

Chapter Ten: In the Here and Now

‘By ‘essence’ I mean that part of our nature we recognise as the god in hiding, the source quality that links us to our highest becoming, that transcends time and space, life and death.’

– Dr. Jean Houston¹

‘There is a beyond’

When the full significance of experiential knowledge of the Afterlife begins to dawn on you, your life in the here and now is changed forever by the realisation and it will never be the same again. Henceforth you know for sure that there is a life hereafter for everybody whether they believe or not and it gives you great peace of mind to know it. As Lilith said in her closing speech in George Bernard Shaw's ‘Back to Methuselah’, ‘It is enough that there is a beyond’. If there is life beyond death, then death is not the opposite of life. It is the opposite of birth. Birth is the entry to this life and death is the exit to the life beyond. Many people *believe* that there is a life beyond this one, but those who have had personal experience of it *know* there is. However, even if your own experience of the Afterlife is not that personal, there are areas in which it is possible to benefit from other people’s direct knowledge of the Afterlife.

The one thing common to all direct knowledge is the continuation of life after death. This used to be in the belief category for me - a matter of faith based on Jesus’ resurrection and his promises. I now classify it as a fact of experiential knowledge because I accept the evidence provided by the consensus of other people’s experience – at least that vast majority of people who experienced anything at all.

When I had my first experience of ‘the Divine’ at an evangelistic crusade at the age of twenty one, I acquired a spiritual dimension to my life that I knew would continue on after death. However, in recent years I have experienced moments of doubt about the reality and the nature of the after-death existence, especially after I retired and saw death as the next step along the way. Nevertheless, thanks to experiential knowledge, I am now totally at peace and without fear about what happens to the real ‘me’ after death, as I discovered during my own recent close brush with death. I now look forward to the opportunity for further personal and spiritual growth when my time comes. I also look forward to at least a possibility of having some after death contact with those I love while they are still alive in this world as well as to the certainty of being able to link up with them again in due course in the Afterlife.

As a result of all these insights I now feel that there is only a very thin veil between this world and the other dimension, which I used to describe at funerals as ‘closer to us than living and breathing’. This reminds me of the symbolic passage of Scripture often read on Good Friday that, when Jesus died, ‘the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.’² This signifies that the way is open for ordinary people, not just the high priest, to access the ‘Holy of Holies’ or inner sanctum where God was believed to dwell. I now see the curtain separating us from the immediate Afterlife as no barrier to communication between here and there.

Take the High Ground

Knowledge of the nature of the Afterlife gives you in the here and now a great sense of excitement and anticipation. Death is truly ‘not the end but a new beginning’ as I have preached many times at funeral services without realising the full implications of what I was saying. To know that there is so much more to do on the other levels is to be much more relaxed about the rest of your life on this level and less anxious to achieve more in the worldly sense in the remainder of your life here. It also generates an increased impulse to show more love and compassion in this life and a calm realisation that falling short of perfection is not ‘eternal life’ threatening. As Martin Luther once said in support of his own belief in the grace and forgiveness of God, “Be a sinner and sin boldly!”

The strong possibility of having future lives on earth as covered in Chapter Eight, especially if they are voluntary, means that this present life may be only one of many possible lives for your true self and you are therefore part of a much larger and longer history than you may have ever imagined. It means that your life is more a part of eternity than you had ever realised before.

Furthermore, experiential knowledge causes you to see everything in this world from a higher perspective. For example, events that you would usually regard as a major setback in your life or other people’s you now see as part of a much larger plan and as such may have been predestined, preordained, chosen, or meant to happen for a reason or a purpose. This is supported by and backs up religious beliefs such as, ‘*It’s the will of Allah*’ or ‘*God brings good out of evil*’.

‘We’ll meet again...’

With respect to relatives and close friends who have died, you still grieve but you may not feel so anxious for them or quite so devastated

that their earthly life is over. You may now feel you are farewelling them as ones who are going on the next stage of a long journey, especially as you know they will not be far away 'in the spirit'. We can say 'au revoir' till we meet again, knowing that we will have further contact and fellowship with them on the other side, especially if we have been very close emotionally in this world.

Belief in after death survival has already reached at least one academic area – the training of grief counsellors at tertiary level. I have been told by a university lecturer that the old methodology of adapting to the loss of the loved one has been amended in her university by adding a final step – that of welcoming back the deceased in the spirit.

Testimony of an Amateur: 'Love is in the Air.'

When my last aunt died recently she was looking forward to being reunited with her husband who had died five years earlier. She always said that she loved him just as much as when he was alive and she told me that he would be there waiting for her. At his funeral she had arranged for the song, 'We'll meet again' to be played as the casket was taken out. As I was reading the details of her funeral notice in the paper I wondered whether my uncle had actually been there waiting for her and I suddenly had the song, 'Love is in the air' on my brain – the theme song of the movie, 'Strictly Ballroom'. This meant a lot to me and other members of her family to whom I revealed the 'message' as we had all noticed a marked similarity of appearance between uncle and one of the lead characters in that movie. It was also typical of my aunty who had always had a great sense of humour.

