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# THE BEYOND AND THE CONSCIOUSNESS

WHICH ANSWERS GIVES US RELIGION,  
PHILOSOPHY AND NEAR-DEATH-EXPERIENCE?

German title:

Jenseits und Bewusstsein

Welche Antworten geben uns Religion, Philosophie und Nahtoderfahrung

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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
PROLOGUE .....	6
HISTORICAL ABOUT THE NEAR-DEATH-EXPERIENCE.....	21
THE PHENOMENON OF THE NEAR-DEATH-EXPERIENCE .....	36
THE CONTACT WITH THE BEYOND .....	43
MY NEAR-DEATH-EXPERIENCE.....	43
WHAT HAS CHANGED FOR ME AND MY LIFE.....	55
THE UNITS OF THE NEAR-DEATH-EXPERIENCE.....	68
THE PRIMARY UNITS OF THE NDE .....	68
THE OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE .....	70
UNLIMITED FREE MOVEMENT.....	76
EMOTIONS OF ETERNAL HAPPINESS .....	77
TUNNEL-VISION AND PERCEPTION OF CELESTIAL LIGHT.....	77
THE FLASHBACK OF LIVE .....	84
MY ENCOUNTER WITH THE BEING OF LIGHT .....	86
RECOGNITION OF TRUTH AND UNIVERSALLY KNOWLEDGE .....	87
THE ULTIMATE BORDER – THE REAL GATE TO THE BEYOND.....	89
PERCEPTION WITH ANGELS AND SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE .....	92
PERCEPTION WITH DECEDENTS AND RELATIVES.....	93
LUMINOUS TOWNS AND BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES.....	93
THE CHOICE OF THE RETURN.....	94
THE SECONDARY UNITS OF THE NDE .....	95
THE QUALITY OF THE PERCEPTION .....	96
THE DEATHBED-VISION - A SPECIAL TYPE OF THE NDE.....	97
GENERALLY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NDE .....	101
ARE NEAR-DEATH-EXPERIENCES DREAMS? .....	101
THE PROBLEM WITH OUR LANGUAGE .....	102
SCIENTIFIC ISSUES OF THE NEAR-DEATH-EXPERIENCE .....	104
THE POINT OF DEATH IN A MEDICAL VIEW .....	104
THE NEAR-DEATH-EXPERIENCE AND THE SCIENCE.....	115
LIFE AFTER LIFE AND THE RELIGIONS .....	119
THE JUDAISM .....	123
RELIGIONS FROM PREHISTORIC TIMES .....	140
RELIGION OF THE ILLITERATE CULTURES IN MODERN TIMES.....	144
SUMERIANS - BABYLONIANS - ASSYRIANS .....	151
EGYPT.....	159
THE ANCIENT GREECE.....	167

HINDUISM .....	175
BUDDHISM .....	189
ISLAM .....	199
CHRISTIANITY .....	214
THE BEYOND AND THE CULTURES - A CONCLUSION .....	231
THE HISTORIC TRUTH OF THE RELIGIONS .....	236
THE OLD TESTAMENT .....	239
THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE LIFE OF JESUS .....	245
THE LEGEND OF BUDDHA .....	266
THE ANALOGIES OF RELIGIONS AND ANCIENT HISTORY .....	270
THE DONATION OF CONSTANTINE .....	272
THE ISLAM AND THE POLITICAL POWER .....	274
THE BUDDHISM AND THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP .....	276
A SHORT INTERIM RESULT .....	280
THE ERRORS OF THE RELIGIONS .....	285
THE EXCLUSIVENESS MANIA OF THE RELIGIONS .....	285
THE FLAME OF GOD IN EVERY HUMAN BEING .....	298
SIN, GUILT AND ATONEMENT .....	299
SIN IN THE FOCUS OF THE BEYOND .....	306
THE MEANING OF LIFE .....	309
IS RELIGION STILL CONTEMPORARY? .....	319
WHY RELIGION COULD BE A GOOD WAY .....	319
THE INSPIRING WAY OF RELIGIONS .....	323
THE BEYOND AND THE CONSCIOUSNESS .....	331
WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS? A FIRST CONCEPT .....	331
THE CAVE PARABLE OF THE PLATO .....	337
WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS? A NEW CONCEPT .....	346
DOES GOD EXIST? .....	376
WHO OR WHAT IS GOD? .....	376
THE DEVINE PRINCIPLE .....	382
THE DEVINE ESSENCE .....	387
WHERE THE LOVE IS, THERE ALSO IS GOD .....	388
EPILOGUE .....	390
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	399

For we cannot but speak the things  
which we have seen and heard

The Acts of the Apostles 4:20



## INTRODUCTION

### WHAT THIS BOOK SETS OUT TO DO – AND WHAT IT DOESN'T

When I was in my mid thirties I had a near-death experience. During an unusual event of this nature, the individual experiences an extraordinary physical and spiritual state. Near-death experiences are usually brought on by life threatening situations such as a bad accident, or clinical death during surgery. But, as in my case, near-death experiences can also be precipitated by far less dramatic causes. But more on this later.

