

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Survival of the Soul

There is no death, only a change of worlds...

— Native American Chief

For life is eternal and love is immortal  
and death is only an horizon,  
and an horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight.

— Anonymous

No book on the soul can be complete without a consideration of death and what happens to us when we die. It is truly astonishing that after millennia of human life on this planet and all the vast amount of knowledge that is now available to us, we still know virtually nothing about the most mysterious, challenging and awesome experiences of our lives — our birth and our death. From what other dimension of reality or ‘place’ in the universe do we come at our birth? And to what other dimension or place do we go when we die? Even more extraordinary is the fact that science, until very recently, has ignored the existence of the huge amount of material gathered over the past hundred or so years by institutions devoted to recording non-ordinary experiences: near-death, after-death and out-of-the-body experiences (NDE, ADE and OBE’s), as well as communications to the living from the “dead”. Nor has it accepted as worthy of scientific attention the shamanic experiences of visionaries and mystics of all cultures and times that have testified to the existence of other dimensions of reality and the possibility of a direct relationship with them.

As long as science insists that the universe is impersonal and “dead” and without purpose or intention and that the physical brain is the sole source of consciousness, these beliefs will continue to cripple and constrict the human spirit and limit the horizon of our sight. As long as it continues to believe with Bertrand Russell that “No fire, nor heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave,” it will continue to block the growth of human understanding and stifle the longing of the human heart. Christopher Bache comments on this situation in his book *Dark Night, Early Dawn*:

Western thought has committed itself to a vision of reality that is based almost entirely on the daylight world of ordinary states of consciousness while systematically ignoring the knowledge that can be gained from the night-time sky of non-ordinary states... Trapped within the horizon of the near-at-hand, our culture creates myths about the unreliability and irrelevance of non-ordinary states. Meanwhile, our social fragmentation continues to deepen, reflecting in part our inability to answer the most basic existential questions. (1)

This restricted vision of reality has left an aching void in many people's lives that neither religious belief, nor scientific progress, nor improving the material circumstances of our lives can fill, although these categories of knowledge are presented as offering all that is necessary to ameliorate the suffering of the human condition. What is missing is a sense of our intimate and joyous interaction with an invisible dimension, knowledge of how the relationship with this dimension can be cultivated, and how fear can ultimately be replaced by trust. There have been many great teachers—astronauts of the soul—who have pointed the way to a direct

experience of reality but their message and their teachings have, for the most part, been misinterpreted or ignored. Rigid beliefs and their dark companion, fanaticism, have become a substitute for that mysterious relationship.

Yet we could awaken to awareness of something that was once instinctively known and has long been forgotten—an understanding that we participate in and are contained by the creative consciousness and loving intelligence of the universe. Whatever name we give this consciousness - God, Universal Mind or Intelligence, Cosmic Soul, Energy or Spirit - does not really matter. What matters is that we recognize the existence of a dimension of reality beyond the one we know and enter into a relationship with it.

The neglect of a vitally significant field of human experience has meant that the experiences and discoveries related to this field are considered to be irrelevant or, worse, symptoms of deluded and 'superstitious' minds. We no longer have access to other levels or modes of consciousness because our 'rational' mind has, over the last four centuries, increasingly ridiculed, disparaged and repressed what it has been unable, so far, to accept, prove or comprehend. It has, therefore, cut us off from those deeper instinctive aspects of our nature that have the power to connect us with other dimensions of reality. Access to those deeper-dwelling faculties has been denied for centuries and has led to them becoming atrophied for want of use. From the denial and repression of these intuitive, creative and imaginative aspects of ourselves has come our secular belief system and a culture of escalating violence which now threatens us with the disintegration of civilization and, ultimately, with the possible extinction of our species.

William James' carefully chosen words, written a hundred years ago, seem more relevant than ever today:

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. (2)

Our understanding of life and the interconnectedness of all aspects of it is now tragically deficient. However, the growing pressure of current experiential evidence—most importantly in the field of transpersonal psychology and psychedelic research, but also in the work of scientists at the cutting edge of physics and cosmology—suggests that we are poised at the threshold of a breakthrough, a revelation in our understanding of the nature of reality. It may be that the finality of death is the greatest of our illusions. It may be that, with death, we awaken from the dream of life. Sogyal Rinpoche writes in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*:

All the greatest spiritual traditions of the world, including of course Christianity, have told us clearly that death is not the end. They have all handed down a vision of some sort of life to come, which infuses this life that we are leading now with sacred meaning. But despite their teachings, modern society is largely a spiritual desert where the majority imagine that this life is all that there is. Without any real or authentic faith in an afterlife, most people live lives deprived of any ultimate meaning.”(3)

And, he continues,

I have come to realize that the disastrous effects of the denial of death go far beyond the individual: They affect the whole planet. Believing fundamentally that this life is the only one, modern people have developed no long-term vision. So there is nothing to restrain them from plundering the planet for their own immediate ends and from living in a selfish way that could prove fatal for the future. (4)

Long ago, in Stone Age cultures of the world, people believed that the soul, at death, entered the Milky Way as the passageway to another world from which it would be reborn. The constellation of Cygnus – the Swan – was believed by many to be the destination for the souls of the ‘dead’. In all cultures, even our own modern secular one, the belief in immortality is deeply, instinctively present in the human soul. It may be that this belief has its far distant origins in the observation of the moon and its cyclical process of death and regeneration. The greatest myths from the ancient world – those of Sumer, Egypt and Greece, as well as the Christian myth of the death and resurrection of Jesus - all offer the lunar imagery of rebirth after the three days of darkness.

When my mother died, I instinctively put a rose into her coffin as a symbol of my love for her and the continuity of my relationship with her. Several years later I was amazed to hear a medium say that my mother had been very touched by my gesture of farewell. Her words did not really surprise me but confirmed what I already felt to be true—that consciousness in some form survives death.

While working on the last chapter of *The Myth of the Goddess* with Jules Cashford, we came across these deeply reflective words of the poet Rilke which enlarge the boundaries of our limited vision:

Death is the side of life averted from us, unshone upon by us: we must try to achieve the greatest consciousness of our existence which is at home in both unbounded realms, inexhaustibly nourished from both...The true figure of life extends through both: there is neither a here nor a beyond, but the great unity in which the beings that surpass us, the ‘angels’, are at home...We of the here and now are not for a moment hedged in the time-world, nor confined within it...we are incessantly flowing over and over to those who preceded us...(5)

I know that for many people in their later years the inevitability of death weighs like a stone on their hearts, yet they cannot share their grief and apprehension with their children or friends because there is a reluctance to talk about such matters. Even though death is an experience that awaits each one of us it is still deeply threatening to us. In a culture which believes that consciousness originates in the brain and that the death of the brain must inevitably bring about the extinction of consciousness, the subject of our survival beyond the death of the body rarely comes up for discussion. And so the deeper concerns of the heart are unable to find a channel of expression.

