

Otherworldly perceptions during the near-death experience: should they be taken literally ?

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The perceptions of “the other world”

When do they occur ?

The extra-corporal perceptions start at the very beginning of an out-of-body state due to an accident, a surgery, a heart attack or any other reason that takes the subject to the brink of death. The perceptions which occur when the consciousness is still in our world can be corroborated whereas the ones experimented in the “other world”, after the passage of the tunnel, remain unverifiable, although described in a very similar way by thousands of experiencers.

What do experiencers see during their NDE ?

Carol and Arvin Gibson (Gibson 1994) analysed near-death experiences of 68 subjects (40 women and 28 men), mostly of them (63%) being Mormons and living the Salt Lake City area.

In 21.7% of the cases, the subjects saw landscapes with plants, trees, shrubs, flowers and gardens. Colours were much more beautiful and intense than on earth. In same cases, animals were also seen.

7.2% of the subjects saw buildings.

55.4% saw deceased persons and, in 39.8% of the cases, the experiencers seemed to recognize them. Unless these spirits were relatives, the subjects could not quite remember who these deceased persons were, they just had the impression they knew them. As far as the deceased relatives were concerned (27.7% of the cases), the subjects could describe them in details and received telepathic messages from them (in 63.9% of the cases).

Divinities (God, Jesus) were involved in 26.5% of the testimonies and in 18.1% of these cases, they were seen. Those who saw Jesus described him like an being of energy and light, dressed with white and brilliant cloth.

Unfortunately, I don't have time here to enter into the different interpretations I describe in my paper, they include the materialistic, the symbolic and the superluminal hypothesis. I also reflect on the cultural influence of these otherworldly perceptions.

The point of view of an experienter

I am happy to provide the analysis of a Dutch experienter by the name of Macheld Blickman.

"My interpretation to a better understanding of what a glimpse of a continuation after death may reveal.

In order to make you understand how I experienced the reality of the existence hereafter I have to turn our way of thinking upside-down. When we are born, we are in fact 'all knowing': very spiritual beings that incarnate from another dimension in full consciousness for a purpose that we deliberately have taken as a task in this lifetime. But we must forget this promise in order to find its meaning. So during our incarnation, after birth when we are still connected to that other world, we must at the same time grow into our bodies in order to be able to ground and to get familiar to the circumstances we are born into and to the task we have to complete during our mission on earth.

The imprints of our brains are formed and very much influenced by the way we learn to think: from our parents and the people around us. Maybe you can compare it to a computer in which all kind of chips are put, partly in the right place, but some upside down and in the wrong place. I always felt myself being different from my parents and when I was very small (about 3 years old) I have decided that I wanted to remain myself whatever meaning that may have at that age. So besides the upbringing of my parents I very much tried to stay on my own, but I had to build up an ego as well in order to survive and to fit into the world around me. So to keep it short: my brains adjusted to all kind of circumstances and built up a personality that was divided. Half of it was inauthentic and survival patrons, the other half came from my heart and was conscious, self-thinking, original. And that part was very strong, hidden deep inside myself under a layer of fears, expectations and wishes. More or less I had shrunk my capacity, my own self in order to adjust to a world in which I had to play my part. But when I was on the edge of death I experienced that I was much more than that!

When I had my near-death experiences (1975, 1976) I was connected to that bigger dimension that immediately felt like coming home. I had never really attached myself into this world, nor to my parents nor to any religion or fantasy world, so outside my body, without eyes, I was tuned into this other dimension that I recognized as being real, as being my home-base, as Love with a capital L, the pure essence of my being and of all of us, the Source where we come from and where we are all inter-connected. My mind did not make up any images of a real world behind death, on the contrary, the reality was there, in me and there were no images that somehow reminded me of the life I had just been taken out. I "saw" no deceased dear ones, no Jesus or Maria, no green meadows, no structures and I heard no music or smelt nice fragrances. To me, these are projections of the mind and have to do with the way we are formed and still attached, either positively or negatively, to these earthly images. In fact I think we need these images as a bridge to enter into the spiritual world and to find our way "back home". To me they are a kind of interface, the last contractions of the dying mind.

For the mind these images, whatever they are, are real as they have helped to build up the mind and give it its understanding of the world we live in. To let go these images takes a while for the brain. And the other dimension we are tuned into is far

too big to be understood with our normal, limited brains. Our brain cannot capture the impact of what it is experiencing through the normal brain function, cannot cope with this full-awareness. I think this also explains why people from all countries and all cultures have more or less the same experiences outside their bodies, only the interpretation of what they "see" is very much determined by their culture and their backgrounds.

What I experienced is that we are all part of a Divine Energy that surpasses any religion as we believe in here on earth, but of which we carry a spark hidden deep down in ourselves. But that is what we have forgotten and during our life we are in search of this most precious gift outside ourselves where we will never find what we are looking for.