One of the most amazing features of many reports of near-death experiences are out of body experiences, or OBEs. During an OBE, the soul leaves the body, which undergoes extraordinary experiences that enable the individual to journey to, and experience, the afterlife. Hence during my OBE, my soul did in fact leave my body and journey to the afterlife. This was undoubtedly the most amazing and extreme experience of my life. An experience of impressive beauty and magnificent depth. An experience that cannot be compared with anything that I had ever encountered, or have encountered since. From this point on, my life was utterly changed. My OBE has remained an indelible memory, and has become a constant companion of my very being.

And though at first I was reluctant to go public with my OBE, because pretty much everyone totally misunderstood what it was all about, in recent years I've been wanting to describe my OBE in a book, along with the related perceptions and the insights I've derived from it.

I've been preoccupied with death, dying and the afterlife since childhood.

I was barely 16 when I experienced what I now think of as a mortality wakeup call – which, to my mind, is a situation where an individual suddenly and clearly realizes, and grasps the fact, that they are mortal. I suddenly became aware that, regardless of how long I might live, at some point the bell of mortality would toll for me.

Needless to say, even before this mortality wakeup call, I was well aware of the fact that people are not only born but also die.

But there's a world of difference between the carefree awareness of youth that dying is a far-off event, and mentally grasping the unavoidable fact that our existence on this earth is finite. This difference is an obstacle that many people never manage to wrap their minds around, even when their own death is staring them in the face.

My mental picture of the afterlife was heavily influenced by my Christian upbringing, which imbued me with a certain idea of what life after death is like. The same goes for what I had absorbed from religion, school and my family in a Western Christian culture. But now the question arose: Would this mental picture survive what I now carried within me? Was it compatible with my journey to the afterlife? I felt that I absolutely had to explore these issues.

In any case, my near-death experience and journey to the afterlife opened up to me a world that differs from the world that is depicted by the catechism and the teachings of Christianity. But even when I looked at other religions, I found contradictions that merited further study.

So when I began investigating the metaphysical aspects of the mystical and mythical heritage of various cultures, in terms of their symbolic character and ultimately their transcendent truth, I gained new insights. The more I looked beyond the fossilized dogma of religions, the more plausible they became. And the more I disregarded what separated the various religions from each other and instead concentrated on what they had in common, the more they took on the form of living and breathing entities. By focusing on what the world's various religions have in common, I stumbled upon a core truth, which can be regarded as the universal heritage of humankind and that is intrinsic to all religions.

But this universal heritage, far from being a privilege of individual religions, is instead a legacy that was granted to human beings from the very beginning. This legacy is no longer rooted in high culture, but instead in the myths of prehistorical time – a time when human beings wandered the earth as hunter gatherers, and shamans were the mediums to the afterlife.

But it was not so much in religions, but rather in the writings of the philosophers of Antiquity, that I found echoes of what I had learned and experienced during my journey to the afterlife. Plato in particular developed a philosophy of existence that expresses many of the truths that had become clear to me during my journey to the afterlife. Plato and his successors made invaluable contributions to our culture. My engagement with their philosophy showed me how close humanity already was back then to the essence of being, and how much of this essence has since been forgotten.

The constricting power of religions stands in stark contrast to the universal teachings of Plato. The world views of the world's various religions have become the predominant cultural heritage of many of the world's peoples – heritages that have now evolved their own reciprocally demarcated structures that cast a deep shadow over our inner lives, and thus over the fate of humanity.

The further I delved into these matters, the clearer it became to me how completely permeated the world is by religion. In engaging with the writings of untold numbers of theologians, it dawned on me how completely humanity has always been permeated by and held in the clutches of religion. And while I'm by no means the first person to realize this, the tremendous extent to which people are manipulated by religions and religious leaders became increasingly clear to me.

Our world cultural heritage has a plethora of religious documents that are commonly referred to as holy scriptures. Which of these writings speak the truth? Which of them are of divine origin? And which of them have merely been composed or refashioned by human beings in order to satisfy their worldly material needs or to explain matters that humans find intrinsically unknowable?