When it comes to our contemporaries, instead of just feeling sorry that so many of my relatives, friends and colleagues have 'gone', we can also feel a little excited for them because they have passed over into the spirit fraternity and are on the other side waiting for the rest of us. It is a bit like a member of the family leaving to work or live overseas with older relatives, never to return to their homeland but able to communicate occasionally by mail or by phone. A young person about to sail overseas and a bit anxious about the journey might be told, 'Grandma will be waiting for you when you arrive. Give her our love and don't forget to contact us when you get there.' If a young terminally ill patient asks sincerely 'What's it like to die?' a doctor or parent could tell them something along those lines instead of ignoring the question or changing the subject as sometimes happens.

A lot of the foregoing I had already believed in a theoretical way but, with respect to the millions who have died in wars or natural disasters over the past century, nothing in my Christian tradition gave me any satisfactory solution to these sad realities of life. There are soldiers killed in the prime of life in all the wars; non-combatants of all ages and both sexes murdered as victims of genocide; and millions of children and young people taken by starvation, disease or natural disasters before they could make any progress towards maturity.

God brings good out of evil just as he did out of the suffering and death of our Lord, but you have to be alive to benefit from that comfort. It doesn't benefit those who die 'before their time' as it were. However, according to experiential knowledge, those people are still able to complete their purpose in the Afterlife or even in subsequent earthly lives if appropriate. Otherwise there may seem to be no point to their lives at all. Even with Jesus, it is only in the light of his after-death communication to his disciples that his life and death had such great meaning. He completed his purpose and fulfilled his destiny by dying and coming back in spirit to all of us.

The Second Self

When we die we live on after death in 'spiritual bodies'. However, the evidence of those who have had out-of-body experiences during their normal, healthy life suggests that the spiritual body does not come into being only at death or near death but may, for some people, become separate at certain moments of crisis or during meditation. When this happens we separate from the physical body and look at our physical bodies from a new vantage point. We may then realise that our eternal soul is our real self as distinct from our physical body with its brain and flesh and blood, because we are eternal souls in physical bodies.

You may now see yourself and others as part of a much larger self than before. For example, when I look at disabled people now, I no longer see them as disabled people but more as eternal, spiritual beings inhabiting disabled bodies. It is also relevant to relatives or friends who are dying with illness in mind or body. It is so reassuring to know that those illnesses or disabilities will not survive the transition to the spiritual body.

The psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, who significantly had a Near Death Experience himself³, said that we have two personalities – one is our conscious self, an ego with a history; the other is our intuitive, spiritual nature, our better nature with a Divine connection⁴. This two-self concept exists deep in our collective psyche and comes through in certain expressions in common usage. We often say that it is 'second nature' to do certain things

but this implies that there is a 'first nature'. In the Biblical parable of the prodigal son, in the original Greek the son is said to have 'come to himself' - 'his true self'? A man who is very agitated about something is often said to be 'beside himself'. A person saying something out of character may be told, 'Just listen to yourself.' There was a popular song on the hit parade that said, 'Look for the hero inside yourself'. A Christian who becomes aware of the Divine in his or her life may say, 'I am never truly alone any more'.

Becoming aware of the presence of this Divine, higher self within is an experience shared by 'born-again' Christians, converts to other religions and mystics in all the world's great religious traditions. In the Eastern traditions, they call this experience 'enlightenment', which is to suddenly realise that in our inner selves there is a Divine part of our nature that is one with God (or the Universe.) In the Christian tradition the Holy Spirit within us, which is joined to our spirit⁵, is regarded as one with God the Creator.

Our Christian tradition teaches that we can only come to know the Divine through repentance but the word repentance - the New Testament word *metanoia* - can be translated literally as *changing the mind*. This translation fits well with the idea of changing from Jung's first personality to the second or from the ego self to the higher or Divine Self. This type of repentance can happen through the prayers or worship rituals of a religious tradition or through private meditation and contemplation. The Muslims would describe the process as surrendering to God because the word Muslim means 'surrendered one'. The process is also described in a different way by Eckhart Tolle in his book, 'The Power of Now',⁶ and its sequels. The main thrust of his message is that you can 'dis-identify' with, or detach from, your ego self and identify with your higher Self, by learning to live in the Now.

Divinity Within

'The Kingdom of God is within you.' Luke 17: 21

*'The longest journey you will make in your life is from
your head to your heart'.*

Sioux saying.

There seems to me to be a close, direct connection between personal experience of the Afterlife and the ability to live in the present. Some people who have had N.D.E.s immediately become more concerned with living in the eternal Now.⁷ Recently I attended a meeting addressed by a Lutheran minister who told us how he had once 'died' for two minutes. He also said that, after his out-of-body experience, he had stopped wearing a watch because he had lost interest in historical time and was always living in the

present. Apparently he was also now able to rely on ‘intuition’ or the ‘universe’ to prompt him to keep appointments. His intuition also guided him to find a destination once when he had lost his street directory.

