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INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE BASIS OF BELIEF
IN AN AFTERLIFE

by

HEATHER DENISE HARDEN BOTTING

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ABSTRACT

Data collected in connection with supposed communications with the dead bear at least a superficial resemblance to data collected in connection with reported mystical, out-of-body, near-death, and clinical-death experiences. Little scholarly effort has been made to compare these apparently related phenomena. A methodology for pursuing the relationship between such phenomena helps establish common elements among such experiences and at the same time helps to ferret out contradictions. In particular, a series of charts has been developed by which these pan-human experiences may be compared with the experience of actual death reported through spiritualistic mediums and others receptive to the notion that the dead can communicate to and through the living. It is reasonable to assume that the beliefs of the world's various mythic, religious, and literary traditions have been inspired and informed by such experiential encounters with the world beyond. Therefore such an exploration is likely to have widespread ramifications for analysis of attitudes towards death and dying within both the humanities and the social sciences.

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**INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY:
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BELIEF IN AN AFTERLIFE**

CHAPTER I

APPROACHING THE RIVER STYX:
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LITERATURE OF DEATH AND DYING

In his article on death published in Great Ideas Today,
Milton Mayer wrote:

The paper-thin bibliography of the subject is eloquent testimony to the invincibility of our ignorance. We do not know what to say about Death because we do not know what to think about it, and we do not know what to think about it because we do not know what it is.¹

Mayer made this comment at the time when the incipient hospice movement in Europe was about to give birth to the thanatology movement of the 1970's and '80's. The bibliographies on death have since grown into massive tomes in which the sociological, psychological, and anthropological

1. Milton Mayer, "On Death," in The Great Ideas Today, 1965, p. 107.

aspects of grief and mourning are explored and debated, and the experiential process of dying itself is analysed. Although many scholars have analyzed the approach to the River Styx, few have dared to analyze the misty regions beyond.

Notable researchers who have contributed to the burgeoning literature on the psychology of death and grieving are Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Herman Feifel, Robert Kastenbaum, Ruth Aisenburg, and a host of other psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, and theologians. Within this ever growing body of data and opinion, of paramount concern is the well-being and comfort of the individual as he or she experiences the process of dying, and the concomitant process of what has been dubbed "healthy grieving" among those who suffer the loss of that individual. Beyond the ethical question of when death occurs (and corollary questions such as when it is permissible to remove organs for transplant) the dying individual, once dead, generally ceases to be of much academic interest.

That the fate of the individual once dead is of little academic concern is evident in the absence of the subject from academic literature. For example, the funeral rite, traditionally understood to be conducted specifically on behalf of the deceased, is seldom even mentioned outside the

writings designed exclusively for the benefit and assistance of those engaged directly in the funeral business. Beyond the overt concern that the the dead should be disposed of in a sanitary fashion and with dignity, even these writings share the same attitude as the works of historians and anthropologists that the funeral rite's primary function is to allow the bereaved to adjust emotionally and socially to their loss. In short, the funeral and associated rites are understood to be conducted on behalf of the living, not the dead.

From this perspective, any expressed conviction on the part of the living that the funeral affects the deceased in any substantial way is treated as mere superstition stemming from curious, if erroneous belief. Although such beliefs and practices may be recorded by historian and anthropologist alike, they are summarily dismissed as unworthy of further comment. The funeral and its associated rites are treated as ideological artifacts expressing the formal proscriptions and prescriptions placed upon a people by their religious elite.

This attitude in historical scholarship is evident in such works as Prehistoric Religion: A Study in Prehistoric Archaeology by E. O. James, and in the more culture-specific writings of J. M. C. Toynbee in Death and Burial in the Roman World and Robert Garland in The Greek Way of Death.

The ethnographic tradition of anthropology has produced even fewer works which specifically address funerals, and most of those have been articles published in scholarly journals of anthropology. Notable among these are H. Yarrow's "A Further Contribution to the Study of Mortuary Customs of the North American Indians" which appeared in 1879 in the First Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology; and V. Gordon Childe's "Directional Changes in Funerary Practices During 50,000 years," published in 1945 in Man: A Record of Anthropological Science. Most of the historical and ethnographic data, however, is contained in brief passages within works on various time periods or cultural groups with a much broader focus. Within these works, the treatment of the funeral is invariably more descriptive than analytical. Any notion that such activity is intended to benefit the deceased is invariably dismissed as a superstition -- a curious relic of humankind's pre-scientific childhood. The researcher understands, even if those he studies do not, that the funeral is a social device which functions solely to allay the anger, guilt, fear and loneliness of the living as they struggle to readjust to life without their loved one. The underlying assumption that the soul of the deceased cannot benefit from such ritual activity because the soul of the deceased does not exist is a bias of the

contemporary western tradition of scholarship, which precludes any serious consideration of the funeral's purported effect on the deceased. This bias is directly responsible for the present hiatus in the literature.

This attitude has also made possible the publication of numerous works in which the funeral rite has been denigrated as nothing more than a get-rich-quick scheme designed by funeral directors as they prey upon the guilt and sorrow of the relatives and friends of the deceased. In a sociological vein, Paul Irion, in The Funeral: Value or Vestige? has tried to distance himself from the broad spectrum of modern critiques of the funeral, noting that both the attitude and pattern of modern critiques of the funeral "was set in a volume which was widely read earlier in the twentieth century, Bertram Puckle's Funeral Customs: Their Origin and Development".¹ Because Puckle's work was written with an ascerbic sense of satire (he labelled the funeral director "the dismal trader") and because of his cavalier disregard for referencing, his work is of little value to the serious scholar; yet as Irion noted, it, more than any other work, has captured the contemporary attitude and served as a

1. Paul Irion, The Funeral: Value or Vestige?, p. 61.

precursor for much of the writing of more recent times.¹ Puckle's contention that funerals consist primarily of "stupid pagan survivals" based on the primitive notion of the individual's spiritual survival of death has been especially tenacious. Critics of the funeral and its associated customs tend to agree en masse with Puckle that such superstitious practices are neither fashionable nor acceptable in sophisticated, technological society.² Among these intellectual heirs of Puckle are LeRoy Bowman, Ruth Mulvey Harmer, Jessica Mitford, and an anonymous funeral director writing under the pseudonym "Coriolus." Their works, The American Funeral: A Study in Guilt, Extravagance and Sublimity, The High Cost of Dying, The American Way of Death, and Death, Here is Thy Sting, respectively, all consist of critiques aimed at the financial expense of contemporary practices. This approach is both the appeal and the major critical flaw in each of these books, as Irion has noted:

By failing to give due credence to the possibility of any value other than the sheer material trappings of the funeral and their costliness, the

1. Ibid.

2. Bertram Puckle, Burial Customs: Their Origin and Development, pp. 32 and 34.

critics seem to yield to the very materialism which they so vociferously decry.¹

These authors share Puckle's propensity for using derogatory terms when referring to funeral directors, and for using the term "pagan" as "a label of disapproval, a brand of odium, like communism."² In short, these works are more informative of the materialistic culture of which they and their authors are products than they are of the purpose and significance of the funeral rites they seek to criticize.

In his own work, Irion has undertaken a more serious and scholarly critical analysis of the funeral, relating it to the same sociological and psychological concerns expressed by thanatologists in general. Also writing in a serious vein in Funeral Customs the World Over, Robert Habenstein and William Lamers have provided an invaluable tool for funeral directors intent on serving the needs of an increasingly multicultural society. This work contains both detailed descriptions of disposition practices and the purpose of certain rites conducted on behalf of the dead. Otherwise, texts on funerary customs leaves the issue of the

1. Irion, Op. Cit., p. 83.

2. Ibid.

long-term fate of the individual entirely to the imaginations of survivors and the ministrations of the clergy.

That the funeral is first and foremost understood to be a religious event, and hence the legitimate domain of priests, ministers, rabbis and other religious specialists, was perhaps most succinctly stated by Bernard Spilka, Ralph Hood and Richard Gorsuch when they reiterated the common assumption that "if there were no death, there would be no religion."¹ Yet, as Terri Willcocks wrote in "Good Grief -- The Role of the Clergy,"

For many newly ordained clergy, the subject of death is taboo. Having received little, if any, instruction on dealing with death and the bereaved, it is a frightening experience to be faced

with the task of comforting those who have undergone such loss . . . even those with a few years [sic] experience "under their belt" find the moment fraught with awkwardness and self-doubt.²

Willcocks' observation was confirmed in the experience of a Catholic priest, Robert Kavanaugh, who wrote in Facing Death of his own struggle to minister to the grieving. From the perspective of an ordained priest, he acknowledged that the only formal preparation he had received for dealing with death and grieving among his parishioners was his marginal -----

1. Bernard Spilka, et als., The Psychology of Religion: An Imperical Approach, p. 126.

2. Terri Willcocks, "Good Grief -- The Role of the Clergy," in Canadian Funeral Director, May 1988, p. 34.

participation as an altar boy in some 400 funerals conducted in his home town church.¹ Of his own seminary training, he wrote:

Our seminary specialized in avoidance. We were encouraged to sever every important tie, any bonds that would make parting painful, in the interest of serving all men equally. In their zeal to mold us into men of that world where death has no victory, our spiritual directors concentrated their fire on our cliques and close friendships as well as family relations.

Our seminary offered no lessons on facing the dying patient as a human being with fears and maybe terror.²

The impact of this training on one's own ability -- or inability -- to cope with death became apparent when Kavanaugh was hospitalized with a fellow priest who had been his friend for several years. The 36-year-old friend requested his company on a stroll around the grounds. Acquiescing to a hospital schedule which made this inconvenient, Kavanaugh declined. His friend died that night, alone in the woods near the hospital. While the death was treated as an accident occasioned by a fall, Kavanaugh, aware of certain doubts that were haunting his friend, suspected suicide. In retrospect he wrote: "Had my friend requested a sacrament

1. Robert Kavanaugh, Facing Death, p. 28.

2. Ibid., pp. 34 and 35.

from me, hospital rules would not have stopped me. He asked for a human presence, and I was not there."¹ Trained for formal rites which in times of crisis could be reduced (in Kavanaugh's own words) to "quicky sacraments," he soon discovered the only skills he possessed as a priest dealing with the dying and bereaved were the kindness and thoughtfulness he had learned in childhood from his mother.²

Kavanaugh's experience was mirrored in that of Earl Grollman, a Jewish rabbi. Quoting Grollman on his own perceived lack of adequate training for dealing with death, Willcocks wrote:

While studying to be a Rabbi, says Dr. Grollman, in six years of theology, liturgy, eulogy, etc., there was never any information taught on dealing with death and grieving. As a Rabbi, his first call was by a family whose young boy had drowned while at summer camp. The family was seeking comfort and answers which the young Rabbi was ill-equipped to handle. "I didn't know what to do, I was the least likely person to talk about death," he says.³

Out of the personal, often painful, experience of men like Kavanaugh and Grollman a significant contribution has been made to the body of literature within the field of

1. Ibid., pp. 36-37.
2. Ibid.
3. Willcocks, Op. Cit..

thanatology which deals specifically with the clergy's role in dealing with death and grieving. Yet the very need for such material begs the question as to what extent the funeral, traditionally understood as a religious rite, is really religious at all.

Given the openly acknowledged ineptitude of many religious specialists in their dealings with the death and bereavement of those who depend upon them for spiritual guidance, to what extent does the funeral lie within the domain of religious enterprise? To what extent and in which manner does it fulfil a religious function? If important in the context of religious traditions in which religious specialists are expected to act as intercessories on behalf of the dead and provide spiritual solace and guidance for the bereaved, these questions become critical to an understanding of the role and purpose of the funeral when considered against the evidence of certain traditions in which religious specialists have no role at all to play in any rites associated with death. In the Puritan tradition, for example, the "funeral" ideally consisted only of the simplest disposition of the body without any formal religious rite. For the Puritans, any intercession on the part of either clergy or laity to effect the progression of the soul after death was a useless and arrogant affront to the will

of God, and hence dispositions of the deceased were officially reduced to the status of "civil functions, not properly the concern of the church" at all.¹ The burial ground was owned and operated by the town. The dead were laid out at home, taken directly from there to the place of public burial, and interred without benefit of religious service of any kind. The minister, if he should happen to be present, had no official role to play. He was allowed at most to "put the mourners in remembrance of their duty" and turn their minds to their own destinies.²

In ancient Greece, many of the priests and priestesses were forbidden even to attend a funeral or visit a home in which a death had recently occurred. In 543 B.C., the tyrant Peisistratos exhumed the remains of the dead from graves near the sacred sanctuary located on Delos and had them removed to a remote part of the island. In 426 B.C., Nikias decreed that the dead must be removed entirely from the island and that no person was to be allowed either to

1. Gordon Geddes, Welcome Joy: Death in Puritan New England, p. 114. The Calvinist conviction that burials should be conducted with dignity and reverence, but no ceremony, was set out in Directory, 1644, originally compiled by the English Puritan divine, Walter Travers, 1586. The section entitled "Concerning Burial of the Dead" is contained in Geoffrey Rowell's, The Liturgy of Christian Burial, p. 83.

2. Ibid., pp. 110, 111, 115 and 146.

die or to give birth there.¹ The dead of ancient Greece were buried with only the assistance and ceremony provided by the non-priests and non-priestesses of their own families. Although sanctions against contact or involvement with the dead and bereaved varied from one order of priesthood to another, Robert Garland notes,

. . . some priests were forbidden all contact with the dead. Those who presided at the Eleusinian Mysteries were debarred from entering a house of mourning, visiting a grave, or even attending a funeral banquet. Similar restrictions were placed on the priestess of Demeter on Kos. The cult of Zeus Polieus on the same island prescribed that if a priest attended an ekphora, five days had to elapse before he could resume his functions again.²

Irion explored the degree to which a funeral may express an anthropological, psychological, sociological, or theological imperative, and discovered that each component may vary in importance from group to group. In The Funeral: Value or Vestige, Irion noted that most funeral rites address all four areas of concern. The emphasis may vary from one tradition to another, but only rarely could one expect

1. Robert Garland, The Greek Way of Death, p. 45.
2. Ibid.

to find a funeral pattern in which only one sphere was operative.¹

While contemporary thanatological writings share Irion's analysis of the funeral rite as an activity involving anthropological, psychological, sociological and theological imperatives, the theological aspect is virtually ignored by the vast majority of writers in the thanatological arena. The efficacy of the funeral in helping the mourners to come to terms with their profoundly altered social relationships and grief, however, has been unanimously acknowledged by all. Within this paradigm the theological component has been understood to be of value only to the extent that a specific set of religious beliefs is operative in the minds of the bereaved. The traditional concern for the welfare of the deceased, which has long been understood to be the primary theological thrust of funeral rites, has not been addressed at all. Life and afterlife questions have been addressed by various individuals associated either directly or indirectly with the thanatology movement, but not the possible significance for the deceased himself of the age-old human rites of passage celebrated as one passes from the former state to the latter.

1. Ibid., pp. 124-127.

For the past century at least, to address such a question as the possible impact of funeral rites upon the fate of the deceased -- or any other postmortem concern on behalf of the dead -- would have brought recriminations of neurosis, wishful thinking, and superstitious delusion. Yet a rift which has developed within the ranks of the thanatology movement within the last ten to fifteen years now invites precisely that question. Once attention had been turned to the dying during the 1960's, not only were patterns of grieving discovered and analysed, but a large body of data with a highly consistent internal pattern began to emerge from the reports of those who had experienced near- or clinical-deaths. Reports of such experiences became readily accessible to the public a mere decade after the thanatology movement had begun.

In 1961, a new edition of F.W.H. Myers' work Human Personality and Survival of Bodily Death, which had been first published in 1903, was released. Based on the research of Myers, Edmund Gurney and other Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge during the late nineteenth century, this work provided a body of data against which to assess the contents of the near- and clinical-death reports which the

thanatologists of the 1960's were compelled to address.¹ Subsequent publications which reflected the themes of Myers in conjunction with the reported experiences of near- and clinical-death survivors were Raymond Moody's Life After Life [1973], Reflections on Life After Life [1978], and Archie Matson's Afterlife: Reports from the Threshold of Death [1977]. The experiences of those who had "died" were mirrored also in the first of Robert Monroe's works on astral projection or out-of-body experiences, Journeys Out of Body [1971]. While these authors all carefully maintained that such experiences merely "suggested" the possibility of life after death, Ian Currie's You Cannot Die: The Incredible Finding of Research on Death, [1978] spoke with a more audacious certainty. By this time, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, who had worked with dying patients for years, had begun to express such convictions of her own. A large, bold-print subtitle in an article on Kubler-Ross written by Ann Nietzke for the September, 1977, edition of Human Behavior warned: "She is aware that in sharing such experiences she is taking a big risk with her reputation in the

1. For an historical account of the nineteenth century movements and ideologies which influenced the work of the Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, see Alan Gault, The Founders of Psychical Research, 1968.

scientific community."¹ Although undaunted by her critics, the risk has proven to be real, as Kubler-Ross herself acknowledged five years later in her 1983 publication, On Children and Death:

I have been criticized for "getting involved in spiritual matters," as some people put it, since I was trained in the "science of medicine." Others in reacting to a growing spiritual awareness on my part, have dismissed all my work and clearly stated that "Ross has become psychotic; she has seen too many dying children!" I have been called every possible name, from Antichrist to Satan himself; I have been labeled, reviled, and otherwise denounced.²

In her own estimation, this reaction on the part of her colleagues and peers "indicates that we are working in an area where people have so many fears that their only defense is to attack."³

One typical attack from the "scientific" camp of thanatologists, aimed at the "spiritual" camp, is contained in Robert Kastenbaum's article, "Temptations from the After-life," published in the same issue of Human Behavior as Nietzsche's article on Kubler-Ross. Against the experience of the 60% of near- and clinical-death patients who do report

1. Nietzsche, "The Miracle of Kubler-Ross," in Human Behavior, September, 1977, p. 26.
2. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, On Children and Death, p. 206.
3. Ibid.

anything from instantaneous life reviews to visions of heaven, Kastenbaum describes a cardiac-arrest patient recovering with no experience of any kind to report.¹ Kastenbaum shares with other detractors of the "spiritual" camp a concern for the facts that if these experiences do speak of life-after-death, why doesn't everyone return from a near- or clinical-death experience with such a positive tale to tell? Why do some have either negative experiences (visions of "hell") or no experience at all? Seeking a safer -- that is to say, physiological -- cause, they suggest as an alternative explanation some yet-undetermined biological function within the brain which automatically engages as death approaches to make the passage more pleasant for the dying person. However, if the contents of near- and clinical death experiences really are simple, physiological functions of the brain intended to alleviate the anxiety and suffering of the dying individual, how can one possibly account at all for visions of "hell" rather than "heaven"? And if the phenomenon is physiological, as in the case of the adrenalin surge which universally prepares the threatened individual for "flight or fight," why doesn't everyone undergoing a brush with death have the same experience? If anything, the

1. Robert Kastenbaum, "Temptations from the Afterlife," in Human Behavior, September, 1977, p. 28.

absence of this kind of experience in 40% of near- and clinical-death patients would appear to vitiate any argument in favour of an innate, physiological cause for the phenomenon in the remainder of the research population.

Still, the scientists persist, no research has been done to determine the particular circumstances of each patient. Are these visions associated with certain types of diseases, drug therapies, trauma, or anaesthetics? Surely the answer to either the absence or presence of such experiences must lie in one or more of these variables. One suspects that future research into this particular aspect of near- and clinical-death experience would have little impact on scientific opinion given that such work has been performed already and studiously ignored. Perhaps Karlis Osis's work, reported in Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses [1961], has been ignored precisely because it demonstrated that there is no statistically significant connection between the absence of a near- or clinical-death experience and any of the variables the detractors consistently enumerate.

Also ignored by the academic world are the works of Robert Crookall. Beginning in 1961 with the first edition of The Supreme Adventure: Analyses of Psychic Communications, he has subsequently published The Next World -- and

the Next: Ghostly Garments (1966), Events on the Threshold of the After Life (1967), Out of Body Experiences (1970), and What Happens When You Die? (1978). These works offer the possibility of an important bridge between the accounts of the afterlife provided by near- and clinical-death patients and the afterlife itself. Yet, as the critics of near-and clinical-death experiences delight in stressing, these experiences are, after all, only mere brushes with death -- not death itself. Those who really die never come back to tell us anything. Crookall, however, suggests that those who die not only can but do come back to tell us what the afterlife is like.

Analysing the data reputedly transmitted from the realm of the afterlife through trance mediums, Crookall searched in a broad, cross-cultural context for patterns which might render a comprehensive and systematic whole of the superficially confusing and often apparently contradictory reports of "life on the other side." The Supreme Adventure was devoted entirely to this process, and in it he describes a clear distinction of pattern between the experiences of those who claimed through various mediums to have died

"natural deaths" and those who claimed to have died sudden, unexpected deaths through trauma.¹

While the manner of death appeared to be a significant factor in the type and timing of communications or manifestations, it apparently in no way altered the composite picture of the afterlife itself as it emerged from the data at Crookall's disposal. According to his analysis of this data, there are seven "spheres" or "conditions" described for the afterlife state. These are not clearly separated, but rather interpenetrate each other to some extent, allowing for communication between higher and lower levels, especially between those which are adjacent to each other. That the categories are not entirely distinguishable, Crookall says, ". . . is not surprising, since hard and fast classifications are impossible in our natural sciences." The general descriptions of the succession of "spheres" or "conditions" in numerous independent accounts shows a remarkable similarity.²

The single, most succinct description of the spheres provided by Crookall is presented on pages 48 and 49 of The Supreme Adventure. In this passage he describes "Hades" as -----

1. Robert Crookall, The Supreme Adventure, p. 202.
2. Ibid., p. 48.

"a temporary abnormal condition" through which all must pass at death. Crookall's use of the term Hades must not be confused with that of the Greeks, for in Crookall's work it describes not the destination beyond the boundary from which none may return (the River Styx) but rather the hinterland between incarnate life and that boundary. He concludes that it would be within this sphere, over a more prolonged period of time, that conditions traditionally described as "Hell" or "Limbus" would be experienced by some souls. Describing the seven spheres which his data suggested as existing beyond the realm of Hades, Crookall wrote:

The first 'Sphere' closely resembles the earth: it is a place of adjustment for its inhabitants. The Second 'Sphere' (which interpenetrates the First) is only a slight advance on it. The Third "Sphere" ("Paradise," "Summerland," "Elysium", "The Garden of Eden", etc.) is a "glorified earth" that interpenetrates those two already mentioned. The "Judgment"-experience [an emotion-laden review of one's life, neither a punishment nor a reward, as such] occurs soon after it is entered Development is due to the use of the intuitive and imaginative faculties rather than by the exercise of the intellect. "Time" is largely subjective . . . ; "space" is also largely subjective¹

Crookall concluded that if these spheres must be described in largely symbolic form only, the "Higher 'spheres' are indescribable, and the seventh one can best be conceived, in -----

1. Ibid., pp. 48 and 49.

a Christian context at least, as "the Absolute, Transcendent, Unmanifested, Infinite 'Father' . . . 'pure spirit', 'purely subjective.'"¹

Within Crookall's scheme, communications between the living and the dead can occur any time from four days prior to death to four days after in the case of "natural death", whereas in the case of "sudden death" communications are not reported as having occurred prior to death itself. "Sudden death" communications, however, appear to have a higher frequency over a longer period of time. These post-mortem communications also have a larger number of collective manifestations associated with them. Given that many of these "apparitions" have been seen by more than one person present, they cannot be facilely dismissed as mere hallucinations induced by wishful thinking: hallucinations are individual experiences, not collective ones.

Yet the primary problem with addressing the issue of survival after death remains its apparently non-objective quality. The very notion of a non-physical and hence non-empirical component of the human being separating from the

1. Ibid. Crookall's statements concerning the inability of incarnate human beings to understand anything above the third level or sphere are supported by F.W.H. Myers in Human Personality and the Survival of Bodily Death, and by Ian Currie in You Cannot die.

body to survive the physical death of the body grievously offends the preconceptions of the scientific community. But, as Crookall and other have argued, there is an objective aspect to the reports of survival. In Events on the Threshold of the Afterlife Crookall recites many accounts in which friends, relatives or attendant medical staff report having seen a mist or smoky substance rise above the body of a dying individual which gradually becomes a replica of the body lying prone beneath it. Quoting from Dr. H.H.U. Cross's work, A Cavalcade of the Supernatural, Crookall wrote,

The author, when on medical duty . . . watched at the bedside of a dying missionary and beheld a luminous cloud which enveloped the head and thorax of the patient. This was visible by candle-light and all who were near, and the whole night-staff saw the phenomenon. The author placed his hand in the cloud and it became obscured as by a fog. As life departed, the cloud gradually disappeared. It was visible for some two hours. There was no odour or any other abnormality to account for its presence.¹

Skeptics within the medical profession have on occasion attempted to account for this frequently described phenomenon. As Matson reported in Afterlife: Reports from the Threshold of Death, one woman, after observing that her mother was "serene, and floating from her and above her

1. Robert Crookall, Events on the Threshold of the After-life, 1967, p. 9, quoting from Dr. H.H.U. Cross, A Cavalcade of the Supernatural, 1939.

toward the ceiling was a bright, golden, shapeless mist," asked her mother's doctor if he, too, could see it. According to Matson, "He told her he could, but that it was not unusual, and that it was 'gas escaping from the body.'"¹ It seems not to be a problem to such men of science that gas does not usually collect in one place in an open room. Furthermore, by most accounts, the "mist" emanates from either the solar plexus or the back of the head -- unusual routes of egress for gas to take when quitting the human body.

Although the data of post-mortem communications and the data of out-of-body experiences and near- and clinical-death experiences appear superficially to corroborate each other, little effort has been made to compare them systematically. To date, debate within each of these specific areas has been restricted largely to its own orbit, and even now many members of the thanatology movement would not consider such a comparison of any value, dismissing all such reports as either mindless superstition or some as-yet-poorly-understood brain function, and nothing more. As in the case of the explanations for the "gas" observed to collect at death, they fail to realize that such superficially

1. Archie Matson, Afterlife: Reports from the Threshold of Death, p. 14.

psychological or scientific explanations merely substitute one mystery for another.¹

Given the propensity of the scholarly, scientific community to react in this way to the pursuit of afterlife studies, the researcher who embarks on a voyage into this little-understood area is automatically forced to weather the storm of what Krister Stendahl has called the "fundamentalism of the unbeliever."² Still, the data of near- and clinical-death studies, when compared with the data of out-of-body experiences in general and full-death, post-mortem communications in particular, demands a serious reassessment of our contemporary attitudes towards those traditions of belief that are all too often dismissed as "stupid pagan superstitions." Although undoubtedly of pagan origin, these beliefs are more properly described as "traditions" rather than superstitions, and far from being "stupid" they offer a valuable source of corroboration for many of the findings of contemporary thanatologists.

