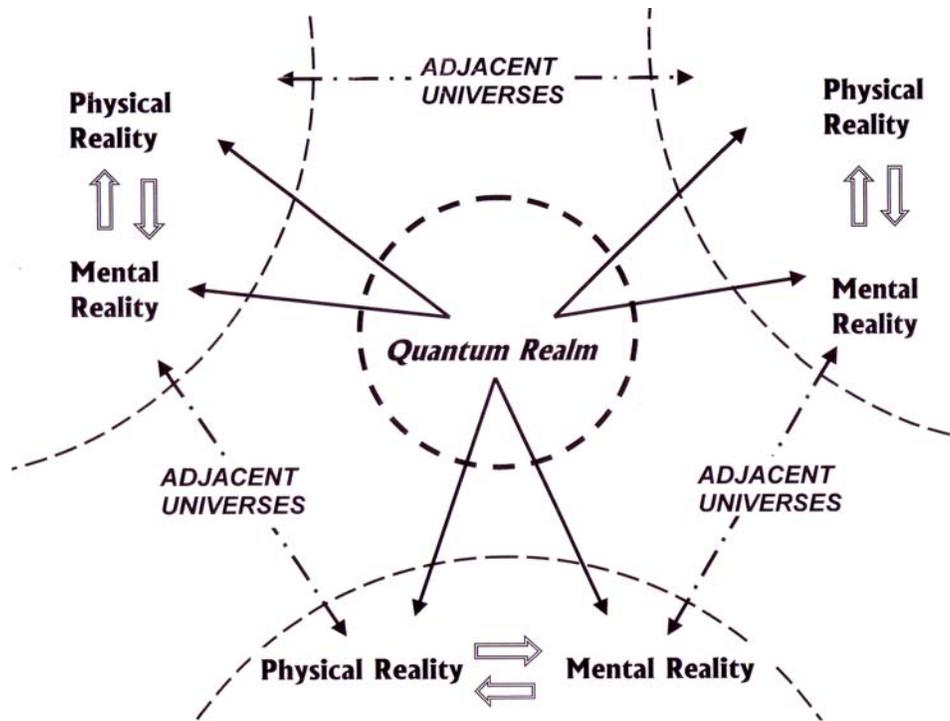
## **Portals to other worlds**

*'This Life's dim Windows of the Soul  
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole  
And leads you to Believe a Lie  
When you see with, not through the Eye'*

*William Blake, The Notebook, from The Everlasting Gospel*

I make no apology for taking time to introduce some features of quantum cosmology and the paranormal, since it prepares us so well for the 'life beyond death' question. Consciousness transcends spacetime and our spacetime is just one of many. Once the concept of matter and consciousness together endlessly unfolding out of the quantum realm is grasped, the saying of Jesus 'my father's house has many mansions' speaks no less for science than spirituality. We are one of a myriad of universes all interwoven by the prima materia of consciousness. And for consciousness to become fully all that it is, it seems it must engage with experience, hence the endless round of the birth and death of innumerable life forms.

The following schema serves to illustrate how the quantum realm gives birth to a multiplicity of universes in different dimensions:



If we allow that the dimension of the Bardo or spirit realm is close enough to our own world of spacetime to enable information transfer to take place, we can set aside the limitations of what is generally held to be 'consensus reality'. A whole range of phenomena can now be approached with an open mind. They include:

- Psychedelic and mystical experiences.
- Psi phenomena – psychokinesis and extra sensory perception.
- Near-death experiences.
- Re-incarnation studies.
- Multiple personality and spirit release therapy
- Trance Mediumship
- Past life regression

I next want to turn to the near-death experience or NDE. Much research has taken place over the thirty years since Raymond Moody's famous compilation of case histories for a doctoral thesis<sup>25</sup>. The phenomena regularly described are in a sequence that, while shaped by cultural factors, carries the same core spiritual revelation, and is strikingly consistent<sup>26, 27</sup>.