People with near-death experiences from all over the world tell the same story and there is a lot to learn from them. It is not death that separates us, it is an all encompassing Love of which we all carry the essence in ourselves, that binds us and that unites us in the other dimension. If only more people knew about these experiences and we, the people who had a near-death experience, would be taken more seriously, we all together would be able to contribute to a better world. And in that sense we could help to create 'Heaven on Earth!'

Otherworldly perceptions as a visual support

I postulate that the otherworldly perceptions can be understood like some sort of visual support that allows the dying person to become acclimated to the other dimension. I believe this dimension is actually unimaginable and incomprehensible without this visual support which serves as a link between the material and the immaterial worlds, similar to a computer interface. The other world reveals itself in form of images which are familiar to the experiencer and allow him or her to understand what is happening. I propose that these perceptions or images should not be taken literally but understood like a translation or a stage setting which decode a reality which is certainly real, certainly existing, but incomprehensible for a human mind. I believe that the otherworldly reality is much more complex than these perceptions allow to understand or even to presume.

The hypothesis of the Absolute Being

I hypothesize that the human being can be seen as one of the multiple – or maybe infinite - dimensions or facets of an absolute being. In other words, a human being is only one of the possible expressions or representations of the absolute being. When suggesting that an absolute being has multiple facets, I am not entirely rigorous, as an absolute being can suffer no restriction, it is by nature pluralistic and global, but I put it this way to be more understandable. The absolute being exists and, as a human being, incarnates into a body, disincarnates at the moment of "death" and then invests another of its multiple facets. Intrinsically, the nature of the absolute being remains unchanged, though empowered by more or less powerful properties. Each of these dimensions would therefore be "true", consistent and observable in a given context. Thus, in the context of the "living", one would observe the "human being" with his/her reality, like birth, happiness, illness and, finally, "death". "Death" is therefore seen as a transitory process which would permit the

human being to move to another dimension and thereby activate another of his/her facets. When dying, human beings change state, they do not cease to exist as being. This change of state is not a change of nature. This is similar to the states of water which can be solid, liquid, or gas, but which, fundamentally, always remains water. This analogy is not altogether as consistent as I would like it to be, as these different states of water all take place in the same context which is not necessarily the case for the different facets of the absolute being. This hypothesis does not necessarily corroborate the incarnation belief system. I rather hypothesize that the “human-being-state” would be undergone just one time, before unfolding into another facet, or dimension.

Certain properties or characteristics are linked to each facet of the absolute being. According to which state is activated, inherent capacities are activated. The human-being state is probably the state with the most limited characteristics and capacities. We know that during the near-death experience, subjects have access to larger knowledge that can be defined as “absolute knowledge”. They perceive the meaning of life and “death”, the reason why their earthly life unfolded the way it did, the nature of human condition, the destiny of humankind from the beginning to the furthestmost point in future and the mysteries of the universe.

The human-being-state is submitted to limited characteristics or perspectives. Due to this limited perspective, he/she can see (understand) only certain issues. Let us illustrate this idea with another analogy. When you are in a river valley, you have a limited perspective; you can see the fields around you, and maybe a forest clinging to the side of the mountain in front of you. But if you go to the top of the mountain, you can see the valley in its totality, dotted with hamlets, traversed by the river which meanders downhill. You even might catch sight of a far-off town. You will see the entirety of the valley and you will understand the necessity of its geography, such as the river had no other choice than to follow the exact shape of the terrain.

The absolute being in its human-being-state has only access to a partial perspective and therefore to a limited comprehension. According to the characteristics linked to the activated state, the absolute being can observe all the aspects or only some of them, it is contextual. The totality of the facets of the absolute being is not visible from the point of view of the ordinary consciousness. I hypothesize that it is only when human beings leave their body temporarily during the near-death experience, and, presumably, when they leave it definitely, that they attain a perspective which allows them to have a transcendent perception of their human state. They understand the necessity of the unfolding of their existence and are finally in peace with their destiny. In this new state, the absolute being has a transcendent vision and comprehension of the world and the human condition. I suppose that the near-death state situates in the intersection between these two states – or maybe it is one of its facets.

When leaving the body, human beings enter into a new dimension of their nature of absolute beings. Material constraints do not exist, time and space are abolished, they move from one point of the universe to another in no time. In fact, they do not “move” as this verb is characterised by time that flows, they simply are. Even their representation becomes obsolete as this is yet another human referential. And so it is, I suppose, with otherworldly perceptions during the near-death experience: trying

to explain them is yet another human referential, the otherworld reality exists, the absolute beings are, and our human-being-state does not permit to say more than that....