1. Raymond Moody, Life After Life, 1975, p. 174.

2. Krister Stendahl, "Immortality," in The End of Life, (John Roslansky, ed.), 1973, p. 75.

CHAPTER II

ENTERING THE RIVER STYX:
STUDYING THE BELIEF IN AN AFTERLIFE

While excavating the Shanidar cave in the Zagros Mountains north of Iraq in 1960, archaeologist Ralph Solecki of Columbia University unearthed the skeletal remains of an adult male Neanderthal. This was certainly not the first time Neanderthal remains had been discovered, but it was the first clear indication that this barrel-chested, apparently loutish, less-than-fully-human relative of modern Homo sapiens had aspired to more than the mere physical survival of his own species. The crucial evidence for this claim emerged in the laboratory of Solecki's colleague, Arlette Leroi-Gourhan. When she examined pollen specimens removed from the 60,000-year-old-grave she found evidence of an elaborate funeral rite hitherto unexpected. Pollen was present in the grave in unprecedented abundance. Even more astonishing, some of it appeared in clusters and a few clusters had been preserved along with the parts of the flowers that had supported them. No birds or animals or wind could possibly have deposited such material there.

Clearly, masses of flowers had been placed in the grave by the companions of the dead man.¹

In the final analysis, it was determined that the hunter, who had died from a crushed skull occasioned when a part of the cave's superstructure collapsed around him, had been laid to rest on a bed of woven pine boughs and flowers prepared for him in the bottom of his grave. He had been carefully covered with bundles of grape hyacinths, bachelor's buttons, hollyhocks and groundsel before any earth had been placed over him.²

The contents of this ancient burial site sparked much speculation as to the "humanness" of the Neanderthals.³ In his own musings as to the significance of Solecki's discovery, George Constable wrote that the flowers may simply have been placed upon the body "in the same spirit that moves modern people to place them on graves and gravestones."⁴ Without offering any explanation as to what that motivating

1. George Constable, et als., The Emergence of Man: The Neanderthals, p. 100.

2. Ibid.

3. The classification of early man had originally used the nomenclature Homo sapiens and Homo neanderthalensis to distinguish them as two separate species. This has since been revised, the names now being rendered as Homo sapiens sapiens and Homo sapiens neanderthalensis to indicate what is now accepted as a much closer affinity between the two distinct but closely related groups.

4. Ibid.

spirit might be, he made the alternative suggestion that, since the flora discovered in the grave were of those species still used in poultices and herbal remedies by the contemporary residents of Iraq, they may have been placed in the grave to promote the healing of the fallen hunter in the afterlife. But more intriguing than any speculation as to what purpose the dead man's companions envisioned for the flowers in an afterlife was the suggestion that he and his companions even had a conception involving the persistence of the human soul after life. The significance of this cannot be minimized, for as Constable himself concluded:

Funerals declare that some essential quality of human life -- call it spirit or soul -- cannot be destroyed, but continues to exist after death, somewhere else, in some other form.¹

Implicit in this belief is an apprehension of human nature as an essential duality in which life is understood to consist of both a transitory, physical component and a more enduring, spiritual one. From Neanderthal times to the present, this is the ineluctable premise upon which every vision of an afterlife from the distant past to the present has been predicated. But where did this apprehension arise?

Working from within the intellectual framework established during the Age of Enlightenment, several scholars

1. Ibid.

developed theories as to the derivation of the human vision of an afterlife. Each of these individuals posited that man's forebears had a "primitive" mind qualitatively different from that of modern man. From this perspective, all ideas associated with religious beliefs and practices were understood to be pre-scientific -- hence, erroneous -- rationalizations of human experience.

Most notable among the various human experiences to which scholars attributed the rise of a belief in a soul were dreams. For example, dreams were an integral part of the theories of British anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor [1831-1919]. According to Tylor, "animism" was the "minimum definition" of all religious phenomena. He explained the role of dreams in his theory of animism as the origin of belief in an afterlife in Primitive Culture:

It seems as though thinking men, as yet at a low level of culture, were deeply impressed by two groups of biological problems. In the first place, what is it that makes the difference between a living body and a dead one; what causes waking, sleep, trance, disease, death? In the second place, what are those human shapes which appear in dreams and visions? Looking at these two groups of phenomena, the ancient savage philosophers probably made their first step by the obvious inference that every man has two things belonging to him, namely, a life and a phantom. These two are evidently in close connexion with the body, the life as enabling it to feel and think and act, the phantom as being its image or second self; both also, are perceived to be things separable from the body, the life as being able to

go away and leave it insensible or dead, the phantom as appearing to people at a distance from it.¹

The most common criticism of Tylor's theory revolved around concerns that he had not taken as a baseline, a sufficiently primitive level of human intelligence or consciousness to constitute a point of origin from which all religious ideas could be seen to be derivative. Most of the scholars focussing on primitive religion during Tylor's era were convinced that a belief in spirits, including the notion of a human soul separable from the physical body, was a later development based on earlier, simpler ideas and sentiments. This was the opinion of R. R. Marett who later assumed Tylor's chair of anthropology at Oxford. Working on the assumption that dream theory was too sophisticated to represent a true origin for religious beliefs of any kind, he concluded,

It will suffice to prove that supernaturalism, the attitude of the mind dictated by awe of the mysterious, which provides religion with its raw material, may exist apart from animism, and further, may provide a basis on which animistic doctrine is subsequently constructed.²

1. Sir Edward B. Tylor, Primitive Culture I, p. 428.
2. R. R. Marett, The Threshold of Religion, p.

French sociologist Emile Durkheim also criticized Tylor for positing the belief in a human soul as the primordial basis for religious beliefs in general. Distinguishing Tylor's animism from naturism which is concerned with physical phenomena alone, such as winds, rivers, stars, and trees, Emile Durkheim defined animism as a more advanced aspect of religious development; namely, "the religion of spirits."¹ Accordingly, Durkheim wrote of Tylorian animism,

. . . it has spiritual beings as its object, spirits, souls, geniuses, demons, divinities properly so-called, animated and conscious agents like man, but distinguished from him, nevertheless, by the nature of their powers and especially by the peculiar characteristic that they do not affect the senses in the same way: ordinarily they are not visible to human eyes.²

Durkheim found Tylor's theory wanting on several counts. First, Tylor's theory of dreams as the origin of a belief in a spirit world incorporating a human afterlife accorded early man an intellectual status beyond any Durkheim envisioned for him. In Durkheim's own words, Tylor's theory "has the inconvenience of seeming to imply that men, in the proper sense of the term, existed before there was a civilization."³ He also argued against a primary role for

1. Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, p. 48.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., fn. 1, p. 50.

dreaming in the development of religious constructs because he saw nothing behind these images except "the nightmares of primitive minds". He held that Tylor's thesis reduced religion to nothing but a dream without any foundation in everyday reality, and concluded,

. . . It is an essential postulate of sociology that a human institution cannot rest upon an error and a lie, without which it could not exist. If it were not founded in the nature of things, it would have encountered in the facts a resistance over which it could never have triumphed.¹

Tylor's basic assumption that dreams contributed to the origin of a belief in the persistence of a human soul after physical death was more favourably received by the English philosopher Herbert Spencer, although Spencer made several modifications to the theory. He accepted Tylor's position that the belief in a spirit or soul which could move about and exist independent of the physical body was the by-product of images remembered from the dream state of sleep.² Like Tylor, Spencer never went so far as to deny man his humanity prior to civilization, but he did share the post-enlightenment conviction that early man had a mind qualitatively different from that of contemporary man. For

1. Ibid., pp. 2 & 69.

2. Ibid., pp. 49-51. This passage was written with reference to Edward Tylor, Primitive culture, Chapters xi-xviii.

Spencer, this supposed difference was critical to the whole theoretical underpinnings of Tylorian dream theory, since it postulated that our human ancestors developed the notion of soul-survival because they were incapable of distinguishing between the contents of waking life and sleeping life.

It was precisely upon the notion that any belief in an unobservable, immeasurable soul must be born of error and confusion that Spencer undertook to modify Tylor's theory. Despite his stated opinion that beliefs, "entirely wrong as they may appear . . . , germinated out of experience and originally contained, perhaps still contain, some small amount of verity," Spencer pursued his argument, elaborating upon the nature of the basic confusion which he suspected to be the source of man's entirely errant belief in a realm of spirits.¹ He speculated that the basic confusion was the cumulative result of a progression of errors in language. In succinct terms, he postulated that our ancestors were not only incapable of distinguishing between the images of waking and sleeping life, but also of discriminating between an object and the name given by them to that object. Object and metaphor, according to this scheme, were of equal value,

1. Herbert Spencer, First Principles, 1862, quoted by Robert Crookall in Events on the Threshold of the Afterlife, p. 153.

and the problem once more was posited in terms of man's faulty intellectual faculties.¹

Spencer's basic position on error and confusion appears to have been seminal to the theories of Julian Jaynes, published in 1976 in The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind. Expanding on the theme of error, if not outright illusion, Jaynes concluded that the original confusion and subsequent error resulted not only from an inability to distinguish between metaphor and physical object, but also from a failure to discriminate between physically-produced sound and auditory hallucination. After a lengthy analysis of Homer's Iliad, Jaynes concluded that the transition from primitive to modern mind must have occurred after the time of Homer.² From this perspective, belief in a spirit world results from a mind which is not only confused but malfunctioning due to a pathological disturbance.

The reductio ad absurdum of Jayne's position was apparently anticipated by Durkheim when he cautioned against the facile acceptance of any theory on the origins of religion which was based on the notion of human error. Seeking more

1. Ibid., p. 54.

2. Julian Jaynes, The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind, pp. 67-83.

secure ground for his own theoretical work, first published in 1915 in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Durkheim suggested that society, rather than gods or spirits, was the critical unseen force which generated religious beliefs and ideas. Accordingly, he concluded that the ideal world is "not an irreducible fact which escapes science; it depends upon conditions which observation can touch; it is a natural product of social life."¹

Whereas the theories of Tylor, Spencer and Jaynes rested firmly on the notion of human error and confusion, Durkheim's came to rest on the supposition that pre-civilized man was a passive recipient of the cultural by-products of society. This leaves the unsatisfying proposition that a creature who was in Durkheim's own estimation not even worthy of the name "man" could create the societal means of his own humanity before he could become fully human. In abandoning psychological reality in favour of objective, social reality, Durkheim never did adequately account for the ideational source from which man could have drawn the gumption to create the society which in turn was to endow him with the intellectual accoutrements of civilization, including a set of religious ideologies. Durkheim attempted to avoid the problem of faulty intellect by

1. Durkheim, Op. Cit., p. 422.

sidestepping the individual who possessed it. However, his argument became circular, for in defining society as a collectivity of individuals, he was forced to recognize the individual as the only source of ideas anyway.¹ By the time this series of debates had spun itself out, interest in primitive beliefs was on the wane. Surprisingly little has been added to the discussion since. As a result, these theories continue to inform our understanding of the origin of religious beliefs in general and of a separable soul in particular.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of the era of Tylor, Spencer, and Durkheim is the notion that sophisticated religious ideas developed only after the rise of civilization and the subsequent evolution of the human brain into something it had not been before man set hand to plough. Yet, in the ritual disposition of one adult male Neanderthal at Shanidar we have clear evidence of a concern for the dead which predates civilization by more than 50,000 years. We also have calendars dating back to the Paleolithic period, artifacts whose very existence suggests that man already possessed the ability to spatialize time not only within the scope of one mortal lifetime, but beyond it into a future he -----

1. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

knew he himself would not survive to enjoy in the flesh. The carefully sculpted Venus figurines of equal antiquity and the painting of the dead man of Lascaux also give clear indication of an acute intelligence replete with a sense of self excerpted and abstracted by the human mind and hand. The fashion in which the female and male forms of the Mesolithic became transformed into the mortar-and-pestle motifs of the Neolithic give further credence to the suggestion that man could already reconcile past conscious experience with novel situations. Furthermore, he could do this in such a way as to render new rational and plausible patterns of human ideology and action, as in contemplating a future he knew would reach far beyond the scope of his own physical lifespan. In short, there is little support in the prehistoric record for assuming our sapient forebears had minds in any way inferior to or substantively different from our own. There is likewise no reason for assuming that a belief in the soul is of such recent vintage as to render it an artifact of civilization, much less to assume that it is founded speciously on error alone, as early theorists would suggest. In fact, if we are to take the advent of Homo sapiens sapiens as the dawn of man, we must acknowledge that a concern for the fate of the dead in a life beyond physical life is older than man himself as we define him.

Perhaps the greatest flaw in theories which posit the dream as the source of belief in souls lies in the narrowness of their scope. The current resurgence of interest in the possibility of an afterlife, for example, has not been generated by dreams, but by the publication of countless reports of near-death encounters experienced by individuals in medical crisis. This should serve to remind us that dreams constitute only one small part of the psychic reality of the human mind.

The data of near-death experiences, mystical states, out-of-body experiences, and even communications reputedly received from the dead, must be taken into account as possible sources of ideas concerning the afterlife. This is especially critical since we have no basis for limiting any of these phenomena to recent human history. That neither mystical nor out-of-body experiences were taken into consideration by early researchers is more a reflection of their own intellectual bias than a lack of data on the subject.

The writings of the eastern religious traditions have long provided us with a wealth of information on the mystical state both in terms of defining it and providing techniques for achieving it. Notable among these works is the Bar-do thos-grol or The Tibetan Book of the Dead which deals specifically with assisting the departing soul on its journey into the world beyond. In addition to this rich store

of data there exists a body of western mysticism, although it has generally been received with limited enthusiasm and respect by the larger Christian community within which it was generated and continues to persist.

Although the current interest in out-of-body experiences in the West may be attributed in part to a growing interest in the teachings of the eastern traditions in general, it has received its primary impetus from two books by Robert Monroe, Journeys Out of the Body and Far Journeys published in 1971 and 1982 respectively. An earlier work, Out-of-Body Experiences, published by Robert Crookall in 1970, is a more analytical work, but has not received as wide a reading as the works of Monroe. That the possible contribution of mystical activities or practices such as out-of-body experiences to a belief in an afterlife were not accounted for by Tylor and his critics is understandable in that these phenomena were not well known or understood in the West during their lifetimes, and to the extent they were known, were treated simply as literary or anthropological curiosities. At the present time, however, such data cannot be overlooked or ignored.

Unlike mystical and out-of-body experiences, there did indeed appear initially to be no indication in the historical records that near-death experiences had ever been

encountered before they first came to public attention during the last few decades. Visions experienced while in medical crisis were apparently novel events made possible only by the development of advanced techniques of resuscitation. The events experienced by an individual in such a situation were described in synoptic form by Raymond Moody, in 1975 in Life After Life:

A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time feels himself moving very rapidly through a long dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside of his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance, as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and is in a state of emotional upheaval.

After a while, he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. He notices that he still has a "body," but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind. Soon other things begin to happen. Others come to meet and to help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving, warm spirit of a kind he has never encountered before -- a being of light -- appears before him. This being asks him a question, nonverbally, to make him evaluate his life and helps him along by showing him a panoramic, instantaneous playback of the major events of his life. At some point he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds that he must go back to the earth, that the time for his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of

joy, love, and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.

Later he tries to tell others, but he has trouble doing so. In the first place, he can find no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes. He also finds that others scoff, so he stops telling other people. Still, the experience affects his life profoundly, especially his views about death and its relationship to life.¹

After considering numerous contemporary cases upon which his synopsis was based, Moody drew attention to the "Myth of Er" contained in Plato's Republic. With the proverbial wisdom of hindsight afforded by his own research on near-death experiences, Moody had come to recognize this ancient text not as a fabulous story born of wild imagination, but as precisely what it was purported to be -- an account of a near-death experience of the Greek soldier Er.

From the experience related by Er after regaining consciousness on his funeral pyre, Moody turned to another case he had discovered in the annals of more recent history. He had been struck by the uncanny likeness of the Swedish theologian Swedenborg's experience recorded in the Compendium of the Theological and Spiritual Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg to those his own informants had given him. Convinced that this was yet another record of a near-death experience, he quoted Swedenborg:

1. Raymond Moody, Life After Life, pp. 21-23.

Still man does not die, but is only separated from the corporeal part which was of use to him in the world . . . Man, when he dies, only passes from one world to another.

. . . I perceived and retained in memory the things which occurred, and which occur to those who are resuscitated from the dead Especially it was given to perceive . . . that there was a drawing and . . . pulling off . . . mind, thus of my spirit, from the body.¹

Since the publication of Moody's original work, other authors have added to the list of near-death experiences to be found in the writings of the ancient world. Plutarch's *Moralia*, extant in fifteen volumes dating from the first century A.D. contains a passage entitled "On the Delays of Divine Vengeance." The story of Aridaeus' journey into a world beyond the physical one in which he lived is now recognized as a classic example of a near-death experience.²

Even where the "Myth of Er" and the "Story of Aridaeus" have subsequently been acknowledged by various writers as records of near-death experiences, little detail is offered the casual reader, and little encouragement given to find the passages in terms of explicit referencing. One may speculate that the negative, unappealing contents of these

1. Moody, Op. Cit., pp. 123-124.

2. "The Story of Aridaeus," as contained in the version of Plutarch's Moralia published by William Heinemann Ltd. of London, appears on pages 269-298 of Vol. VII.

passages, while supporting the antiquity of near-death experiences, does little to support the general contemporary supposition that most, if not all, such experiences are pleasant.

The significance of the apparent discrepancy in content between what is casually referred to as visions of heaven or hell constitutes an enigmatic problem in the study of near-death experiences. From the earliest of contemporary reports it had been optimistically assumed that heaven was all that awaited those on the threshold of death. Tales of individuals coming back from the brink with terror in their eyes and vivid memories of hellfire were few in number and generally swept under the carpet as anomalous and too idiosyncratic to warrant serious attention.

For some theologians, the very notion that heaven could accommodate so many was in itself offensive. That the devout were often among those scorched by a brush with death made the topic even less palatable. Silence seemed to be the only appropriate answer in a situation to which standard, received visions of morality, reward and punishment were apparently of no consequence. Yet, as P. M. H. Atwater argued in Coming Back to Life [1988], hellish experiences do occur and affect those subjected to them. To illustrate her point, she recounted her own experience at being called to the sick-bed of a woman she had befriended:

She was chalk-white when I arrived. While clinically dead, she had experienced an incident which went like this: she floated out of her body and into a dark tunnel, headed through the tunnel toward a bright light ahead; once the light was reached, she came to view a landscape of barren, rolling hills filled to overflowing with nude, zombie-like people standing elbow to elbow doing nothing but staring straight at her. She was so horrified at what she saw she started screaming. This snapped her back into her body where she continued screaming until sedated. As she relayed her story, she went on to declare death a nightmare, then cursed every church throughout all history for misleading people with rubbish about any kind of heaven. She was inconsolable.¹

Atwater's concern with the need to deal honestly with negative experiences echoed those expressed in 1978 by physician Maurice Rawlings in Beyond Death's Door, where he described an experience he had had in dealing with one of his own patients whose heart had stopped. In Rawlings' own words,

The patient began "coming to." But whenever I would reach for instruments or otherwise interrupt my compression of his chest, the patient would again lose consciousness, roll his eyes upward, arch his back in mild convulsion, stop breathing, and die once more.

Each time he regained heartbeat and respiration, the patient screamed, "I am in hell!" He was terrified and pleaded with me to help him.

He then issues a very strange plea: "Don't stop!" You see, the first thing most patients I resuscitate tell me, as soon as they recover consciousness, is "Take your hand off my chest; you're hurting me!" I am big and my method of

1. P. M. H. Atwater, Coming Back to Life, p. 14.

external heart massage sometimes fractures ribs. But this patient was telling me, "Don't stop!"

Then I noticed a genuinely alarmed look on his face. He had a terrified look worse than the expression seen in death! This patient had a grotesque grimace expressing sheer horror! His pupils were dilated, and he was perspiring and trembling -- he looked as if his hair was "on end."

. . . He said, "Don't you understand? I am in hell. Each time you quit I go back to hell! Don't let me go back to hell!"¹

In many of the historical cases, visions of heaven were interspersed with those of hell. Such was the experience of Drycthelm as recorded by the Venerable Bede in A History of the English Church and People.² The subtitle under which Drycthelm's tale was told -- A Man in the Province of the Northumbrians returns from the dead, and tells of the many dreadful and many desirable things that he saw -- gives clear indication that his experience, like that of the mythic Er and the legendary Aridaeus, was a mixture of both perceived joy and sorrow. The question as to why we should have such a high ratio of negative to positive content in these early accounts is one to which we must return later in the thesis, for they do provide us with a more consistent voice in assessing the origins of beliefs in particular

1. Maurice Rawlings, Beyond Death's Door, pp. 18-19.

2. Bede, A History of the English Church and People, pp. 289-294.

types of afterlife than do most of the accounts of the contemporary world. For example, the near-death experience of Carl Jung, recorded in Memories, Dreams, Reflections, typifies the vast majority of contemporary descriptions to the extent that it was apparently totally devoid of any frightening or unpleasant content. As Jung himself stated: "This is eternal bliss. This cannot be described; it is far too wonderful."¹ While this may be true for the majority, it is apparently not true for all.

Whether of a positive or negative cast, the importance of the near-death experience cannot be dismissed as a possible origin of the belief in an afterlife. The evidence of those who have undergone such experiences, both in the distant past and the present, provides a compelling argument for this position, especially so in view of the fact that even former agnostics often come to an expressed conviction that what they experienced was real and that they now not only believe, but know there is life after death.² These events would appear to provide a much more compelling experience than that afforded by any dream visit with a dead relative.

1. C. G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, p. 293.

2. Moody, Op. Cit., pp. 94ff.

When assessing the comments of near-death survivors, critics are quick to point out that these individuals have not really died, only come very close, and no one ever returns from actual death to tell tales of a world beyond. Yet there exists a vast literary record of events which are specifically reputed to be communications from or accounts of manifestations by the dead. Because most of this material is anecdotal in nature, it is generally considered to be more appropriate for entertainment around a bonfire than for serious academic consideration. However, there does exist a body of data within the literature which has been collected and analysed under fairly rigorous conditions. Notable among scholars who have contributed to this body of data were Henry Sidgwick, F. W. H. Myers and Edmund Gurney, all Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge during the later part of the last century.

Each investigator in this area has had to deal with the problem of collecting raw data on purported post-mortem communications from the reportage of a wide number of informants. Against the usual contention that all such communications are necessarily fraudulent to begin with, Camille Flammarion wrote in Death and Its Mystery: "Cases in which there was a possibility of there being concerned farceurs, liars and minds that were given to illusions . . .

constitute a minimum." He expressed surprise that "in almost every instance in which I have been able to make a personal investigation, I have encountered perfectly trustworthy people."¹

Convinced that post-mortem communications represent a genuine if poorly understood phenomenon, later researchers such as Robert Crookall have sought to systematize their data into comprehensible patterns. Undaunted by critics who saw in the material at hand nothing more than the confused babbling of unreliable neurotics, Crookall took the sheer bulk of the material as a compelling enough reason to subject it to analysis. And when he did, he accumulated his data from a broad cross-cultural base. He included materials from both Americas, continental and insular Europe, Tibet, India, China, New Zealand, and the Hawaiian Islands.² He then decided to restrict his data to that which dealt with one topic only -- what each communicator had to report on the experience of dying itself. By limiting his data in this way, he hoped to avoid the nonevidential banter of the classic parlor-room seance in which "spirits" were engaged in frivolous expositions, asked to describe the afterworld

1. Camille Flammarion, Death and Its Mystery, Vol. III, p. 113.

2. Robert Crookall, The Supreme Adventure, pp. 187-192.

itself, or challenged to prove their continuing existence in it.

From this approach it was hoped a pattern of events would emerge which addressed the process of dying itself, and it did. For example, while there was great internal consistency in the accounts of those who had died natural deaths and those who had died violent deaths, the two forms of death each had its own unique pattern.¹ The results of his research convinced Crookall that neither hallucination, which is a private rather than public event, nor collusion could function over a cross-cultural base to produce such results.

Crookall also examined the content of mystical and out-of-body experiences. From these studies he concluded that the altered states of consciousness or perceived separation from body involved in these experiences were similar to those of dying itself as reported through what were reputed to be post-mortem communications from the dead. Before it can be established, however, that such apparently disparate events as dreams, mystical states, out-of-body and near-death experiences constitute a continuum of related

1. Ibid., Appendix II, pp. 196-207.

psychological events, the details of each must be more systematically analysed and compared.

Before undertaking such a study, it is worth noting the words of warning written by Kenneth Ring for those who would dismiss such experiences as figments of either the imagination or the oxygen-starved brain:

In this regard, I would like to advise any neurologically minded researcher interested in investigating this issue of one important constraint: Any adequate neurological explanation would have to be capable of showing how the entire complex of phenomena associated with the core experience (that is, the out-of-body state, paranormal knowledge, the tunnel, the golden light, the voice or presence, the appearance of the deceased relatives, beautiful vistas, and so forth) would be expected to occur in subjectively authentic fashion as a consequence of specific neurological events triggered by the approach of death. A neurological interpretation, to be acceptable, should be able to provide a comprehensive explanation of all the various aspects of the core experience. Indeed, I am tempted to argue that the burden of proof has now shifted to those who wish to explain near-death experiences in this way.¹

Ring's words apply with equal force for any investigation of events associated with or analogous to those surrounding death. Any interpretation must provide a comprehensive explanation.

1. Kenneth Ring, Life At Death, p. 216.

In pursuing the relationship between such phenomena, each must be analysed for constituent elements, then charted in such a way that common elements and idiosyncrasies alike are clearly established. Once the basic pattern has thus been generated, any contradiction or inconsistencies must be addressed.

Since these events have traditionally been understood to involve either a partial or total separation of body and soul, this process must also be examined with respect to two distinct aspects of the phenomenon. First, descriptions of the process itself must be considered given that there is a wide range of variability on this topic reported in the literature of various traditions. Within the Christian tradition, for example, one may envision a relatively simple, dualist split between physical body and pure spirit, while within the Buddhist tradition one may understand the process to involve a series of "deaths" and separations as the spirit systematically sheds each progressively rarefied "body" until the ultimate state of pure spirit has been reached.

Finally, however the process of separation is understood to occur, one must consider the affects it is reputed to have on the mind, especially as reflected in the perceptions and awareness of the individual experiencing it.

CHAPTER III

MYSTICAL AND OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES

The literary record of mystical experience has been described as the "poetry of religion."¹ Comparing the literature of mysticism with that of theology, Patrick Grant concluded that the former "seemed always profounder, subtler, and closer to authentic human experience than the theological ideas which were its ostensible subject."² For Grant, the power of the mystical vision lay in its ability to address with a creatively humanizing and redeeming energy the realities of love, suffering, yearning and fear that analytical theology could not equal.³ The difference would appear to lie in the contrast between the overt concerns of

1. Patrick Grant, A Dazzling Darkness: An Anthology of Western Mysticism, p. 15.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

formal theology, on the one hand, and mysticism on the other. Theology seeks to articulate the relationship between the institutionalized church, whose mandate includes the role of intercessory acting on behalf of its adherent before its God. The goal of mysticism is personal and direct at-onement with the divine. While theology strives to approach the divine as a quality external to man, mysticism seeks the divine within him.

Grant noted that solitude appeared to be the primary prerequisite to achieving the mystical state, as attested by the experience of various traditions. He was quick to clarify that solitude is not to be confused with isolation or alienation. Rather, he defined solitude as a serene, reflective state which can be attained as easily within the hubbub of daily life as in a quiet retreat from the world. The individual simply has to withdraw inward until he enters the still centre of himself, wherein he is truly self-conscious and capable of experiencing his own capacity for relection. In this state he becomes acutely aware of his own interior, self-conscious life marked by genius for relationship, and is infused with a concomitant sense of responsibility and compassion for all.¹

1. Ibid., p. 66.

Grant's observation that the state of solitude inducive to mystical experience could come upon one anywhere " -- in a moment in the garden, a moment in the hall -- " echoed the findings of Robert Crookall, whose informants had entered mystical states under a wide variety of circumstances, always from a normal, waking state of consciousness. Entry into this state is also invariably described as instantaneous. There is no sense of a passage or journey leading one into it.