In the full NDE, there is the sensation of floating above the body and looking down, often watching resuscitation being carried out, the experience of instant travel to other parts of the hospital or to home, including overhearing family and friends, entering a dark tunnel and being drawn towards a bright light.

In the radiance of this light, there may be a dialogue with either a deceased relative, close friend or higher spiritual being. There is a kaleidoscopic life review in which the whole of the life and all its deeds, both good and bad must be faced. The judgement is one's own, with the painful recognition that the law of cause and effect is absolute. The life review would be unbearable were it not for the ambience of unbounded love and acceptance.

There is awareness of a threshold that once crossed means no return. Because this place feels so powerfully like 'coming home' there is usually great reluctance to go back, but the person is told, or may decide, that an important life task still lies ahead. There follows a sudden and painful pulling back into the body with the recovery of consciousness.

Some scientists have argued that what is being reported are the terminal throes of neural activity in a hypoxic central nervous system. But these vivid and coherent recollections are quite unlike those of hypoxic or other organic conditions, which are fleeting and fragmentary. It has also been shown that the NDE occurs while the EEG is flat<sup>28, 29</sup>, further evidence for the non-local nature of consciousness.

Particularly striking is the spiritual impact of the NDE, leading to a profound transformation of the psyche<sup>30</sup>. The fundamental purpose of life is now understood to be to open to love; all else pales into insignificance.

Another perspective comes from the concept of re-incarnation, which has been with us since about 800BC. In Hinduism, it is believed that the soul transmigrates intact into another human, or other life form, depending on the state of a person's karma. This is the cultural context in which young children, mostly in India, have astonished their parents by talking about other families and other lives they previously lived, and which were cut short usually by some abrupt trauma such as an accident, or murder. When taken to the former home, the child can correctly identify family members and recall the circumstances of the death. Professor Ian Stevenson has impeccably researched such cases, and has also confirmed that sometimes birthmarks found on the child correspond exactly to the bullet hole, for instance, on the murder victim.<sup>31, 32</sup>

On the other hand, the Buddhist view is that individual consciousness dissolves away at death leaving nothing but dispositions, which find their way back into re-birth as karmic intentions. Since the spiritual goal is to transcend the ego in life rather than waiting for death, Buddhists are not very interested in the question of the survival of personal identity, since it is viewed as an ego-based aspiration.<sup>33</sup>

Can Buddhist and Hindu views be reconciled? This is possible so long as we don't expect there to be only one cosmic reality to which everyone must subscribe. How we collapse the wave creates the world that we go on to experience, so the journey ahead is capable of infinite variety. The implication is enormous - think yourself into the future of your own choice!

Next, a few remarks on Multiple Personality. This disorder is characterised by different parts of the psyche functioning quite independently, often in ignorance of the presence of each other. This means the therapist can

strike up distinct relationships with the various sub-personalities (or alter-egos), each of whom behaves like a person in his or her own right.

People come for help because their lives are being severely disrupted, since different 'alters' are running the show at different times. Sometimes the patient will have periods of amnesia, coming round only to find a trail of chaos. Male and female 'alters' co-exist, some prudish, others licentious, some dominant and others submissive. There is invariably a history of childhood abuse.

Conventional wisdom has it that early trauma results in a fragmentation of the ego, with dissociated sub-personalities developing from splits in the psyche. Psychotherapy is arduous and often the sub-personalities refuse to be ousted. Sometimes they can be helped to become aware of each other and to learn to live together.<sup>34</sup>

Transpersonal therapists on the other hand, allow for the possibility that one is dealing here with spirit attachment, the splits in the ego having opened the door to intrusive entities that have taken up residence.<sup>35</sup> The therapeutic aim is therefore not to promote the integration of autonomous psychic complexes but, on the contrary, to get the intruders out of the house. These are generally spirits of the deceased that have for various reasons remained earthbound instead of continuing their soul journey.<sup>36</sup>