Every day millions all over the world die, yet in our Western society the dead body of a relative does not usually stay in the house for more than a few hours. It is no longer part of the ritual of death to sit with the body or have relatives and friends come to say goodbye to the deceased and put flowers in the coffin. Children very rarely see the body of a grandparent or a parent and are shielded from the reality of what a dead body looks like. Many people are cremated rather than buried. That particular ceremony seems almost surreal because it ends abruptly after an allotted number of minutes in order to make room for the next group of mourners coming to say goodbye to a loved one. While there may be mention of eternal life, a

return to God and similar time-honoured and reassuring ideas at a funeral or a cremation, people are given no idea of what the afterlife might be like, or what the passage from this life to another might entail, or of how to prepare for this experience.

In view of the fact that death has always been part of the human condition and comes to us all, sooner or later, it seems strange that something of the greatest significance to people is given so little attention. However, as Jung pointed out in his autobiography,

Critical rationalism has apparently eliminated, along with so many other mythic conceptions, the idea of life after death. This could only have happened because nowadays most people identify themselves almost exclusively with their consciousness, and imagine that they are only what they know about themselves. Yet anyone with even a smattering of psychology can see how limited this knowledge is...a great deal will yet be discovered which our present limited view would have ruled out as impossible. (6)

Thanks to my own out-of-the-body experience, and the direction my life took in response to that and to the early messages channeled by my mother and her friends, I have gathered together over the years the testimony of many individuals who have spoken of their out-of-the-body experiences and how these have changed their lives. Although I have enormous respect for science as a methodology, I do not accept the reductionist belief that the brain is the origin of consciousness because it seems implausible in the light of what I and many others have experienced, as well as what the philosophers, visionaries, mystics and shamans of cultures past and present have discovered.

The variety of human experience is so rich, extensive and fascinating that I feel it is essential to include subjective experience in any consideration of what is of greatest value to us. And what could be of greater value than to know that consciousness survives the death of the body and what actually happens to us when we die? Those who do not know what it feels like to leave the body and retain conscious awareness of their separation from it are surely not qualified to dismiss such an experience as an illusion, or to affirm that it could only reflect a brain state generated by schizophrenia, epilepsy, a deteriorating nervous system or acute anxiety at the approach of death. To put this kind of label on an experience which is not yet explained by science suggests a monotheistic cast of mind which insists, as Richard Dawkins does, that only one view — the atheist view of reality — is 'true'. I much prefer Rilke's vision which recognizes the fundamental unity of both the 'here' and the 'there' and does not see us confined to a time-bound world. In this chapter I am not attempting to argue the authenticity of the belief in our survival, nor to provide scientific or medical proof of it, but simply to offer the testimony of certain individuals and their beliefs because I find them relevant to a wider comprehension of the soul.

So many millions of people today are losing their lives prematurely, not only through the barbarity of war but through the devastating scourges of diseases such as AIDS and cancer. For this reason there seems to be an ever-greater urgency to explore the question of whether our consciousness survives death. The brutal intrusion of the sudden death of a loved one into so many people's lives, and the anguish of their deep grieving, creates a pressure to discover more about the fate of those so abruptly banished from this dimension. The loss of life in Iraq and Afghanistan, both soldiers and civilians, comes to mind but there are other areas of conflict in the world of today where sudden death is a shocking reality. There is also the sudden loss of life in an earthquake as in the recent terrible one in China. In the poorer parts of the world, there is the loss to parents of children who die of starvation, regional conflicts and water-borne disease and, for millions of children, the loss of parents who have died from AIDS, leaving them to fend for themselves. If we knew more about what happens after death, it might not lessen the pain of the loss of a loved one, but it could take away the image of

death as it is presently defined and allow people to trust that those closest and dearest to them are not lost to them forever. This trust is particularly vital in the lives of children, whose grief at being abandoned can develop later on into uncontrollable rage.

I wonder whether the violence that is so endemic in humanity could be born not only from the experience of calamitous loss but also from the unconscious fear of death and the anger arising from the fact that we know so little about the deeper purpose of our presence on this planet and believe that we have only one life to live here. It may be that the killing of the 'enemy' in war, for example, is a surrogate sacrifice that unconsciously enhances our own capacity for survival. Yet what would be the point of rejoicing in the killing of others if we knew that our bodies were only a temporary casing for an immortal consciousness? What would be the point of the huge engine of destruction that centuries of warfare have brought into being with the aim of destroying the body? Would we not realize that all our efforts to conquer, control and kill others in order to protect our own tribal group are a waste of resources, energy and precious life?

Moreover, to be confined to only a brief span of life on this planet may give rise to the desperate drive to pack as much experience into this one life as possible and to struggle to accumulate wealth, power, prestige and sexual encounters as a compensation to the limited time we have to live.

It seems tragic that so much fear, loss, grief and pain may derive from the image we have of death. This image, transmitted through different cultures, is hardly ever questioned or discussed. For centuries, Christians were taught to believe that death was a punishment introduced into the world through the sin of the Fall, and that Christ's redemptive death on the cross had broken the power of death and given us access to the resurrection—provided we were baptised as Christians. To rise again in a physical body (not a spiritual body) at the Day of Judgement, according to the doctrine, we need to have been baptized into the Christian faith. Not to have been baptized condemned the non-believer and, until very recently, even the unbaptized infant, to limbo. The atheist, of course, believes that death is the final end. He has only this one life and nothing beyond it. No modern belief system, as far as I am aware, apart from that of Tibetan Buddhism and certain shamanic cultures, prepares us for the actual experience of death or describes what life on the other side of death might be like.

Unsurprisingly, in view of this strange silence, the greatest sorrow, the greatest fear we can experience in our lives is the loss of a beloved parent, child or companion, believing either that he or she may be lost to us forever or that reunion with them is uncertain. Despite my trust in survival and the certainty that this life is not my only one, the awareness of death evokes deep anxiety and sorrow in me. Sooner or later I, like everyone else in the world, will experience the loss of a loved one and, eventually, my own death and the parting from my husband, daughter and grandson.