Even within Eastern religious traditions which encourage the practice of meditation for facilitating entry into the mystical state via a self-induced, waking trance, transport into the mystical state itself is achieved as a sudden flash of enlightenment, not a gradual awakening. It must also be noted that alternate states of consciousness, such as sleep or trauma-induced unconsciousness, seem to be counter-indicated as states from which to enter the mystical experience. Not only is there no sense of a preliminary alteration in sense or sensibility. The euphoric mystical state is most commonly entered when no such experience is in any way anticipated. In fact, it frequently occurs during one of life's more mundane and unremarkable moments. Mary Austin, one of Crookall's subjects, for example, had experienced a mystical state while casually strolling through a garden. She stopped to watch a bee amidst the foxglove.

The sense of at-onement which is the hallmark of such experiences was described by her as "a swift inclusive awareness of each for the whole -- I in them and they in me" ¹
 The description of Austin and countless others is strongly reminiscent of William Blake's "Auguries of Innocence":

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
 And Eternity in an hour.

Indeed, whole traditions of poetry can be understood in terms of the mystical experience defined in this way, including the Haiku and Tanka poetry of Japan, with its potent links to Taoism and Zen.

While the mystical state, thus described, is an experience apprehended within the still centre of the self, it is understood to connect the self with that which lies beyond. According to Crookall, the external entity with which it connects may be anything from a blade of grass to God himself. ² Within the Christian tradition, mystical union with God receives what is perhaps its clearest expression in the 17th Chapter of The Gospel According to John, where Jesus is reported to have said,

1. Robert Crookall, The Interpretation of Cosmic and Mystical Experiences, p. 16.

2. Ibid.

20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for
 those who will believe in Me through their word;
 21 "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are
 in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in
 Us. . . .
 22 "And the glory which You gave Me I have given
 them, that they may be one just as We are
 one. . . ."¹

After categorizing the various external forms with which the
 self may enjoy the mystical apprehension of unity or at-
 oneness, Crookall presented the following list.

At-oneness with inanimate objects
 At-oneness with animate objects (nature)
 At-oneness with both inanimate and animate objects
 At-oneness with inanimate objects, nature, and
 people
 At-oneness with people
 At-oneness with both nature and people
 At-oneness with inanimate and animate objects and
 with God
 At-oneness with both nature and God
 At-oneness with both men and God
 At-oneness with God²

Within the context of the Kundalini tradition of
 Hatha Yoga, the occurrence of this perceived state of

1. Holy Bible, The New King James Version, [1979] 1982.
2. Ibid., p. v.

"atoneness" is not left to serendipitous happenstance. Rather, it is actively sought. In fact, the word "Yoga" itself means "union".¹ Within the literature on Kundalini Yoga, however, there are clear indications that not all encounters with the mystical state are euphoric, enlightening, or even pleasant. Some students of the discipline report violent jerking movements of the physical body and disconcerting hallucinations. Yogi Bhajan is but one Yoga who dismisses such subjectively negative experiences as not genuine. According to him, "This is what we call jerk yoga! It is totally make believe." In defining what he accepts as an authentic experience with an awakening kundalini which heralds the onset of a mystical state, he concluded:

"The sign of the kundalini energy is the expansive consciousness, the compassion, and the practicality of the being who acts in humility before the infinite creator."²

One mystic who has taken the other side of the debate in this issue is Gopi Krishna, whose book, Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man, contains a vivid account of his own personal entry into a mystical state reputedly generated

1. Swami Rama, "The Awakening of Kundalini," in Kundalini: Evolution and Enlightenment, John White, (ed)., p. 33.

2. M.S.S. Gurucharan Singh Khalsa [with Yogi Bhajan], "Exploring the Myths and Misconceptions of Kundalini," in Kundalini: Evolution and Enlightenment, John White, (ed), p. 133.

by a kundalini awakened without proper preparation on the experiencer's part. While Krishna reported entering an initially pleasant state replete with the sense of expanded consciousness and union with that beyond himself, he quickly slipped into a terrifying state in which he felt an energy coursing through his body so intense he feared it would destroy his nervous system and kill him. Chapter 3 of his book is a detailed account of the insomnia, intense fevers, nervous agitation, "bolts of lightning" exploding in his brain, distorted vision, abnormal sensory perception, visits from "demons", and the intense fear he suffered in the wake of his first euphoric mystical experience.¹

Within the western tradition, there is also an historical debate concerning the legitimacy of designating a subjectively negative state of altered consciousness as a true mystical experience. Certainly the list of elements prepared by Crookall as an indicator of the content of mystical experiences focuses on positive or pleasant aspects alone, but the term "a dazzling darkness" by which certain western mystics have referred to the state contains a sobering caveat: in this case, that the mystical state of union or at-oneness may be preceded by a period of intense psycholog-

1. Ibid., Chapter 3, pp. 46-57.

ical and emotional darkness. Unlike its illuminating, euphoric counterpart, the period of growing darkness which may occur as preparatory for the light-bringing mystical experience to follow may be of considerable duration, lasting for weeks, months, or even years. St. John of the Cross referred to this passage in which the passions of the physical world are stripped from the self as "the night of sense."¹ The next stage, he called "the dark night of the spirit."² Within the intense darkness of this night, the self or "soul" finally finds the solitude necessary for the mystical apprehension of at-oneness with God,

For its imagination and faculties are no longer bound, as they were before, by meditation and anxiety of spirit, since it now very readily finds in its spirit the most serene and loving contemplation and spiritual sweetness without the labour of meditation. . . .³

Although the soul, within the context of St. John of the Cross's treatise, has not yet undergone its total purgation in readiness for the culminating mystical experience, the

1. St. John of the Cross, Dark Night of the Soul, p. 36ff. This work is divided into two sections or books, the first of which the author devoted exclusively to his treatise on "the night of the sense."

2. Ibid., p. 91ff. (This marks the beginning of Book II of Dark Night of the Soul, and deals exclusively with "the dark night of the spirit.")

3. Ibid.

intense darkness of this phase is understood to provide the background out of which the dazzling light of the divine may burn and illuminate the seeker. Within an Eastern context, the such practices as meditation, physical exercise, and diet control, are intended to achieve this purgation. In both cases, what is sought is "the state of the perfect, which is of the Divine union of the soul with God."¹

The state of perceived unity or at-oneness achieved either within the context of a simple, and very sudden euphoric enlightenment or within the context of a bright light dawning upon an intensely dark and frightening night of the soul is the same. Still, events encountered along the long and torturous routes to the state of mystical union described by St. John of the Cross and Gopi Khrisna warrant inclusion in any list of elements associated with the mystical experience in general. For the purpose of comparison with out-of-body and near-death experiences, however, it will suffice to treat the feelings of alienation, abandonment, and despair encountered in the night of sense and the preliminary phase of the dark night of spirit as one element. Treated this way, the preliminary darkness and the subsequent illumination represent the two poles of a contin-

1. Ibid., p. 37.

uum that is analogous to the distinction between the experience of hell and that of heaven.

Whereas entry into the euphoric component of the mystical state is instantaneous, the return to normal consciousness normally involves a gradual dissipation or fading of the experience. This is not to suggest that the experience is ever completely erased from memory. On the contrary, those who have achieved a sense of at-oneness with something which lies beyond themselves are aware that their encounter has permanently altered their understanding of and response to life. According to Grant, these people retain from their experience a new appreciation for non-violent and tolerant attitudes in dealing with the world. Rejecting anger, they embrace love as the divine key to personal wholeness and come to a more mature understanding of the need to accept, without recrimination, their own suffering as an opportunity for spiritual growth.¹

For the purposes of comparing and contrasting the mystical state with other phenomena such as out-of-body and near-death experiences, the experiential elements of the mystical state may be presented in chart form as indicated on the following page.

1. Grant, Op. Cit., p. 16.

ELEMENTS OF THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE	
MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATE AT TIME OF EXPERIENCE	Generally normal health Normal state of waking Sense of internal solitude
TRANSPORT INTO STATE:	Instantaneous
EXPERIENCES ENCOUNTERED ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED:	<p>A feeling of At-oneness with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) inanimate objects (b) animate objects (nature) (c) both inanimate and animate objects (d) inanimate objects, nature, and people (e) people (f) both nature and people (g) inanimate and animate objects and with God (h) both nature and God (i) both men and God (j) God <p>Thought perceptions acute and lucid.</p> <p>Environment bright and glowing.</p> <p>Environment infused with numinous warmth.</p> <p>Feelings of peace and contentment.</p> <p>Sense of love for all.</p> <p>Sense of overwhelming energy surge.</p> <p>Thought confused.</p> <p>Perceptions distorted.</p>

	<p>Acceleration in rate of respiratory and cardiac activity.</p> <p>Sense of loss of sanity.</p> <p>Feelings of suffocation, panic, fear and anxiety.</p> <p>Encounter "demons" or hinderers.</p> <p>Feelings of aloneness, abandonment and despair.</p>
THE RETURN:	Gradual fading of impressions and feelings experienced.
EFFECT OF THE EXPERIENCE UPON RESUMPTION OF NORMAL LIFE:	<p>Rejection of anger, power over others, and violence in favour of tolerance and understanding. An expanded feeling of love and a new appreciation of the meaning of suffering.</p> <p>New sense of purpose in and for life.</p> <p>New desire for knowledge.</p> <p><u>Belief</u> in a world beyond transformed into <u>knowledge</u> of a world beyond.</p>

Both the feeling of euphoric unity and that of despairing loneliness which have been reported in connection with mystical experiences have traditionally been referred to as states of ecstasy.¹ In such a state the individual is

1. The Oxford English Dictionary, while noting that the term "ecstasy" is most commonly used to describe a state of rapturous delight, notes that it is equally appropriate to conditions in which one feels transported by feelings of

generally understood to feel displaced in the sense of having his being infused with and expanded by that which he normally perceives to lie beyond himself. This is not a case of the drop flowing into the sea, but rather the sea flooding into the drop. Perhaps, it is precisely because the mystical experience involves a sense of inflow rather than outflow that it seems to involve no sense of actual separation or severance from the physical body. To encounter reports of this phenomenon one must examine accounts of out-of-body experiences (also commonly referred to in the literature as astral-travelling or astral-projection), in which self does not simply "share" private psychic space with that which is perceived to be both self and other at the same time, but actually understands the core of consciousness to be located outside the confines of the physical body.

Whereas the mystical state is commonly achieved during a normal, waking state of consciousness, the out-of-body experience is often first encountered during the state of sleep, or in the twilight zone between sleeping and waking. With respect to the state of health of the individual under-

 ...Continued...

intense sorrow or despair. For variations in the historical usage of the term, see The Oxford English Dictionary, Volume 3, p. 36.

going an out-of-body experience, Robert Monroe determined that 78.4 percent were in a state of normal health at the time. Only 21.2 percent were suffering minor debilitations, and a mere 0.4 percent had either a significant illness or injury.¹ Interestingly, Monroe noted that drugs acted as inhibitors rather than facilitators of the experience.²

Normally, an out-of-body experience is encountered while the individual is in a state of deep relaxation or sleep, although sudden emotional stress can also precipitate such an experience. For example, the driver of a car loses control of his vehicle and sees that an collision is imminent. Suddenly, he finds himself viewing the entire event from a location above and behind his car. Only after the car has come to a full stop does he find himself once again behind the wheel, dazed by both the accident itself and the strange perspective from which he has just witnessed it. In retrospect, it seems as though the conscious part of himself

stepped out of both car and physical body while in a state of anticipatory shock.

1. Robert Monroe, Journeys Out of the Body, p. 244.
2. Ibid.

The experience of the accident victim shares all the classic traits of the average out-of-body experience described by Monroe:

We can formally define an OOB as an event in which the experiencer (1) seems to perceive some portion of some environment which could not possibly be perceived from where his physical body is known to be at the time; and (2) knows at the time that he is not dreaming or fantasizing. The experiencer seems to possess his normal consciousness at the time, and even though he may reason that this cannot be happening, he will feel all his normal critical faculties to be present, and so knows he is not dreaming. Further, he will not decide after awakening that this was a dream.¹

In the case of out-of-body experiences not precipitated by the expectation of shock-trauma, about 90 percent who have reported them described the phenomenon as joyful. Only 5 percent report that it is in any way unpalatable or frightening.² Unlike the mystical experience, however, there can be a disconcerting or unpleasant entry into the out-of-body state, often reported to take the form of a loud, uncomfortable vibration or buzzing in the ears, which may be followed by a sensation of being drawn or sucked down a dark, narrow tunnel.³ A brief blackout or period of unconsciousness may -----

1. Ibid., p. 7.

2. Ibid., p. 9.

3. Crookall, Op. Cit., p. 49.

follow this initial phase of the experience. At some stage thereafter, a sensation of rising from the physical body occurs, and the individual becomes aware of a "replica" or "double" of himself forming above his physical body.¹ After this spirit-like body has taken shape, the physical environment in which the physical body lies, and on occasion even the body itself, are visualized as though with normal vision despite the fact that the eyes of the physical body remain closed. At this point, it is understood by the individual that his consciousness is contained in his lighter, spirit-like, replica-body rather than in the physical body he sees lying inert beneath or apart from him. From this experience, he determines and accepts that he has in some fashion vacated his physical body. He is not, however, totally detached from it. He may either see or feel a slender, sometimes pulsating silver cord connecting his new center of consciousness to his physical body. As soon as he chooses to turn his attention away from the immediate surroundings he discovers that the normal constraints of space, time and physical objects prove no impediment to his newly discovered spirit-body.

1. Ibid., p. 11.

For some individuals, a phase may be experienced in which they feel confused and disoriented. They report clouded perceptions as if experiencing events in an aqueous mist or fog. When the perceived separation of consciousness from physical body leads into this type of experience, the connecting silver cord, reminiscent of an umbilical cord, is reported to emanate from the region of the solar plexus. The individual may sense the presence of other disoriented and bewildered entities sharing his hazy, aqueous surroundings, some of which may be perceived to be overtly hostile and threatening. Those who generate an actual sense of anxiety or fear are referred to by Crookall as "hinderers".¹ The psychic vista may then clear, in which case a clearer, brighter, and more pleasant environment may be entered. As the environment becomes increasingly clear, the individual's thought processes become correspondingly lucid. This transition from cloudy to clear environment may be accompanied by the auditory sensation of ripping or hissing. Within the brighter environment, the individual may encounter other entities perceived to be friendly. This

1. Ibid., p. 139. In Christian terms, these entities may be regarded as "demons," but other traditions such as those of the North American Indians use labels which convey the same meaning as "hinderers" does for Crookall.

category of perceived beings Crookall has called "helpers".¹ Other ostensibly beneficent entities may include friends and relatives known by the individual in his out-of-body state to be dead. Yet others may include the "replicas" or "doubles" of those known still to be living, and hence presumed to be also in an out-of-body state at the time of contact. Many of those who undergo out-of-body experiences proceed directly to this latter state, by-passing completely the foggy dimness of the former. When this is the case, the silver umbilicus apparently emanates from the back of the head.²

Often, the consciousness of the individual in an out-of-body state, remains primarily focussed on the physical world. Throughout Journeys Out of the Body, Monroe cites case after case in which individuals returned from an out-of-body experience with detailed descriptions of events occurring at great distance from where the physical body lay, ostensibly asleep. Many of these reports were verified by Monroe to his personal satisfaction, indicating that the individual had in fact witnessed by some means actual events

1. Ibid. In Christian terms, "angels" might be seen to fulfil a similar role. Among North American Indians, the term would be "spirit-helpers."

2. Ibid., p. 145.

which had occurred in another building, or in some cases, even another town, while in the out-of-body state. Although on rare occasions individuals have reported actually seeing the out-of-body individual, Monroe offered a more typical example of communication from his own personal experience:

In a motel in Winston-Salem: I woke up early and went out to have breakfast at seven-thirty, then returned to my room about eight-thirty and lay down. As I relaxed, the vibrations came and then an impression of movement. Shortly thereafter, I stopped, and the first thing I saw was a boy walking along and tossing a baseball in the air and catching it. A quick shift, and I saw a man trying to put something in the back seat of a car, a large sedan. The thing was an awkward-looking device that I interpreted to be a small car with wheels and electric motor. The man twisted and turned the device and finally got it into the back seat of the car and slammed the door. Another quick shift, and I was standing beside a table. There were people sitting around the table, and dishes covered it. One person was dealing what looked like large white playing cards around to the others at the table. I thought it strange to play cards at a table so covered with dishes, and wondered about the overlarge size and whiteness of the cards. Another quick shift, and I was over city streets, about five hundred feet high, looking "home."¹

Monroe continued his description, noting that later that evening while visiting friends he had a "hunch" that they were the individuals he had watched from an out-of-body perspective earlier in the day. He was able to ask them directly about their morning activities, and confirm that

1. Monroe, Op. Cit., pp. 48-49.

their son had indeed been tossing his baseball in the air and catching it as he prepared to leave for school. The object Monroe had assumed to be an electrical motor of some sort was a Van DeGraff generator his friend had loaded that morning into the back seat of his car. The large white cards being dealt were the objects of that morning's mail delivery.¹

In most cases of out-of-body experiences in which scenes within the world have been reported to be seen unfolding, there is no intimation the individual in the out-of-body state has either attempted to engage or succeeded in engaging in any type of interference or tangible interaction with those he is observing. In a small number of cases, however, physical manifestations of a visit on the part of the out-of-body traveller have been reported by those affected. Monroe acknowledged that he himself had been responsible for one such incident when he visited a long-time friend while he was out-of-body. The friend knew of his out-of-body experiments. She found them interesting, but remained skeptical of their reality. Curious as to whether he could, in fact, attract her attention while he himself was in the out-of-body state and she was chatting

1. Ibid., pp. 49-50.

with friends in her own home, he

. . .reached over and tried to pinch her, gently, I thought. I pinched her in the side, just above the hips and below the rib cage. She let out a good loud "Ow," and I back up, because I was somewhat surprised. I really hadn't expected to be able actually to pinch her. Satisfied that I had made some impression, at the least, I turned and left¹

Three days later, Monroe had an opportunity to speak in person with the woman he had pinched during his out-of-body experience. When he asked her directly about the pinch,

A look of complete astonishment crossed her face. "Was that you?" She stared at me for a moment, then went into the privacy of my office, turned, and lifted (just slightly!) the edge of her sweater where it joined her skirt on her left side. There were two brown and blue marks at exactly the spot where I had pinched her.²

Monroe promptly apologized for inflicting such an injury upon her, and promised that if he should desire to make his presence felt on another occasion, he would find a more appropriate and less painful method of so doing. According to Crookall, one alternative others have used to indicate their out-of-body presence is the production of clearly

1. Ibid., p. 56.

2. Ibid., 56-57.

audible footsteps which can actually be recorded with sound equipment.¹

If there is a connection between mystical and out-of-body states, one would expect there to be an element of ecstasy in the latter similar to that described in the context of the former. Ecstasy is, indeed, reported as a possible component of the out-of-body experience, but here it has more of an affinity with ecstasy in the sexual sense rather than the purely mystical one. Monroe attempted to describe the quality of out-of-body ecstasy, noting that the physical sexuality with which he was comparing it was a mere shadow. He wrote:

If the opposite charged poles of electrostatics could "feel," as the unlike ends approach one another, they would "need" to come together. There is no barrier than can restrain it. The need increases progressively with nearness. At a given point of nearness, the need is compelling; very close, it is all-encompassing; beyond a given point of nearness, the attraction-need exerts tremendous pull and the two unlikes rush together and envelop one another. In an immediate moment, there is a mind (soul?) -shaking interflow of electrons, one to the other, unbalanced charges become equalized, peaceful contented balance is restored, and each is revitalized. All this happens in an instant, yet an eternity passes by.² Afterward, there is a calm and serene separation.²

1. Crookall, Op. Cit., p. 57.

2. Monroe, .Op. Cit., pp. 193-194.

The states of rapturous delight as described by Monroe seem to be triggered by any direct contact with other entities, however fleeting. The feeling generated from an act he described as a simple handshake was, according to Monroe, analogous to a "giddy electrical-type shock, and then we separated."¹ Such an encounter may either lead to the calm, serene state described by Monroe, or instantaneously terminates the entire out-of-body experience. In the case of instantaneous termination, the individual usually reports finding himself immediately back inside his own physical body.

The return is not always simple, or quickly achieved, however. Those who have had several out-of-body experiences may simply decide it is time to return to their physical bodies, or may feel a sudden need to do so. If one has not progressed beyond the initial out-of-focus fogginess, any disruption in the environment in which the physical body lies may trigger the return. There may be a sensation of tugging on the silver cord, then a sudden drawing back of the "replica" body into the physical body. For those in the more lucid conditions beyond, the return is usually triggered emotionally. In either of these cases, the return

1. Monroe, Op. Cit., p. 199.

becomes a conscious part of the experience. Where the experience has been one of joy, the individual may even feel a genuine reluctance to make the return.¹ If the return and subsequent "reassociation" with the physical body is too rapid, a repercussion or shock can be felt. According to some, a miscalculation in lining up the spiritual body with the physical one can lead to a traumatic re-entry.

Regardless of the manner of return, most of those who undergo an out-of-body experience are left with an expanded appreciation of the meaning and value of the physical life they temporarily left behind. Explaining that the out-of-body experience was often a profound one in a person's life, Monroe commented on the subsequent transformation:

This is usually expressed as, "I no longer believe in survival of death or an immortal soul, I know that I will survive death." The person feels that he has directly experienced being alive and conscious without his physical body, and therefore knows that he possesses some kind of soul that will survive bodily death.²

Commenting on the probable significance of the out-of-body experience in informing and shaping human attitudes toward the persistence of life beyond physical death, Monroe noted:

1. Ibid., p. 13.

2. Ibid., p. 8.

. . . OOBES are a universal human experience, not in the sense that they happen to large numbers of people, but in that they have happened all through recorded history, and there are marked similarities in the experience among people who are otherwise extremely different in terms of cultural background. One can find reports of OOBES by housewives in Kansas which closely resemble accounts of OOBES from ancient Egyptian or oriental sources¹.

He added:

I am certain that our ideas concerning the existence of souls have resulted from early experiences of people having OOBE's. Considering the importance of the idea of the soul to most of our religions, and the importance of religion in people's lives, it seems incredible that science could have swept this problem under the rug so easily.²

For the purposes of comparing and contrasting the out-of-body experience with other phenomena expected to bear significantly upon the idea of a human soul capable of surviving the death of the physical body, the experiential elements of the out-of-body state may be presented in chart form as set out on the following pages. This chart is designed to contain all elements, positive or negative, recorded as common to the out-of-body experience. It is, therefore, in no way intended to represent any ideal or even average experience.

1. Ibid., p. 8.
2. Ibid., pp. 9-10.

ELEMENTS OF THE OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE	
MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATE AT TIME OF EXPERIENCE	<p>Full sleep</p> <p>Between sleeping & waking</p> <p>Repose in state of fatigue</p> <p>Normal health (78.4%)</p> <p>Minor illness/injury (21.2%)</p> <p>Significant illness/injury (0.4%)</p>
TRANSPORT INTO STATE:	<p>Vibration or buzzing in ears</p> <p>Sensation of being drawn down a long, dark tunnel</p> <p>Temporary blackout or loss of consciousness</p> <p>Sensation of rising out of physical body</p> <p>Sensation of "replica" or "double" forming above physical body</p>
EXPERIENCES ENCOUNTERED ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED	<p>"The Review" of life</p> <p>"Seeing" physical body from location outside it</p> <p>Awareness that consciousness is located in spirit-like "replica" or "double" of physical body</p> <p>Awareness of a silver cord linking the physical body and its spirit-like "replica"</p> <p>Awareness that time, space and physical objects present no impediments to the "replica"</p>

	<p>Sensation of travelling as if flying</p> <p>Being attendant upon and witness to events occurring within the world of the living, but at considerable distance from the physical body</p> <p>Disrupting or intervening in environment in such a way as to make presence known</p> <p>Clouded perceptions, as though enshrouded by dense fog or mist</p> <p>Feeling of confusion or bewilderment</p> <p>Awareness of other entities perceived to be "hinderers"</p> <p>Ripping or hissing sensation as aqueous conditions disappear and clear surroundings entered</p> <p>Clear, bright surroundings</p> <p>Clear perceptions of sense and lucid thought</p> <p>Awareness of other entities perceived to be "helpers"</p> <p>Awareness of friends or relatives known to be physically dead</p> <p>Awareness of friends or relatives known to be living</p> <p>State of ecstasy analogous to that experienced in sexual encounters</p>
THE RETURN:	<p>From cloudy, mist-like state, triggered by disruption in environment of physical body</p>

	<p>From clear, lucid state, . . . triggered by emotional need</p> <p>Triggered by ecstatic encounter with another entity</p> <p>Sensation of being drawn back by silver cord</p> <p>Repercussion as "replica" re- enters and merges with body</p>
EFFECT OF THE EXPERIENCE UPON RESUMPTION OF NORMAL LIFE:	<p><u>Belief</u> in a world beyond transformed into <u>knowledge</u> of world beyond in which "replica" can and will survive without the physical body.</p>

CHAPTER IV

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

Mystical experiences tend to occur during waking moments of internal solitude and out-of-body experiences are most commonly reported to transpire during sleep, whereas the near- or clinical-death experience is normally undergone while the individual is, objectively speaking, in a state of unconsciousness. The individual who undergoes a mystical or out-of-body experience usually does so in a state of good health. The person who enters a near- or clinical-death experience is usually in a state of medical crisis which may be the result of anything from a heart attack to serious shock-trauma injuries suffered in a traffic accident. Of these three disparate states of altered consciousness, the near- or clinical-death experience is clearly that in which the individual is most directly exposed to the possibility of physical death.

