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HERALDING THE INTEGRATION OF MEDICINE WITH PHYSICAL, MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, SPIRITUAL & SOCIAL ASPECTS OF HEALTH

Einstein, Spirituality & NDEs

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How Can NDEs Be Real If Having One Means You Are Crazy?

By Melvin Morse, MD

I WAS COUNSELING one of my young patients on what to expect after having his tonsils out. I was just getting to the good part where I was going to tell him that he would get to eat ice cream for a week, when his grandfather interrupted me and vehemently said, "Tell him about the tunnel."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"What tunnel?"

"You know," the elderly man said, "the tunnel he'll see after he gets his tonsils out."

"Oh, don't listen to him," his daughter (the young man's mother) said to me. "He's crazy. He is always talking about the tunnel he saw when he had his tonsils out when he was a child. Don't pay any attention to him."

Even though I was already 30 minutes behind in my schedule, and my nurse was giving me the "hurry up" look, I took the time to ask the man, "What do mean that he will see a tunnel?"

The elderly gentleman sat back in his chair and said, "You'll think I am

crazy, but when I had my tonsils out, I saw a tunnel. Then I went down the tunnel. The sides of it were lined with lights like airplane landing lights. I came out on a beach, where it was so beautiful. I felt so loved, so at peace. I have never forgotten how wonderful it was. I learned that life is about trying to find that love in everyone I meet. You'll think I am crazy, but...."

This statement is the hallmark of the authentic spiritual experience as told by a late 20th or early 21st century American. I have heard spiritual experiences in my practice that could be the core understanding of any religion in existence today that began with those words. A young boy who was part of our study of near-death experiences at Seattle Children's Hospital made a drawing of his experience. He too saw a tunnel that was lined with airplane lights, during the time that he was documented to be clinically dead. He told me, "You'll think I am crazy, but all I wanted to do was to get to the end of that tunnel. Forget my body, forget being alive. I just wanted to get to the end of that tunnel, but

then I was back (in my body), and you were standing over me!"

I enrolled the 83-year old gentleman, the grandfather of my patient who was to have his tonsils out, in my long-term study of adults who had near-death experiences as children. I reviewed his medical records and discovered that in fact he had a cardiac arrest when he had his tonsils out at age 7. Those were the days of the use of drop ether as an anesthetic agent. Those were also the days when patients had cardiac arrests and if they survived, they were never told about the event.

I did my study with Vernon Neppe, MD, director of neuropsychiatry at the University of Washington. We studied adults who had near-death experiences (NDEs) as children. We carefully compared them to adults who had near fatal events as children but did not report a near-death experience. We also studied control patients who had no sort of spiritual experience or near-fatal event at all, as well as patients who had spiritual events but no actual near-fatal experiences.

We gave the study subjects an intensive battery of psychological tests, basically designed to answer the question of whether or not they were crazy. We had them fill out personality profiles, interviewed family members, got their employment histories, examined their tax returns, gave them death anxiety profiles and numerous other tests. We published our results in the popular book *Transformed by the Light*.

What we learned was that it is good for you, from a psychological point of view, to have a NDE. Far from being crazy, our subjects who had NDEs as children had jobs in the helping professions such as social work or being physicians, gave more money to charity than our control groups, had better personal relationships and family ties than our control groups and spent more time in quiet meditation and private time than control groups. They lived rich, wonderfully inspiring lives filled with love and compassion and strong interpersonal and family relationships.

Our study reached the same conclusion as numerous social science research studies of persons who have had NDEs. These include works by Ken Ring, PhD, Bruce Greyson, MD, Michael Sabom, MD, and numerous other studies. The bottom line is that the transformation seen after the NDE is very real and results in healthy life-affirming positive consequences for those who have them.

This is in stark contrast to the negative consequences of hallucinations. Indeed, our control group of patients who had near-fatal events but did not have an NDE showed that they frequently suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome. The positive transformation associated with the NDE can be considered a post-traumatic bliss syndrome.

There are numerous psychiatric syndromes characterized by beliefs in aspects of reality that no one else

can see or experience. These include people who believe that their family members are aliens, people who think that they are the subject of a television show (called the Truman Syndrome) and many other psychotic thought disorders. What makes these people

ideas are part of a greater psychiatric dysfunction. This is the primary way that psychotic belief systems and conditions are differentiated from those who have had NDEs.