The entities are more likely to be confused and misguided than malevolent, sometimes not even realizing they are dead. The therapist can dialogue with them through the agency of the patient and obtain a personal history just like any consultation.<sup>37</sup> Alternatively, if the therapist is clairvoyant, he or she can see and converse directly with the spirit presence. Whichever approach is used, the task is compassionately to help the spirit move on. In our culture this means guiding the spirit to the light, very much as is told in the near-death experience.<sup>38</sup>

Spirit release therapy is as old as the hills but is here to stay, and remarkable results can sometimes be achieved. An important part of the process is always to explore with patients how they came to be vulnerable in the first place, whether through childhood abuse, or serious injury or illness when psychic defences are down, or through intake of alcohol or drugs, or by inviting spirits in, as in dabbling with the occult or using the Ouija board. Meanwhile, the Church discreetly continues to offer the Ministry of Deliverance, working in very much the same way but within the Christian tradition.

Both secular and religious approaches come up on occasions against entities that seem truly demonic. There are greater and lesser demons. They can usually be persuaded to talk, and on questioning will admit to never having been in human form. They may plague families for generations and relish creating fear, destroying lives, and causing cancer and other illness. The lesser demons can be inveigled into looking into the depths of their own darkness, in the heart of which a light can be discovered. Immediately there is an astonishing transformation and the demon is filled with remorse for its misdeeds. These demons are 'fallen angels' who are now only too glad to exchange the pit of hell for love and light. But greater demons are threatening and aggressive and should be left to specialists in the field.

What is really going on here? I have worked this way with patients who describe being possessed, so that the therapy is consonant with the belief system of the person and with this proviso, I can vouchsafe the phenomenology. But what of psychodynamic therapy, with the concept of the internal object world and its defence mechanisms, especially splitting and projection? This is a very different kind of belief system, and I cannot debate it here other than to say we should be aware that a quantum cosmology has no place for concepts like 'inside' and 'outside', 'mine' and 'yours' except as signatures of local spacetime.<sup>39</sup> When we see *with* and not *through* the eye, we see the world not as it truly is *but* as *we are*. On this much, transpersonal therapists and psychoanalysts are likely to agree.

Then there is Trance Mediumship, an enormous area of study and research, which I can touch on only briefly. For thousands of years, shamanic healers have worked in trance but in the West, contact with the supernatural was condemned by the Christian church as heretical – over fifty thousand people, most of them women, were burned or drowned as witches during the fifteen and sixteenth centuries. But in the mid-nineteenth century there was a resurgence of interest in the supernatural. Spiritualism was afoot in England, the Theosophical Society was founded in New York in 1875 and the compilations of Allan Kardec<sup>40,41</sup> on spirits and mediums gave the impetus to Spiritism, widely practised to this day in South America. Also in the same tradition are healers known as psychic or spirit surgeons, who carry out surgical procedures while in trance.<sup>42</sup> In the UK, bodies such as the National Federation of Spiritual Healers and UK Healers have no truck with this kind of practice, yet psychic surgery can be found over here too. Less contentious is Mediumship and there are a number of centres where this is practised, such as the College of Psychic Studies in London and the Society for Psychical Research, both active since the 1880s.

Here, I want to highlight the Scole Report, published in 1999 by the Society.<sup>43</sup> In brief, a small group of researchers with impeccable scientific credentials regularly attended home séances held by spiritualists, two of whom were mediums. A wide range of paranormal phenomena was encountered, including moving lights that passed through solid objects, the touch and vision of 'disembodied' hands, and movements of the table. Voices were not only vocalised by the mediums but also picked up on audiotape in a recorder from which the microphone had been removed. There were a number of apports or materialisations, including a copy of the Daily Mail, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1944, reporting on the trial of the medium Helen Duncan. (Print analysis proved it to be an original, yet the paper showed no sign of having aged). There were also images on unexposed film, including faces, hermetic symbols and poetry, including some by F. W. Myers, one of the founding fathers of the Society for Psychical Research.