The very fact that the near-death experience is most commonly associated with profound medical crisis has led to

some speculation as to the role drugs, anoxia (lack of oxygen in the brain), anesthetics or disturbances in temporal lobe function might play in the process. Appealing as such explanations initially appear to be (they offer, after all, a physiological basis for the phenomenon), they have been systematically eliminated as contributing factors in the near-death experience. Inspired by his own work with dying patients in the 1950's, Karlis Osis conducted a survey in which 10,000 medical staff, including 2,000 general practitioners, 1,000 interns, 1,000 residents, 2,500 general duty nurses and 2,500 private duty nurses were asked to respond to a questionnaire which focussed on the percentage and content of the experiences of dying patients who remained conscious into the final hour preceding death. Although only 640 of the questionnaires were returned, the results provided data respecting 35,540 patients.¹ The results of which were published in 1961, Osis determined that the presence of drugs in the dying actually appeared to inhibit the occurrence of a near-death experience. From this same body of data, Osis further concluded that high body temperature, a variable often associated with hallucinations, was also counter-indicated as a contributing factor

1. Karlis Osis, Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses, pp. 18-20.

in the near-death experience.¹ Sixteen years later, in collaboration with E. Haraldsson, Osis presented additional data which indicated that anoxia, like drugs and body temperature, was a factor which tended to inhibit rather than enhance the likelihood of undergoing a near-death experience. However, their most startling discovery lay in the observation that certain key aspects of the visionary experience were reported among terminal patients who were in a state of normal waking consciousness at the time of the experience. In particular, these individuals often reported seeing dead friends or relatives waiting to receive them when they died. Osis and others had already referred to such reported experiences as "Peak-in-Darien events."² During these events, the patients were reported to be calm and exhibiting lucid thought patterns. In several of these

1. Ibid., p. 26.

2. Ibid., pp. 16-17. On page 16, Osis offered the following explanation of the origin and use of the term. "Miss F.P. Cobbe originated the idea of 'Peak in Darien' cases, later emphasized by Hyslop, Barrett and Hart. This concept is based upon the belief that the spirits of dead relatives come to aid the dying and 'take them away to another world.' According to this view, the dying patients 'see' the spirits as apparitions in their sickrooms. These patients are not delirious, so the apparitions cannot be explained in this way. The 'Peak in Darien' explanation implies that dying persons 'see' only the dead. This belief that dead relatives come to take dying patients away is quite widespread and some patients may expect such an eventuality."

well-documented experiences, the dead relatives reported to appear to the dying person were presumed by friends or relatives at the deathbed to be living. Upon investigation, however, it was discovered that anyone whom the dying reported seeing were indeed dead at the time of the vision.¹

Kubler-Ross has recently added her own research finding to the growing list. In one of her cases, in which the victims of a multiple-casualty traffic accident were taken to different hospitals, one young boy reported that "Mommy and Peter are already waiting for me."² The last official report Kubler-Ross and other medical staff had received was that the boy's mother had in fact died, but Peter was alive and being treated in the burn unit of another hospital. According to Kubler-Ross,

Since I was only collecting data, I accepted the boy's information and determined to look in on Peter. It was not necessary, however, because as I passed the nursing station there was a call from the other hospital to inform me that Peter had died a few minutes earlier.³

Incidents such as these serve to indicate that even though the individual is involved in the depths of medical crisis,

1. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

2. Kubler-Ross, On Children and Death, p. 210.

3. Ibid.

the contents of his experience can in no way be attributed to the side-effects of drugs, wishful thinking, hallucination, anoxia, or other brain dysfunction precipitated by the trauma or illness which brought on the crisis. Many researchers agree on this point, including Raymond Moody, M. B. Sabom and Kenneth Ring. Ring, however, added that while anesthetics, narcotics and antidepressants do not prevent near-death experiences, they clearly do not initiate them.¹

As for the subjective experience of the near-death encounter, Kubler-Ross echoed the description of a typical near-death experience provided earlier by Raymond Moody. As a medical practitioner integrally involved in the care and treatment of the dying, Kubler-Ross drew her assessment of the significance of the experiences from patients resuscitated from the depths of medical crisis.

The common denominator of these out-of-body experiences is that these people were totally aware of leaving their physical body. There was a rush of air or wind, and they found themselves somewhere in the vicinity of where they were originally struck down: the scene of an accident, a hospital emergency room or operating room, at home in their own bed, or even at their place of work. They felt neither pain nor anxiety. They described the scene of the accident in minute detail, including the arrival of people who had tried to rescue them from a car or who tried to put out a fire, and the arrival of an ambulance. Yes, they described

1. Ring, Op. Cit., p. 292.

accurately even the number of blowtorches used to extricate their mangled body [sic] from the wrecked car.

They often described the very desperate efforts the medical team made during a resuscitation to bring them back and their own attempts to convey that they were really OK, so the would-be rescuers could cease all efforts. They then began to realize that they could perceive everything, but the others present could not hear or perceive them.

The second awareness they shared in these experiences was the fact that they were whole again: amputees had their legs again, those who were in wheelchairs could dance and move around without any effort, and blind people could see. We naturally checked these facts out by testing patients who had been blind with no light perception for years. To our amazement, they were able to describe the color and design of clothing and jewelry the people present wore. I am sure no scientist could call this a projection. When asked how they could see, people described it with similar words: "It is like you see when you dream and you have your eyes closed."

The third event they shared was an awareness of the presence of loving beings, who always included next of kin who had preceded them in death. There was always a beloved grandmother waiting for a little girl, or a special uncle who had died ten months earlier, or a classmate who was accidentally shot almost two years prior to the critical illness of his friend.¹

The sheer accumulation of reports of such experiences demands careful analysis of the material both in terms of its potential relationship to other forms of out-of-body experience and its highly suggestive intimation of the survival of the conscious component of the human being in the after-death state. In a preliminary breakdown of the -----

1. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Op. Cit., pp. 207-208.

constituent parts of the experience, Raymond Moody, in Life After Life, listed fourteen discrete elements:

1. Ineffability,
2. Hearing the news,
3. Feelings of peace and quiet,
4. The noise,
5. The dark tunnel,
6. Out of the body,
7. Meeting others,
8. The being of light,
9. The review,
10. The border or limit,
11. Coming back,
12. Telling others
13. Effects on lives,
14. New views on death.¹

In addition to examples of each of these elements, he provided a section on corroboration in which events purportedly witnessed by the near-death experiencer in the operating room or at the accident scene were verified by other participants in the event. When Moody published his second book, Reflections on Life After Life, he added four more elements to his original list.

15. The vision of knowledge,
16. Cities of Light,
17. A realm of bewildered₂ spirits,
18. Supernatural rescues.²

Among those who report near-death experiences, only a few

1. Raymond Moody, Life After Life, 1975, (Table of Contents).

2. Raymond Moody, Reflections on Life After Life, [1977] 1983, (Table of Contents).

per thousand offer descriptions which contain all elements. Most who tell of their experience report having encountered from eight to twelve of the elements, and although many experiences were similar, no two were identical.¹

In 1980 Kenneth Ring published a much more detailed analysis of the content of near- and clinical-death experiences in his book Life at Death. Some categories of experience were identical to those set out by Moody. "Ineffability of experience," for example, was the same. Other categories, such as the "subjective sense of dying" or the "subjective sense of being dead," were new. Moody certainly acknowledged the sense of death or dying, but he did not treat it as a single element in his list.² However, Moody did include the perception of many patients in which they hear medical staff declare them to be dead or perilously close to it. Some patients even report having watched the medical team at work, knowing even as they watched that they were themselves very near death or already in a state of clinical death. This element Moody called "hearing the

1. Raymond Moody, The Light Beyond, p. 7, and Moody, Op. Cit., Life After Life, p. 23.

2. Moody, Ibid., p. 29. Here, one of Moody's informants reported: "I remember thinking, 'I must be dead'."

news."¹ Ring, too, reported such perceptions among the resuscitated, but rather than including them as a discrete unit of experience in his list of elements, he incorporated them in his narrative discussion of the sense of bodily separation.²

Ring's list is analytically more useful for comparative purposes than Moody's, especially in such areas as "feelings and sensations at time of near-death experience." Under this category he lists twenty-one separate feelings.

1. Peacefulness,
2. Calmness,
3. Quiet,
4. Serenity,
5. Lightness,
6. Warmth,
7. Pleasantness,
8. Happiness,
9. Joy, exaltation,
10. Painlessness,
11. Relief,
12. No fear,
13. Relaxation,
14. Resignation,
15. Curiosity
16. Anxiety,
17. Fear,
18. Anger,

1. Ibid., pp. 26-28.

2. Kenneth Ring, Op. Cit., 1980, pp. 47ff.

19. Dread,
20. Despair,¹
21. Anguish.¹

Ring's list of elements not only acknowledges the negative experiences many researchers prefer to ignore altogether, but actually accommodates them within the larger scheme. Ring creates more categories than Moody, with some exceptions. Moody's "city of lights," for example, is but one of thirteen "features of location" for Ring.

Although the highly subjective nature of the experience apparently leads to difficulty in making clear distinctions between closely related categories, what is most obvious in its absence from both lists is the category of "love". This is a surprising omission given the extensive consideration of the feelings of love which many informants report as transcending anything they had ever experienced in their normal, waking lives. While Moody, Ring, and many other near-death researchers describe the all-encompassing, non-judgmental quality of this rapt love, Kubler-Ross has perhaps given us the best definition in stating that it is "unconditional love" -- a love which "has no claims, no expectations, needs not even a physical presence."²

1. Ibid., pp. 275-276.

2. Kubler-Ross, Op. Cit., p. 9.

Although the category of love would appear to be an obvious and essential element in any description of the near-death experience per se, its highly subjective nature underscores the difficulty one faces in attempting to reduce a whole range of subjective experiences to list form, in which fine distinctions must be made between equally subjective constituent elements for the purposes of analysis and comparison. This is especially true when, as Moody has noted, one can expect only a limited number of the elements to occur in each unique near-death experience. Nevertheless, such an assay is mandatory for the creation of an adequate basis for comparison with mystical, out-of-body, and full-death experiences. Both Moody and Ring have made an important initial contribution in this regard, and their work provides a sound foundation upon which to build.

The fact that Ring recognized both the possibility and need for future work is clearly indicated in the questionnaire he prepared for the ongoing collection of data. Within many of the categories he arranged in list form he incorporated several "blanks" for use in recording novel or anomalous details of the near-death experience. To this extent, Ring's categorization of elements was no mere list, but rather a research tool, and was included in this form in Appendix III of his book as follows:

<u>CHARACTERISTICS</u>	<u>RATING</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>
A. Ineffability of experience		
B. Subjective sense of dying		
C. Subjective sense of being dead		
D. Feeling and sensations at time of near-death experience 1. Peacefulness 2. Calmness 3. Quiet 4. Serenity 5. Lightness 6. Warmth 7. Pleasantness 8. Happiness 9. Joy, exaltation 10. Painlessness 11. Relief 12. No fear 13. Relaxation 14. Resignation 15. Curiosity 16. Anxiety 17. Fear 18. Anger 19. Dread 20. Despair 21. Anguish 22. 23. 24. 25. 1		
E. Unusual noise(s); if +, describe		

1. Ring has added space here to accommodate any elements which may be discovered in the future.

<u>CHARACTERISTICS</u>	<u>RATING</u>	<u>COMENTS</u>
<p>F. Sense of movement, location</p> <p>1. Quality of movement, experience</p> <p>a. Walking</p> <p>b. Running</p> <p>c. Floating</p> <p>d. Flying</p> <p>e. Movement w/o body</p> <p>f. Dreamlike</p> <p>g. Echoic</p> <p>h.</p> <p>i.</p> <p>2. Feelings on moving</p> <p>a. Peaceful</p> <p>b. Exhilarating</p> <p>c. Struggling</p> <p>d. Fearful</p> <p>e. Panicky</p> <p>f.</p> <p>g.</p> <p>3. Sensed features of location</p> <p>a. Dark Void</p> <p>b. Tunnel</p> <p>c. Path, road</p> <p>d. Garden</p> <p>e. Valley</p> <p>f. Meadow</p> <p>g. Fields</p> <p>h. City</p> <p>i. Illumination of scene</p> <p>j. Vivid colors</p> <p>k. Music</p> <p>l. Human figures</p> <p>m. Other beings</p> <p>n.</p> <p>o.</p> <p>p.</p>		

CHARACTERISTICS	RATING	COMMENTS
<p>G. Sense of bodily separation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Felt detached from body but did not see it. 2. Able to view body 3. Sense of time <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Undistorted b. No sense of time c. Timelessness d. 4. Sense of space <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Undistorted b. No sense of space c. Infinite, no boundaries d. 5. Feeling bodily weight <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ordinary bodily weight b. Light c. Weightlessness d. No sense of body e. 6. Sense of loneliness 		
<p>H. Presence of others</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deceased relative(s); if +, specify 2. Deceased friend 3. Guide, voice 4. Jesus 5. God, the Lord, a higher power, etc. 6. Angels 7. Evil spirits, devil, etc. 8. Living person(s); if +, specify 		

CHARACTERISTICS	RATING	COMMENTS
I. Light, illumination 1. Color(s) 2. Hurt eyes?		
J. Life flashbacks 1. Complete 2. Highpoints 3. Other (specify) 4. Sense of sequence		
K. Threshold effect		
L. Feelings upon recovery 1. Not relevant 2. Anger 3. Resentment 4. Disappointment 5. Shock 6. Pain 7. Relief 8. Peace 9. Happiness 10. Gladness 11. Joy 12. 13.		
M. Changes 1. Attitude toward life a. Increased appreciation b. More caring, loving c. Renewed sense of purpose d. Fear, feeling of vulner- abililty e. More interested, curious f.		

(Changes continued)

CHARACTERISTICS	RATING	COMMENTS
2. Religious beliefs/ attitudes a. Stronger b. Weaker c. Other (specify) 3. Fear of death a. Greater b. Lesser c. None		
N. Idea of Death 1. Annihilation 2. Body dies, soul survives 3. Transitional state 4. Continuance of life at another level 5. Merging with uni- versal conscious- ness 6. Reincarnation ideas 7. Peace 8. Bliss 9. A beautiful experience 10. A journey 11. No idea 12. Nothing, nothingness 13. 14.		1

While Ring's working list is certainly comprehensive, it does in certain instances indicate the difficulty of establishing clear distinctions between the various elements of the near-death experience. For example, in Section H.,

1. Ibid., pp. 275-279.

"the presence of others," he includes the living as well as the dead. Although the framing of the questionnaire in this way indicates that Ring was quite objective in his technique of data-collection, the juxtaposition of the questions might lead the reader to infer that the individual undergoing a near-death experience might expect to encounter either those he knows to be deceased or those he knows to be living, all within the same context. But this is not the case, as Ring clearly stipulates in the body of his text. The "spirits" of dead loved ones are typically both seen and recognized in the immediate environment in which the near-death experienter finds himself. Any awareness of the living, on the other hand, occurs strictly in the spatial context of a "pull" from behind them. This often involves what the near-death experienter understands to be a conscious attempt on the part of the living to call him back into the land of the living. It may be "heard" by the experienter as a plea or prayer originating with a loved one.¹ This may appear to be a very fine distinction, but it is nevertheless important to distinguish the two experiences clearly to avoid making the erroneous assumption that the "replicas" of the living encountered in the out-of-body experience and the awareness

1. Ibid.

of the living in the near-death experience are either qualitatively the same, or engage the dying person in the same type of relationship.

It must be remembered that Ring's list was prepared primarily for the purpose of collecting further data on the near-death experience. It is also evident that each attempt at categorization involves an element of subjective interpretation. The following list uses the categories already established in Chapter II. For the sake of clarity, it divides the "Experiences" category into positive and negative subcategories.

ELEMENTS OF THE NEAR-DEATH-EXPERIENCE	
MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATE AT TIME OF EXPERIENCE	Life-threatening illness/injury
TRANSPORT INTO STATE	Audible "noise" (uncommon) Silence Sense of anxiety or dread (uncommon) Sense of peace and wellbeing Sensation of being drawn down a long, dark tunnel Temporary blackout or loss of consciousness Perception that they themselves are either dead or dying

(Transport into State continued)

	<p>Hearing themselves declared to be dead by attendant physican or other witness of event</p> <p>Total cessation of pain or discomfort while retaining consciousness awareness of self</p>
<p>EXPERIENCES ENCOUNTERED ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED</p>	<p><u>POSITIVE</u></p> <p>Sense perceptions clear and thought processes clear</p> <p>"See" physical body from location outside it</p> <p>Awareness that consciousness is located outside of physical body</p> <p>No awareness of physical body</p> <p>Awareness of very light "spirit" body as center of consciousness</p> <p>Total lack of emotional concern for the physical body (in cases where it is "seen")</p> <p>Sense of warm, peaceful, comforting, intense darkness</p> <p>"Seeing the light" -- perception of a "magnetic" light which is dazzling but does not hurt the eyes</p> <p>Sense of being in another world of preternatural beauty, unearthly colours and landscapes</p>

(Experiences encountered once entry into state has been achieved, continued)

	<p>Feeling of a warm, powerful, and loving presence, often referred to as "a Being of light"</p> <p>Feeling of being <u>rapt</u> in an unconditional love which may or may not directly emanate from the Being of light .</p> <p>Sense of euphoria or ecstasy</p> <p>"Seeing" dead friends or relatives who are understood to be helpers</p> <p>Communication telepathic with those encountered</p> <p>"The Review" -- a vivid, instantaneous, and normally emotionally neutral flashback of life (experienced either spontaneously as one enters the near-death state or under the auspices of the Being of light)</p> <p>Sense of total understanding of the meaning of life</p> <p>Understand importance of <u>love</u> in physical life</p> <p>Understand importance of <u>knowledge</u> in physical life</p> <p>Awareness of a "boundary," the crossing of which precludes a return to physical life.</p>
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(Experiences encountered once entry into state has been achieved, continued)

	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>NEGATIVE</u></p> <p>Sense of stifling suffocation</p> <p>Intense fear and anxiety</p> <p>Feeling of confusion or disorientation</p> <p>Gloomy, misty surroundings</p> <p>Barren landscape</p> <p>Lifeless apparitions (often naked and staring blankly)</p> <p>Sense presence of overtly hostile beings -- "hinderers"</p> <p>Sense of danger and imminent threat of violence</p> <p>Sense of being in "Hell", reported in terms of either extreme heat <u>or</u> cold</p> <p>May shift from an initially negative experience to a positive one</p>
THE RETURN	<p>Sent back by friends, relatives or the Being of light</p> <p>"Sucked" back into body</p> <p>"Called" back by prayers of loved ones</p> <p>Feel reluctant to return, may even resist</p>

(The Return continued)

	<p>Awareness of "choice." Whether to return to physical life or to cross the boundary is a personal decision to make</p> <p>Return voluntarily out of sense of duty to complete "unfinished business" of life</p> <p>Instantaneous return of which experiencer has no conscious memory</p> <p>Return in state of fear and panic</p>
<p>EFFECT OF THE EXPERIENCE UPON RESUMPTION OF NORMAL LIFE</p>	<p><u>Belief</u> in a world beyond transformed into <u>knowledge</u> of world beyond in which consciousness will survive without the physical body</p> <p>Life becomes more precious because it is more <u>meaningful</u></p> <p>Approach life with a new sense of <u>purpose</u></p> <p>Acute awareness of the importance of <u>love</u> in life -- especially "unconditional love"</p> <p>Acute awareness of the importance of <u>knowledge</u> in life -- understanding that life is a <u>learning experience</u></p> <p>Despite new sense of purpose, approach life more calmly with fewer fears and worries</p> <p>Become more focussed on present -- living each moment to fullest</p>

(Effect of the experience upon resumption of normal life, continued)

	Fear of death gone (positive experience)
	Fear of death exacerbated (negative experience)
	<u>Know</u> that love and learning are eternal
	Death seen as a "graduation" or "homecoming"
	An enduring sense of timelessness
	View physical reality in more detached manner -- see <u>through</u> events and problems
	Decreased emphasis on money and material possessions
	Become more tolerant, less judgmental
	Heightened appreciation of life, of nature and of other people
	Become more "religious" in a spiritual sense, not an institutional one.
	Become more intuitive or psychic
	Tendency to "love" all life equally, which may translate into problems with personal relationships
	Lack of sensitivity for the normal anxieties of life expressed by those who have <u>not</u> had a near-death experience

Perhaps, because of the sheer number of elements and their complexity in the near-death experience, certain components have often been treated as substantive co-equals. The sense of warmth and love experienced in the presence of the Being of Light, for example, is often assumed to be the mere converse of the sense of anxiety or fear experienced in the presence of bewildered spirits. A careful reading of the literature, however, indicates one clear, substantive difference. The warmth and love of the Being of light is invariably described as an all-encompassing one in which the individual becomes subjectively rapt. The confusion of the bewildered spirits, on the other hand, is regarded with what may best be described as objective horror. In the first instance, the individual is involved in the experience as an integral part of it. In the second instance, he witnesses the content of the experience objectively: he is repelled by it without being drawn into it.

The memory of negative events is also substantively different from the memory of positive ones. Negative experiences, terrifying as they may be in the passing, appear to be more fleeting in terms of retention. More than a matter of poor memory, Maurice Rawlings has suggested that repression alone may account for the comparatively few accounts of negative experiences contained in the literature. In his estimation, this certainly seemed to be so in the case of his

own cardiac patient already described in Chapter II of this thesis. To briefly rehearse, this is the patient who underwent "three or four episodes of complete unconsciousness and clinical death from cessation of both heartbeat and breathing." Between each period of unconsciousness, the patient frantically declared that he was "in hell" and pleaded for Rawlings to help him. The very fact that he demanded his physician continue with the attempted resuscitation was anomalous, for most patients demand that he stop as soon as they are able to utter the word. Yet each time this particular patient lost consciousness and regained it, he reported having slipped into a state he clearly perceived to be "Hell," and was prepared to endure extreme physical pain in order to escape from it. Surely, this would be not only a memorable event, but a very disturbing one. For these reasons, Rawlings was determined to pursue the matter with his patient. After a brief discussion, he wrote:

A couple of days later, I approached my patient with pad and pencil in hand for an interview. At his bedside I asked him to recall what he actually saw in hell.

He said, "What hell? I don't recall any hell." I recounted all of the details he had described two days earlier while he was on the floor next to the treadmill machine being resuscitated. He could recall none of the unpleasant events! Apparently, the experiences were so frightening, so horrible, so painful that his conscious mind could not cope with them and they were subsequent-

ly suppressed far into his subconscious.¹

Many serious students of the near-death experience dismiss Rawlings' work out of hand, given that his book is clearly a vehicle of proselytization for his own fundamentalist Christianity. After commenting that this bias seriously vitiates Rawlings' work, Ring added:

. . . I do not think it is legitimate to dismiss all his case history material. Indeed, I am myself persuaded there is something to Rawlings' contention, even though I am equally convinced that he has probably exaggerated its magnitude.

If we admit that hellish near-death experiences may occur, even if they are not frequent, we obviously need to account for such a possibility in our theoretical interpretation of near-death phenomena.²

The need to account for such reports is perhaps heightened by Rawlings' frank observation that those who experience such horrifying events are in behaviour and lifestyle not obviously morally worse than those who report comparatively pleasant experiences.

Ring's own evaluation of the significance of hellish elements revolves around the panoramic life review reported by many who claim to have experienced the near-death state. He noted that the literature gives clear indication that any

1. Ibid.

2. Ring, Op. Cit., p. 195.

sense of being "judged" for one's actions as one sees his life flash before his eyes is strictly self-judgment. He suggests, in essence, that guilt and the expectation of punishment may lead the individual to judge himself more harshly than any objective, sentient being would. Still, these accounts of hellish experiences demand yet further consideration and explication.

As indicated in the list, there is a wide variation in accounts of the perceived return to the physical body. One may choose to do so in his own right, be directed to return by an external agent, or return spontaneously with no idea of how or why he did so. However the individual returns, he often expresses an offending lack of appreciation for the efforts of those who have resuscitated him. As one of Moody's informants recounted, "After I came back, I cried off and on for about a week because I had to live in this world after seeing that one. I didn't want to come back."¹ In these cases, the renewed sense of purpose often reported may take time to develop.

With specific reference to such after-effects as a new sense of purpose and appreciation of life, the most positive construction is placed upon them by most researchers. Only

1. Moody, Life After Life, Op. Cit., p. 84.

a rare few, such as P.M.H. Atwater, contemplate and comment upon the negative residue. However, in Atwater's treatment of the subject, a strange irony emerges. The all-encompassing, unconditional love experienced by the individual in the near-death state leads him to be more tolerant, more loving, and less judgmental in dealing with others. The subject tends to love all people and all nature in ways which can offend those with whom he has had a bond of special intimacy prior to his experience. Spouses and children of the near-death experiencer often find this newfound, expansive love for all manner of humanity -- often associated with what they perceive to be an undeserved charity -- as not a little disconcerting.

No matter how the near-death experience affects those it touches, there is clear evidence that it does provide the individual with a basis for reassessing both the meaning of life in general, and the purpose of his own life in particular. Yet perhaps the greatest impact of such an event lies in its apparent efficacy in bringing even the agnostic individual to a professed knowledge that his own consciousness will survive physical death. Within this context, the content of his experience is understood to represent the afterlife itself. It is surely no coincidence that many of the world's religions envision an intense, guiding light, toward which the soul migrates at death.

Near-death experiences rather than mere wishful thinking were probably an inspiration for the Ainus of Japan, for example, who send their dead on their way with assurances that the Goddess of Fire will guide them to the world of the gods where their ancestors already abide.¹

The data collected on near-death experience parallels that of the data collected on the full-death state which it is usually regarded as anticipating. The following chapter will examine the body of extant data on the full-death state upon which such a comparison can be based.

1. Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, p. 343.

CHAPTER V

FULL-DEATH EXPERIENCES: CROSSING THE RIVER STYX

In a an essay in which he contemplated the wisdom of suicide, Michel de Montaigne noted that nature "has ordered one door into life, but a hundred thousand ways out."¹ One may die a languishing death from a wasting disease in old age, or have his young, healthy life snuffed out instantly in a traffic accident. One may slip into death during a deep and peaceful sleep, or watch with throat-binding horror as a rifle aimed at his chest is discharged. One may even choose to end his own life by slashing his wrists, firing a gun at his own head, ingesting a lethal overdose of drugs, or hanging himself. Whatever events or conditions the process of dying involves, by the time putrefaction has set -----

1. Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, The Essays of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, translated by Charles Cotton and Edited by W. Carew Hazlitt for Great Books of the Western World, Volume 25, p. 167. In making this statement, Montaigne was alluding to a passage from Seneca, Phoen., i. I. page 151: "Death is everywhere: heaven has well provided for that. Any one may deprive us of life; no one can deprive us of death. To death there are a thousand avenues."

in, death is final. While events such as mystical, out-of-body or near-death experiences may be understood by those who have undergone them to have been journeys into a world beyond the temporal and spatial limits of physical life, these events are, in themselves, transitory. Full, physical death is not.

In the examination of mystical, out-of-body, or near-death experiences, the researcher can accumulate data from those who have undergone such events, then returned to a normal, waking state of consciousness in which they may communicate the content of their experience. In the examination of the experience of death itself, as many critics hasten to point out, the fully dead never return to tell us their tales. From an objective perspective, this is certainly true. One cannot simply phone the dead, invite them over for supper, and chat about their experiences while sipping tea or coffee beside the hearth. Yet throughout history there have been those among the living who insist the dead have indeed returned, however fleetingly, to be seen by, to be heard by, to communicate with, or aimlessly to haunt the living.

Within the scholarly community, such tales are most commonly interpreted and summarily dismissed as the simple products of wishful thinking, hallucination, or an

overactive imagination. Whatever the cause of events interpreted as "contact" with the dead, their prevalence alone continues to stir the curiosity of some. With reference to apparitions of the dead in particular, Ian Currie wrote:

People do not take such experiences lightly. They are intensely vivid experiences, unforgettable, shocking, even terrifying. And they have happened to literally millions of people. They have been repeatedly studied, in the 1890s, 1930s, 1940s, and 1970s. They are a human universal, a recurring theme in the literature and folklore of all societies, and all ages.¹

The fact that such experiences are universal does not in itself preclude them from being products of the human imagination. Certain other characteristics of such reported encounters with the dead would, however, make such an explanation unacceptable, and it is these which keep drawing a small number of serious researchers back to the topic. For example, it is a common assumption that apparitions of the dead must be faint and transparent. Yet, as Currie and others have noted, not all accounts describe apparitions as mere glimpses of wispy insubstantiality. The apparition in the following report was anything but the cliché of a "ghost."