Whether it is our own death or the death of someone close to us, we may be deeply distressed by the fact that when so much passion and effort, suffering and love have been expended in living, everything we have built up, everything we have loved and cherished in our own lives or in those we love, has to be relinquished, often without preparation. Moreover, all that rich experience is, so to speak, gone forever, vanishing without trace in a moment. Many people who have lost loved ones may be left with deep feelings of grief, guilt and anger as well as regret over "unfinished business" with the departed that may affect them for the rest of their lives. Moreover, because of the identification of consciousness with the life of the body, there are also the body's feelings of distress at death, its fear of dissolution and abandonment. What do people say to children when a parent has died? Do they tell them, as I heard one nurse tell a little girl whose mother had just died in hospital, that she could imagine that her mother had been flushed down the toilet and that she would never see her again? Or do we tell them that their mother is being looked after by the angels or by her parents, that she is still close to them and that when they die, she will come to meet them? What we tell them is important for our words have the power to nourish or destroy a child's trust in life.

There is also the problem of suicide, which leaves parents or children with deep feelings of guilt. My brother, whose son killed himself at the age of twenty-eight, carried a heavy burden of guilt until, several years later, he visited a medium. His son told him via the medium to let go of his feelings of guilt. He was far happier where he was than struggling to survive in the world, crippled as he had been by an addiction to cocaine and the onset of schizophrenia. Details he gave which the medium could not have known convinced my brother that this was a genuine message from his son.

What do we take with us as we approach the threshold of death? Surely the quintessence of our being: the love and energy we have poured into life; the love of children and grandchildren to whom we have given life; the love of the people we have cherished and who have cherished us; the creative work whose residue we leave behind us—part seen, part unseen—because no-one can express the full range of his or her being nor can those closest to us know the extent of it.

#### Past Beliefs about Life after Death

Until the scientific revolution of the last four hundred years, people all over the world had a strong sense of connection with a dimension of reality beyond this material one. Within Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as Hinduism and Buddhism there was (and still is) a belief in the existence of angels or spiritual beings who intervene to help and guide humanity, and there was and still is a belief that the soul survives the death of the physical body. Strangely, however, with the exception of Tibetan Buddhism, there seems to be a reluctance to gather evidence for what might happen to us after our death.

If, however, we look back as far as Bronze Age Egypt, we find a highly developed and comprehensive cosmology and a detailed concept of the survival of the soul after death. Far from seeing death as extinction, the Egyptians compared the experience of death to an awakening to cosmic life and a return to the starry world of the cosmos and the “Blessed Fields of Ra”. As Jeremy Naydler tells us in his book *Shamanism in Ancient Egypt*, the divine element of the human being was called the *akh* or “shining spirit”. “It was associated by the Egyptians both with the sun and the stars, for its mode of existence is cosmic. The Egyptian Book of the Dead was an account of the practice of dying, and one of the most important teachings it contains has to do with the separability of the soul.” (7) (Temenos 2006)

Priest in the mask of Anubis preparing the deceased for the afterlife

One of the oldest images of the soul’s survival comes from Crete, engraved on a beautiful gold seal ring called the Ring of Nestor, found in a beehive tomb at Pylos on the west coast of the Peloponnese and dated to c. 1500 BC. It shows a young deceased couple seated on a branch of a great tree. Above their heads are two small chrysalises and, hovering near these, two butterflies.

The Ring of Nestor - Cretan Seal from Pylos

It is said that in ancient Greece, the secret rituals of the Mysteries celebrated at Eleusis and believed to have lasted for a thousand years, gave initiates the certainty of immortality. Etruscan wall paintings dating to 690 BC have recently been discovered that show migrating birds which are believed to symbolize the souls of the dead as they journeyed from one 'home' to another. Instead of building on these earlier beliefs about the survival of the soul, modern secular culture, influenced first by Christianity which dismissed these pagan beliefs, and now by scientific reductionism, has seen them as superstitions that we have thankfully outgrown. Modern culture appears to have lost trust in the continuity of life after death and the living relationship that many earlier cultures had with the ancestral dead.

### The Survival of the Soul

Long ago in 8th century Tibet, a great Buddhist Tantric master called Padma-Sambhava who brought Buddhism to Tibet gave out a teaching on the after-death experience to his closest disciples and the ruler of Tibet. At his request, the text of this teaching was to remain concealed in one of Tibet's sacred mountains, there to await the appointed time when it was appropriate that it should be found and made available to a wider world. An era of persecution followed but in the fifteenth century, the text of Padma-Sambhava's teaching was found and news of it carried far and wide through the mountainous regions adjoining Tibet. Early in the last century, two great scholars, W.Y. Evans-Wentz and the Lama Anagarika Govinda, translated one chapter of it into English and this translation was first published in 1927 as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The third edition of this translation was published in 1957 by Oxford University Press with a commentary by C.G. Jung. Now, for the first time, Penguin has published the entire text of twelve chapters or sections in a new translation called *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, with an introduction and commentary by his Holiness the Dalai Lama. (2005)

It seems that the ground has been prepared for the Tibetan teaching, however difficult to understand. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, a growing number of people have become convinced through their own subjective experience and through reading the many books on the subject that consciousness continues beyond the death of the body. Those who have been unexpectedly precipitated into a near-death experience and returned to their bodies have found that it has given them a new perspective on life. They now live life in a different way, with less fear of death and a greater sense of responsibility for their actions. Others have recorded out-of-the-body experiences (OBE's) and also their being in touch with deceased loved ones.

### A Great Pioneer

The greatest modern pioneer in opening up the subject of life after death for Western culture as a whole was the late Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Like the stunning impact of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* in 1962, which opened our awareness to ecological concerns, the publication of her book *On Death and Dying* in 1969 tore away the opaque veil that had shrouded the subject of death. (8) Almost single-handedly, assisted by her strong personality as well as her extensive clinical experience as a doctor and psychiatrist, she broke through the taboo on the subject of death and transformed attitudes towards death and the care of the dying. Her later books, particularly *On Life After Death* (1991), kept the subject before the eyes of the public and, thanks to the rapid dissemination of her ideas through the media as well as many workshops in different countries, led to many thousands, if not millions, having a greater trust in their own and their loved ones' survival after death. (9) Her writing also led to far better care of the dying and respect for their needs.

Her experience of caring for her dying patients taught her that many of them had NDE's and OBE's which gave them trust in their survival beyond the death of their body. Increasingly

fascinated by this subject, she gathered together the case-histories of over twenty thousand people from all over the world and from every cultural and social background who had returned to life after being declared clinically dead. Some had returned to life naturally and some through the rapidly developing skills of medical reanimation. Drawing on the same imagery as the Cretan Seal of 1500 BC, she compared the death of the physical body to the shedding of a worn-out casing or cocoon, releasing the “butterfly” of the soul into life in another dimension.