Though formal proof is lacking, Ockham's razor would suggest that the phenomena are not fraudulent but genuine. The problem here is that people gifted with extrasensory perception need no convincing – the manifestations are self-evident - yet others, who are sufficiently sceptical, can never be quite persuaded, even though no one any longer doubts the existence of X-rays or radio waves.

## Death and soul consciousness

*'Death is a touch of the Soul which is too strong for the body'*

*A A Bailey 'The Unfinished Biography'*

There is a good measure of agreement on what we mean by physical death, unlike words such as consciousness, soul and spirit. But I did introduce the phrase 'soul consciousness' into the title of this paper for a particular reason and I should explain.

Consciousness comes from the Latin *com* – *scire*, the words meaning 'together' and 'to know'. It entails the awareness of one's own existence, sensations, thoughts, feelings and identity and, not least, of each other, since through knowing others we come to know ourselves. But more than that, I have wanted to show that the nature of consciousness in its higher reaches is unitary and indivisible. Ultimately I am you and you are me. Accordingly, it follows that to love one's neighbour is to love oneself. This is the golden rule of all the great faiths. What then of soul and spirit? <sup>1</sup> My approach is to see spirit as the universal, organizing principle of consciousness, and the human soul as spirit personified in each of us.

The first task of soul is to sustain us through childhood, support the development of the ego, energise us sexually and thrust us into the complex world of human relationships. But at a certain point in life, we find ourselves increasingly occupied with the nature and meaning of compassionate and unselfish love that transcends the ego.<sup>44</sup> In the esoteric tradition, this is symbolised by the fourth or heart chakra,<sup>45</sup> at which level, to borrow from Jung, 'spirit appears as an archetype endowed with supreme significance and expressed through the figure of the divine hero, whose counterpart in the West is Christ'.<sup>46</sup> I would no less include Muhammad and Buddha among the great spiritual masters all of whom inspire us to try to fulfil our highest self. The journey is a long and arduous one, there are many mansions to be visited and most of us are just starting out. Life provides no end of opportunities for the betterment of the soul, but it is also good to know that the work goes on after death.

We cannot help being a bit curious about what kind of life-after-death we might expect. Near-death experiences take us so far and no further. Not surprising then, that post-mortem communications relayed by Mediums or through automatic writing, or by using hypnotherapy to access the between-life

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<sup>1</sup> Etymologists have a field day with these words, for they have a common source in the Greek and Hebrew for breath, being *pneuma* and *neshana* respectively. The actual word 'spirit' derives from the Latin *spiritus*, again meaning breath, and refers to the vital and animating essence of all life forms. 'Soul' comes from the Old English, *sawl*, and is usually taken to mean the spiritual or immaterial part of the human being that is immortal.

planes, meet with such interest. These days there is a large literature to hand that should satisfy most appetites. But what the accounts hold in common is far more important than details of difference. From Swedenborg<sup>47</sup> to Alice Bailey<sup>48</sup> to Neil Donald Walsch<sup>49</sup>, the awakened soul is endlessly engaged in the prospect of ever-greater learning and wisdom. Souls are attracted to other souls at a similar level of progress and heaven and hell in other places are not unlike the heaven and hell we make for ourselves in this life. Jesus says in the Gospel of Thomas, '...rather, the kingdom (of heaven) is inside you and it is outside you'. And when he was asked, '...when will the new world come?' Jesus answered, 'What you look for has come, but you do not know it'.

I remember having a discussion with a spirit presence who identified himself as Paul the Apostle. I wanted to know what he thought about karma and rebirth. He replied 'How typically human, to suppose it all has to be worked out on Earth! Earth is where karma is accrued so that afterwards the soul can reflect on its deficiencies and spend as long as necessary making them good.'

It is said that the brighter the light, the darker the shadow. But when the light shines from within, there is no shadow and this would seem to be where each soul, in its own good time, is headed. However, everyone has to start somewhere and there is no disgrace in this. So I'll conclude with a couple of past life regressions from the kindergarten of spiritual learning.

