

Is 'Heaven is for Real' for real?  
An Orthodox Reflection on Near-Death Experiences: Week Three

*Finding the Good...*

*Conclusions from Contemporary NDEs that We Can Affirm:*

- \* That our soul is immortal and survives physical death (the soul containing consciousness, memory, sense perception, and personality)
- \* That the souls of our departed loved ones also live on
- \* That there is another realm beyond what our bodily senses perceive where other intelligent beings of a spiritual nature exist
- \* That the governing principle of the universe and all of its inhabitants is a personal and loving God
- \* That the souls feels a heretofore unexperienced, yet natural, peace and comfort when parted from the flesh, with heightened sense perceptions and cognition
- \* That the soul, in this state, may feel and experience the Uncreated Energies (i.e., "Divine Grace") and Love of God in a much more direct and perceptible manner than when in the flesh; this experience transcends human words or comprehension
- \* That the soul, in this state, perceives heretofore unseen spiritual beings (though may not necessarily possess the spiritual discernment to know their true nature)

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*A State of Confusion*

*The Inconclusiveness of Contemporary NDEs*

While NDE researchers claim that "the core NDE experience is the same all over the world" - irrespective of culture or religion - this claim is not accurate. NDEs provide no single or cohesive vision of ultimate reality. Rather, the vision of the afterlife provided by taking all NDEs at face value leaves us with an inconclusive, and even incoherent, worldview:

Everyone goes to heaven OR those who have lived poorly have to be reincarnated to try again; no judgment and hell OR definitely a judgment and hell; paradise and a reunion with departed loved ones OR reincarnation; a personal and individual God OR multiple divine beings OR an impersonal creative force; an essentially "Christian" vision of the universe OR various "New Age" visions of the universe???

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*Things to Keep in Mind*

*Biblical Revelation about the Spiritual Realm*

- \* Galatians 1:8
- \* 2 Corinthians 11:14-15
- \* Ephesians 6:11-13

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*REAL versus TRUE*

\*Contemporary NDEs do not take into account a potentially very important variable: INTENT. In other words...

- \* Not every aspect of every account is authentically true!
- \* Not everything is necessarily what it appears to be!
- \* Not everyone is necessarily who they say they are!

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*Aspects of Contemporary NDEs Requiring Discernment*

These are not things that we reject wholesale. They are “real” experiences, but nonetheless cannot be accepted as TRUE without *great* discernment:

- \* Being greeted by departed loved ones
- \* The identification of seemingly otherworldly realms with Heaven
- \* The “being of light”
- \* The lack of judgment and hell

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*Excerpt from an NDE reported by Joe G.  
on NDERF website*

When i was in the E.R. i felt my body go numb and my chest was heavy. I started seeing the room go black and i had a hard time hearing everyone around me but i remember hearing my doctor say "No we can't lose him, lets keep going, I don't want to lose him, he is just a kid, give me another round of epi and charge it to 360 and keep bagging him," Then everything thing went black and deadly quite.

Then I was what i thought was the waiting room and my doctor taking to my dad. Then my brother (who was in the E.R. with me working on my) walking in a daze saying "what did I do wrong, all the medical training i have and i could not save my brother...". I tried to tell him that i was ok but he could not hear me. Then i remembered what my sister said happen to her when she had her NDE just a few weeks before. I thought oh my God I am dead, this is what it is like, but where is my mom and grandfather? where is the music that she said she heard? Where is the light so bright that she talked about? Then everything went black and i could not see anything and all my thought were played back to me.

Then wherever i was started to fill with fog. I then felt myself move along a hallway of darkness. Then i heard someone calling my name and telling me to come along. I was ok and this where i was to call home. They were there to guide me home. I could feel something was not right and i wanted to go back the way i came but i was told that i could not go back my time on earth was done. I was to keep moving and i would see my mom soon. The voices keep telling me to move along with them and to keep up. Everything i looked back i felt something bad was going to happen to me and that i need to go back the way i came. Every time i look back the voices told me to keep up and keep moving.

I told myself that enough was enough and i said that i did not want to go any further then where i was, till they told me where i was and where we were going. The voices

said that we had reached our point. That i was where i need to be now. I then could smell what i thought was sulfur and death. Then the voices started to laugh and say that this is what my life caused me to have. I asked where i was and what was going to happen next. The voices just laughed some more and repeated what i said. I thought to myself that i had to be in hell, because this was not as my sister said happened her. This is not how she said heaven was like. Then i could hear my thoughts out loud. The voices then said that there was not heaven for me. That this was the heaven that was to be mine. Then one of the said that it was feeding time.

Then i felt like i was pushed back into a wall and my arms pinned back to the wall. I felt totally helpless and then i saw what looked like hair ball with shark teeth come at me. I looked to my right side and saw that the voices were little monsters that were turning into the hairballs and back into monsters. They were the ugliest looking things i have seen and yet to see. They looked like snakes crossed with bats crossed with something that had horns. They had bodies that was like that of a snake and it had wings. They arms and hands look like those of a bat. Their faces look like snakes and they had fangs like a bat and a snake. On the top of their heads they had horns, but not like the horns of a bull or a ram. They had pointed horns but nothing that i could say was earthly.