Not only direct experience like the Lutheran minister’s but experiential knowledge as a whole tells us that the Afterlife is another dimension that is very close to us in the present moment. Eternity seems to be like a circle rolling along the horizontal line of historical time from past to future. However, the circle only touches the line at one point – not in the past or in the future but only in the present. The eternal Now is the only aspect of time that coincides with the other dimension.

The Lutheran Minister’s N.D.E. also enabled him to use his intuition but you don’t need to have an N.D.E. in order to learn to use your intuition. Char Margolis⁸ says that we can all discover this attribute for ourselves if we wish, and can learn to use our intuition in our ordinary, every day activities, instead of relying wholly on pure logic and specific information. She says that using intuition is like using a sixth sense or seeing things from a higher perspective as it were. You don’t have to be a psychic medium like Char Margolis or Alison DuBois to be able to do that.

It should be no surprise to Christians that there is an element of Divinity within us. According to the Christian tradition the Holy Spirit – the risen Christ within us - is one with God the Creator above us.⁹ Paul said that ‘...your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you’.¹⁰ Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is within us and likened it to buried treasure which, when found, should be acquired at any cost¹¹.

Eastern traditions are also familiar with the insight that there is a close link between our higher Self within and the Divine above. For example when Hindus achieve enlightenment they describe it as ‘Atman equals Brahman’, which means that our inner, higher Self is one with the God of the universe. The Eastern or mystical way of seeking unity with the Divine through looking inwardly is called by M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled*¹².

Alternative Routes

So then, what you can learn from your own or other people’s direct knowledge of the Afterlife includes many possible benefits: a renewed peace of mind regarding your own death; the ability to see everything in this world from a higher perspective; an increased ability to live in the present (the Now); an ability to use your intuition; and/or a greater consciousness of Divinity within you.

All of these facets of life in the here and now are very closely related and may not come in any particular order. So it could be that any one of them

could serve as a doorway or entry point to any or all of the others, which are also different routes to the Divine.

Some Christians may recognise this experience of ‘the Divine’ that resides within all of us as simply a renewal of an earlier experience when they first heard and appropriated the Christian Gospel. Therefore, they are able to interpret it as a renewed awareness of the Holy Spirit or the risen Christ within them.

However, for others, the experience of the Divine within might have other interpretations - the second personality, the second self, the higher self or Divine Self. Experiential knowledge suggests still another interpretation - ‘the eternal soul’. But maybe ‘all roads lead to Rome’ in the sense that living in the present, learning to use your intuition or any other of the above doorways may all be alternative routes to the same Divine Reality going by different names. As the Hindu Scriptures say, ‘Truth is one but the sages call it differently’.¹³

The Bottom Line

Some theologians especially in the Catholic tradition have coined the phrases ‘anonymous Christians’ or ‘Christians unawares’ to explain how people outside the Christian tradition can still come to know God apart from the Christian Gospel. In any case, any or all of these alternative routes may serve to raise us above our ego selves to that state of grace in which we are able to manifest the fruits which St. Paul attributes to the Holy Spirit – ‘Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self control.’¹⁴

However, St Paul also says, ‘Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect’.¹⁵ I am sure that all would-be practitioners of the art of living in the Now wish that they could live in Christ, their Higher Selves or their Divine selves all of the time, but the unpalatable truth is that the ego self keeps re-asserting itself. We can’t all be like Jesus and be perfect all the time and even Jesus may have lost the sense of His Divine Self for a moment as he was being crucified, when he asked, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’¹⁶ From bitter experience I am sure that anyone’s awareness of the Divine will fade from time to time. But an awareness of the Divine, no matter how intermittent, is valuable for its own sake because it increases our quality of life in this world and helps us to grow in love and compassion to prepare for the next.

Someone asked me recently ‘So what’s the bottom line?’ Throughout this book, all the evidence points to one truth - that we are all eternal souls who live on after the death of our bodies and probably for ever, because of

the way we have been created and *not because of anything we do or believe or experience in this life*. That is why I can say with confidence, in the words of the title of this book, there is life after death for *everyone* in ‘a lodging along the way’.

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* Fictitious name.

1. Rosen, Elliot May, *Experiencing the Soul: Before Birth, During Life, After Death*, 77.
2. Mark 15: 38.
3. Rosen, Elliot May, *Experiencing the Soul: Before Birth, During Life, After Death*, Pages xxv-xxvi.
4. Carl Gustav Jung, ‘*Memories, Dreams, Reflections.*’
5. Romans 8: 16.
6. Eckhart Tolle, ‘*The Power of Now, a Guide to spiritual enlightenment*’, Hodder Australia, Sydney, 2005.
7. Dianne Ahlquist, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Life After Death*, Alpha Publishing, Penguin Group (USA) Inc. 2007, 81.
8. *Op. Cit.* 81-82.
9. Romans 8: 16 and 26.
10. 1 Corinthians 6.19.
11. Luke 17: 21; Matthew 13: 44.
12. *Op. Cit.* Hutchinson and Co., Great Britain, 1983.
13. Hindu Vedas: Rig Veda 1.164.46.
14. Galatians 5: 22.
15. Philippians 3: 12.
16. Mark 15: 34.