These thousands of testimonies convinced her that there was no such thing as death—that it was an experience of transition to another state of consciousness “where you continue to perceive, to understand, to laugh, and to be able to grow.”(10) It seemed to her that it was nothing short of a tragedy that so many millions were not aware of this and she realised that, after her many years of work as a psychiatrist with schizophrenic patients, and many more years of work caring for the dying, she needed most of all to communicate to people the fact that death was not the end of consciousness. “The dying experience is almost identical to the experience at birth. It is birth into a different existence which can be proven quite simply. For thousands of years you were made to “believe” in the things concerning the beyond. But for me it is no longer a matter of belief, but rather a matter of knowing.”(11) Through the many years of her work, she, like others who followed her, was able precisely to define what happens as we move from this dimension into another.

She described how the first stage of the near-death experience begins with a feeling of serenity and calm, even feelings of joy and bliss. A person may become aware that he or she is leaving the body, floating above it and with the unfamiliar ability to move around in the room and look down on the body, often from the ceiling.

As soon as your soul leaves the body, you will immediately realize that you can perceive everything that is happening at the place of dying, be it in a hospital room, at the site of an accident or wherever you left your body. You do not register these events with your earthly consciousness, but rather with a new awareness, even during the time your body has no blood pressure, no pulse, no breathing, and in some cases, no measurable brain waves. (12)

She found that people gave clear descriptions of what they saw happening to them during surgery, or cardiac resuscitation, or when being cut free from a car after an accident, even to such details as the license plate on the car that hit them. They could hear the words of the doctors and nurses working on their shattered bodies and could repeat these to the astonished and often sceptical helpers. A special study of blind people that she conducted showed that they were able to see and remember the colours, jewellery, clothes and even the patterns on the clothes of the people engaged in resuscitating them.

In the second stage of the NDE, the ‘dead’ person who previously had been seriously injured, or perhaps blind or deaf in their earthly life, realizes that they are restored to perfect wholeness and health. Those formerly blind and deaf report that during their NDE, they can see and hear. Even patients who had multiple sclerosis and were confined to a wheel-chair reported that during their NDE they were able to move again, even to dance and sing. A person might be fully aware that he or she had lost a limb in an accident, but in the NDE he or she sees that limb rejoined to the body. This experience would seem to reflect the words in The Tibetan Book of the Dead, “Even though you may have been blind, deaf or lame while you were alive, now your eyes see forms, your ears hear sounds and all your sense faculties are faultless, clear and complete.”(13) While the Tibetan words refer to the person who is actually dead rather than to one who is undergoing a near-death experience, the similarity between them is striking.



Kübler-Ross found that children who were close to death moved in and out of an NDE state as the time of their death drew nearer. They said that a grandparent or other close relative on the other side was there to reassure them and help them with the transition. As her work gathering the thousands of experiences of NDE's developed, she found that no-one who had one of these experiences was any longer afraid of dying. Many indeed wanted to return to that out-of-the-body state where they experienced themselves as healed and whole again. Since the care of dying children was her special concern, she sat with many who had been brought to hospital after car accidents. She found that as she sat watching for the signs of serenity immediately preceding death, a child might say that everything was all right and that their loved ones were waiting for them. In one example she shared, a child told her that her mother and brother were waiting for her—even though no one had told her that her mother and brother had been killed in the same accident.

Another case that Kübler-Ross mentions describes how a Native American woman died in the arms of a stranger shortly after a hit-and-run accident, saying as she passed that he should give a message to her mother that she was happy because she was with her dad. The stranger was so moved by this experience that he drove seven hundred miles to see the woman's mother on an Indian reservation. There he was told that her husband, father of the victim, had died of a coronary one hour before his daughter's accident. (14) There were many cases like this where the dying person had not known of the prior death of another member of the family, yet was greeted by them.

The third stage of the NDE—which can sometimes anticipate the awareness of the physical body being separate from the observing body—is the experience of moving very rapidly through a tunnel or cylinder-like funnel, often accompanied by a loud roaring noise as of a rushing wind, avalanche or waterfall. This is the experience that I myself had when I was eleven and I remember the loud roaring noise as being terrifying because I did not know what was happening to me. If I had known then what I know now, it would have greatly diminished my fear. As they move through the tunnel, many people describe seeing a light at the end of it which grows brighter as they advance through it until they find themselves bathed in its indescribably brilliant radiance.

Near the end of her book *On Life After Death*, Dr. Kübler-Ross describes her own experience of the light and love of the divine ground:

It started with a very fast vibration, or pulsation, of my abdominal area which spread through my entire body and then to anything that my eyes could see – the ceiling, the horizons outside of my window, the trees, and eventually the whole planet earth. It was as if the whole planet was in a very high speed vibration, every molecule vibrated. At the same time, something that looked like a lotus flower bud appeared and opened into an incredible, beautiful, colorful flower. Behind the lotus flower appeared the light that my patients so often talk about. And as I approached this light through the open lotus flower, with a whirl in a deep, fast vibration, I gradually and slowly merged into this incredible unconditional love, into this light. I became one with it. (15)

Later she describes how soon afterwards, as she went out of her house, she experienced “the greatest ecstasy of existence that human beings can ever experience on this physical plane. I was in total love and awe of all life around me. I was in love with every leaf, every cloud, every piece of grass, every living creature.” There was, she says, “no questioning the validity of this experience, it was simply an awareness of a cosmic consciousness of life in every living thing, and of a love that can never ever be described in words.” (16)

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross laid the foundation for a new approach to the experience of dying, one that is based on trust and that presents the invisible dimension of the cosmos as loving and

caring for the lives of those who are about to leave this dimension. There is a gentleness, a true feminine compassion, an empathy in her books that is something new. There is also the fierce passionate strength needed to bring her vision through into a culture which denies death and treats old people with shocking indifference.

Traditionally women have been the ones who care for the dying just as they care for the newborn. However, in the past, all the pronouncements on the nature of death and the survival of the soul from whatever religious tradition have been formulated by men. Here, suddenly, is a woman's perspective on death, a woman's trust in the survival of the soul. We are being offered an opportunity to create a new vision of reality, a new enlightened and compassionate approach to death that could take humanity forward, into a different understanding of both life and death.

#### A New Perspective on Death and Dying

There have been other books (see appendix for list) which have opened up this field of our experience. I vividly remember the impact of Raymond Moody's two books, *Life after Life* (1975) and *Reflections on Life after Life* (1978) which, like Elisabeth Kübler Ross's books, aroused an enormous increase of interest in the possibility of life after death. In 1973 Robert Monroe founded the Monroe Institute America to study out-of-body experiences and wrote *Journeys Out of the Body*. In 1980, Kenneth Ring, Professor of Psychology at the University of Connecticut, published his book, *Life at Death: A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience*, and followed this up with the founding of the International Association for Near-Death Studies, dedicated to the exploration of near-death experiences and encouraging their investigation at an international level. His later books, among them *Heading Towards Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience* (1984) and *Lessons from the Light* (2000), gave further detailed accounts of an experience that must have long been familiar to people in shamanic cultures but had, until very recently, not been discussed in our own.