As they turned into hairballs i asked what was happening to me. They laughed and told me to shut up and i could hear my feeling out loud. Then they started coming at me and as they did, i felt sick to my stomach. I remember feeling why is this happening? Where is my mom and where is God? Then i felt them feeding on me. I looked down at my what i thought was my body and parts where gone. I then looked at them and my body parts where in their mouths. Then one of them said "We told you already that this is your heaven and we are your God."

I don't know why i did this, but i started saying the 23rd psalm out loud and they stopped feeding for a few seconds. One of they said that was not going to help me now. I kept on saying The lord is my shepherd, i should not want, he make me lay down in green pastures, for his name sake. It was then they curled into a pile and yelled, "There is nobody to save you!" I kept on saying the 23rd psalm. "Yea, i walk through the valley of the shadow of death, i will fear no evil for thou are with me, thy staff and thy rod. they comfort me." I then felt my arms go free and i was standing and they were crowding in this pile saying there was no one to help me now.

I felt that i had to say the psalm all the way to find my way out of this place - that i now felt was hell. So with everything i had in me i tried to recall every word that i could say. "He leadeth me beside the still waters and he restored my soul. You set a table before in the face of my enemies, You pour oil over my head and over flow my soul, Your love and kind have always been with me." At that point i started feeling a wonderful feeling that come over my and i had to close my eyes.

*[at this point, the Joe G. was delivered from this hellish experience, and eventually returned to his physical body]*

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*Sarah Charlotte's NDE*  
*on NDERF website*

I had an allergic reaction to meds in the hospital. Total cardiac arrest and flat lined. The sound I heard upon dying was exactly like the sound check that they used to give in the movie theaters when it says "the audience is listening". I was suddenly aware of being outside of my body and heard my sister crying and fighting to stay next to me. I was suddenly in some kind of very long hallway. I felt a being on each side of me and was pulled really fast through the hallway. I felt scared and for some reason pictures of my mom crying at my funeral flashed in front of me. The beings (I guess angels) made me calmer and I all of a sudden knew that I was going to see my grandpa wherever I was headed.

I came to a halt and it was some kind of "Limbo" where my sins where dealt with. I felt sensations of sadness and witnessed my first sin being committed. I was aware of almost some kind of judge being present but not visible. I felt scared and was pleading to help me. Again, the 2 angels were next to me and I was sort of lifted up to a mountain like top with them. I was told to look down and witnessed heaven and hell. Yes, I know it sounds insane to someone who maybe has not been there.

I found my faith very fast right there on the mountain and realized very moment when God had tried to speak to me but I was too busy with material things. It felt like someone had cleansed me off completely. I felt like an almost magnetic pull with the angels and wanted to move forward but the angels told me I had to go back again. I had to tell what I had seen. I just wanted to see my grandpa and felt like fighting going back. It was like I was dropped and I fell and fell and crashed back into my body.

What amazed me was the amount of time I had only been gone less than a couple of minutes but it seems that it felt like hours. I used to be a totally different person before my experience. Maybe part of my personality had to do with being young and naive about life. Not caring for others. I will never forget that there is definitely a place called hell. I can witness to this.

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*Frances Z*  
*NDE following suicide attempt*  
*on NDERF website*

By the time my son found me, I was blue. He ran to the neighbor and told them that something was wrong with his mom. As they were taking me to the hospital, my heart stopped and from outside my body, I watched them do CPR on me so that they could at least get me to the hospital. As we arrived at the hospital, I began to descend into a darkness. My body, of course, stayed in the hospital, but I found myself falling down a very dark tunnel. Demons appeared around me, and, though I was spirit, they were going through the motions of ripping my flesh off. It was intensely painful. As I went deeper and deeper into Hell, I saw many prominent historical figures, and lastly, my father. My father turned to welcome me to Hell, and I was thinking that this was it for me. My life on Earth was over, and I've ended up in Hell. Getting out of Hell would not be a possibility. But suddenly I started to move away from them and began to go back up the tunnel towards my body. However, I did not return completely. I stayed apart from my body, watching the doctors work on it. They were trying to stabilize my vital signs

and flush out all the drugs and alcohol so the toxins would not continue to ravish my body. I was horrified at the things they were doing but was glad that the demons were no longer tearing my flesh off. After what seemed like forever, my heart started to beat in a fairly reasonable manner and I was breathing with the help of a ventilator. As my vital signs returned, I was pulled towards, and then into, my body. At that point my awareness ceased and I returned to unconsciousness. I woke up about 10 hours later in the ICU. I tried to talk but was unable to because of the ventilator. Eventually the doctors reversed my condition and, mostly out of danger, I stayed in the ICU for another week. While I was there, they suggested I go to addiction treatment and also recommended I address what I had told them had happened to me when I had died. (They did not believe there was a Hell.) After that, I did go into treatment and now I have 18 years of sobriety. I became an Addiction Specialist, trying to help others learn to deal with addiction, so they would never have to experience the misery that I had.