On the other hand, a great many writings, from Antiquity to the present, provide amazing insights far exceeding the bounds of dogma.

I felt the need to closely scrutinize all of these legacies, myths, revelations and philosophies. I wanted to analyze what they had to say about death, the human soul and the infinity of the heavens, and find out whether their writings were in sync with the awareness I had brought back with me from my intensive journey into another dimension.

My goal was then, and still is in writing this book, to compile all of the experiences that form the underpinnings of the world's cultures and humanistic traditions as they relate to the aforementioned matters, and that have come down to us, as regards death, the afterlife and consciousness; and against this backdrop, to take a closer look at my near death experience and the insights that near-death experience research provide.

This book documents the results of these explorations. My intention was to ferret out the insights that near-death experience research provides in the context of theological and philosophical teachings concerning our being. In this book, I explore and assess the existential issues of our being in light of actual journeys to the afterlife. In so doing, I explore, among other things, the issue of the nature of consciousness. Does consciousness have to do with our soul, with our sense of self (our ego), with our very identity – i.e. with all of the various elements that go to make up our being? Does human consciousness arise from a mechanisms of the brain, or does it have its origins in a dimension of the beyond? Are we our bodies – or our soul?

In other words, who are we?

In this book, I also discuss the relationship between consciousness and the afterlife. Does the afterlife really exist, and if so, what exactly is it? How do consciousness and the afterlife interact? And how does all that fit in with our experience of this world, the so called real world?

At the end of the book, I discuss the issue of God, the divine and the sacred. The issue of God and our true origins is one of the most central questions of all. But please forgive me if I do not provide any proof of God's existence. Unlike St. Thomas Aquinas and others of his ilk, I will not be creating a seemingly logical edifice based on absurd circular references and dubious arguments – an edifice which, upon closer scrutiny and the most cursory application of healthy human understanding, collapses like a house of cards.

And in the interest of getting this issue out of the way once and for all, God's existence cannot be proven; for God can only be experienced. But this will not prevent us from lifting the veil of the divine, in order to come closer to the truth of being.

All of this sheds invaluable light on near-death experiences. To do this, we need some basic knowledge about this phenomenon and a basic understanding of what is entailed by a near death experience. I discuss both of these issues in the first section of this book. In the second section, I explore the philosophical and humanistic issues that arise.

My purpose in describing my own particularly intensive journey to the afterlife is to shed light, in a highly personal and authentic fashion, on the out of body dimension of this exceptional spiritual state. My discussions of each of the various topics in this book are informed by the insights that I gained from my journey to the afterlife. In a sense, these insights constitute the underpinnings of my reflections, and provide a kind of guide to the interpretation of philosophical and theological teachings.

However, I do not engage to any major extent with scholarly debates as to how authentic and real near-death experiences might be. The Scholarly debates as to whether near-death experiences are ascribable to the residual activity of neuronal mechanisms in the brain, as opposed to constituting the spiritual reality of the afterlife, have the same effect on me as calling into question the discovery of the New World.

As a person who's directly concerned, it seems to me ridiculous to call into question the authenticity of my own – and for me totally real – perceptions. Inasmuch as I myself had a near-death experience, its authenticity is a given. For me, casting doubt on this authenticity would be tantamount to casting doubt on my own existence. By the same token, the astronaut Neil Armstrong didn't need to prove that he was the first human being to walk on the moon; for this was a fact that he simply knew. But still today, there are people who believe the first American moon mission never actually happened. There will always be people who cannot be convinced of anything and who will cast doubt on even the most self evident matters.

However, I see no need to convert such doubting Thomases to my way of thinking. My interest lies instead with the discoverers of ancient truths, whom I have come to see with new eyes as a result of my journey to the afterlife – and whom I thus can now reinterpret in this book. And incidentally, these truths have nothing whatever to do with any constraining religious perspective.

In this book, I make no attempt to discuss endless numbers of reports of near-death experiences, or to provide scientific proof of their authenticity and truth.

Many books have been published on the subject of near-death experiences. The authors of these books also address the controversies surrounding these experiences. Scholarly debates concerning the authenticity of near-death experiences have resulted in two opposing camps: those who believe that near-death experiences are the real McCoy, and those who do not.

But my book takes a completely different tack, in that I address the relevant humanistic and philosophical issues.