In 2005, a book by Professor David Fontana—called *Is there an Afterlife?*—minutely documented and summarized the history of research into survival after death. (17) Commenting on it, Dr. Peter Fenwick, who, with his wife, has recently published *The Art of Dying*, writes, "After reading it and assessing the evidence, there can no longer be any doubt that there is life after death." (18) Apart from these seminal books, there were many others published over these thirty years by individuals recording their own personal experience. (Mention Mellon Thomas Benedict's experience)

#### What We Can Learn from These Books

This material, documenting the recorded testimonies of tens of thousands of near-death and out-of-the-body experiences, as well as the evidence gathered through organizations such as the Alister Hardy Research Centre in Oxford, have begun to change our understanding of what lies beyond the transitional experience that we call death. What is most striking about these experiences is their vivid, precise imagery and the intensity of the emotions generated by them, as well their capacity to change people's perspective on their daily lives, giving them a sense that their lives hold a much deeper meaning. It is possible that through thousands of people all over the world having NDE, OBE and ADE (after-death) experiences and recording them for others, our lost tradition of shamanic journeying practiced by lunar cultures as an initiation into other dimensions of reality, is being recovered.

In contrast to this expansion of consciousness, there is the ongoing attempt by scientists to prove that these experiences are "all in the mind". Experiments have been reported and published in the journal *Science* (2007) where scientists have recreated OBE's in the laboratory. From this they conclude that these are nothing more than illusion or "tricks of the mind". So insistent are scientists like Dr. Susan Blackmore, who teaches at a university in the United Kingdom, that OBE's are "all in the brain" that she can unequivocally state, "Out-of-

the-body experiences should be understood not as evidence for the supernatural, but as a fascinating experience that potentially we can all have.” But these scientists cannot so far explain the kind of experiences Kübler-Ross recounts.

Despite this ‘rational’ approach, there now exists a kind of sub-culture formed of thousands of people who have a hunger to know more about these experiences. This hunger would seem to reflect the soul’s need for a deeper insight into the meaning of our lives and the creation of a relationship with other dimensions of reality and with loved ones who have left this world. Belief for these people is not enough: they want to know and they want to connect. Many thousands of people in indigenous cultures still do routinely connect with their ancestors. They consider it perfectly normal and, indeed, necessary to build ongoing relationships with them for the benefit of the particular group to which they belong and to align the life of the community with the deeper life of the invisible world. It is only in ‘rational’ cultures that this connection is ridiculed or dismissed. Here is one experience recounted to me by a woman who has practised shamanic visualization:

I have been involved in a formal shamanic training for almost two years and as one of our exercises we journeyed to the moment following our death. I won't go into detail about all that I saw on the other side, but I will say that I came back with a radically different feeling about life on this earth. I did see something of what you describe, the idea that this world is embedded within a vast matrix of cosmic life. One image – metaphor - that I received was of myself standing in a still center before rebirth while around me turned, like a great carrousel, “entrances” to world after world, dimension after dimension, planet after planet. They were all there and could be accessed at the proper time. For all I know, the possibilities are infinite. During that meditation/vision I saw more clearly than I have ever seen that this is not a flawed, “inferior” world, as Christianity teaches. We already exist in paradise, if only we had eyes to see it—the beauty of this world is immense and dazzling. I realized that in all my best moments, especially in the natural world—near the ocean, on the mountaintop among the redwoods, in the fields and woods of my childhood—I have felt that oneness, that wholeness, that ecstasy of belonging, that sense of immortality and the eternal, that understanding that all is well at the foundation of the world. I recognized that feeling as I looked through the entrances that led to the borders of all these worlds.” (19)

Many NDE testimonies describe a “being of light” who comes to meet them and who is experienced as loving and embracing them—almost the quintessence of love itself. This is a deeply emotional experience, the memory of which stays with them on their return to their earthly life. Others are met by a close family relative, already deceased or by a dear friend who welcomes and reassures them.

A further feature of the NDE is witnessing a life-review, often shown to them by the being of light and experienced ‘in a flash’ even though the review includes minute details of the experiences, relationships, thoughts and emotions of many years of earth life. They are made aware of all the things they have said and done that have affected others in both a positive and negative sense. Their experience suggests that every thought, every word we utter is somehow recorded and also that events that we experience here, as it were in slow motion, are speeded up in that other dimension. Also our capacity to view these events and assimilate them is apparently accelerated there.

What is so interesting about this particular feature of the modern near-death experience is that it reflects a similar experience in Egyptian times, which gave the Egyptians the mythic image of Osiris as the Judge of the Dead and Weigher of the Soul in the scales of the goddess Maat. The Egyptian Book of the Dead shows the soul of the deceased passing through the Hall of

Judgement to be “weighed” before it passes on to the “Fields of Ra” or the starry world. The same image is shown in the right-hand bottom quadrant of the Cretan Seal.

To live one’s life in the awareness that we not only survive death but that every thought, every nuance of relationship, is recorded in a deeper dimension of being which will be played back to us in a life review, gives a far greater awareness of our responsibility for how we conduct ourselves in our relationships with others and how far-reaching our words and actions are in affecting the lives and well-being of others.

Naturally, people who have been critically injured want to stay in this strange new environment which is often described as being exquisitely beautiful. However, if their destiny is to return to earth life, they come up against some kind of barrier, such as a fence or a door, or they encounter someone, sometimes a deceased family member or perhaps a being of light, who gives them reasons why they need to go back to care for their family or to complete their work on earth. Regretfully, they accept this, although sometimes not without protest, and soon find themselves back in their physical body, not knowing quite how they returned to it.

As to what the feeling of passing from one dimension to another is like, there is an interesting description in a book called *On Death and Dying* by Jung's closest colleague, Marie-Louise von Franz. She writes:

All the dreams of people who are facing death indicate the unconscious, that is, our instinct world, prepares consciousness not for a definite end but for a profound transformation and for a kind of continuation of the life process which, however, is unimaginable to everyday consciousness...The image of light appears more often than any other image in our quoted material. Jung has expressed the assumption that psychic reality might lie on a supraluminous level of frequency, that is, it could exceed the speed of light. (20)

One of the interesting accounts she cites is that of a man who was thought to have been clinically dead for twenty-three minutes:

I was moving very quickly toward a bright shining net which vibrated with a remarkable cold energy at the intersection points of its radiant strands. The net was like a lattice which I did not want to break through. For a brief moment my forward movement seemed to slow down, but then I was in the lattice. As I came in touch with it, the light flickering increased to such an intensity that it consumed and, at the same time, transformed me. I felt no pain. The feeling was neither agreeable nor disagreeable, but it filled me completely. From then on everything was different—this can be described only very incompletely. The whole thing was like a transformer, an energy-transformer, which transported me into a formlessness beyond time and space. I was not in another place—for spatial dimensions had been abolished—but rather in another state of being. (21)