'I am on a boat smuggling brandy from France. It is profitable but dangerous work. My job is to get off as we round the point on the return journey, climb up the rocks and meet up with other villagers while the boat beaches in the cove. No one is there to meet me and I realise something is wrong. Then I hear musket fire down below. The militia have been lying in wait and are killing everyone on board. I run away. Soon I am in a valley strange to me. I know I can't go back. I am full of remorse. I will never see my mother and father again, or my sweetheart. So as not to starve, I become a highwayman. Then one day I stop a stagecoach and find a row of muskets pointing at me. The militia take me to a judge who finds me guilty to be hanged. The next morning I am put on a cart and driven to a gibbet by the roadside. They put a rope round my neck and drive the cart away. I am hanging, I can't breathe. I am dying (begins choking).

Now I am floating up. I look down and can see myself hanging there. I watch the birds peck out my eyes. Then they cut me down and throw my body into a pit of lime. I want to leave but can't. (Here the therapist interjects, 'look around and see if there is anyone to take your hand and help lead you away from this place'.) No one comes. I am filled with remorse for my wasted life. My family was loving though poor and if I had not been so greedy I would be with them now. (The therapist interjects again, 'look up and see if you can find a light somewhere'). I look up and far, far away there is a tiny point of light. I am filled with longing to go there. I call out, 'God forgive me for what I have done', and immediately I soar upwards into the light and it's all over.

This particular 'past life' happened to me and, as you can imagine, it left a strong impression! What did I learn? Every action has its consequence and it really is possible to throw away the gift of life for the sake of a few shillings.

Sometimes the chance for reparation comes in the Bardo, or spirit realm. In another lifetime, I was a miller in France in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a family man with a wife and two small children. There was civil insurrection going on at the time. One day, without warning, I was dragged out of my home by soldiers and taken to the local prison on a trumped-up charge of treason. A military tribunal found me guilty and I was flung into a cell.

A past life is experienced in real time, so the therapist moves the subject back and forward through time, like running videotape, in order to assemble the whole life story. In this case, we kept going forward, year on year, but nothing changed. I stayed where I was, in that wretched cell, in chains and alone. So we moved on to the day of my death. My ankle chain had rotted my leg and I was dying of gangrene. My last emotion before leaving the body was anger with my wife. During all those years, she had not once been to see me and I felt deeply betrayed.

The therapist asked me if I would be willing to meet her in the spirit realm. I very grudgingly agreed, and waited there for her to come across at the conclusion of her life. As soon as she caught sight of me, she ran forwards and embraced me lovingly. She told me how she had come to the prison day after day, year in year out, imploring the guards to let her visit me, but she was always turned away. When I heard this, my heart melted and tears came to my eyes. I could see that my fury at abandonment, which had made my captivity infinitely worse, resulted from my lack of faith and trust in the goodness of love. This was the fundamental lesson I had to learn.

Sceptics will say this is nothing but the stuff of which fantasies are made, which would be a legitimate psychological interpretation. But the essence of quantum theory is not either/or but both/and. I don't reject the psychological view, yet like those ivory balls made by Chinese craftsmen that Alice Bailey referred to, this is a multi-layered holoverse in which space and time are mere artefacts. Whatever the true nature of the experience I am reporting, it had to be given form and content by my psyche. There is no way of knowing to what extent the experience was lived by me as an individual on planet earth, or on another planet, or in another universe. Or perhaps I tapped into a quantum field on the basis of sympathetic resonance and collapsed the wave in line with my emotional concerns. Once we are out of the body, who can say what is individual to each of us, and how much does our consciousness go on to merge? Hold up five fingers. Now look again and you see one hand.

I hope by now that the concepts I have been presenting, and the experiences I have described, sound as normal as going to the shops, or for a walk in the park. If I have succeeded in my intentions, it will be apparent that death is every bit a miracle, as much as life.

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