When I was about fifteen, I [visited] Dr. G. [in England] and . . . formed a friendship with [his] cousin, a boy of 17 [named Bertie]. We

1. Ian Currie, You Cannot Die, p. 17.

became inseparable One night Dr. G. was sent for to see [Bertie], who had been taken suddenly very ill with inflammation of the lungs, and the poor boy died the next night. They did not tell me how ill he was, so I was quite unaware of his danger. . . . The night he died, [I was] alone in the drawing room . . . reading by fire-light . . . when . . . Bertie . . . walked in. I jumped up to get him an arm-chair by the fire, as he looked cold, and he had no greatcoat on, and it was snowing. I began to scold him for coming out without his wraps. He did not speak but put up his hand to his chest and shook his head, which I mistook to mean his cold was on his chest, and that he had lost his voice, to which he was subject. So I reproached him again for his imprudence [He] walked across the room to the opposite side of the fireplace, and sat down . . . I purposely did not ask him any questions on account of his apparent inability to talk, and I myself went on speaking in order to give him time to regain [his] breath, which, on account of his delicate chest, often occurred There was nothing in his appearance that struck me as different from usual, except his paleness and silence Dr. G. came in and asked to whom I was speaking. I said, "There's that tiresome boy without his coat, and such a bad cold he can't speak; lend him a coat and send him home."¹

But the doctor could not send the boy home, for as Currie explained, the child had been dead for half an hour already. The most surprising part of this experience, however, in Currie's assessment of it, lay in the fact that "his

1. Ibid., pp. 12-13. Currie quoted this passage from Edmund Gurney, F. W. H. Myers and Frank Podmore, Phantasms of the Living, Volume 1, (London: Trubner and Co., 1886), pp. 532=534.

apparition was so utterly lifelike that his friend spoke to him for five minutes without realizing that he was not alive."¹

Cases in which more than one person independently witness an apparition raise further problems for the wish-fulfillment theory which postulates that intense desire to communicate once more with a dead loved one might generate an hallucination. Yet, as Currie succinctly noted, "although such cases are rare, they are important precisely because they cannot be hallucinations."² Hallucinations are strictly private events, which by definition, cannot be shared. The following multiple-observer case, originally reported in Proceedings for the Society for Psychical Research, was quoted by Currie. It involved a terminally ill patient, Harriet Pearson, and three relatives who were caring for her:

Harriet . . . slept in a large three-windowed bedroom over the drawing-room. The room behind was occupied by Mrs. Coppinger and myself On the night of December 22nd . . . Mrs. John Pearson was in [Harriet's] room, Mrs. Coppinger and myself in the back room; the house lighted up on the landings and staircases, our door wide open.

About 1 or 2 a.m. on the morning of December

1. Ibid., p. 13.
2. Ibid., p. 119.

watching every sound from the next room.

We saw someone pass the door, short, wrapped up in an old shawl, a wig with three curls each side and an old black cap. Mrs. Coppinger called out, "Emma, get up, it is . . . Aunt Ann [Harriet's dead sister]. I said, "So it is." We jumped up and Mrs. John Pearson came rushing out of the room and said, "That was . . . Aunt Ann. Where is she gone to?"¹

According to Currie, "Harriet Pearson died at 6 p.m. that day, but before she did, she too said that she had seen her dead sister, who had come for her."² In addition to the synchronic, multiple-observer cases, are a host of diachronic cases in which the same apparition will be seen and reported over a long period of time by individuals who know nothing of previous accounts of such apparent "hauntings".

In the Pearson case, the relative seen by the dying person was, in fact, known by all involved to be dead. But there are also peak-in-Darien cases among those about to enter full death. As mentioned in the foregoing chapter, the peak-in-Darien event is unusual in that the perceived

1. Ibid., p. 120. Originally presented in Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, Volume 6, p. 20.

2. Ibid.

apparition is that of someone who is not known to be dead.¹ In yet another permutation of the peak-in-Darien event, apparitions of the dead may appear to a normal, healthy, living individual who has no knowledge of the death of his perceived visitor. An example of this experience was recorded by F. W. H. Myers:

In June, 1879, I was a teacher in Macclesfield. A friend, Mrs. _____, was near her confinement. She told me she was afraid she would die. I went into the county of Durham for a holiday. While there I was roused from sleep by Mrs. _____ as I supposed. She was shaking me, and saying, "I have passed away, but the baby will live." Then the figure left the room by the door. I got out of bed and went to my sister and related the incident. We agreed to make a note of it. Next day I received a letter from a friend in Macclesfield saying that Mrs. _____ was dead but the baby was alive.²

Other cases have been reported in which patients, even those who have slipped into a state of unconsciousness, will become temporarily lucid, stare up as though seeing an

1. Ibid., p. 122. While Karlis Osis attributed the use of the term peak in Darien directly to a Miss F. B. Cobbe, Currie attributes it to John Keats who used it in his poem "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." The significance of the expression lies in the idea it conveys of the awestruck amazement one experiences upon making an important discovery.

2. F. W. H. Myers, Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death, p. 227.

apparition, then slip into death with the facial expression of one in a state of heightened euphoria.¹

Apparitions, however, constitute but one part of the corpus of data concerned with the post-death experience. Verbal communication transmitted via the agency of living mediums is another. The problem of relying upon verbal communications produced through the mouths of mediums and purported to be from the dead lies in three separate concerns. First, the material is fraught with many contradictions. Second, when there are similarities rather than contradictions, the material may be "dismissed as due to the 'fact' that the 'sub-conscious minds' of mediums, psychics or sensitives tend to think in the same way," and are therefore likely to produce similar data.² Then, of course, when the limits of the sub-conscious have been reached, there is always the spectre of more conscious input in the form of "collusion". This theory, in its extreme form, seems to smack of a worldwide "conspiracy" within which mediums and sensitives from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds share and standardize the contents of their trance sessions. Third, the content of many communications is dismissed as -----

1. Currie, Op. Cit., pp. 113-114.

2. Robert Crookall, The Supreme Adventure, pp. 4-5.

aimless nonsense by those who seek to explore it. Yet as Crookall emphatically indicated in The Supreme Adventure, the problem here may not lie with the communicator at all, but rather with his audience if that audience approaches the subject with skepticism, or is intent on asking him nonsensical questions.¹ After examining a vast compendium of data retrieved by allowing the purported dead to speak for themselves, he concluded:

When, instead of demanding that supposed communicators prove their reality by "telling us something we don't know", "something about God", "new scientific facts", etc. -- we make an unbiased study of what they do say that they experienced (at, and soon after, death) their narratives are seen to be highly significant, since they exhibit "internal consistency" to a quite remarkable degree.²

Clearly, the determination of what data to accept and what to reject in this highly speculative area of endeavor were critical factors for Crookall. Not only did he have to eliminate any data stemming from those about whom the suspicion of chicanery hung, but also from any of the trivial tea-party seances. Given that his own concern was with the post-death state, particularly that of the period

1. Ibid., p. 8.

2. Ibid.

immediately following death, and that each purported communicator would, or theoretically should, have experience of such a state, he chose to focus on that single, defined category of experience. Beyond eliminating the fraudulent and the frivolous, he thus restricted his scope to one area upon which he could focus and upon which all communicators could comment. Working on the assumption that most communicators, like most living individuals, would be of both average intelligence and average moral character, he embarked upon a study of what he anticipated would be the average death experience. He hypothesized that the manner of death might be a significant variable. This factor would clearly vary along the continuum that can be drawn between what he called "natural" death (which typically occurs in old age), and "enforced" death(which typically occurs in the prime of life as in the case of a young soldier killed by enemy fire). In thus limiting his scope and defining his categories, Crookall created for himself a "sieve" through which vast quantities of data could be passed to fall into significant and coherent patterns of experience. Only in this fashion, Crookall felt, could he bypass the "deadlock"

or "stalemate" invariably encountered in the search for direct evidence of survival after death.¹

From within Crookall's theoretical framework, the data at hand could be sorted into several categories which provide both the only comprehensive analysis and systematic synthesis of such material to date. Much of the following analysis is, therefore, based on Crookall's work, especially as it appeared in The Supreme Adventure (1961).

Crookall determined that in the course of a natural death the first event to be experienced by the dying individual is a self-generated "call". This "call" which is apparently intended to attract the attention of loved ones to bring them to the assistance of the person in transition may be deliberate and conscious or instinctive and subconscious. According to one communicator,

In this land we are much more sensitive than whilst on earth and when thoughts are directed to us by mortals we have a direct call . . . and we are practically always able to come in close contact with the person who is thinking of us.²

After reviewing many such reports, Crookall concluded:

1. Ibid. p. 9.

2. Ibid., p. 11.

As a man, having attained a ripe old age, approaches death, his thoughts go out instinctively, if not consciously, to friends who have 'gone before'. The latter receive such thoughts telepathically: to them they represent a 'Call' they 'come' to aid, welcome and instruct him. The stronger the affection between the 'living' and the 'dead', the stronger is this 'Call'. Other features, besides our thoughts, warn our discarnate friends of an impending 'passing'. (Apart from any specific 'Call', all who die are 'met' by someone.)¹

Among the other phenomena which may signal a passing in the absence of an actual call, is the reputed growing luminosity of a soul in transition which can act as a beacon to attract helpers. Failure on the part of a person dying a normal death to send an explicit call is usually attributed to his own self-centered personality. A fixed idea that there is no afterlife may also result in no call being sent. But communicators indicate that even these individuals, as their passing is noticed, will be met. In this case, however, it is reported that rather than being met by friends and relatives, these individuals are met by "deliverers" -- "certain discarnate helpers who voluntarily undertake such services and are specially trained in such duties."²

1. Ibid., p. 59.

2. Ibid.

The second experience or event reportedly encountered by the dying person is a "review" of his past life. According to one communicator, "I saw clearer and clearer the events of my past life pass, in a long procession, before me" Another described it as "a film shown backwards."¹ Although some communicators refer to the sense of reliving all the joys and sorrows of life within the context of one present memory, most indicate that there is no emotional reaction at all. In the words of one communicator, "I reviewed it as though I had no responsibility for it."² In the third experience, the dying sense themselves shedding the physical body. This perception may be accompanied with a sensation either of sinking away from the body, or of rising and floating away from it. Describing his own experience, one communicator said:

I saw about me those that had been dead for a long time Then I seemed to rise up out of my body and come down quietly on the floor There seemed to be two of me, one on the bed and one beside the bed My pain was gone.

1. Ibid., p. 12.

2. Ibid., p. 13.

Some of those whom I recognised as persons who had died asked me to go . . . My next thought was that it was a dream . . . I was gently told what had happened.¹

For many communicators, the process experienced as the shedding of the physical body was accompanied by a momentary coma or blackout. In these cases there is a concomitant sensation of passing through a tunnel, doorway, or other passageway. According to one communicator, part of the duty of a deliverer is "to make this passage through the tunnel as happy as possible."²

With or without the sense of passing through a tunnel, the consciousness of the dying person is said by communicators to expand: "I am where I am, yet I am everywhere! I am a self that is far greater and vaster than what I thought and felt myself to be."³ Even with such an alteration in consciousness, communicators often insist that the newly dead have no notion of the fact that they are dead, and may

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., pp. 15-16. Originally from Anon., Talks with Spirit Friends Bench and Bar, Watkins, 1939, p. 79.

3. Ibid., p. 17. Original in W. T. Pole, Private Dowding, Watkins, 1917, p. 107.

acquire this knowledge only slowly as they are assisted by the discarnate souls around them.¹

Many communicators report having observed, both at their own death and at that of others, a non-physical "silver cord" linking the physical body to the emerging spiritual one. After passing through a brief period of unconsciousness, one communicator reported:

I came to consciousness with my new body resting parallel over my old one and about a yard away, immediately above it A cord from the solar plexus linked me to my old body. I remained floating and swaying, realising that I was still bound Then I saw that the cord had snapped. I was free, a new man in a new body. I was surrounded by all the dear ones . . . born again!"²

The most critical aspect of the silver umbilicus in the full death experience appears to be its severing. Once the cord has been broken, the process of dying becomes irrevocable, and death is achieved. When discussing the cord, communicators provide details of its structure never mentioned in connection with out-of-body experiences. In certain cases two cords are reported to form, one emerging from the head, the other from the solar plexus. When these two cords snap,

1. Ibid., p. 18.

2. Ibid., p. 19. Original in F. T. Robertson, Celestial Voices, H. M. Greaves Ltd., p. 265.

death occurs, but many other fine threads are said to connect the physical body to the newly emergent spiritual body. According to some communicators, breaking these remaining threads is a task assigned to the deliverers:

'A.L.E.H.' was promised, "I shall be able to free your spirit from the many tiny threads that bind it to the body Then you will be able to leave this cast-off garment and will not hang about it as so many do"1

This entire process can, according to most accounts, be consciously witnessed by the disengaging soul or spirit as it observes the physical body from a location several feet away. And all communicators agree that the process is entirely free of pain. In the words of F. Heslop, "The Act of dying is absolutely painless. The contortions frequently witnessed are purely muscular: the dying man does not feel them as pain"2 What apparently can be felt, however, is the sorrow or anguish of those who are bereaved by the passing of their loved ones. Whether the sorrow is expressed merely in casual thought or formal prayer, it would appear that the departed can be emotionally affected to the point of being unable temporarily, at least, to escape the

1. Ibid..

2. Ibid., p. 21. Quoted from F. Heslop, Life Worth Living, Charles Taylor, p. 26.

atmosphere of gloom and unhappiness generated by the grieving parties.¹

Once the cord has been severed, the newly dead are reported to enter a state analogous to sleep. Describing this state, Crookall wrote:

The nature of the sleep (i.e. whether it involves (a) complete unconsciousness, (b) a dream-state or (c) alternations of the two), and its duration, vary in accordance with several factors, including the following: (1) the natural degree of mental alertness and integration of dying persons, (2) their age at the time and (3) the amount of physical and mental suffering (and consequently exhaustion) undergone.²

Clearly, from this description, one could anticipate that those who died in extreme old age after a long and exhausting illness would tend to sleep longer than those who had died in younger years of a more acute condition. The average duration of this period of sleep, however, appears to be about three or four days.³ At either end of the continuum,

an above-average man who dies without exhausting illness, and whose wise friends replace selfish grief by quiet prayer, may have little or no

1. Ibid., p. 22.

2. Ibid., p. 33.

3. Ibid.

sleep, while a below-average man who dies under certain conditions may sleep for weeks or months of earth time.¹

The post-death condition referred to as sleep is not to be confused with what Crookall calls the "Hades" state. This state, while sharing certain qualities with the state of sleep, reputedly involves the individual in a murky or hazy environment in which his consciousness is dimmed as though enshrouded in a veil. For most who pass through this state it is of short duration, and is experienced only because they have been unwilling or unable to turn their attention away from the physical world.² The state of sleep, strictly speaking, involves only those who have suffered a severe illness with much pain and weakness. In the case of those in Hades conditions, their own determination to progress is said to be the catalyst for achieving a clearer consciousness and more palatable surroundings. The mechanism for recovery from the state of sleep was described by one communicator who reported on the progress of a recently deceased individual:

Only yesterday she got right away from her body
[although she had shed her Physical Body some days
before, 'only yesterday' had the 'silver cord' and

1. Ibid., p. 63.

2. Ibid. p. 34.

all the subsidiary 'threads' been 'loosed']. She will go on resting awhile, waking up and sleeping, gradually getting used to her new [Soul] body. It is rather strange getting used to a body which is very strong and well when you have had to treat yourself [in the Physical Body] very carefully for a long time.¹

The recovery to full, active consciousness implied in this passage, is, according to most accounts, preceded by a brief period of growing consciousness which Crookall calls "the awakening." According to most communicators, only a small portion of the newly dead, most notably those who have possessed quick, enquiring minds, find themselves immediately in an environment which can be described as one which is beautiful, clear, light, or brilliant and imbues the individual with a sense of peace, security, happiness, and freedom.² For the person of average intellect, there appears to be an intervening period in which he has a self-awareness, but has not yet learned to use his astral senses or to discriminate amongst the strange sights, sounds and feelings.³ In short, "The new senses have not yet begun to

1. Ibid., p. 35. From The Rev. C. Drayton Thomas, In the Dawn Beyond Death, Lectures Universal Ltd., p. 64.

2. Ibid., p. 22.

3. Ibid., p. 38. From A C. and F. H. Curtiss, Realms of the Living Dead, San Francisco, 1917, p. 167.

function."¹ Once the awakening is complete, however, the state of fully expanded consciousness is achieved. As one communicator noted:

I seemed to pass into a peaceful sleep I hear now that I must have slept for three or four days When I woke completely I felt so refreshed I knew I was not on earth, not only because of the long-lost people around me again, but because of the brilliancy of the atmosphere."²

The state to which the sleepers wake Crookall calls the "Paradise" state and describes it as a "glorified earth."³ It is while in this state of consciousness that communicators report experiencing earth-like environments, which include cities, landscapes, homes, flowers, and countless other features reminiscent of earth-life all illuminated by a brilliant light which caused the eyes no discomfort.

The most important event reported to follow the awakening and subsequent entry into paradise conditions, is the "judgment". Unlike the review, which tends to be instantaneous and generally void of any emotional content, the judgment is "essentially an emotional and a

1. Ibid. From Jan Sherwood, The Country Beyond, Rider & Co. Ltd., p. 26.

2. Ibid., p. 40. From The Rev. C. Crayton Thomas, In the Dawn Beyond Death, Lectures Universal, Ltd., p. 67.

3. Ibid., p. 48.

personally-responsible review of the past earth-life which, with average people who die natural deaths occurs within a few months (reckoned in our time) of 'passing'." ¹ In this process, one purportedly relives, so to speak, not only personally experienced joy and sorrow, but all the joy and sorrow each and every one of his actions has brought to others in his life. The effect of the judgment on the individual was described by one communicator as follows:

The judgment consists in being able to see ourselves as we are, and by no stretch of imagination being able to avoid seeing it. It is a Judgment of God on us [lesser selves] through our Higher Selves. On earth, even the best are subconsciously avoiding things, or trying to think things are slightly other than they are No other person could be so just a Judge as we ourselves can be when facing the truth. For many it is a terrible hour Directly one has realised how, where and why one was wrong, there is an instinctive feeling that one must work it out. And this way of recovery is in helping others who have exactly similar limitations, difficulties or vices. ²

The pain which can be associated with this process, which many communicators call the real judgment, was expressed by one communicator who admitted to living "a somewhat selfish life":

1. Ibid., p. 42.

2. Ibid., pp. 42-43. From The Rev. C. Drayton Thomas, Beyond Life's Sunset, Psychic Press Ltd., p. 48.

I have had the most disturbing experiences. I don't really know how I lived through them. One of the tasks set me was that of looking back. I have been shown the effects of all my acts upon other people's minds. Their thoughts were shown to me. It was the most humiliating and awful experience I have seen what is called 'the emotional reactions' to my own acts. . . . On the whole, I deserved what I got I am changed. I am a much softer person now."¹

There is apparently nothing to indicate that the judgment occurred in isolation from other forms of conscious activity, however. Just as one may suffer mental anguish and soul-searching in the midst of physical life's mundane tasks, so too it would appear from communicators that "the ordinary objective life goes on side by side with the Judgment."²

According to Crookall's research, the purpose of the judgment is to prepare the individual for the assignment which appears to constitute the final phase of adjustment to be experienced in the immediate post-death period. Once the judgment has made the individual more acutely aware of the existence and needs of others, he will be placed in or simply progress to the appropriate level of spiritual existence. He may, according to some communicators, join others

1. Ibid., p. 45. From E. B. Gibbes, Light, Volume LV, 1935, p. 100.

2. Ibid., p. 148.

of like mind or spirit to become a member of a "Group Soul."¹ This group, within which members share their wisdom and strength, may be on any one of approximately seven levels of spirituality indicated to exist in communications with the dead. Some may even opt to take on special duties, serving, for example, as deliverers to assist others make the transition. Other researchers speculate that the dead may, at this point, opt to reenter the physical world through the process of reincarnation in order to grow spiritually by means of compensating in a new life for any deficiencies in their former life revealed during the period of judgment.

While those who experience what Crookall calls an "enforced death" would appear ultimately to attain to the same end as those who experienced natural deaths, there are significant differences in the overall process which are worthy of consideration. For example, the "call" would appear to be absent altogether in the case of enforced death. As Crookall wrote: "Whereas reference to the 'Call' commonly occurs in connection with natural transitions, we have seen no case whatever in connection with soldiers who

1. Ibid.

were killed in battle, etc."¹ And, as Crookall further explained, it may be some time before the deliverers are alerted to the arrival of those killed suddenly:

In unexpected death in the prime of life there is no time to 'call' friends who have 'gone before' The double [i.e., one's spirit] is not increasing

in luminosity and discarnate friends may not know, for some time, of the 'passing' -- they may not come to the aid of a man who dies unexpectedly.²

To allay the impression that those who die an enforced death are doomed to an eternity of loneliness, Crookall added that helpers would eventually come to all, although the shock to the soul occasioned by violent death may leave the dead person unable to see them for a while even though the helpers are indeed there and waiting.³ For the present, only the actual experiences, as described by communicators, of those who have suffered enforced death will be treated. Speculation as to possible causes for these variations will be considered in Chapter VII.

Many who die enforced deaths share with some of those who die a natural death a total lack of comprehension that

1. Ibid., p. 11.

2. Ibid., p. 66.

3. Ibid.

they are dead. A soldier shot in battle at the bottom of a hill may charge up the hill with his comrades only to realise after the fact that he has left his physical body lying on the ground behind him. He may even spend time commiserating with others of his company who have likewise been felled as they each try to determine what has happened to them before any of them can be contacted by deliverers who have come to their assistance. This confusion, however, apparently in no way inhibits the review. The life of a man undergoing enforced death flashes as surely before his "eyes" as that of the man experiencing natural death.¹

The enforced death also shares with the natural death an apparent lack of any pain and only a temporary blackout, if any, in consciousness. In addition, Crookall notes that those who have experienced enforced death saw their own bodies, suffered from any undue grief on the part of their still-embodied friends, could not make mortals see or hear them, and often wondered at first if they were dreaming.² The effects of enforced death were captured in the words of one communicator who had died on a battle-field. After waking from a deep sleep (a temporary blackout),

1. Ibid. p. 12.

2. Ibid., p. 22.

Bewildered, I got to my feet, and, looking down, saw my body among many others on the ground. I remembered the battle, but did not realise I had been shot. I was apart from, yet I still seemed held in some way . . . to the body. My condition was one of terrible unrest; how was it that I was alive and had a body . . . and was not yet apart from the covering I had thought constituted my body? I moved about. Others of the seeming dead moved. Then many of them stood up and, like me, seemed to emerge from their Physical Bodies, for their old forms still lay upon the field. Soon I found myself among thousands in a similar mental state: none knew just what had happened. I did not know then, as I know now, that I always possessed a Spirit Body and that the Physical Body was only the garment it wore in earth-life. While the passing-out from this old body is without pain, it is a terrible thing to drive a strong spirit from a healthy body, to tear it from its covering. It is unnatural and the sensation following re-adjustment is awful. In a short time I became easier, but I was still bewildered. It was neither night nor day; about us all was gloom. Something like an atmosphere, dark and red, enveloped us all. We seemed to hear one another think. Soon there was a ray of light that grew brighter each moment and then a great concourse of men with kindly faces came and, with comforting words, told us not to fear -- that we had made the great change, that the war for us was over I will not tell you of the sorrow that came with such realisation, sorrow for the wife. Her great grief, when she learned what had happened, bound me to her condition. We sorrowed together. I could not progress . . . out of the dream-like 'Hades' into 'Paradise' . . . or find happiness, until time had healed her sorrow.¹

The temporary confusion at finding oneself in what appears to be a fantastic dream world inhabited by other equally

1. Ibid., pp. 22-23. From Edward C. Randall, Frontiers of the After Life, Alfred A. Knopf, 1922.

bewildered souls struggling to make sense of a state which lacks the familiar framework of time and space, is a common element of virtually all enforced death accounts. In the words of another communicator: "It seemed as if I were floating in a mist that muffled sound and blurred the vision. Everything was distant, misty, unreal."¹

According to many who have reputedly suffered enforced deaths, in the absence of an appropriate span of time being allowed for the soul or spirit body to emerge from the physical body, the silver cord has no opportunity to form. Speculating that a transfer of energy and memory may occur during the time the cord is intact in a normal transition, this appears to represent sudden, violent breakage between body and soul not experienced in natural death. One significant effect of this instantaneous rupture appears to be the total inhibition of sleep. Whereas the individual who dies a natural death most commonly refers to at least a brief period in which he sleeps, the individual who dies an enforced death cannot sleep at all.² Sleep for him comes only at the point at which the trauma caused by the cords' sudden severance has repaired itself. At that point, he finally

1. Ibid., p. 25.

2. Ibid., p. 66.

becomes aware of the helpers who can further assist him.¹
 Once this critical juncture has been passed, communicators indicate that "the newly dead man enters upon the normal sequence of after-death sequences" including the awakening, the judgment and the assignment.²

In the course of his investigations, Crookall found only one exception which appeared to stand outside the experience of both natural and enforced death. According to one communicator he cited,

With those who die by explosion, the Astral . . . Body, as well as the Physical Body, is shattered. It will take some time before the attractive power of the life-principle can draw the astral atoms round it and reconstruct the bodily form.³ During this period the soul remains unconscious.

The recovery period leading to a renewed consciousness may last for a matter of weeks or months in this case. Another communicator called Raymond, who claimed that he had not died this way himself, reported being told that "when anybody has been blown to pieces it takes time for the

 1. Ibid., p. 68.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 30. From The Rev. C. L. Tweedale, Man's Survival After Death, Grant Richards, Ltd., and ed., 1920.

spirit-body to gather itself all in and to be complete."¹ While the recovery period to waking consciousness may span weeks or months of earth-time, this communicator insisted that it did not mean the spirit itself was blown apart, only that the dispersal of astral or etheric material associated with physical life had an effect on the spirit.² Once consciousness has been achieved, however, the normal progression of events ensues, and the individual concerned is then in the same state as those who died natural deaths or deaths enforced by means other than explosions.³

Whatever the cause of death, the communicators are clear on the purpose of life in the physical sphere. Life is an opportunity to love one another and through that love to participate in the larger love of "God," however God may be defined.⁴ Physical life, according to one communicator identified as "Dowding", is also an opportunity for learning:

1. Ibid., p. 30. From Sir Oliver J. Lodge, Raymond, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1916, p. 195.

2. Ibid., p. 31. From Sir Oliver J. Lodge, Raymond, p. 117.

3. Ibid., p. 40.

4. Ibid., p. 243.

Many of the lessons in selflessness, self-control, the relation between reason and intuition, between intellect and emotion, are lessons which we should have learnt while still on earth.¹

This sentiment was echoed by another communicator identified as "A.B." when he stated,

Your world is the hardest round of your school of experiences. Prizes won here are won for eternity. The very density of the material in which you work makes the over-coming of it a finer conquest Experience on your planet is a unique opportunity and a privilege Make the best use of every opportunity.² A strenuous life on earth is of immense value.²

Myers, supposedly communicating through trance medium Geraldine Cummins, added that creativity and learning are important during physical life, because in the spiritual spheres beyond which are virtually devoid of either conflict or effort, there is a general absence of any true creation.³ Within this context, even attitudes held in life take on a new significance in that, far from being shed at death, they are understood by the communicators to become crystallized in the newly emergent spiritual entity.⁴

1. Ibid., p. 248. From Private Dowding, Watkins, 1943, p. 35.

2. Ibid., p. 236. From The Coming Light, Watkins, 1924, p. 85.

3. Ibid. From Geraldine Cummins, The Road to Immortality, Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1932, p. 85.