Here is another observation she cites, that of an architect named Stefan von Jankovich:

One of the greatest discoveries I made during death...was the oscillation principle...Since that time “God” represents, for me, a source of primal energy, inexhaustible and timeless, continually radiating energy, absorbing energy and constantly pulsating...Different worlds are formed from different oscillations; the frequencies determine the differences...Therefore it is possible for different worlds to exist simultaneously in the same place, since the oscillations that do not correspond with each other also do not influence themselves...Thus birth and death

can be understood as events in which, from one oscillation frequency and therefore from one world, we come into another. (22)

#### After-Death Experiences (ADE's)

Many bereaved people have had the experience of seeing their loved ones appearing to them or communicating with them in some way after their death. Others feel a very strong presence of that person in their lives, as if they were still close to them, even close enough to have a dialogue with them. They can feel the presence of the other even if they cannot see them with their physical eyes. Some people have vivid dreams of the deceased person. While this may be considered an unusual event in our culture, probably because there is no way it can be shared with a wider public, in indigenous ones, it is an entirely normal experience.

In his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung describes a dream he had of his wife shortly after her death:

I saw her in a dream which was like a vision. She stood at some distance from me, looking at me squarely. She was in her prime, perhaps about thirty, and wearing the dress which had been made for her many years before...perhaps the most beautiful thing she had ever worn. Her expression was neither joyful nor sad, but, rather, objectively wise and understanding, without the slightest emotional reaction, as though she were beyond the mist of affects. I knew that it was not she, but a portrait she had made or commissioned for me. It contained the beginning of our relationship, the events of fifty-three years of marriage, and the end of her life also. Face to face with such wholeness one remains speechless, for it can scarcely be comprehended. (23)

I wonder whether our world and the worlds or dimensions we cannot see exist as levels in the vast vibrational field of cosmic soul where each level is vibrating at a different rate. So the world of the "living dead" moves at a different vibratory rate than the "physical matter" of our world. Occasionally, in some way we don't yet understand, these different levels come close to or overlap with each other, or perhaps our field of consciousness expands so that we have a glimpse, a brief connection, before we are returned to our usual state. In a talk he gave on Angels, the artist the late Cecil Collins said, "Perhaps there are not two things, spirit and matter ...but different degrees of one reality: different degrees of vibrations on a scale from the lower end of vibrations we call matter to the higher, the vibration and radiance of the world of light which is the world of angels. We see according to our place on the scale of vibrations." (24)

#### The Subtle Body

One of the most important questions that arises from these experiences is the nature of the vehicle of consciousness after the death of the body. In 1919 G.R.S. Mead, translator of major works of Egyptian and Neo-Platonic philosophy and the then known Gnostic texts, published his *Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition*. (25) This revealed, as the introduction to a new edition published in 2005 says, that there is and always has been an esoteric tradition in the West, as well as in the East, concerning the "subtle body" of man. This would seem to correspond to what is generally referred to as the soul in the Christian tradition. But the concept of the soul as the subtle body we inhabit after death was never developed by Christian doctrine and offered to the culture as a whole, so the pre-existent teaching about the survival of consciousness after the death of the body derived from Egypt and, subsequently, the Platonic School in Athens and the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus was virtually lost.

Mead writes of the subtle body: "Conjectures concerning it vary with every stage of culture and differ within every stage. But the underlying conception invariably holds its ground, and makes good its claim to be one of the most persistent persuasions of mankind in all ages and climes."(26) Even in 1919, he could write in words that are as relevant for our day, nearly a hundred years later, as they were for his: "It is, however, the prevailing habit of the sceptical rationalism of the present day to dismiss summarily all such beliefs of antiquity as the baseless dreams of a pre-scientific age, and to dump them all indiscriminately into the midden of exploded superstitions. But this particular superstition, I venture to think, cannot be justly disposed of in so contemptuous a fashion." (27)

Mead was already anticipating the possibility that physicists would one day discover the existence of subtle energy fields and would therefore be able to prove the existence of the subtle body, using their own methodology.

Many writers of earlier cultures speak variously of a "subtle" body, a "resurrection" body (St. Paul), a "celestial" body, a "shining" body, a "radiant" body and an "ethereal" or "starry" body. In the sixteenth century, an alchemist who goes by the unforgettable name of Ruland the Lexicographer, identifies the faculty of the imagination itself with the subtle body when he writes "Imagination is the star in man; the celestial and super-celestial body." This "body" was thought by some to be located in some part of the physical body but was also described as something that surrounds or enfolds the physical body and acts as a vehicle for consciousness when it is incarnated in this earthly dimension. When we discard the body the "celestial body," so to speak, comes into its own and we discover to our surprise that we are not dead but very much alive in a "new body". As the great early Christian theologian, Origen (ca AD182-ca 251), pointed out, we do not need the same kind of body we have on earth as we no longer need to eat, excrete etc.

This radiant celestial body can see and hear as before, only more intensely, more rapidly, and it gives us instantaneous access to the thoughts of others, as well as to places or people with whom we wish to communicate. It also gives the person access to the thoughts and emotions of people they knew while in this physical dimension. If people are harbouring negative thoughts about them, this can cause them great suffering, while, as Sogyal Rinpoche suggests, if they are sending them loving, healing thoughts, these can help them so there is a connection between the two planes. The life review, which moves from beginning to end with incredible speed, suggests that time is different or non-existent in this other dimension. The subtle body moves faster than thought to the place it wants to be and just as quickly to contact the people it wants to see. Other people's thoughts and communications appear in one's own consciousness. In relation to the clarity of vision and freedom of movement that characterises life in the subtle body, we are, in this physical dimension of reality, living a diminished existence, enclosed like an oyster in its shell, as Plato put it in his Phaedrus.

One of the most beautiful descriptions of the subtle body is to be found in The Hymn of the Robe of Glory or Hymn of the Pearl as it is also known. Believed to have been written by a Gnostic called Bardasanes, who lived in Edessa in the third century AD, and originally translated by Mead, it tells the story of the soul taking leave of her father and mother in the heavenly realms, her descent into mortality, her lapse into forgetfulness of her divine origin, her awakening and seizure of a pearl from the jaws of a great dragon and her return to the source from which she came, where she is finally clothed in the "body of glory" and received into the Kingdom. The vibrant words of this extract from the poem describe the soul's encounter with the innermost essence of the "body of light".

My bright embroidered robe,  
Which... with glorious colours;  
With gold and with beryls,  
And rubies and agates  
And sardonyxes varied in colour...