Needless to say, such an approach cannot possibly hope to meet the standards of scholarly research. And while meeting this standard would be highly desirable, it is simply not feasible, because the realms explored in this book simply do not lend themselves to scientific investigations and verification. In other words, this book explores uncharted waters – namely spiritual and esoteric matters that to some extent can only be experienced on an emotional or transcendental level. Hence in this book I adopt a philosophical approach involving the search for truth and which, as we shall see, is very akin to the concepts of German idealism.

In so doing, I have made every effort to think in an interdisciplinary fashion. The ideas that I discuss in this book are derived from my journey to the afterlife; but their counterparts can also be found in ancient myths and philosophies. Hence this book is written not so much from a scientific perspective, but rather from a humanistic and philosophical standpoint – which, however, does not exclude the consideration of legitimate scientific issues.

Apart from the aforementioned introduction to the phenomenon of near-death experience, I also extensively explore ancient cultures, as well as religion and philosophy. I discuss the ancient cult of the dead, and the writings of historians from the dawn of human history. I also address the credibility and truthfulness of the teachings of the world's major religions. In so doing, I attempt to paint a new picture of religion and religious beliefs, with the view to exploring the beliefs that all religions hold in common. I also discuss the philosophers of Antiquity and their take on the soul and being – the goal being to rediscover philosophy in light of the picture it paints of the afterlife. I seek to uncover the truth, the interface between religion and philosophy, and the lowest common denominator of all revealed truth.

Hence in this book, I endeavor to view the results of my investigations in a new light, against the backdrop of my journey to the afterlife. In so doing, I address a number of issues that are worthwhile considering and that have always been the subject of human thought. This also involves subjecting established views on life and death to critical examination. To this end, I take a close look at both the content and truthfulness of myths, philosophies and doctrines.

Such an undertaking cannot of course hope to lead to ideal, definitive wisdom, and many questions will need to remain unanswered, and mere hypotheses or speculation. And while my search for the truth will not yield the all encompassing truth of being, it can perhaps bring us a step closer to finding it.

Hence the overarching goal of this book is to formulate a new and contemporary view of life, death and the journey to the afterlife – a view from which the divine is not excluded but is, to the contrary, recognized as the eternal foundation of being itself. I also try to show that

when it comes to God and the afterlife, there can be only one God, one afterlife, and ultimately one truth that applies equally to all human beings, regardless of race, creed, religion or culture. It is time for all peoples, nations, races and religions to become aware of their common origin and their spiritual unity.

It is also time for we humans to vanquish our fear of death once and for all, in keeping with the teachings of Socrates, Jesus, and the Buddha. But we can only achieve this if we realize that the afterlife cannot be divided up into a Muslim, Jewish, Christian or Buddhist entity. It is high time that we once again drew nigh to the divine truth, to which the human race has long since had the key ready to hand. It is up to us to use this key to vanquish the portals of death once and for all. And so I invite you to accompany me on this quest for the truth about life and death, and the search for a greater understanding of the afterlife – and thus a greater understanding of being itself. In this quest for truth, I will be calling certain elements of received wisdom into question; for we have not only the right but also the obligation to critically examine our heritage – and with it, everything that purports to be “the truth.” For in the final analysis, the truth relates to what is most valuable to us, namely our (eternal) life.

But we need to call our very selves into question as well, because as history has all too often shown, human beings can easily stray from the right path. Like all philosophers, I am merely a seeker. A seeker who, though he lifts the veil of death, nonetheless never ceases to call himself into question and who, as an author, expects to be read with a critical eye as well.

But in this quest, it is crucial that we never be satisfied with simple answers, notwithstanding the fact that a simple truth exists concerning all that is divine.

The search for answers can be compared to a voyage of discovery in the fog. A fog that sometimes casts light and enables us to perceive small islands of insight, or a trusted lighthouse.

We need to give ourselves permission to call established truths into question, for only in this way can knowledge advance. Through systematic doubting, Descartes established the foundation upon which his philosophy was built. His profound insight, “I think therefore I am” has entered the annals of history. And in this same vein, Blaise Pascal wrote the following:

*»We must know when to doubt, when to feel certain, when to submit. Who fails in this understands not the force of reason. There are those who offend against these three rules, either by accepting everything as evidence, for want of knowing what evidence is; or by doubting everything, for want of knowing when to submit; or by yielding in everything, for want of knowing when to use their judgment.«*

Descartes, Pascal and many other philosophers and scholars changed the world by calling the world around them into question and seeking a higher truth. Thus in order to find the truth, we not only can but must adopt a mindset of doubt. And one thing is certain: in the final analysis, there is only one truth.

AND YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH,  
AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE.

John 8:32