4. Ibid., p. 237.

As for those who fail to take advantage of the opportunities for love and learning in life, the communicators agree that the help of the living may be required in the form of prayer "in overcoming the inertia which characterised their mortal lives and which they have taken with them."¹ In short, we are told that only what is sown in life is reaped thereafter -- nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Within this context, even the suicide has failed to end it all, and may need the prayers of the living in order to progress spiritually.²

The notion of "spiritual progress" is not without definition in the communications. In his own final assessment of the data, Crookall concluded that the ultimate goal of the individual would appear to have been cogently expressed in the mystical terms of the Fourth Gospel, and the Epistles of John. In particular, he found in 1 John IV. 12, 16 a succinct summary of the anticipated mystical union with God alluded to by many communicators:

12 . . . If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us

1. Ibid., p. 238.

2. Ibid., p. 241.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.¹

The importance of physical life as a means of expressing this form of love which leads to mystical union, is expressed in the Christian tradition in John XV:12: "'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'" The message, however, is not restricted to the Christian tradition, alone: rather, it is universal.

For purposes of comparison with the data of mystical, out-of-body, and near-death experiences, the data from Crookall's studies of natural deaths and enforced deaths is set out in the following charts.

ELEMENTS OF THE FULL-DEATH EXPERIENCE IN NATURAL AND ENFORCED DEATH	
MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATE AT TIME OF EXPERIENCE	<p>Final phase of terminal illness</p> <p>Suffering fatal injury, where a lapse of time occurs between incurring injury and death</p> <p>Often in state of physical and mental exhaustion from disease</p>

1. 1 John: 12, 16, The New King James Version of the Holy Bible, p. 1196.

(Mental and physical state a time of experience, continued)

	<p>Suffering debility and exhaustion of extreme old age</p> <p>May lapse into a state of unconsciousness prior to death</p> <p>Thought patterns may or may not be lucid immediately prior to death</p> <p>Those who have been unconscious may regain momentary lucidity immediately prior to death</p>
ACTIVITY AND EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO TRANSPORT INTO STATE	<p>Send out the "call", either consciously or subconsciously to bring helpers, who are most commonly dead friends or relatives</p> <p>Report seeing those friends or relatives who have come to help them</p> <p>Where the presence of helpers has been reported or implied by facial expression, may enter a state of euphoric excitement moments before slipping into unconsciousness and death</p> <p>If full death entered without awareness of helpers, individual may not understand that he is either dying or dead</p> <p>Total cessation of pain or discomfort while retaining conscious awareness of self</p>

(Activity and experience prior to transport into state, continued)

	<p>"The Review" -- a vivid, instantaneous, and normally emotionally neutral flashback of life</p> <p>"The Separation" -- a sense of shedding the physical body which may be accompanied by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) a sensation of rising (b) a sensation of sinking (c) a sensation of floating (d) dual awareness of both physical and spiritual world (e) visual perception of physical body from a distance (f) awareness of either one or two "silver cords" connecting physical body to spiritual body (g) awareness that consciousness is centered in the spiritual body (h) awareness of deliverers who may assist in breaking cords or residual threads connecting physical and spiritual bodies (i) sensation of receiving telepathically an explanation of what is happening from helpers (j) absence of pain or any emotional content (k) momentary coma or blackout (l) sensation of being drawn
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(Activity and experience prior to transport into state, continued)

	<p>through a tunnel or doorway</p> <p>(m) sensation of consciousness expanding</p> <p>(n) severance of the cord(s) and entry into full-death state</p>
<p>EXPERIENCE ENCOUNTERED ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED</p>	<p><u>"NATURAL" DEATH</u></p> <p>"The Sleep" -- may involve</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) complete unconsciousness (b) a dream-like state (c) alternations of the two (d) a duration of three or four days (e) a duration of weeks or months if death has followed a long and exhausting illness (f) neutral emotional state <p>"Hades Conditions" -- may involve</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) awareness of murky, or hazy environment (b) awareness through dim state of consciousness <p>"The Awakening" -- a brief post-mortem period in which there may be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) self-awareness only (b) a sense of growing or expanding consciousness (c) a growing awareness of "Paradise Conditions", including the emergent perception of being in a clear, bright, and beautiful environment (d) an emotional state of peace, freedom, security, and happiness

(Experience encountered once entry into state has been achieved, continued)

	<p>May appear to living as apparitions</p> <p>Direct entry into "Paradise Conditions without experiencing intervening states of either "the sleep" or "the awakening" (only those who possessed in life quick and enquiring minds and died without entering state of total exhaustion)</p> <p>"The Judgment" -- in which individual judges himself as he undergoes <u>emotional</u> and <u>responsible</u> review of his past life</p> <p>"The Assignment" -- enters spiritual state or "sphere" appropriate to present spiritual state and future spiritual growth</p> <p><u>"ENFORCED" DEATH</u></p> <p>Failure to comprehend or accept "fact" that they are dead</p> <p>Consciousness sensed to be full and clear, though confused by failure to comprehend fact that death has occurred</p> <p>May perceive environment to be that of normal earth despite sense of bewilderment as to what has happened</p> <p>"The Review" -- life flashes before his eyes</p> <p>Possible temporary coma or blackout</p>
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(Experience encountered once entry into state has been achieved, continued)

	<p>Total absence of pain or discomfort</p> <p>May see physical body and be bewildered by its apparent lifelessness</p> <p>May temporarily attribute experience of confusion to being in a dream state</p> <p>May see the living but are unable to attract their attention or in any way communicate with them</p> <p>May appear to living as apparitions</p> <p>May experience a hazy, misty, or otherwise aqueous environment</p> <p>Sensation of floating</p> <p>Sleep totally <u>inhibited</u></p> <p>No awareness of "silver cord(s)" or of their rupture</p> <p>Unable to perceive or sense presence of helpers or deliverers</p> <p>May perceive or sense presence of other equally bewildered individuals who have also suffered enforced death</p> <p>"The Sleep" -- may be achieved only after trauma of abrupt severance of physical and spiritual bodies healed</p> <p>"The Awakening"</p> <p>"The Judgment"</p>
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(Experience encountered once entry into state has been achieved, continued)

	<p>"The Assignment"</p> <p>May appear to living in form of apparition</p>
EFFECT OF THE EXPERIENCE	<p>Understand significance of love and learning in physical life</p> <p>As a result of experience of "the judgment"; may be more loving and tolerant</p> <p>Understand ultimate goal of life, both in physical and spiritual terms, as the mystical union of the individual with "God" or "the All That Is" <u>without</u> the loss of his individuality</p> <p>May seek and/or accept "the assignment" in order to further this goal</p>

CHAPTER VI

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE MYSTICAL,
OUT-OF-BODY, NEAR-DEATH, AND FULL-DEATH EXPERIENCE

In order to facilitate a comparative analysis of the elements reported in the mystical, out-of-body, near-death, and full-death experience where normal life is resumed, the data for each has been organized according to five major phases: 1) "Mental and Physical State at Time of Experience," 2) "Transport into State," 3) "Experiences Encountered Once Entry Into State Has Been Achieved," 4) "The Return," and 5) "Effect of the Experience upon Resumption of Normal Life." In the case of the full-death experience where normal life is not resumed, data concerning the post-death state shall be understood to be "Effect of the Experience in the Afterlife." The presentation of the elements reported in each phase of the various experiences is followed immediately by an analysis of that phase.

With reference to the first phase, "Mental and Physical State at Time of Experience," the data is arranged in such a

way as to move from states of normal health and waking consciousness through states of progressively failing health and limited consciousness.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATE
AT TIME OF EXPERIENCE

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Normal state of waking	*				
Sense of internal solitude	*				
Normal health	*				
Full Sleep		*			
Between sleeping & waking	*	*			
Repose in state of fatigue	*	*			
Minor illness/injury (21.2%)	*	*			
Major illness/injury (0.4%)	*	*			
Lucid to onset of actual experience	*		*		
Life-threatening illness /injury (acute rather than chronic)	*		*		
Final phase of terminal illness	*			*	
Life-threatening trauma	*			*	
Physically and mentally exhausted by disease	*			*	

(MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATE AT TIME OF EXPERIENCE, continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Suffering debility and exhaustion of extreme old age	*			*	
In established state of coma				*	
Periodic lucidity	*			*	
Fatal traumatic injury					*

As indicated in the preceding chart, there is a definite progression in the pre-experience state from normal health and waking consciousness to poorer health and more limited consciousness as one considers the progression from the mystical experience, through the out-of-body and near-death experiences to that of full death. While virtually all mystical experiences are entered from a state of normal health and waking consciousness, only 78.4% of out-of-body events occur in this state. The presence of minor illnesses, injuries, or exhaustion appear to be factors which facilitate, if not precipitate, the out-of-body experience. In near-death events, the key factor would appear to be a state of medical crisis caused by disease or injury which leads into a state of apparent unconsciousness. In the case of full death, relatively normal health precedes the

experience only in cases where death is enforced through traumatic injury. There would be an absence of normal, waking consciousness at the time of the event only in the case of an injury such as a gun-shot wound inflicted while the individual was asleep. The individual entering death due to traumatic injury likely does so from a state of normal waking consciousness. The transport itself is the subject of the following chart.¹

TRANSPORT INTO STATE

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Instantaneous (Waking consciousness retained throughout)	*				*
Send out "the call", either consciously or sub- consciously to bring helpers, who are most commonly dead friends or relatives				*	
Report seeing dead friends or relatives				*	

1. "Transport" is used to refer to entry into any altered state; "transition" normally implies death in this context.

TRANSPORT INTO STATE (continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
State of euphoria visible to others present as experiencer reports seeing dead friends and relatives	*			*	
Audible noise (e.g. buzzing in ears, wind blowing)		*	*		
Silence	*		*	*	*
Sense of peace and well-being	*		*	*	
Sense of anxiety or dread	*	*	*		
Temporary blackout or loss of consciousness		*	*	*	*
Hears himself declared to be dead or dying by attendant doctor or other witnesses present			*		
"The Separation"					
(a) sensation of being drawn through tunnel or doorway		*	*		
(b) sensation of rising out of physical body		*			
(c) sensation of sinking				*	
(d) sensation of floating				*	
(e) dual awareness of both physical and spiritual world		*	*	*	

(TRANSPORT INTO STATE, continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
(f) awareness of either one or two "silver cords" connecting physical body to spiritual body		*		*	
(g) awareness that consciousness is centered in the spiritual body		*	*	*	
(h) awareness of deliverers who may assist in breaking connecting cords or residual threads				*	
(i) sensation of receiving telepathically an explanation of what is happening from deliverers				*	
(j) absence of pain or emotional content while retaining conscious awareness of self			*	*	*
(k) sensation of consciousness expanding	*		*	*	
(l) severance of the cord(s)				*	
Sensation of replica or double forming above physical body		*			
Visual perception of physical body from a distance		*	*	*	*

(TRANSPORT INTO STATE, continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
"The Review" -- a vivid, instantaneous, and normally emotionally neutral flashback of life		*	*	*	*
Awareness by individual that he is dead or dying			*	*	
No sensation on part of experiencer that he is dead or dying	*	*	*	*	*
Failure to recognize any kind of transition has occurred (believes self to be alive still)				*	*

Note that some elements of mystical, out-of-body, near-death, and full-death experiences are common to more than one type of experience, while other elements appear exclusively within the domain of only one. For example, a transition into an altered state while retaining what appears to be full waking consciousness is reported for entry into both the mystical state and the enforced full-death state. It should be noted, however, that once the entry has been made with no initial awareness of a shift in consciousness, the individual in the mystic state will report an

awareness of an expanded consciousness, while the person who has entered enforced death reports a confused state of consciousness. Still, common to both types of experience are reports that the transport itself normally occurs without any awareness of a marked shift or break in normal consciousness, and in both of these types of events the transition is reported to happen instantaneously.

Entry into the out-of-body or near-death experience, on the other hand, is reported to involve an awareness of the passage of time, however brief. It is, perhaps, precisely because of the perceived duration of the transition phase in both the out-of-body and near-death experience that other events are reported as part of the transport process into these two altered states of consciousness. These events include such elements as the perception of audible noises, the feeling of being drawn through a tunnel or doorway, and an awareness that a temporary coma or blackout has occurred. The blackout is occasionally reported in connection with entry into enforced death as well, but where the waking consciousness is engrossed in a particular activity, such as an ongoing battle in which one is under heavy enemy fire, no such lapse or break in consciousness is reported. Whether the individual who dies an enforced death communicates having experienced a blackout may also be a factor of the actual speed with which the death was inflicted. Not all

fatal injuries kill instantaneously, and one could anticipate that the individual who dies over a matter of mere seconds would have a different experience from the one who dies over a period of several minutes. In short, it would appear that the duration of the transport affects the number of elements experienced and subsequently reported.

The time span involved in the transport phase would also seem to be a determinant in any awareness of a "silver cord" which reputedly links the physical body to the spiritual body both in cases of temporary separation involved in out-of-body experiences and in the process of natural death. In the mystical experience, which is reported to involve a sensation more of the inundation of the normal, waking consciousness from an external source rather than its separation from the body, the cord is apparently absent. Its presence is never reported in cases of near-death or enforced death, either. Based on communications from his own informants, Crookall has already speculated that the cord is not reported in cases of enforced death because there is literally no time for its formation.¹ In this event, it would appear that the physical body and the spiritual body

1. Robert Crookall, The Supreme Adventure, p. 67.

are torn apart rather than slowly and systematically disengaged.

Only where separation is reported to occur over a matter of minutes, as it is in the case of out-of-body experiences, is visual awareness of the cord commonly reported. Those who reputedly died natural deaths in which the transport phase occupied a period of several hours provide the most detailed accounts of the formation and purpose of the cords. Many of these communicators have described the "shedding" of the body as a process in which the spirit body slowly emerged from the physical body, attached to two cords which normally emanate from the back of the head and the solar plexus as the spirit body forms horizontally over the prone physical body. According to these communicators, it was only when the spirit body had thus been freed of the physical body that the cord broke and full death was achieved. The cord is thus understood to provide a vital link between the physical and spiritual bodies, and through them, at any time prior to its actual breakage, the spirit may theoretically return to the physical body, whereupon normal life may resume.

Given the putative purpose of the cords, it would appear anomalous that cords are never reported as a part of the visual experience in the case of near-death events, not

even where the experiencer tells of having watched medical staff working to resuscitate his physical body. Yet, given the reported purpose of the cords, one or more must be present and functioning in these cases for the individual to return to normal, physical life. In attempting to explain this apparent anomaly, one must consider reported variations in the constitution of the cord itself. According to one communicator identified as J.M. Stuart-Young, each silver cord can be as thick as a clothes-line or as fine as a silken thread.¹ In some cases, the individual may be aware of the presence of a cord only when he feels its "elastic tug".² While no near-death experiencers report "seeing" the cord, they do report feeling themselves tugged or drawn back to the body. One could therefore argue that the limited time in which a thick, well-formed, and highly visible cord could develop in a state of medical crisis may account for its visual absence, while the tug back to the body attests to its operative presence.

The speed with which an individual enters the near-death state may inhibit his awareness of a connecting cord,

1. Robert Crookall, Events on the Threshold of the After-Life, p. 22. From J.M. Stuart-Young, Light, LII, 1932, p. 398.

2. Ibid. From E.C. Simons, Journal, S.P.R., X, 1894.

but it is apparently not so rapid as to inhibit other experiences shared with those entering out-of-body or natural death states. Entrance into the near-death state reputedly allows for the individual to hear audible sounds (including announcements that he is dead or dying), to feel himself being drawn down a long, dark tunnel, to experience dual consciousness (thinking within the bounds of both his physical and spiritual bodies at one and the same time), to see himself prone on a bed or at an accident site, and eventually to become aware of his consciousness being centered in the spiritual body. One can therefore speculate that while the initial crisis rapidly forces the individual through the initial stages of the separation process, it then allows in its aftermath a slower progression in which the individual may experience more of the elements of transport common to those who reputedly leave their physical bodies in a slower, more organized fashion. In notable contrast to the mystical state, the participants of out-of-body, near-death, natural-death, and enforced-death states all appear to arrive at one common destination or vantage point from which they may look back at their own bodies and recognize them as their own recently-shed physical counterparts.

The data supports the suggestion that the time allowed for entry into each of the five stages under discussion affects the number of discrete elements experienced in each.

For example, the instantaneous entry purported to carry one into the mystical state seems to afford no opportunity for the experience of several elements reported in connection with transfer into other altered states, whereas the process of transport into natural death over a period of hours appears to afford the experiencer the greatest number of detailed elements. The time factor is perhaps most evident in descriptions of the perceived process of separation of physical from spiritual bodies. While all who undergo out-of-body, near-death, and full-death experiences ultimately report having a spiritual body which is separate from the physical body, the process by which the physical body appears to be shed is experienced in more detail according to the speed with which the shedding of the physical body is reported to happen. The formation of the replica body above the physical body in the out-of-body experience, for example, is perceived to occupy a matter of mere minutes and contains fewer details than the same process described in cases of full death, the duration of which may occupy several hours.¹ The reported presence of dead loved ones, which often occurs hours before the onset of objective death, expands the entry process into natural death even further.

1. Robert Crookall, The Supreme Adventure, p. 20.

In fact, most communicators suggest that a total of three to four days may pass before all connections with the physical world are breached and full death is finally achieved.¹

The length of time involved in transport may not, however, be the only factor operative in determining the elements reported to occur during the transport phase. Note that the review which consists of a vivid, instantaneous, all-encompassing and emotionally neutral flashback of the life just lived, is absent in the mystical experience. Crookall alludes to only two reports of the review in connection with out-of-body experiences, during which it is apparently rare.² It is, however, a common feature of the near-death experience and virtually universal in communications relating to entry into the full-death state. The occurrence of the review would, therefore, appear to be a factor of depth of experience rather than duration. That is to say, the closer one approaches the total separation of physical and spiritual bodies conjectured to occur at death, the more likely one is to experience the review.

1. Ibid., p. 182.

2. Robert Crookall, Out-of-Body Experiences, p. 115.

We have determined that the data suggests that entry into mystical, out-of-body, near-death and full-death states share common elements, the scope of which seems to be affected by the duration of the entry process itself and the extent to which it draws the individual toward the experience of death. We must now examine the data pertinent to the contents of each state as experienced by the participant who has fully entered it.

EXPERIENCES ENCOUNTERED
ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE
HAS BEEN ACHIEVED

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Feel sense of <u>at-oneness</u> with objects, nature, others	*				
Feel sense of <u>at-oneness</u> with "God"	*		*		
Feel alone, abandoned, sense of despair	*				
Suffer emotionally from grief of living loved ones			*	*	*

(EXPERIENCES ENCOUNTERED
ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE
HAS BEEN ACHIEVED,
continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Awareness that time, space and physical objects present no impediments to the spirit body		*	*	*	*
Sensation of travelling as if flying		*			
Witness events occurring within the world of the living, but at considerable distance from the physical body		*	*	*	*
May disrupt or intervene to make presence known		*		*	*
"Hades" conditions -- perceptions clouded, as though enshrouded by dense fog or mist	*	*	*	*	*
Feelings of confusion or bewilderment	*	*	*	*	*
Awareness of hostile entities perceived to be "hinderers" (sense of danger and imminent violence)	*	*	*	*	*

(EXPERIENCES ENCOUNTERED
ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE
HAS BEEN ACHIEVED,
continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Ripping or hissing sensation as aqueous conditions disappear and clear surround- ings entered		*			
Clear, bright surroundings	*	*	*	*	*
Clear sense perception and lucid thought patterns	*	*	*	*	*
Awareness of other entities perceived to be "helpers"	*	*	*	*	*
Awareness of friends or relatives known to be physically dead		*	*	*	*
State of ecstasy or euphoria	*	*	*	*	*
No awareness of physical body	*	*	*	*	*
Awareness of very light, "spirit" body as center of con- sciousness	*	*	*	*	*
Total lack of emotional concern for the physical body (in cases in which it is seen)	*	*	*	*	*
Sense of warm, peaceful, comforting, intense darkness		*	*		

(EXPERIENCES ENCOUNTERED
ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE
HAS BEEN ACHIEVED,
continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
"The sleep" -- may involve unconsciousness, a dream-like state, or alternations of the two				*	*
"See" the Light -- perception of a "magnetic" light which is dazzling but does not hurt the eyes	*		*	*	*
"The Awakening" -- "Paradise" conditions -- growing sense of being in another world of preternatural beauty, environment often mirrors physical world	*	*	*	*	*
"The Review" -- a vivid, instantaneous, emotionally neutral, flashback of life (N.B. Only in the case of near-death and enforced death experiences are there reports of the review happening <u>after</u> transport into state has been achieved.)			*		

(EXPERIENCES ENCOUNTERED
ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE
HAS BEEN ACHIEVED,
continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Feel presence of a warm, powerful, loving entity often referred to as a "Being of Light"	*		*		
Feeling of being <u>rapt</u> in an unconditional love emanating from the "Being of Light"	*		*		
See dead friends or rela- tives who are under- stood to be helpers			*	*	*
Communicate telepathically with those encountered		*	*	*	*
Fail to comprehend or accept fact that they are dead (applicable to full- death columns only)				*	*
May perceive environment to be that of normal earth despite sense of bewilderment as to what has happened					*
Sleep totally <u>inhibited</u>					*
Total absence of pain or discomfort	*	*	*	*	*
May see physical body and be bewildered by its apparent lifelessness					*

(EXPERIENCES ENCOUNTERED
ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE
HAS BEEN ACHIEVED,
continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
May temporarily attribute experience of confusion to being in a dream state					*
May see the living but are unable to attract their attention or in any way communicate with them		*	*	*	*
May appear to living as apparitions		*	*	*	*
Unable to sense presence of helpers or deliverers			*	*	*
May perceive or sense presence of other equally bewildered individuals			*		*
Sense of stifling suffocation			*		
Intense fear and anxiety	*		*		
Gloomy, barren landscape in misty surroundings			*		*
Lifeless apparitions (often naked and staring blankly)			*		*

(EXPERIENCES ENCOUNTERED
ONCE ENTRY INTO STATE
HAS BEEN ACHIEVED,
continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Sense of being in "Hell", reported in terms of either extreme heat <u>or</u> cold	*		*		
May shift from an initially negative experience to a positive one	*	*			*
Sense of total understanding of the meaning of life	*		*		
Understand importance of <u>love</u> and <u>knowledge</u> in physical life	*		*		
Aware of a "boundary," the crossing of which pre- cludes a return to physical life			*		
"The Judgment" -- in which the individual judges himself as he under- goes <u>emotional</u> and <u>responsible</u> review of his past life				*	*
"The Assignment" -- enters spiritual state or "sphere" appropriate to present spiritual state and future spiritual growth				*	*

The suggestion that the mystical state appears to depend more on the inundation of the consciousness by an intense and external emotional force, rather than on an apparent separation of the physical body from the spiritual body, seems to be supported by the content of the experience once it has been fully entered. The sense of at-oneness, whether it involves physical objects or "God" as its apprehended focus, has been described by Michael Washburn as a state of "numinosity or enchantment." Describing the source of the experience as the Dynamic Ground, analogous to the ground of Being as that term is used by philosophers, Washburn wrote:

The relatively unrestricted outflow of the power of the Ground imbues the body-ego's outer world with a sheen of numinosity. The world is overlaid with an aura that renders things superreal, both intense and gripping. The world is charged and magnetized. It is full of objects that possess heightened qualities and that pulsate with hypnotic power. The body-ego thus tends to be in awe of its world.¹

The enchantment of which Washburn wrote clearly applies to the mystical state in which the individual feels an intense sense of at-oneness with one or many of the aspects of the

1. Michael Washburn, The Ego & The Dynamic Ground: Transpersonal Theory of Human development, p. 127.

world around him; but with reference to the broader mystical experience, Washburn hastened to add that

This enchantment, however, is not always a positive thing. For the numinous power that permeates the body-ego's world can make things appear not only superreal and alluring but also strange and daunting. In fact, it is not uncommon for the body-ego at one moment to be rapt in a scene of great appeal only at the next moment to be shot through with a bone-chilling sense of uncanniness.¹

The feelings of aloneness, abandonment, and despair which are also reported, if less frequently, as part of the mystical experience have been addressed by virtually every religious tradition in the world, past or present. Within the Christian tradition, the negative feelings associated with the mystical state have been referred to as the dark night of the soul. The Islamic tradition treats them as the spiritual desert or the state of self-accusing, while Zen refers to them as the great doubt. In Hinduism, they are spoken of as the ordeal of dying to the world, the descent into the underworld, or the encounter with Kali. For the Buddhist, it is the encounter with Mara, as well as the passion or death of the self.²

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p. 155.

This later, darker aspect of the mystical experience is critical to an understanding of the mystical state in relation to other altered states of consciousness, since the more euphoric or ecstatic sense of at-oneness tends to suggest an inflow of the Dynamic Ground or the spiritual world into the consciousness of the individual without any apparent separation from either his physical body or world. Yet, as Washburn eloquently argues, the mystical experience does involve a separation of the ego (normal waking, conscious entity) from the underlying Dynamic Ground (spiritual self) which serves to bolster the self at the expense of the ego. In summarizing the relationship between the ego and the Ground (or the normal waking consciousness and the deeper, "spiritual" self) Washburn used the psychological concept of regression when he concluded:

. . . The "dark night" is, then, more a regression in the service of the spirit than a regression in the service of the ego. Or more precisely still, it is a regression in the service of transcendence.¹

The regression which Washburn speculates to be in the service of the spirit or transcendence eventually leads the individual to what can be called a period of psychic renewal, or what Washburn himself calls "regeneration in

1. Ibid., p. 155.

spirit."¹ Drawing a parallel between the darker mystical experience and the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox concepts of purgatory as a place of purification, Washburn notes that purgatory

. . . is held to be the postmortal place or state of being in which one undergoes the purifications requisite for admission to the heavenly kingdom. Purgatory is said to be an eschatological domain or condition in which the soul endures the redemptive transformations needed to cleanse it of residual earthly contaminations and thereby prepare it for the blessings of the celestial estate.²

Such was the understanding of St. John of the Cross when he wrote Dark Night of the Soul. The dazzling darkness from within which the light of God could be seen and the warmth of His burning love felt, was but a part of the soul's journey toward God. The description of God in these terms is strikingly similar to that of the Being of Light related by near-death experiencers. Whether one first passes through a dark night or enters directly into the light, St. John of the Cross concluded that "Such a person is only able to say

1. Ibid., p. 186.

2. Ibid.

that he is satisfied, tranquil and contented and that he is conscious of the presence of God."¹

It would thus appear from both the data available on the mystical state and religious interpretations of that data that a negative experience not only may be transformed into a positive one, but may be expected to undergo such a change. The data as set out for the other states of altered consciousness dealt with in this thesis would appear to corroborate this notion. In the out-of-body state, the experiencer may initially find himself in an unpleasant, if not overtly hostile, environment. In this case, with additional experiences, the individual seems able to avoid the hazy and often menacing environment and progresses, in a manner of speaking, beyond this stage into a more lucid and friendly realm. Likewise, for those relatively rare individuals who undergo multiple near-death experiences, later experiences are often more pleasant than earlier ones. Even the "Hades" conditions described by Crookall as a legitimate part of the post-mortem experiences of many of his communicators is understood to be both abnormal and temporary.²

This is perhaps nowhere more clearly stated than in the

1. St. John of the Cross, Dark Night of the Soul, p. 161.
2. Crookall, Op. Cit., The Supreme Adventure, p. 48.

words of those reputedly discarnate souls whose primary plea is "Pray for me!"¹ This data suggests that change from negative to positive content is understood to be not only possible, but highly desired and sought after. It would appear, therefore, that experientially negative elements of the mystical, out-of-body, near-death, natural full death and enforced full death experiences are understood to be of a temporary nature, and the individual who undergoes them may anticipate eventual entry into the more experientially positive aspects of his own form of altered state of consciousness as described by the majority of those reporting on the same phenomena. And the culminating experience toward which all states of altered consciousness tend to lead, no matter how torturous the journey, is the apprehended state of euphoria or ecstasy enjoyed in the total absence of pain or discomfort of any kind.

