

# The Soul of the Newborn Child

Dr. Andrew Powell

I want to begin with a story told to Paul Perry, the co-author of a recent publication on near-death experiences by Dr. Melvin Morse. The man in question, an immigrant from Soviet Georgia, related that he had been waiting one night at a bus stop when a car that had gone out of control hit him. The bystanders at the scene thought he had been killed instantly. He was taken to the morgue where he was put in cold storage for three days until a post-mortem could be performed by a doctor from Moscow, which is how local officials protected themselves from the charge of assassination.

During this time, the man became aware of a pinhole of light. He crawled towards it and through a hole and found himself on the other side bathed in brightness. He found he could 'fly' so he went home to visit his family, where he saw his grieving wife and two small sons. Then he 'visited' the family next door who had a child, born a couple of days before the accident. As it happened, they were deeply distressed by the continuous crying of the baby, who would not stop no matter how he was comforted.

In this disembodied state, the man found that he could talk to the baby. As he put it, 'No words were exchanged but I asked (the baby) maybe through telepathy what was wrong. He told me that his arm hurt. And when he told me that, I was able to see that the bone was twisted and broken.'

When the doctor from Moscow arrived to do the post-mortem and they moved the body from the cold store, he noticed the man's eyes flickering. He was immediately taken to theatre and after emergency surgery recovered consciousness.

He told his family what had happened when he was 'dead'. No one believed him until he provided details of his out-of-body travels and his knowledge of the baby's fracture. The baby was taken to be X-rayed and was indeed found to have a greenstick fracture of the arm, almost certainly a birth injury (Morse 1992: 95).

Such stories are anecdotal, so they get short shrift in our scientific methodology. But taken as it stands, this story is either true or false. Let us just for a moment entertain the possibility that it is true and without subterfuge.

There are two components to this story that are of interest, each in its own right. Firstly, there is the near-death experience. Much research has taken place over the last twenty years since Raymond Moody's famous compilation of case histories for a doctoral thesis (Moody, 1975, Lorimer 1990). Some scientists have argued that what is being reported are the terminal throes of neural activity in a hypoxic central nervous system. However, the phenomena regularly described with great clarity are in a sequence that, while shaped by cultural factors, carries the same core spiritual revelation, and is strikingly invariant.

I refer to the sensation of leaving the body behind, often hovering for a time near the ceiling and watching the 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 floating away from the body with a profound sensation of relief and tranquillity. Then there is the approach of a bright light and often a dialogue with an important other, either a deceased relative, close friend or higher spiritual being, a kaleidoscopic life review in which the whole of the life and all its deeds, both good and bad are faced, the awareness of a threshold which, once crossed, means no return, indeed often the reluctance to go back except to finish an important life task, either work or family, and lastly the sudden and painful pulling back into the body with the recovery of consciousness.

These experiences are not qualitatively like those in hypoxic or other organic conditions, which are labile and fragmentary. Particularly striking is the profound and lasting spiritual impact of the experience on the near-death survivor.

The whole question of the non-locality of mind is now a legitimate subject for discussion in the scientific community. Experimental data, which began in earnest in the '70's with Russell Targ's and Harold Puthoff's work at Stanford Research Institute in Palo Alto, California (Targ and Puthoff 1974) have been linked with developments in quantum field theory to support the notion that consciousness is woven into the fabric of space-time in such a way that far from each of us manufacturing consciousness, it is more probable that we are individually participating in a universal energy field, tapping into it much as a radio or television set functions as a waveform transducer (Grinberg-Zylerbaum 1992).

This ties in with the concept that reality is multi-layered and that the physical world as we know it, from simple inorganic molecules to the human being, is but one facet of what David Bohm (1980) calls the explicate order, arising out of a total vibrational field. Cosmologists have begun to discover just how orderly and coherent this total process is turning out to be.

The second feature of the story concerns, of course, the baby's capacity to communicate the nature of his injury. Even if we accept the idea of the principle of consciousness as some kind of resonating quantum field, how on earth could a newborn baby have this precise knowledge and speak about it?

Our natural incredulity arises from our psychobiological frame of reference. This assumes that we assemble reality from the building blocks of sensory and motor fragments coming together in the neonatal period, a kind of confusional state which clears as maturational changes bring about structuring of the contents of the psyche. On this same basis, it is now accepted that even the foetus has a rudimentary psychic life, although it follows that it is the more primitive and unformed the further back we go towards the moment of conception.

If, however, we reverse the usual figure/ground assumption and put mind before matter, just as the near-death experience is premonitory of a rich and complex life after death, so the story of the baby likewise suggests one before birth. Birth and death are no more than the entry and exit points of the physical incarnation of mind.