And like the sapphire stone also were its manifold hues...  
It hastened that I might take it  
And me too my love urged on  
That I should run to meet it and receive it;  
And I stretched forth and received it,  
With the beauty of its colours I adorned myself  
And my toga of brilliant colours  
I cast around me, in its whole breadth. (28)

### The Moment of Death

These beautiful lines written by the sixteenth century English poet John Donne in his poem "Hymn to God, My God" awaken deep reflection on the moment of transition when we move from this dimension into another:

Since I am coming to that holy roome  
Where, with thy Quire of Saints, for evermore  
I shall be made thy music; as I come  
I tune the instrument here at the door,  
And what I must doe then, think here before. (29)

But how do we tune the instrument of our being to the music of the cosmos? Even the act of reflecting on this gentle metaphor of communion or reunion may help to quieten the turmoil of our thoughts, bring to mind what is most important to us, how we might refine our being. In the final hours and minutes of our lives, we may experience many strong feelings: fear and uncertainty about what is to come, regret about things we may have done or were not able to do, bitterness at the suffering we may have endured or caused, deep sadness that we were unable to do more, the longing to communicate all that we were unable to say to loved ones, and, above all, to express the love we felt and feel for them. It helps greatly if those feelings can be shared with someone who can spare the time to listen to us.

Group Captain Leonard Cheshire V.C., founder of the Leonard Cheshire Homes, wrote these moving words in a pamphlet he published entitled "Death":

To accompany a man on his final life's steps as a companion and a friend, recognising that it is his special hour in which we are privileged to share, is to receive as much as it is to give. It is to become more fulfilled and mature, and almost certainly a little more sensitive to what is taking place in another person's heart. It is to learn how truly our living and our dying are both part and parcel of the same process and how much easier it would all become if we could learn to talk about it during our lifetime as naturally and realistically as we do with life's other main turning points. (30)

Those who do quietly sit and listen, in empathic companionship, even when a person has lost consciousness, may become aware that just before the person dies, a deep feeling of peace and serenity pervades the room.

Often those who are dying may find themselves intensely alone and afraid at the moment when they are in the greatest need of comfort and support. If they have been wounded in battle or involved in a car accident, they may have been rushed to hospital and the Intensive

Care Unit. Doctors and nurses may be busily engaged in trying to prolong the moments of their life when, sensing the approach of death, all they want is to be able to prepare for the moment of transition and to be listened to by another human being when, as Leonard Cheshire writes, “There takes place in the uttermost depth of our being a dialogue into which no one else on earth, even our closest partner, the sharer of all our other secrets, can enter.” In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Sogyal Rinpoche asks us to live our lives in awareness of this moment of death so that, when it comes, we are able to relinquish the pressing concerns of the personality and focus on reunion with the Source from which we come. This Source, in the Tibetan tradition, as in others, is conceived of as a great light—the light of the Void. Whatever effort we can make in our last moments to free ourselves from the powerful emotions that may have ruled our lives, will ease our transition from one level of reality to another. With death approaching it is important, where possible, to resolve old problems of relationship with others, to let go of old angers, jealousies, envies and fears, to be reconciled with people from whom we have become alienated, to speak lovingly and reassuringly to parents or children from whom we may be separated, to share our anxieties with a close friend or relative.

### Euthanasia

In this country many people have the dreadful experience of seeing their loved ones suffering from an incurable illness with the knowledge that neither they nor their doctors are permitted by law to help them to die, even though the person suffering is begging to be released from their body and ready to pass on to whatever they believe awaits them after death. Some thirty or so years ago, when there were still family doctors who knew the whole family well and who were often trusted friends, this was not a problem. Unfortunately, the reorganization of the NHS in the United Kingdom, together with the fall-out from the Shipman case, in which a GP, considered to be a highly respected doctor in the old-fashioned “family” sense, casually murdered dozens, possibly hundreds, of people he had decided were expendable, have made it very difficult for a doctor to “help” a patient over the threshold. Officially it is no longer possible.

While the opposition to euthanasia is understandable because people might be tempted to dispose of an elderly spouse or relative for a variety of reasons, each individual case should, I feel, be assessed by the family of the person who wishes to die, together with a doctor's assessment of the patient's condition and the quality of life available to him or her. To make a blanket law, applicable to everyone, is possibly to protect society against the abuse of the freedom to make a choice between life and death, but it is also to act without compassion for the suffering of the individual and his or her family. It goes against the values of the heart. Some countries, notably Switzerland, Belgium and, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands, allow people the right to choose to end their lives.

### Reincarnation

In a lunar culture, the idea that we have many lives, moving in and out of this physical dimension of reality, would have been thought of as perfectly natural, given the nature of the recurring cycles of the moon. I have long been convinced that we have many lives, fragments of which may return to us, some vividly and some as a faint memory—perhaps as a longing for a specific place or a strong attraction to someone who seems strangely familiar to us or, conversely, as fear or dislike of places or people we barely know. When I first went to India and came across the belief in reincarnation in both Hinduism and Buddhism, it never occurred to me to question it. I felt totally at home in India, at home in these religions so different from my own. Because of the breadth and depth of their concept of divinity, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita meant more to me than the Christian image of God I had grown up with. I found myself drawn to study the life and teaching of the Buddha and the wonderful images of him that had spread from India all across Asia to China and Japan.



It seemed obvious to me that thousands of years of contemplation in traditions that were far older than Christianity needed to be respected and, moreover, the idea that we have many lives seemed so logical. One life was not nearly long enough to encompass all that was in me that wanted to live and experience, nor was it enough to learn all I wanted to know and to apply that knowledge to how I lived my own life, however it was to unfold. The idea that we only have one life was claustrophobic. The idea that we are continually reborn into this material dimension until we are able to recover the knowledge of our divine origin and begin consciously to relate to that source or ground made perfect sense.

The teaching about the long-term karmic effects of my actions, carried over from life to life, made me more conscious of the need to act with greater awareness of how I was living and how I was treating other people. Although there were abuses - as for example when people do not try to relieve the suffering of others because they think they must have deserved it - the concept of karma seemed more compassionate as an explanation of suffering and release from suffering than the concept of original sin. There were so many questions that could never be answered if the framework was limited to one life. But if I widened it to embrace many lives, everything made more sense. There was more time to pause and reflect on things instead of packing every moment with frenetic activity, in case something was left out of my one and only life.

In a recent book, *Science and the Re-enchantment of the Cosmos* (2006), Ervin Laszlo sums up the many cultures and peoples who have believed in reincarnation.