Unfortunately, those who have had valid spiritual experiences, including

“Our society needs spiritual inspiration and transformation....”

different from people who have had NDEs?

All the research documents that people who have had NDEs are otherwise completely psychologically healthy and function well in society. They do not have thought disorders. They use language properly. They have healthy relationships with family and friends.

People who have psychotic syndromes such as believing family members are aliens or the Truman Syndrome also have numerous other psychiatric symptoms. They don't simply have a weird belief and yet otherwise are normal. Their psychotic

NDEs, in the late 20th and early 21st century are often perceived to be “crazy” even though the scientific evidence is that they are often saner than the ordinary population. They say they have seen God or a very loving spiritual being, and often they receive messages of love and hope. Many are completely healed shortly after the experience.

It is somewhat reasonable to be concerned that someone who says they have “seen God” might claim that they have been told to do something negative or start some sort of conflict. The headlines on the Internet and newspapers are replete with examples



of crazy people who claim that God has told them to do terrible things.

Yet the scientific research is clear: There is a huge difference between people who have seen God in a NDE and are otherwise psychologically healthy, and those who claim to see God in the context of a wide variety of psychiatric symptoms. These two situations are clearly being confused by many in our society.

In turn, this confusion and lack of understanding of the science and experience of spirituality has led to a devaluation of the valid and real spiritual experience of NDEs. This is very unfortunate, as our society needs spiritual inspiration and transformation and many of us are ignoring the input of those who have had NDEs who have much to share with us about how to live productive and healthy lives. Δ

This article is reprinted by permission of the author from his blog at <https://www.theuniversityofheaven.com/blog/you-ll-think-i-am-crazy-but?cid=2c6b7895-8680-420a-abb2-593cc88b3776>

Melvin Morse, MD, was voted by his peers as one of "America's Best Doctors" many times. He has published numerous scientific articles in medical journals over the course of his thirty-year career as well as a number of bestselling books, including his best known *Closer to the Light*. He has done extensive research on NDEs in children, and became the Research Director of the Institute for the Scientific Study of Consciousness (ISSC) in 2007. While Director of ISSC, he was awarded the Warcollier International Prize for consciousness research in 2011.

His other books include, *Transformed by the Light*, and *Parting Visions: Where God Lives*; he also co-authored *Spiritual Sight* with medium Isabelle Chauffeton Saavedra. He is currently doing research into the applications of intuition to the medical field using an approach he calls "applied remote viewing." Contact: Melvinmorse@hotmail.com

Einstein on Spirituality

DURING THE THIRD DECADE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY a girl from New York posed this question to physicist Albert Einstein:

January 19, 1936

My dear Dr Einstein,

We have brought up the question: Do scientists pray? in our Sunday school class. It began by asking whether we could believe in both science and religion. We are writing to scientists, to try and have our own question answered.

We will feel greatly honored if you will answer our question: Do scientists pray, and what do they pray for?

We are in the sixth grade, Miss Ellis's class.

Respectfully yours,

Phyllis

Days later, Einstein wrote back in response to Phyllis's question:

January 24, 1936

Dear Phyllis,

I will attempt to reply to your question as simply as I can. Here is my answer: Scientists believe that every occurrence, including the affairs of human beings, is due to the laws of nature. Therefore, a scientist cannot be inclined to believe that the course of events can be influenced by prayer, that is, by a supernaturally manifested wish.

However, we must concede that our actual knowledge of these forces is imperfect, so that in the end the belief in the existence of a final, ultimate spirit rests on a kind of faith. Such belief remains widespread even with the current achievements in science.

But also, everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that some spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe, one that is vastly superior to that of man. In this way the pursuit of science leads to a religious feeling of a special sort, which is surely quite different from the religiosity of someone more naive.

With cordial greetings,

Your A Einstein

—From "Dear Professor Einstein: Albert Einstein's Letters to and from Children," which included Einstein's encouraging words to women in science. For more see brainpickings.org.

You simply wake up one morning and confess that you always already are, and that you have been playing the great game of hide-and-seek with your Self.

—Ken Wilber in *What is Enlightenment?* magazine, "In the world but not of it," issue 18, Fall/Winter 2000; more at <http://www.wie.org/j18/wilber.asp>

"The interlacing of the two planes [spirit and matter] is found in all great works of art."

—Arthur Koestler in *The Act of Creation*