A further aspect concerns the nature of the space-time dimension inhabited by our bodies, including the central nervous system. In our world,

duality applies to all things and provides a neurophysiological basis for the differentiation of experience. There is light and shade, good and evil, ignorance and knowledge, inside and outside, then and now and much more besides, all packed into the space between the encompassing duality of birth and death. Even in theoretical physics, duality is to be found in particle and wave. The point is that all our empirical researches into reality and all that it contains, including the study of the human mind, are mediated by way of the psychology of our own minds.

The infant mind lacks the equipment for complex awareness, thought and communication. But this baby was not communicating as a neurophysiological organism, nor was the man hearing it as such. It follows that within the dimensional reality in which the communication took place, this was not what we know as a baby doing the speaking.

We cannot speculate beyond a certain point because of the very limits to which I have been referring, but there is actually no good reason to confine ourselves to just two realities, this one we know and another one, which lies beyond. Research in mathematics, physics and energy systems suggests that a hierarchy of realities co-exist. Our universe, which we are told erupted in the Big Bang, appears to have been dualistic in nature from the outset, being made from matter and anti-matter. It also has, to our senses, a stable three-dimensional structure. But other vibrational planes are bound to be different.

The dimension which out-of-body states suggest would seem to have an entirely non-material composition. Yet what is described is not entirely different from our own. There goes on being the sense of having a body, although it is weightless. There is light and sound, though it is reported that perceptions do not seem to come via the special sense organs, and, remarkably, there continues to be continuity of personal identity.

We can surmise that dualities do, to a degree, feature in this dimensional reality adjacent to our own. However, other aspects point to a loosening of the space-time frame. Travel is instantaneous and effected by volition. Time can be traversed likewise. Communication is telepathic and with it flows a profound awareness of loving and being loved. The implication is that the 'higher' the level of reality, the more the subtle energy of what we call love is in the preponderance.

It is generally agreed that science should concern itself with the question 'now' and the humanities with 'why'. Sigmund Freud set out to establish a scientific psychology but did not spare himself the question 'why' in doing so. For example, he asks himself why mankind clings so tenaciously to a belief in God. Freud's answer is that Man cannot afford to give up the transference need for an almighty Father. Why should this be so? The rejoinder is that mankind craves the security of childhood in the face of knowledge of death and obliteration, which is unbearable to him. Heaven is reduced to a wish fulfilment and God turned into a projection (Freud 1927).

Freud could not resist asking himself these questions and the answers that he came up with were inevitable, given his psychobiological premise. But psychology is a movable feast, and can be founded in psycho-spirituality equally well. So why not allow ourselves, like Freud, to ask one or two 'hows' and 'whys',

bearing in mind what we have been learning from the advances in physics.

As I mentioned earlier, quantum theory seems to be pointing a new way to the 'how' of consciousness. As to the 'why', since psychophysical consciousness is without end, death is not such a dreadful prospect. We are free to take into account spiritual considerations without dismissing them as defensive rationalisations.

The first question to consider is: 'Why are we conscious of our existence?' Traditionally, the psycho-biologist regards consciousness as epiphenomenal, a by-product of neuro-synaptic activity. We start with no consciousness, we become aware, and then, like our physical body, it is gone. In contrast, the psycho-spiritual perspective is this: the human mind has access to ultimate reality, if only by a slender thread, and by making use of this vertex, we are able to reflect on ourselves and the gift of life. Much of the time, we don't bother because we are using our on-board computer, the brain, to negotiate the practical complexities of ordinary reality. At other times, our egotistical requirements are such that we tend to be preoccupied with our selves to the exclusion of all else. But when we are prepared to lose ourselves in contemplation, as with the hologram in which the part contains the whole, so we discover that consciousness harnesses us to the very source of life. We first must lose the small self in order to find Self.

This experience cannot be communicated directly. In language, poetry comes the closest, along with music and the expressive arts. In its most immediate and powerful form, nirvana, enlightenment, or satori, as it is variously called, cannot find translation. It has to be 'stepped down' in such a way as to be talked *about*. Accounts are paradoxical, such as knowledge that surpasses all facts and blissful realization of selfless love. But there is a middle way open to ordinary folk, to be found in meditation and prayer.

Can we frame any of this in more familiar psychodynamic terms? Over the last half century, Freud's instinct theory, based on the idea that the goal of the human organism is self-sufficiency, has been superseded by object-relations theory (Guntrip 1977). I include here John Bowlby's seminal work on attachment theory (Bowlby 1973). Not only is the human being driven by a primary need to relate to the 'other' from birth onwards but the quality of the early bond which is established, be it anxious or secure, will mark the whole of that person's life.