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*Diane P's NDE*  
*on NDERF website*

I was in my living room looking in the mirror my right eye couldn't focus on my reflection I kept blinking and blinking trying to get it to focus I felt numbing going through my right side of my face leading to the top of my head. My breathing became short and it was like there was no oxygen in the air, my chest squeezed tight and Everything went black and I fell. 2 hours later I woke up. I broke the glass table I landed on with my back. I know God made sure no pieces went in my back. I thought I actually slept they're all night. I thought to myself why would I sleep here on the floor? I then realized I passed out. At the time I thought it was a lack of iron. I did not realize that I had a minor stroke. Now talking to doctors I realize it. When I was passed out it seemed like seconds and then I woke up I looked at the clock and noticed that I was lying on the floor for 2 hours. I didn't go to the doctors because I figured I just passed out no big deal.

The second time this happened I felt it coming now because my right eye seen only black. I could hardly run I was weak my heart was beating out of my chest "really hard" and erratically. My breath was short and rapid I jumped into bed and figured if I was going to pass out let it be in bed this time. I waited to pass out but my heart was beating so hard I thought it was really going to pop out of my chest I listened to it as it went boom boom then stopped all together then came back and was beating really fast and hard then stopped again. This went on for like 5 minutes erratic heart beats till finally my heart stopped.

I didn't feel any pain anymore. No numbness. What was really weird was I didn't breath anymore I was just lying there thinking okay what now? I didn't realize that I was dead. the pillow when I landed on the bed was halfway across one eye on my face and I tried to push it off because it was bothering me and I lifted my arm and noticed as I attempted to push the pillow off of my head my arm went right through it. I couldn't believe what had happened so I tried again. this timed it really scared me. I lifted my head, which I thought, was my physical head up to try and escape dealing with this and I watched my leg jump "my physical leg" from nerves I felt the flesh get cold. Once and a while my whole physical flesh jerked and jumped. The one thing I did notice was I

looked at my body like I was not a part of it anymore. Almost in a way as it was dirty and not really me. I was happy in a way that I wasn't in it but then sad that it died that way. I feared most of all that I was going to hell. My flesh was my only hope on still being able to really give my life to Jesus, now it was too late. I thought like a child, innocent and pure. I couldn't make up excuses on why I was going to Hell. I couldn't lie. Then I started to see through the walls I seen through the pillow with both eyes "still thinking physical". I seen this small black image hovering over the pillow looking straight into my eyes it kept looking in a eager and greedy way and I could hear what it was thinking. It was waiting for me to leave my body. This figure reminded me of a half human and frog being it stood like a frog Its face was mutilated. Its eyes were so black you fell into them as you looked into them. I screamed at it I don't belong to you I belong to God! I belong to Jesus!! I finally realized I was dead. I started to cry but I felt no tears roll down my face. I just kept crying out I belong to you God I belong to you Jesus! There was no response. My life passed by me as I laid there I thought of all the times I sinned and all the times I was good which were very few. I kept repeating these words "I don't want to die". I waited for God to talk to me but there was no response.

The demon left my side after I mentioned Jesus' name but Jesus did not come to get me. I was alone. I didn't see any tunnels I guess because I refused to accept my death. I stopped saying I don't want to die and just cried . I cried so much that I went into a deep depression. My soul felt heavy on the bed. I knew at that point I did not give my life to God after all. My life was all a lie. I just thought to myself I deserve to go to hell I was a fifthly sinner I don't deserve to go to heaven. It came to a point to were I just gave up. I didn't care anymore I couldn't cry because I was cried out and God and Jesus had every right to ignore me because that's what I did to them all of my life. I knew not only was my flesh dead but so was my soul. I was in total despair. I kept hearing my mom's voice you have to really give your life to God. You have to really except Jesus as your Lord and Savior. I didn't and it was too late. The last words I said were I deserve this. For at least it seemed like hours I laid there like a zombie.

Then all of a sudden: these words came out of me. Now let me make this clear I never read the bible and never cared at all about what it said. "Father why hast thou forsaken me"? It was repeated one more time and I was just laying listening to this voice coming out of my souls mouth. My whole soul felt peace and love. Inside my physical stomach I felt a snap way deep down inside. A warm feeling ran through my body like electricity. I jumped out of bed and started running all over the house I knocked things over running for about 15 minutes. I kept saying thank you Jesus for having mercy on me. Finally I stopped running and thought of what just happened? I new it was the mercy of God that I was living again.

My heart felt brand new it's beat was soft and smooth. I looked at the clock to see how long I was dead and I was dead for about 1 hour. Maybe more. I am perfectly healthy to this day I have given my life to Jesus. I thank him for the gift of life he gave me on that day. My advice to you is love is the answer. God is love. I died when I was 21 in 1991 that was the day I truly gave my life to Jesus.