The achievement of such euphoria and ease is, admittedly, not secured within each and every brief encounter with an altered state of consciousness. While many experiences, be they mystical, out-of-body, or near-death, involve only positive elements, many contain negative ones which, given the brevity of the experience, apparently have no

1. Ibid., p. 135.

opportunity to transform into a more pleasant one. It would appear that the experience of the perceived spiritual body returning to the physical body may be affected by the quality of the experience itself. In order to assess this supposition, the elements of the return are set out below in chart form.

THE RETURN

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Gradual fading of impressions and feelings experienced	*			.	.
From cloudy, mist-like state, triggered by disruption in environment of physical body		*		.	.
From clear, lucid state, triggered by emotional need		*		.	.
Triggered by ecstatic encounter with another entity		*		.	.
Sensation of being drawn back by silver cord		*		.	.
Repercussion as "replica" re-enters and merges with physical body		*		N/A	N/A
Return with sense of fear or dread (from a negative experience)		*	*	.	.

THE RETURN,
(continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Sent back by friends, relatives, or the Being of Light			*	.	.
"Sucked" back into the body			*	.	.
"Called" back by prayers of loved ones			*	.	.
Feel reluctant to return, may even resist			*	.	.
Awareness of "choice." Whether to return to physical life or to cross the boundary is a personal decision to make			*	.	.
Return voluntarily out of sense of duty to complete "unfinished business" of life			*	N/A	N/A
Return instantaneous and experiencer has no conscious memory of it			*	.	.

The abrupt and often frightening return to the physical body reported by many out-of-body experiencers who have encountered hostile entities while in an altered state of consciousness would clearly preclude any opportunity for

that particular experience to undergo a progression of any kind. Likewise, the individual who experiences "hell" while in the near-death state may return to normal, waking consciousness in a state of utter panic, desperate to cling to physical life rather than face what is perceived to lie beyond its domain. Others return from near-death experiences with great reluctance, sometimes even anger, earnestly wishing that they had not been drawn back into the physical world from a realm filled only with a beautiful, preternatural light, perfect peace, and an all-pervading sense of unconditional love. In these latter cases, one finds evidence for the notion that prayers may indeed influence those in altered states of consciousness, as it is often this kind of "interference" which reportedly draws the individual in a near-death state back to waking consciousness. What the data suggest in general, is that both the content and the depth of the experience may have a profound impact on the manner of return reported by the experiencers. What it does not elucidate in any way is why the content of these experiences should vary so radically in the first place.

Before embarking on that issues, however, a comparison will be made of the effects of the experience upon either the resumption of normal life, or entry into a purported afterlife.

EFFECT OF THE EXPERIENCE

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Despite new sense of purpose, approach life more calmly with fewer fears and worries	*		*		
Become more focussed on present -- living each moment to the fullest	*		*		
Fear of death gone (positive experience)			*	*	*
Fear of death exacerbated (negative experience)	*		*		
Know that love and learning are eternal	*		*	*	*
Death seen as a "graduation" or "homecoming"			*	*	*
An enduring sense of time- lessness	*		*		
View physical reality in more detached manner	*		*		
Decreased emphasis on money and possessions			*		
Rejection of anger, power over others, and violence in favour of tolerance and understanding	*	*	*	*	*
Heightened appreciation of life, of nature, and of other people	*	*	*	*	*

EFFECT OF THE EXPERIENCE,
(continued)

	<i>Mystical</i>	<i>Out-of-Body</i>	<i>Near Death</i>	<i>Full Death (Natural)</i>	<i>Full Death (Enforced)</i>
Become more "religious" in a spiritual sense, not an institutional one	*		*		
Become more intuitive or psychic	*		*		
Tendency to "love" all life equally (may translate into problems with personal relationships)	*		*		
Lack of sensitivity for the normal anxieties of life expressed by those who have <u>not</u> had a near-death experience	*		*		
Life becomes more precious because it is more <u>meaningful</u>	*	*	*	*	*
An expanded feeling of love and a new appreciation of the meaning of suffering	*	*	*	*	*
<u>Belief</u> in a world beyond transformed into <u>knowledge</u> of a world beyond	*	*	*	*	*
<u>Belief</u> in world beyond in which "replica" or spiritual body can survive without the physical body transformed into <u>knowledge</u>	*	*	*	*	*

Once again, the content of the experience as well as its depth appear to be significant factors in determining the effect it will have on the lives (or afterlives) of those affected. The mystical experience, for example, seems to lead the experiencer into a greater state of tolerance and understanding in which the feeling of love and the advent of suffering take on new meaning. It is the more profound near-death experience, however, which seems to be translated by the experiencer into action in terms of express changes in attitude and lifestyle. The suggestion that near-death experiences likewise leave the individual more intuitive or psychic need to be assessed against the background of the intuitive or psychic ability already exhibited by the mystic. This should not necessarily be taken to mean that the near-death experiencer becomes more psychic than the mystic or out-of-body experiencer, simply that his experience awakens him to those potentials in himself of which the mystic and out-of-body experiencer are probably already aware.

The greatest point of convergence, however, lies in the transformation of belief in a world beyond into knowledge of that world. For the mystic, this may not necessarily lead him to believe that he himself shall survive physical death to inhabit such a realm, but it clearly does have this

profound effect on the out-of-body and near-death experiencer. A new appreciation for the importance of love and learning is shared by all those who have had such experiences. The notion that we enter physical life to love and to learn -- often through suffering -- is enunciated by all quite clearly.

While near-death experiencers provide the living testimonials to the depth at which this conviction is felt as they reorganize their lives in the wake of their experiences, it is perhaps the communicators, reputed to speak to us from the other side, who provide the best explanations. According to one such communicator, identified as "A.B.",

Your world is the hardest school of your round of experiences. Prizes won here are won for eternity. The very density of the material in which you work makes the overcoming of it a finer conquest Experience on your planet is a unique opportunity. A strenuous life on earth is of immense value.¹

In the same vein, "Myers," communicating through Geraldine Cummins, stated that in the non-physical world beyond, there is "an almost entire absence of conflict or effort," and hence, a concomitant "absence of any true creation."²

1. Crookall, Op. Cit., The Supreme Adventure, p. 236. From Watkins, The Coming Light, 1924, p. 85.

2. Ibid., p. 236. From Geraldine Cummins, The Road to Immortality, Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1932, p. 85.

Given the words of communicators who supposedly know both life and the afterlife, it is almost ironic that many who believe in spirit communication tend to took upon those in the spirit realm as omniscient, if not omnipotent. Yet Crookall takes to heart the warning of early psychical workers that communicators, though of good intention and pure of motive, are also of limited knowledge and outlook.¹ Nowhere has this caution been more eloquently expressed than in the writing of Carl Jung, who wrote:

. . . When I wrote the Septem Sermones ad Mortuos, once again it was the dead who addressed crucial questions to me. They came -- so they said -- "back from Jerusalem, where they found not what they sought." This had surprised me greatly at the time, for according to the traditional views the dead are possessors of great knowledge.²

Bassed upon both his academic research and his own near-death experience, Jung speculated that the dead are seekers of knowledge rather than its purveyors. He wrote:

Apparently . . . the souls of the dead "know" only what they knew at the moment of death, and nothing beyond that. Hence their endeavor to penetrate into life in order to share in the knowledge of men. I frequently have a feeling that they are standing directly behind us, waiting to hear what answer we will give to them, and what answer to destiny. It seems to me as if they were dependent

1. Ibid., p. 214.

2. Carl Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, p. 308.

on the living for receiving answers to their questions, that is, on those who have survived them and exist in a world of change¹

However compelling the bulk of the data may be in suggesting that learning is limited to the realm of the physical world only, one must remember that while communicators such as "A.B." claim that this world is the hardest of rounds and unique in its learning opportunities, they do not claim it to be the only opportunity. In fact, there are passages in the literature which suggest learning occurs at all levels of spiritual existence. For instance, in Reflections on Life After Life, one of Moody's informants described entering a "City of Lights" during a near-death experience. According to this individual's description of this celestial metropolis,

There were people there, happy people
People were around, some of them gathered in groups. Some of them were learning.²

In Psychic Politics, medium Jane Roberts described in much greater detail her own journeys to a rather cosmopolitan library in another world. One day upon entering this preternatural archive, she "suddenly 'knew' that it was only

1. Ibid.

2. Moody, Op. Cit., Reflections on Life After Life, p. 17.

part of a much larger establishment.¹ Within the context of the overall book, the larger establishment of which the library was understood to be a part takes on the distinct qualities of a centre of higher learning, most notably an otherworldly university. The manner in which the knowledge was dispensed within this library, as described by Roberts in the following quotation, is hauntingly reminiscent of the feast of ambrosia commonly associated with the gifts of the Roman gods. She wrote:

. . . I was aware of the library once again and saw myself drinking a golden-colored elixir of some kind. I knew that the drink, taken there was something like an overall tonic, toning up the entire physical body and specifically purifying the blood. I got the impression that this elixir was given to anyone from here who went there, and that it also provided the necessary energy needed for work at hand. As I drank the liquid in the library, at my table here I thought that it looked like honey, only not as thick; and my head, here, suddenly felt very relaxed and loose.²

As to the larger purpose in entering the library, Roberts noted:

I also know, or thought I knew, that some kind of system of study was being set up for me. I wasn't to spend all of my time in the library but ³would also be outside, in the field so to speak.

Upon reflection, Roberts realized that she had entered a

1. Jane Roberts, Psychic Policits, p. 18.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 19.

college or community of scholars on another plane of reality where learning was indeed as important as it is on this one.

While some may indeed experience an opportunity to learn, as Roberts claims to have done, from "the other side," the most common perception remains that of the dead looking over the shoulders of the living to learn from us. This apprehension of the dead in close, conscious proximity with the living is, however, but on small element of the conscious life which offers the hope, and occasionally the fear, that death is merely a transition into another state of conscious awareness. To such hints one may add the content of dreams experienced during that state of sleep. But one must also allow for the impact of mystical, out-of-body, and near-death experiences in informing the living of a realm beyond -- a realm, the apprehended existence of which is reaffirmed with each new experience and made accessible to other members of one's group through either the oral or written traditions of their culture.

Three major questions persist, however, in the face of the evidence. To begin with, not all people have mystical experiences, despite entering equivalent states of solitude. Not all people suffering from fatigue report out-of-body experiences. Nor do all who enter a near-death state as measured by clinical standards return to normal, waking

consciousness with a tale to tell of a world beyond. In considering this apparent hiatus, Raymond Moody admitted:

I can't detect any difference between those who do and those who don't have such experiences during their "death" in the religious background or personality, in the circumstances or cause of the "death," or in any other factor.¹

The apparent absence of near-death experiences for some individuals in medical crisis remains a contentious point when assessing their reality and significance. The same concern is not expressed for the apparent absence of dreams in the sleep of some individuals. Experiments with REM sleep have established that everyone dreams, but that not everyone remembers his dreams. To date, however, no experiments have been designed or carried out on those who are either asleep or in a state of medical crisis to determine if everyone under the requisite conditions has out-of-body or near-death experiences. It is a curious reflection of our cultural bias that we find it difficult to accept the apparent inconsistency that some people report near-death experiences and others do not. Unfortunately, this observation continues to be used to discredit both the reality and significance of the events for those who do report them.

The first questions, then, for the moment, must remain

1. Raymond Moody, Op. Cit., Reflections on Life After Life, pp.86-87.

simply this: "Why doesn't everyone in similar circumstances report similar experiences?" Phrased in this way, the question allows for both possibilities: 1) that some people do not have these experiences, and 2) that some people do not remember these experiences.

The second question revolves around the variable content recorded for altered states of consciousness. Whether it be mystical, out-of-body, near-death or full-death experiences, the event may prove to be pleasant, reassuring, and euphoric, or uncomfortable, confusing and frightening. Negative experiences can be transformed into positive ones. There would seem to be nothing in either the personality, the religious background, or the circumstances which precipitate the event to account for such a variation. Those who have attempted to correlate the positive experiences with objective standards of "goodness" as espoused by conventional morality have often been embarrassed by the outcome. If "reward-or-punishment" is the only answer we can offer to explain such differences, the results are disturbing, indeed. The second questions, then, is "How do we account for the fact that some experiences are positive and some are negative?"

A third question concerns the repeated conviction that a spiritual or "replica" body can and does persist as a conscious life form without the continued support of the

physical body. The very notion of a living, though non-physical replica separate from the physical body is explicitly dualistic. Aside from the possibility of a series of transformations leading to yet more and more spiritually rarefied states, the final question must be, "How does the spiritual "replica" body achieve its initial separation from the physical body?" This is what the following chapter will explore.

CHAPTER VII

THE PROCESS OF SEPARATION
AND
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSING
MYSTICAL, OUT-OF-BODY, NEAR-DEATH, AND FULL-DEATH
EXPERIENCES

Virtually every religious tradition in the world espouses the notion that a spiritual component of man survives the experience of physical death to continue a conscious existence in another plane or sphere of reality. Within each tradition, people have speculated upon why there is death in the world and what happens to those who die. Given that most accept the proposition that those who die continue to exist in an afterlife, they also wonder about the nature of the world which they anticipate inhabiting after entering death. Some groups have formulated only relatively simple descriptions of their conjectured afterlife and invest commensurately little thought and effort in speculating further upon the subject. Others, however, have generated complex, multifaceted schemes to convey their vision of the

environments and activities they might hope (or fear) to experience in the post-death state.

In addition to the basic vision of the human soul or spirit eventually coming to dwell in a world beyond the physical one, there are numerous theories and dogmas which provide the adherents of various traditions with carefully detailed descriptions of the proscriptive and prescriptive behaviors for living in this world which are deemed appropriate for enhancing the individual's prospects of inheriting the most favorable position possible in the world beyond. Whatever the details of its projected destiny, soul, in general, is understood to be one integral, immortal, "spiritual" entity inhabiting one mortal body for the duration of one physical lifetime. At death, the two are simply understood to separate, the soul to continue its own disembodied existence elsewhere, the body to decompose and return to the elements of the earth from which it was formed.

Within some traditions, however, the composition of the living, physical individual was or is understood to be more complex than this. Among the Egyptians, for example, there was a belief that the physical body was vitally associated with two spiritual aspects -- the ka and the ba. The ka was described as the double or alter ego of the individual created at his birth. While the Egyptian texts provide conflicting details of its nature and location during life,

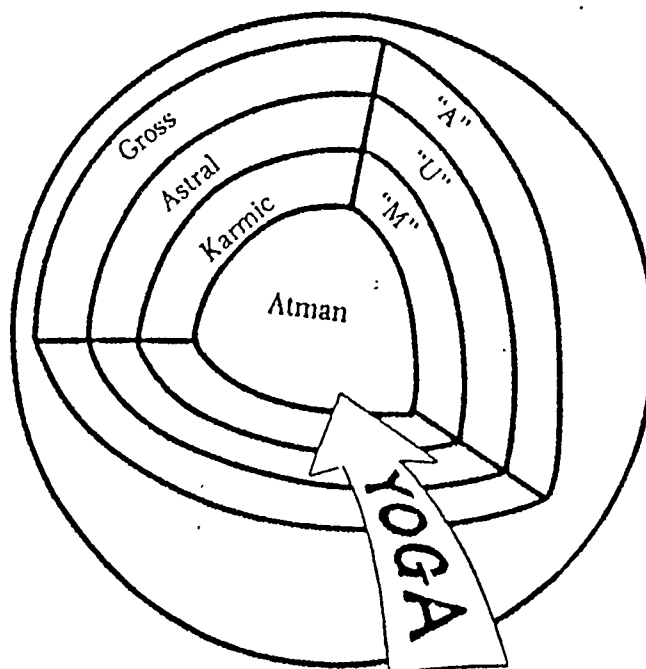
it would appear that the ka was generally understood to be associated with the head of the individual during life and to accompany the body upon death into the het ka (house of the ka) or tomb where it remained thereafter. The ka, associated with "power," was distinct from the "ba" which was more closely associated with the "spirit," embodying in the individual, as it were, a part of the gods incarnate. Whereas the ka was essentially confined to the tomb, Egyptian funerary papyri indicate that the ba was free to roam, although it would often visit the tomb and the body within. Thus, the ba is more closely akin to the western notion of soul than is the ka.¹ Yet both were understood to be associated with the body during life, and to be separated from it, even if only by a small spatial distance, at death. The Egyptians, therefore, provide one example of a people who envisioned a three-way split of the individual at death rather than a two-way split.

An even more complex constitution is envisioned within the Hindu tradition. Kenneth Kramer devised the following illustration to accompany his explanation of the

1. E.A. Wallis Budge, The Gods of the Egyptians: Studies in Egyptian Mythology, Volume 1, pp. 34 and 39.

composition of the living individual as understood in Hindu thought.¹

HINDU PSYCHOLOGY ACCORDING TO KENNETH KRAMER



1

Kramer then wrote:

To illustrate what happens at death from the Hindu standpoint, we will refer to the accompanying illustration. At death, the outer or gross body (skin, bones, muscles, nervous system and brain) falls away. The subtle body sheath (com-

1. Kenneth Kramer, The Sacred Art of Dying: How World Religions Understand Death, Chapter 2: "Hindu Attitudes Toward Death," p. 37.

2. Ibid.

prised of karmic tendencies, knowledge, breath and mind), which coats the jiva, or psychic sub-stratum begins to fall away. After death, the jiva at first continues to remain within or near the body. Soon, however, it shakes loose from the body and, for an appropriate period of time, enters a reality which is conditioned by its earthly life-cravings. When these cravings have ceased, the jiva enters a temporally blissful existence until, at a karmically determined time, it takes on a new physical body and is reborn.¹

Whereas many ancient traditions anticipated only a shadowy aqueous environment after death -- one analogous to the "Hades" state of Crookall's formulation -- the adherents of the Hindu tradition anticipated a progression in which the soul would be progressively purified and eventually escape the cycle of life and death altogether to enter a realm more closely approximating the ultimate sphere in which "Only the Absolute, Transcendent, Unmanifested, Infinite 'Father' is 'pure Spirit', 'purely subjective'."² In this instance we move beyond the notion of a simple two- or three-way split into one which involves the progressive shedding of what might be called spiritual dross to arrive at the ultimate liberation which is union with the ultimate Reality.

Another complex cycle within which a multi-faceted entity is understood to undergo a lengthy progression

1. Ibid., pp. 37-38.

2. Crookall, Op. Cit., The Supreme Adventure, p. 49.

towards an ultimate goal rather than a simple transformation from one state to another at the time of death has been formulated by the Jivaro Indians of the Ecuadorian Andes. Among these traditional "headhunters", three different types of soul are recognized. These were listed by Michael Harner in his classic study, "Jivaro Souls," as follows:

The first type [of soul] to be described is the arutam wakanI. This is an acquired soul and is believed by the Jivaro to be the most important kind. A man may possess up to two arutam souls at one time. The second type of soul is the muksak, or avenging soul. The third to be dealt with is the nekas wakanI, the "true," "real," or "ordinary" soul.¹

The arutam wakanI, as an acquired soul, is not possessed by the individual at birth. Its acquisition is prized, however, as it provides immunity from death. The person who possesses one of these souls, it is believed, cannot die from any form of physical violence, poison, or sorcery. To possess two such souls is to achieve immunity from death by any means, including infectious disease. Since only the male members of the tribe engage in inter-tribal warfare, it is generally only the males who are believed to acquire this kind of soul. The accepted method of securing this type of soul is the vision quest. Once the soul has been taken, it

1. Michael Harner, "Jivaro Souls" in Gods and Rituals, (John Middleton, ed.), p. 181.

must be satisfied through the sacrifice of an enemy's life. While the owner of these souls can retain only two at any one time, he can trade one in, so to speak, on a more powerful one should it present itself to him. Harner offers the following description of what happens to the arutam souls at death:

The arutam soul must leave a man before he dies, since he cannot die while he retains one Thus, at death, he does not have any of the arutam souls left which temporarily dwelt in his body while he was alive. Then, at the moment of death, his own arutam souls come into existence for the first time. The exact number of these completely new, freshly "born" souls equals the quantity which the deceased person had acquired during his lifetime. Thus, if he had acquired and subsequently lost five arutam souls, then at the moment of death he forms five new arutam souls. The newly-created arutam souls of the dead man will live eternally, drifting as breezes and temporarily entering into the bodies of future generations of Jivaro.¹

It is only at the moment the arutam souls are "born" that the muisak or avenging soul comes into existence, and then only for those who have possessed arutam souls and die by violent means. This soul, it is believed by the Jivaro, leaves the mouth of the dying individual. It is to confine this avenging soul or spirit that heads, taken as trophies in inter-tribal feuds, are shrunk to act as portable

1. Ibid., p. 186.

"graves" in which the muisak is trapped and hence rendered harmless.¹

The "true" soul, unlike the others, is born at the same moment as the person, and is possessed by everyone, male and female alike. At physical death, this soul retires to a "spirit-house" identical to the one in which it was born except that it is invisible to living members of the tribe, and from there repeats its entire life experience. This soul is always hungry and always in search of food to assuage its hunger. When it has completed its cycle, it ceases to be a "human demon" and becomes a "true demon." More hungry and lonely than ever, it is now reputedly more visible and more ugly as well. In this state it repeats the cycle of events experienced during its physical lifetime before it, too, "dies" to become a wampanj, a giant owl's-wing moth. At the very end of the "true" soul's long journey,

the wampanj finally has its wings damaged by raindrops as it flutters through a rainstorm and dies on the ground. The true soul then changes into water vapor amidst the falling rain. All fog

1. Ibid., p. 187.

and clouds are believed to be the last form taken by true souls. The true soul undergoes no more transformations and persists eternally in the form of mist.¹

The first two types of soul described above seem to compound a notion of the simple survival of the soul at death with an idea analogous to the western concept of spirit "possession" by an alien entity or of a "pact" with a particular spirit. The "true soul" in Jivaro thought, however, does approximate quite closely the idea that ultimately it is one integrated soul which survives physical death to endure, in this case, in the mists of the rainforest. But as in the case of both the Hindu tradition and the Roman Catholic tradition with its purgatory, there is a progression of transformations during which the soul is purified of all earthly attributes and desires.

No matter how a given tradition has conceptualized the separation of spiritual component from physical body, with few exceptions, each has formulated rituals whose express purpose is to assist the dying individual to make the transition from life in this world to life in the world hereafter. From the Egyptian Book of the Dead to the death chants of the Ainu, from the Tibetan Book of the Dead to the Ars Moriendi (The Art of Dying) of medieval Christianity, there

1. Ibid., p. 192.

have been elaborate ritual procedures developed to assist the soul on its journey as it leaves the body. Yet very little consideration has been given the process in which the actual separation of body and soul is said to occur. The body may be said "to fall away" or the spirit may be said to "shed the body," but more precise descriptions of the process of separation itself are few and far between. If, however, the experiences encountered in mystical, out-of-body, and near-death experiences are to be understood as temporary partial separations as suggested by those who have undergone them, the process itself becomes of crucial importance in understanding not only the overall pattern, but apparent contradictions or gaps in that pattern, as well.

If, as suggested in the Christian tradition, for example, the soul, as a single, discrete unit, simply "leaves" the body, one might envision the body and soul as a form of psychic double helix unraveling or "unzipping" as death ensues, allowing one strand to take up the life of the spirit while abandoning the other strand to decompose and vanish forever. But the notion of a "spiritual" component combined with but distinct from a "power" component, both of which endure after death according to the Egyptian tradition, suggests a more complex process yet, for here the spirit ba has a freer range of activity than the empowering

ka which is understood to be more intimately tied to the physical body. The Hindu tradition, in turn, suggests a series of separations or "sheddings" of various components which constitute the physically living person, while the Jivaro believe that many forms of souls are both acquired and shed throughout various stages of life, at death, and beyond. These variations in suggested components serve to complicate any attempt at formulating a model of separation appropriate to death in general, regardless of cultural background. Accounting for each unique embellishment found within the context of a broad, cross-culture comparison of religious traditions would seem impossible. Yet, the opposite extreme of a simple, dichotomous split would appear to be too limited to be of any value at all.

When Crookall addressed the question of how the purported separation was to be understood to happen, he sidestepped the problem of apparently contradictory explanations of the "progress" of the soul offered by various religious traditions and directed his attention to the reports of the "clairvoyants" of various traditions the world over. The fundamental premise in approaching the topic in this manner would appear to be that the "clairvoyants" represent the basic source of data upon which various religious traditions have built their visions of the afterlife, embellishing them and refining them to meet specific cultural needs. By

studying the data provided by the clairvoyants, one could argue, he was directly utilizing the source of such data prior to its interpretation in the context of specific traditions. From this perspective, Crookall analysed the records of contemporary individuals who were respected within their own societies as reputable "clairvoyants," "mediums," or "psychics". He also drew upon the available historical accounts of such people from the past. From this research he discovered a widespread believe that in addition to the physical body and the spiritual body, people possess a "semi-physical" component which unites the former two. Rather than adopting any one of the many terms used to denote this third component -- terms which varied from "aura" to "etheric body" -- Crookall decided to call it the "vehicle of vitality." In coining this term he was acknowledging both the reputed function and form of the third component. In the first instance, all seem to agree that it "vitalizes" or empowers the physical body. In the second instance, all agreed that while the physical body and the spiritual body each possess a consciousness which can function independent of the other, the third component does not have a consciousness of its own, and hence the term "vehicle" as opposed to body. Using this term, Crookall wrote:

The vehicle of vitality is described as interpenetrating both the physical body and extending beyond it for an inch or two (forming an inner and a denser "aura"), while the Soul Body is described as interpenetrating both the physical body and vehicle of vitality and extending beyond them, as an ovoid, for several feet (forming a middle and a subtler "aura"). The true Spiritual Body interpenetrates and radiate beyond the physical body, the vehicle of vitality, and the Soul Body (forming a rarely seen "outer aura").¹

A third, intervening component is widely understood to interface between the physical body and the spiritual body, allowing them to function in concert. Working from this premise, W. Whately Smith, a British psychical researcher, concluded that this component "is a connecting-link, or 'bridge,' between the Soul Body and the physical body."² Given its apparently integral role in uniting body and soul, this "vehicle of vitality" element of the individual, reminiscent of the ka in Egyptian thought must be taken into account in any discussion of the process of separation.