From the moment of conception, the fertilised ovum exists in relation to mother. It is never alone. At first it is bathed in the secretions of the fallopian tube. Going on to take up residence in the lining of the womb, it spends the next nine months emotionally and physically attached to mother. After birth, the increasingly complex emotional bond with the caregiver will determine the baby's survival and future happiness. These biological facts are hardly new. But bearing in mind what we are learning about the holo-universe, we can similarly look for signs of object-relatedness on the psychophysical plane.

We are all part of the origin of the universe. Our bodies are made up of physical matter, which began then and has been recycling through the birth and death of stars ever since that time. Likewise our minds have an intimate connectedness with the same source, to which we give the word God. This is the true and inherent object-relatedness of the human condition. As biological

parents we are, hopefully, loving guardians of each little life entrusted to our care. But the child never belongs to us. We are there to safeguard its incarnation.

The role of the parent, then, is not only to provide for the psychobiological needs of the infant but to support and sustain this new life so that one day it may begin to experience the stirrings of its underlying spiritual object-relation with the source of all life. Transiently, in young adulthood, this awakening is first manifested in falling in love, which at its best secures a loving relationship in which to raise a family. But no other human can be God. For many people, with the advancing years comes a restlessness of the soul, which sometimes leads them to the consulting room. The symptom may not in itself be a sign of pathology but of spiritual homelessness.

To the question I posed earlier, 'Why are we conscious of ourselves?' The answer I would offer is this: at the psychobiological level, we are born unconscious of ourselves. All the consciousness is turned outwards. The embodied mind of the newborn baby is conscious only of wonderment, broken at times by incomprehensible distress. In its reverie, the baby could be said to be in a state akin to enlightenment. Then comes the hard graft, the obstacle course of life, in which consciousness is re-directed towards the self. This is necessary for the accomplishment of those life tasks that lie ahead and for which purpose we have been born. For some people, work, family and social relationships are more than sufficient. There is no right or wrong about this for the blueprint of each life is according to the needs of each soul. For others, a spiritual longing intensifies and in time the gift of consciousness is put to a different purpose.

This brings me to a second and bigger question, 'Why do we exist in the first place?' Surely it would be more comfortable to stay put in the wise and loving world of discarnate reality, where there is no death to be feared and no broken bones to be endured? Indeed, it is possible that we spend long periods of time among other things recuperating from the life just lived. However, what does appear to happen is that when the psyche (or soul) enters into embodiment, there is a split so that the discarnate psyche retains its maturity of vision, and the embodied psyche has to start again from scratch. It has been famously noted by John Bunyan that being born into a world in which good is paired with evil, suffering with joy, hope with despair and wisdom with ignorance, all laced with the drama of human emotions, makes a pilgrim of each and every one of us. The challenge is to learn, grow and develop. According to Buddhist and Hindu traditions, it may take many lifetimes. If the person is deaf to the divine aspect of the psyche, either in its individual form within, sometimes called the 'higher self', or outside and beyond, which has been the tradition of most religious faiths, progress will come that much harder.

We are an evolving species within an evolving universe. Theories of the 'holoverse', based on the physics of the hologram, reveal the macrocosm mirrored in the microcosm (Powell 1993, 1994). Could it be that we have an archetypal knowledge of the Big Bang in our mythical history of the fall from grace, not only projected into Adam and Eve but also unwittingly dramatised in every live birth? Such a fall from grace is like a fledgling pushed out of the nest. Only then, as it falls, does it try its wings in earnest.

According to the Gnostic tradition, the passage of our souls through life both reflects and enriches the consciousness of the source of creation. Indeed, according to all the religious faiths, that are where we ultimately are headed, it is why we exist and what we were made for.

To make this journey, the incarnating soul has to forget all it knows, so that life's lessons, however painful, are learned in good measure. Probably the biology of embodiment in our space-time helps, for the egg and sperm are required to start off another human life with nothing more than two single strands of DNA. We are indebted to psychoanalysis for our knowledge of the psyche as it emerges from the caduceus of the double helix. But what are we to make of those glimpses we obtain of enduring consciousness free of embodiment in the non-locality of mind, paranormal phenomena, past life regressions, out-of-body and near-death experiences? It is common knowledge that we are guilty of projecting all kinds of imagined things into a newborn baby, especially if it is ours and we want to see a reflection of ourselves. Try instead taking a look deep into the eyes of a newborn child, perhaps not your own. You may see a wholeness as yet unbroken and a gaze, which bears a wisdom as ancient as the hills. If, like our man from Georgia, you happened to be released from the constraints of your own body at the time, you might just find yourself conversing with a mind every bit equal to your own.

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