It has been an intrinsic part of myth, metaphysics, and philosophy for thousands of years. It is an essential element in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, and Taoism. It is present in the belief systems of African tribes, of Native Americans and pre-Columbian cultures, of the Hawaiian kahunas, and of the Gauls and Druids. It was adopted by the Essenes, the Pharisees, the Karaites, and other Jewish tribes and groups; it remains an important element in the Kabbalah. In ancient Greece the Pythagorians and the Orphics subscribed to it. Plato spoke of “metempsychosis” (the transmigration of the psyche) in many of his famous dialogues – *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus* – Julius Caesar mentioned it as a doctrine held by the Celts and Roman historians noted that it was shared by the Germanic people. (31)

So how did it come to be lost in the West? Reincarnation was once part of Christian doctrine until it was removed at the time of the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 AD when the Emperor Justinian anathematised the teachings of the great Christian teacher Origen about the pre-existence of the soul. Origen, described by Saint Gregory as “the Prince of Christian learning in the third century,” wrote: “Every soul comes into this world strengthened by the victories and weakened by the defeats of its previous life.” It seems nothing short of tragic that the Emperor Justinian - who with his wife Theodora facing him stands clothed in magnificent robes in the apse of San Vitale in Ravenna - also closed down the 1000-year-old Platonic Academy in Athens in 529 AD, driving out its last teacher, Damascius. Through the decision of one powerful man, Christianity was deprived of a teaching that could have given it far greater depth and a more complete perspective on life, and the culture of the West was immeasurably impoverished by the loss for nearly a thousand years of the legacy of Platonic and Neo-Platonic teaching with all its rich insight into the nature of the soul. It was only re-introduced into Western civilization by Marsilio Ficino during the fifteenth century when Cosimo dei Medici commissioned him to translate the works of Plato.

Healing the Traumas of Past Lives

Past-life Regression is a recently developed approach to a deep understanding of ourselves that confirms the fact that we each hold experience and memory of many other lives. Using this method of regression, we can access buried memories which are held over from life to life in the wider field of the soul. We can, for example, re-live and heal the trauma of a terrible death in another life whose memory, held at the unconscious level of the psyche, affects us in this one. It may even afflict us with bodily symptoms or disturbing emotional ones such as constant anxiety and obsessive fear or guilt. Roger Woolger is a Jungian analyst and a pioneer in this field. For the last two decades he has worked to develop past-life regression, calling it “Deep Memory Process”. As he writes in his most recent book, *Healing Your Past Lives*, this method “offers a set of tools for delving into the deep recesses of your unconscious mind—what we call the soul—to discover where memories of past existence are stored, and bring them to light...They can open to you the transcendent reality of the soul.” Studying with shamans and spiritual healers in South America, he learned from them that these deeply unconscious memories can be released and the psyche rebalanced and that we have many spiritual resources that are available to us from dimensions of reality beyond our own. In the course of his researches and his practise, it dawned on him that as he empathically accompanied his clients and students into their inner worlds, he was actually moving with them into another world that in many cultures has been called the “subtle world”. He discovered that by cultivating a specific form of imaginative awareness, a visionary capacity which is latent in us all can be developed.

This visionary capacity...is both the language of and the gateway to the soul, transcending time and space to let us access eternal realities only dimly known to our reasoning minds. It has always been available to visionaries, mystics and charismatics—and regarded by them as a sacred faculty—but for many people it lies dormant until it is awakened. (32)

In his view, there are three “fields”. The first carries the memories of the physical traumas, including terrible deaths and diseases that were suffered in a former life or lives. The second is an emotional field which carries “the memories of all unresolved feeling states and emotional traumas from past lives, such as fear of physical violence, anger at injustice, depression about a hopeless situation, grief at deep loss, guilt at cruel behavior, shame from abuse or humiliation, or worthlessness from having failed in some way.” The third field or level of memories carries the memory of obsessive thoughts that arose from these unresolved or distressing situations. These thoughts may persist in this present life, carrying over a negative refrain from another one, thoughts such as “I’m no good,” “I shall never be able to do this,” “Everybody is against me”. Often the refrain may reflect a deep conviction of guilt, arising from a situation in another life where one had perhaps to abandon a child or where one was responsible for the death of others, as in the context of war. Beyond these three fields, there is a vast field which holds the memories of the connections, whether positive or negative that we had with people who were close to us in another life. If, for example, we were responsible for the death of other people, perhaps ordering their execution or the wholesale slaughter of thousands, the spirits of those people, still carrying their unresolved pain and anger, may remain attached to us. This is a sobering thought which those planning to develop or use WMD might contemplate.

These physical, emotional and mental memories and negative refrains from other lives can affect our present life, inhibiting our ability to respond to life’s difficulties and challenges in a positive way. I don’t think there has been a study apart from Roger Woolger’s many case histories which connects severe depression in this life with the memory of trauma carried through from another one. Nor is there one showing how a person may repeat the negative patterns of a previous life by being drawn to situations or people which may re-constellate the

original trauma. As for healing all this trauma, many are involved in helping to release the spirits of those still bound to this dimension by their suffering, particularly the spirits of soldiers killed in war who may not realise that they have died. One of the most effective ways of helping those we have lost is to imagine them bathed in light, healed and whole and free of pain and distress. The pioneering work of Edith Fiore as explained in her book, *The Unquiet Dead*, is of particular note in this connection (33) as is the work of the Jungian analyst, Edward Tick, working with war veterans as well as the souls of the dead, described in his moving book, *War and the Soul*. (34)

There is so much that is still to be discovered. What we perceive as visible reality is only a fraction of the whole. A vast amount of the spectrum of reality is still invisible and unknown to us. Now, amazingly, digital technology is able to show us “orbs of light” which unexpectedly appear on digital photographs, suggesting phenomena are appearing here which come from another dimension of reality. (35)

A few years ago, a manuscript came into my hands called *The Miracle of Death*. I wrote a Foreword to it because I felt it could help many bereaved people to trust in the survival of their loved ones. Betty Kovács, the author, who lost first a son and then a husband in car accidents two and a half years apart, describes how, out of a sustained meditative attention, there was born in her not only a deeper capacity for insight but the opening of her awareness “to a dimension so vast that I was stunned to realize how excruciatingly small a space I had been trained to live in and call reality.” What she experienced as her awareness of this dimension expanded was the shattering of the myth of materialism which condemns so many to a meaningless life of “mediocrity, addiction, violence, indifference and fanaticism.” The message of her book is one of hope and trust that we will be able to open ourselves to the experience of the mysteries of the universe and weave these mysteries into our daily lives, and by doing so healing the deep fragmentation in our souls. On the last page of her book she writes, “As we reconnect, full circle, to the roots of our existence in the Mind of the universe,... We understand that ‘Death is as Divine as Life,’ because it is Life - because ‘There is nothing but Life.’” (36)

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