The "vehicle of vitality" appears to be the object of considerable interest and concern among the many post-mortem communicators who sought to make a distinction between the shedding of the physical body which is said to constitute the first death and the shedding of the "veil" which is said

1. Crookall, Op. Cit., Out-of-the-Body Experiences, pp. 37-38.

2. Ibid.. From W. Whately Smith, Theory of the Mechanism of Survival, Kegan Paul, 1920.

to constitute the second death.¹ In these communications we not only encounter reinforcement for the idea that death involves a progression rather than one, discrete event; we also encounter the idea that episodes of unconsciousness are a normal part of phases of that process which involve the partial or complete separation of the vehicle of vitality from either the spirit ("replica") body or the physical body. Given that periods of unconsciousness or "blackouts" are commonly reported by those entering out-of-body, near-death or full-death states, it would appear that an understanding of how the vehicle of vitality is said to function could have important implications for our understanding of these states as well.

The effects of the postulated "blackout" can, theoretically, be applied to the state of normal sleep, as well as to other states of altered consciousness. According to this approach, as the waking individual falls into a state of sleep, there is a "bilocation" of the physical body and the soul body. As the two move out of synchronism, there is a temporary period of virtual unconsciousness prior to the onset of dreaming when neither the spirit body nor the physical body is available for consciousness. From this

1. Ibid., pp. 75-76.

perspective, the initial phase of sleep would be analogous to the early stages of the out-of-body or near-death experience for which "blackouts" are commonly reported. It would also, theoretically, mirror the brief periods of unconsciousness reported by communicators who speak of the process of death itself. In attempting to explain these hiatuses in consciousness, Crookall speculated:

On our hypothesis, the "blackout" or "tunnel"-effect is due to the fact that, while the "double" is in process of separating from the body, neither was available as an instrument of consciousness -- much as, when we change gears in a motor car, there is a brief lapse in the transmission of power. When a "double" is released very rapidly, the "blackout" may be so brief as to pass unnoticed, or may be so slight as to be unremembered. If the process is relatively slow, on the other hand, it may seem like going down a dark tunnel, or along a corridor or a passage.¹

The bilocation which is reputedly responsible for "blackouts" of consciousness in the dying, and which seems to be mirrored in the experiences of those who enter out-of-body and near-death experiences, may also account for the total absence of near-death experiences in many who suffer near- or clinical-death with no recollection of anything happening. Crookall, admittedly, was primarily concerned with the phenomenon in connection with the full-death experience. Archie Matson, however, incorporated Crookall's -----

1. Ibid., p. 115.

scheme into his own writing on near-death experiences. He used the diagram set out on the following page to illustrate how he envisioned the soul body moving out of synchronism with the physical body until total separation had occurred. In this diagram, the inner circle represents the spirit or soul body while the outer circle represents the physical body. The intervening circle represents the vehicle of vitality which at first moves with the spirit body, then is discarded in the final phase. Had he incorporated the phases of blackout Crookall associated with the passage through each of these phases, Matson could have extrapolated that depending on where in the process of separation the individual's experience was arrested as he moved into the near-death state he would either experience elements appropriate to one of those phases (paradise or hades) or would experience nothing at all if he happened to move into one of the blackout phases and remain there until drawn back to waking consciousness. In fact, the statistics would tend to indicate that most people in a state of medical crisis conducive to near-death experiences would pass through them in precisely such an in-between state in which neither the physical body nor the spirit body is available for conscious functioning: they would be caught in medias res in the

SEPARATION OF BODY/SOUL/VEHICLE OF VITALITY
ACCORDING TO MATSON

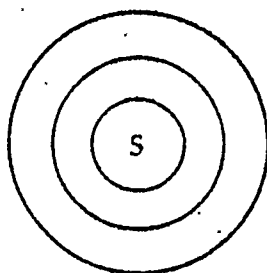


Figure 1

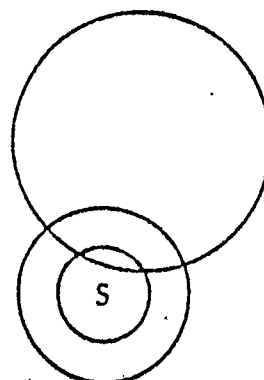


Figure 2

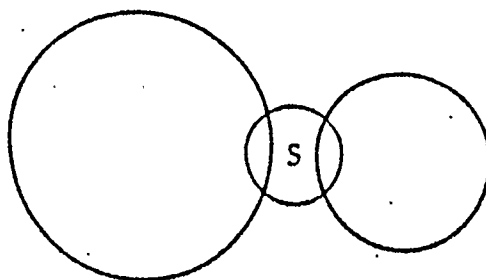
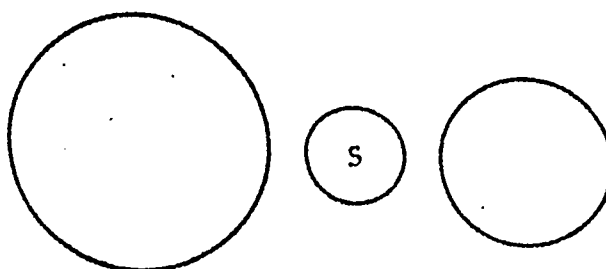


Figure 3



1. Archie Matson, Afterlife, p. 86.

neutral zone between shifting gears, a zone in which the transmission of power is interrupted.

Communicators have suggested that the vehicle of vitality, while having no consciousness of its own, is a subsidiary repository of memory. Crookall extrapolated from this that the separation of the replica or double from the physical body might trigger a release of memories, hence initiating the "review," as the vehicle of vitality discharges its contents into the replica in a process similar to rebooting a computer.¹ This, however, suggests that the replica immediately frees itself from the physical body and the vehicle of vitality during the temporary lapse in consciousness. Since the "review" is reported as an element of entry into the out-of-body, near-death, and full-death experience, it would appear that under certain circumstances the spirit body would be understood to disengage itself from both the physical body and the vehicle of vitality at the same time. Those near-death experiencers who report the "review" as one of the elements encountered once the state has been fully entered would suggest that in other circumstances the spirit body would quit the physical body taking the vehicle of vitality with it temporarily.

1. Crookall, Op. Cit., Out-of-the-Body Experiences, p. 115.

While the data so far considered in this chapter is exclusively from those purporting to communicate from the state of death itself, additional information has been provided by those living individuals who during attendance at a death-bed have witnessed visual phenomena associated with the dying person which range from seeing a "fog" collect above the body to the formation of an actual replica body. Some of these individuals have reported seeing "apparitions" which are luminous, subtle and tenuous, while others saw those which were apparently solid and dense.¹ Even this variation, Crookall has conjectured, could be the result of the difference between two splitting formations, one in which the quasi-physical vehicle of vitality adheres to the physical body, and another in which it adheres to the spiritual body. It has also been suggested that this tendency to split in one of two ways may account for the difference between those mediums who appear to be capable of manipulating the physical environment and those who apparently cannot.

The implications of this variability purported to exist in the fundamental process of separation at death have profound ramifications for the variable experiences of those

1. Ibid.

entering temporary states of altered consciousness. According to communicators, those who enter bright, lucid conditions have "shed" the vehicle of vitality, those who experience dim, hazy or confusing conditions have not. Apparently, the very process of separation itself is subject to individual variation. Those with what Crookall has dubbed "loose vehicles of vitality" --loose that is, in relation to the physical body -- would tend to carry the vehicle of vitality with the spirit body, whereas the spirit or replica of those whose vehicles of vitality were more firmly anchored in the physical body with which it normally shares a greater affinity would tend to leave the vehicle behind with the physical body as the spirit departed. In the first instance a "double or "two-stage" release is said to occur; in the second, a "single" or "simple" one.¹ As with most categories of human propensities or qualities, however, the fundamental physio-psychic constitution of the individual would merely predispose him to separate in one of two basic ways; but the variations on the theme would be as unique as his own fingerprints. Given that many post-mortem communicators refer to the quasi-physical vehicle of vitality as a "veil" which enshrouds or clouds the perceptions of the

1. Ibid., pp. 45-46.

spirit or replica body, those whose vehicles of vitality are loose and tend to move with the spirit body would be more likely to experience the dim "Hades" conditions described in out-of-body, near-death and full-death experiences alike. Those who would tend to leave the vehicle of vitality with the physical body in a simple release would be more inclined to experience the lucid, clear bright consciousness described as the "Paradise" state upon separation from the physical body, either immediately or shortly thereafter, as all traces of the vehicle were finally shed. Thus, the dim, hazy, sometimes confusing states often reported in connection with out-of-body and near-death experiences in particular may have more to do with the psychic constitution of the individual experiencing them than with any notion of reward or punishment for his moral character.

Further support for the notion that the manner in which a person "splits" may have more to do with psychic make up than morality is provided by the recent research findings of Kenneth Ring, reported in his essay, "The Omega Project: An Empirical Study of the NDE-Prone Personality." According to Ring, people who report instances of childhood psychic experiences are much more likely to report NDEs in adulthood if caught in a life-threatening experience than those who report no psychic experiences during their youth. Physical

abuse and punishment, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and a negative home atmosphere also seem to predispose one to a NDE should the appropriate crisis arise. In short, people who have "practiced" entering dissociative or altered states of consciousness are much more likely candidates for an NDE than those who have no such experiences in their backgrounds.¹

In the absence of explanations which address the effects of the enshrouding vehicle of vitality which can alter perception, or individual psychic differences which predispose certain individuals to near-death experiences in the first place, clergy and laity alike have taken umbrage over the apparent lack of a correlation between moral character or behaviour and the content of near-death experiences. The very idea that a Mother Theresa and a Hitler would appear destined for the same "rewards" in the hereafter is more than most people can countenance. But it must be remembered that there are reports of environments in a realm beyond that of the physical world which would appear more appropriate vis-a-vis conventional morality for those who have caused great suffering for others. Such accounts are perhaps too easily overlooked because comparatively few of them

1. Kenneth Ring, "The Omega Project: An Empirical Study of the NDE-Prone Personality," in Journal of Near-Death Studies, 8(4), Summer, 1990, pp. 211-239.

have found their way into the popular press. With rare exceptions such as Maurice Rawlings and P.M.H. Atwater, most writers who address the subject of near-death experiences focus heavily if not exclusively upon visions of joyous reunions with loved ones and the enrapturing love of the Being of light. These individuals, however unwittingly, only fuel the fears of those whose experiences have been anything but delightful. The smugness and egocentricity of many a near-death survivor who cheerfully assumes that his own pleasant experience must be one shared by everyone -- also does nothing to allay such fears. Instead of continuing to ignore the negative experiences, dismissing them as though they were irrelevant, those who undertake to investigate the subject at all have a responsibility to address the genuine concerns of those who yearn to understand why they suffered an unpleasant, if not overtly terrifying, experience while others in a similar state of medical crisis have encountered only bliss.

Returning to experiences reported in connection with the initial phases of full death, a brief review of representative reports of death-bed observers who have visually experienced the formation of the replica body along with the formation and breakage of the cord can be compared to the words of those communicators who claim to speak of personal

experiences encountered during their own deaths. We begin with the words of Dr. R. B. Hout:

"Soon I knew that the body I was seeing resembled that of the physical body of my aunt. . . . The astral body hung suspended horizontally a few feet above the physical counterpart I continued to watch and. . . the Spirit Body now seemed complete to my sight. I saw the features plainly. They were very similar to the physical face, except that a glow of peace and vigor was expressed instead of age and pain. The eyes were closed as though in tranquil sleep, and a luminosity seemed to radiate from the Spirit Body.

"As I watched the suspended Spirit Body, my attention was called, again intuitively, to a silverlike substance that was streaming from the head of the physical body to the head of the spirit 'double.' Then I saw the connection-cord between the two bodies

"The cord was attached to each of the bodies at the occipital protuberance immediately at the base of the skull. Just where it met the physical body it spread out, fanlike, and numerous little strands separated and attached separately to the skull base. But other than at the attachments, the cord was round, being perhaps about an inch in diameter. The colour was translucent luminous silver radiance. The cord seemed alive with vibrant energy. I could see the pulsations of light stream along the course of it, from the direction of the physical body to the spirit 'double.' With each pulsation the spirit body became more alive and denser, whereas the physical body became quieter and more nearly lifeless

"By this time the features were very distinct. The life was all in the astral body The pulsations of the cord had stopped I looked at the various strands of the cord as they spread out, fanlike, at the base of the skull. Each strand snapped . . . the final severance was at hand. A twin process of

death and birth was about to ensue The last connecting strand of the silver cord snapped and the spirit body was free.

"The spirit body, which had been supine [horizontal] before, now rose The closed eyes opened and a smile broke from the radiant features. She gave a smile of farewell, then vanished from my sight.¹

The objective report of this woman's death constitutes a classic, text-book death without sign of resistance or distress of any kind. The overall description is that of a peaceful and apparently pleasant transition. However, not all deaths are reported to be as simple as this. According to Felicia Scatterer, one communicator who spoke of her own death,

I felt myself floating . . . in a kind of buoyant mist. Those who came to me ['deliverers'] said they must slowly help me out of my body -- breaking those threads. I kept very quiet and . . . all the threads broke easily and naturally. I got quite away from my body and was not half-caught, as some are.²

Not only did this communicator indicate minor difficulties with her own separation from the physical body, she suggested that others encounter even greater obstacles. Crookall cites several examples in which "helpers" were reputedly required to break the "threads" or cord in order to free

1. From Light, Iv, 1935, p. 209. Quoted in Crookall, Out-of-the-Body Experiences, Op. Cit., pp. 153-155.

2. Crookall, Op. Cit., The Supreme Adventure, p. 19.

someone caught in a situation analogous to a difficult birth. According to "Raymond", Sir Oliver Lodge's supposed son and "communicator", "We have terrible trouble sometimes over people who are cremated too soon."¹ So death, like birth, is portrayed as an individual experience though which some pass with greater ease than others.

For most natural deaths, communicators state there is a period of sleep immediately following the separation of the vehicle of vitality and replica from the physical body. For most, this sleep is apparently peaceful and refreshing, while for others it involves a partial consciousness of hades conditions. The vehicle of vitality is said to be shed as a part of the awakening, after which the individual experiences only the bright, clear, lucid conditions of the paradise state. Others, however, including those who suffer enforced death, reputedly find themselves caught in the hades state for a significantly longer period during which they are unable to sleep at all. The nature of the death experience, natural or enforced, is not the only factor, however, which appears both to prolong one's sojourn in the hades state and to intensify the negative aspects of it.

1. Ibid., p. 137.

Among these other factors one may include such variables as fixed ideas of non-survival and a desire for revenge which keeps the person focussed firmly on the earth.¹

Those who have undergone negative near-death experiences attest that there are environments which are not only hazy, but overtly frightening. Such was the experience of one woman as recorded by P.M.H. Atwater:

. . . she came to view a landscape of barren, rolling hills filled to overflowing with nude, zombie-like people standing elbow to elbow doing nothing but staring straight at her. She was so horrified at what she saw she started screaming. This snapped her back into her body where she continued screaming until sedated.²

Not only does this example provide a sense of the terror of such experiences, it also indicates the qualitative difference which appears to exist between the contents of the negative and the positive near-death experiences which further underscores the need to distinguish between temporary states associated with the transport of the individual into an altered state of consciousness and the judgment which reputedly occurs later. The woman in Atwater's example, far from becoming "zombie-like" herself, retains a

1. Ibid., p. 137.

2. P.M.H. Atwater, Coming Back to Life, p. 14.

level of consciousness from which she can objectively view the scene and be repulsed by it. This is quite distinct from both the highly subjective feelings of the positive experience which draw the individual into a state of rapture in which they become totally absorbed in the experience, and the intensely personal quality of the emotional content of the judgment experience.

In attempting to understand either the positive or negative content of the out-of-body or near-death state, it is important not to confuse positive or negative elements of such transient states with process of "judgment", which, Crookall postulates, exists at a much later stage of the full-death experience. Far from being an initial part of the process of dying, the experience of the "judgment" does not occur for the average individual until several months after entry into the full-death state, according to Crookall;¹ it follows that the judgment is not encountered at all as part of the near-death experience. According to some communicators, the judgment may not be experienced until an individual has already settled into Paradise conditions. Others, apparently, languish in a hades-like limbo of their own making either because they cannot or will not accept the

1. Crookall, The Supreme Adventure, Op. Cit., p. 42.

fact that they are dead, or because they are still too emotionally bound to the earth. Still others may simply choose to delay the judgment until they feel ready to accept it.

One point upon which all communicators appear to agree is that the judgment can occur only after any hades conditions encountered have been left behind and the individual is ready to progress.¹ Still, there is a natural confusion between the journey-perilous of the early phases of transport into any state of altered consciousness on the one hand, and the judgment itself, on the other.

Interestingly, no mention is made by communicators of either heavens full of bliss or hells full of fire. Rather, in the words one communicator recorded by the Reverend C. Drayton in Beyond Life's Sunset,

The judgment consists in being able to see ourselves as we are, and by no stretch of the imagination being able to avoid seeing it. It is a Judgment of God on us [lesser selves] through our Higher Selves. On earth, even the best are subconsciously avoiding things, or trying to think things are slightly other than they are No other person could be so just a Judge as we ourselves can be when facing the truth. For many it is a terrible hour Directly one has realised how, where and why one was wrong, there is an instinctive feeling that one must work it

1. Ibid.

out. And this way of recovery is in helping others who have exactly similar limitations, difficulties or vices.¹

Once one has arrived at the point where one is prepared to meet the innermost self, which yet another communicator identified as the "judgment-bar of God,"² there is still no external environment offering either peace or torment; rather, there is another review of one's past life. This time, however, it is not the emotionally neutral scanning of events encountered in the initial review. As the events of one's life pass through consciousness during the judgment, "each incident brings with it the feelings not only of oneself alone but of all those others who were affected by the events."³ Clearly, this highly subjective and personal experience has nothing to do with the initial experience associated with either the transport of the individual into an altered state of consciousness or the early phases of the experience itself once entered.

As for those who report seeing individuals apparently trapped in a land of lost and bewildered souls, one can only

1. Ibid., pp. 42-43. From The Reverend C. Drayton, Beyond Life's Sunset, Psychic Press Ltd., p. 48.

2. Ibid., p. 43. From Watkins, Christ in Your, 1918, p. 90.

3. Ibid., p. 42. From Jane Sherwood, The Country Beyond, Ryder & Co. Ltd., p. 73.

speculate, within the context of Crookall's theory at least, that these individuals would be those who were temporarily earthbound either by their own failure to comprehend their own deaths, or by their desire for the life they have left behind rather than for the life which reputedly lies ahead. It must be remembered, however, that from St. John of the Cross down to the communicators of contemporary psychics, this state is understood to be temporary. Eventually, the warmth and brilliance, from God or the Being of Light, is understood to penetrate the souls of all.¹

Many informants have been frightened by their own brief intrusions into a near-death state fraught with negative experiences. One can only suggest that the temporary and partial separation they experienced may have stemmed from the sensation of the spirit body being rapidly forced out of the physical body itself while the physical body was still fully enshrouded by the vehicle of vitality. The resulting distortion tends to dull the perceptions and induce a hades-like state in those who experience it. As Maurice Rawlings has noted, the memory of negative near-death experiences is significantly shorter than that of positive experiences.²

1. St. John of the Cross, Dark Night of the Soul, 153.
2. Maurice Rawlings, Beyond Death's Door, p. 21.

In some cases, those who report terrifying near-death experiences appear to have forgotten them completely within a matter of hours or days after their occurrence. Many researchers suggest that this is due to "repression" -- they simply put such unpleasantness out of their minds. This, however, seems an unsatisfactory explanation given that most people have quite long-term memories when it comes to frightening or unpleasant experiences. The most compelling argument which arises from the data, however, rests with the evidence that the hades-like experiences are products of a dimmed consciousness, and hence the memory retention might also be equally limited.

Such negative near-death experiences appear to have a lot to do with the way in which the individual has temporarily and only partially separated while in a state of medical crisis, leaving him with what might be referred to as an impaired consciousness. They have little to do with his moral integrity or his ultimate destiny. In this regard, it must also be remembered that by all accounts, most individuals who encounter this environment in the context of full death do so only temporarily, or more precisely only until they have shed the vehicle of vitality which dims their perceptions to the point of obscuring the brighter environment beyond.

A perusal of the literature on hauntings clearly indicates that it is from this realm of disconsolate beings that most spectres associated with old houses are said to come. For what reasons would individuals be trapped in such circumstances? Ian Currie provided the following list precisely to answer this question:

- obsessive hatred for persons or specific situations;
- love for any person, object, way of life;
- earthly desires: for food, sex, liquor, drugs, power, money, clothing, life-styles, revenge, the physical or mental torturing of others, and so on;
- any negative general personality trait such as greed, lust, selfishness, religious fanaticism, exaggerated self-absorption, and so on;
- ignorance of the fact of life after death, or fixed but incorrect ideas about its nature.¹

To this list, most writers on the subject would add "unfinished business" connected with family or friends still living in the physical world. Currie himself added "transfixion by death." By this he referred to someone so traumatized by the manner of their deaths that they appear to relive the moment over and over again. Such was apparently the case when two young sisters saw a man beside a distant oak tree. As she approached him, the younger sister

saw that it was a man, hanging . . . from [the]
oak tree He was [wearing] a loose blouse
[and] heavy . . . boots. His head hung forward,

1. Ian Currie, You Cannot Die, p. 193.

and the arms dropped forward too I saw the shadow of the [fence] railings through him.¹

By the time she was within fifteen yards of the man, he suddenly vanished. In Currie's estimation, "Hung long ago from that old oak tree, and transfixed by his death agony, he had been 'hanging' -- ever since." Given, however, statements from communicators that such individuals are capable of freeing themselves from such states as soon as they choose to do so, one can speculate that the victim in this case could be as much a victim of his own rage and desire for revenge if he knew himself to be innocent of the crime for which he was hung as he is of a simple transfixion caused by the physical agony of his death.

However one attempts to explain such a report, the literature seems to agree that even such extreme states as the one cited above are transitory and that, lasting only until the preternatural light of the realm beyond can and does penetrate, freeing the individual from what is understood to be a hell very much of his own making.

Yet another means of entering dark, murky conditions for a more prolonged period appears to be suicide. As Kenneth Ring has indicated, among those who undergo near-death experiences as a result of attempted suicide, only

1. Ibid., p. 53. From W. H. Walter, Ghosts and Apparitions, London: G. Bell and sons Ltd., 1938, p. 105.

negative elements are encountered. In the words of one such individual,

The only thing I can remember about this is just grayness. Like I was in gray water or something. I couldn't really see anything. I couldn't see myself there, either. It was just like my mind was there. And no body.¹

Another man who had hoped to be reunited with his deceased wife shot himself. After resuscitation, he stated:

I didn't go where [my wife] was. I went to an awful place I immediately saw the mistake I had made I thought, "I wish I hadn't done it."²

A third individual who apparently came closer to experiencing the Being of Light than attempted suicides normally do was warned by a consciousness he interpreted as "God" of the consequences of such actions should they succeed.

. . . Then He said, "Do you want to go back?" And He goes, "Finish your life on earth." And I go, "No, I want to die." And he goes, "You are breaking my laws to commit suicide. You'll not be with me in heaven if you die. And I say, "What will happen?" And then after this I started coming to. So I don't know what happened after this. So I think that God was trying to tell me that if I commit suicide I'm going to go to hell, you know? So, I'm not going to think about suicide anymore [laughs nervously].³

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1. Kenneth Ring, Life at Death, p. 122.
 2. Raymond Moody, Life After Life, p. 143.
 3. Ring, Op. Cit., p. 127.

Contrary to the popular notion that near-death experiences point to a positive, paradisiac emergence into an afterlife for everyone, the experiences of attempted suicides in particular indicate that "even if the suicidal death experience is not unpleasant, the ultimate consequences will be."¹ This data corroborates the experiential reality of the Hades-like experiences of those whose voices have informed various religious traditions of the world of a post-death situation in which the dead may well enter unfavorable conditions for a period of time. An encounter with such a state during a partial separation, however, be it in the context of a mystical, out-of-body, or near-death experience, should not be interpreted as diagnostic of that individual's ultimate destiny. Take for example the experience of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in what appears to have been a mystical state as she lay fully awake in bed:

And then I had one of the most incredible experiences of my life. In one sentence: I went through every single death of every single one of my thousand patients. And I mean the physical pain, the dyspnea, the agony, the screaming for help. The pain was beyond any description. There was no time to think and no time for anything except that twice I caught a breath, like between labor pains. I was able to catch my breath like for a split second, and I pleaded, I guess with God, for a shoulder to lean on, for one human shoulder, and I visualized a man's shoulder that I

1. Ibid.

could put my head on. And a thunderous voice came: "You shall not be given" And then I went back to my agony and pain and dyspnea and doubling up in the bed. But I was awake. I mean, it wasn't a dream. I was reliving every single death of every one of my dying patients -- and every aspect of it, not just the physical.¹

After being denied a shoulder, Kubler-Ross asked for a hand. When that in turn was denied, she contemplated asking for a finger-tip. Then, with a "final outpouring of rage and indignity at God or whoever," she decided if she couldn't have a hand she would accept nothing. In this moment she realized that "in the ultimate agony you have to do it alone -- nobody can do it for you." Understanding that the experience of 10,000 more deaths could not add to the pain, that she was already enduring as much suffering as possible, she accepted it:

. . . The moment I felt the confidence that I could actually take whatever came, all the dyspnea, hemorrhage, pain and agony disappeared in one split second, and out of it came the most incredible rebirth experience."²

She said that she herself and the world around her began to vibrate as a form emerged before her:

1. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross as quoted by Ann Nietzke in "The Miracle of Kubler-Ross, Human Behavior, September, 1977, p. 23.

2. Ibid.

And while I watched this in utter amazement -- there were incredibly beautiful colors and smells and sounds in the room -- it opened up into the most beautiful lotus flower. And behind it was like a sunrise, the brightest light you can imagine without hurting your eyes. And as the flower opened, its absolute fullness in this life was totally present. At that moment the light was full and open, like the whole sun was there and the flower was full and open. The vibrations stopped, and the million molecules, including me -- it was all part of the world -- fell into one piece. It was like a million pieces fell into one, and was part of that one. And I finally thought, "I'm okay, because I'm part of all this."¹

The effects of the experience on her life were described as "incredible,"

because I was in love with every leaf, every tree,, every bird -- even the pebbles They were alive as I was, and I was part of this whole alive universe. It took me months to be able to describe all this in any halfway adequate words.²

Struggling to find those words, she explained:

"It was so incredibly beautiful that if I would describe it as 1,000 orgasms at one time it would be a very shabby comparison."³

1. Ibid., p. 24.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

The experience of Kubler-Ross captures many of the salient features of mystical, out-of-body, and near-death experiences. It was ineffable or inexpressible within the confines of verbal language. It began with the dark, terrifying passage in which the experiencer came to understand the effective presence of a purifying process which demanded an acceptance on her part of suffering. The experience was then transformed itself into a bright, ecstatic sense of atonement with all living beings including "God." In the wake of its passage the experience left a profound mark on her life.

From this one may conclude that mystical, out-of-body, and near-death encounters, as well as apparent brushes with the dead themselves, have had a profound impact upon those who experience them. More than either dreams or wishful thinking ever could, these events seem to convince their participants that beyond the physical world there is, indeed, a spiritual world which they themselves will inherit upon physical death. One may speculate that it has been this rich and persistent substratum of human experience from which have been drawn visions of future rewards and punishments, of afterlives filled with either pleasure or pain that are the underlying essence of the religious experience.

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