

Is 'Heaven is for Real' for real?

An Orthodox Reflection on Near-Death Experiences: Week One

Important points that we will return to in more depth, but things to keep in mind throughout our discussion in the coming weeks....

- * "God is love." - 1 John 4:8
- * "And He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.'" - Luke 24:46-48
- * "If you love Me, keep My commandments." - John 14:15
- * "There shall not be found among you anyone who purifies his son or daughter in the fire, or one who practices divination, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord your God, and because of these abominations the Lord your God will destroy them before you." - Deuteronomy 18:10-12
- * "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we preached to you, let him be *anathema* [accursed]." - Galatians 1:8
- * "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted - you may well put up with it!" - 2 Corinthians 2:3-4
- * "For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness." - 2 Corinthians 11:14-15
- * Paradigms in observation - the problem of interpreting data!
 - flat earth *versus* sphere
 - geocentric *versus* heliocentric

Just because we observe, experience, see or feel something does NOT mean that we will necessarily interpret it CORRECTLY!

-OR-

What kind of worldview is informing how we understand what we observe?

Natural observation versus DIVINE REVELATION

Ideal Near-Death Experience*

Compiled by Raymond Moody in 'Life After Life'

*Compiled based upon 50 interviews with persons who had 'Near-Death Experiences'

A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time feels himself moving very rapidly through a long dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance, as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and is in a state of emotional upheaval.

After a while, he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. He notices that he still has a 'body,' but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind. Soon other things begin to happen. Others come to meet and to help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving warm spirit of a kind he has never encountered before - a being of light - appears before him. This being asks him a question, nonverbally, to make him evaluate his life and helps him along by showing him a panoramic, instantaneous playback of the major events of his life. At some point he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds that he must go back to the earth, that the time for his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love, and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.

Later he tries to tell others, but he has trouble doing so. In the first place, he can find no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes. He also finds that others scoff, so he stops telling other people. Still, the experience affects his life profoundly, especially his views about death and its relationship to life.

15-Point Model of Near-Death Experiences*

Compiled by Raymond Moody in 'Life After Life'

*Compiled based upon 50 interviews with persons who had 'Near-Death Experiences'; no one person interviewed experienced all 15 points, but most of those interviewed experienced most of the points listed

- 1) Ineffability - difficult putting experience into human words; the experience transcends human words; inexpressible
- 2) Hearing the news - Hearing others (family/medical staff) pronounce the person dead
- 3) Feelings of Peace and Quiet - extremely pleasant and peaceful feelings early in the NDE
- 4) The Noise - a loud buzzing or ringing (often unpleasant) occurs, usually as the consciousness is about to leave the physical body
- 5) The Dark Tunnel - the sensation of passing through a void or tunnel of darkness, sometimes very rapidly; sometimes a light at the end
- 6) Out of the Body - consciousness, including sense perceptions (though these are often different than usual or 'heightened'), outside of the physical body; NDErs frequently feel their consciousness 'leave' the physical body, and often see their own bodies from outside
- 7) Meeting Others - seeing loved ones, almost always who have already died
- 8) The Being of Light - described as the most common element, and the most profound element, of the NDErs experience; a being of light that communicates directly (thought); feelings of overwhelming love and acceptance; often with the person during the 'review' stage
- 9) The Review - described most often as an extremely thorough (yet almost instantaneous) review of one's life; primarily non-judgmental...most report a 'how-do-you-think-your-life-went' experience of the review; people, though, do experience a greater empathy for others
- 10) The Border or Limit - coming to a kind of barrier that they cannot cross (but want to); the NDEr instinctually knows that crossing the border means no coming back to earth
- 11) Coming Back - often describe cold, physical shock, pain (none of which happened during the NDE itself) when consciousness reenters body; often, wake up days later in the case of ICU-type experiences
- 12) Telling Others - NDErs want to share the amazing experience, but are often met with skepticism (at least in the mid-1970s, pre-Oprah!); remain quiet about their NDE
- 13) Effects on Lives - often, positive and deep changes occur in the person's life; describe being more loving and compassionate; reevaluation of values
- 14) New Views on Death - most no longer fear death (though admit that the process of dying is uncomfortable up until the moment of death)
- 15) Corroboration - things that the person viewed during NDE/OBE (Out-of-Body-Experience) often corroborated in detail