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Thanatology 502X -- Evidence of the Afterlife

STUDY GUIDE by John Griffin PhD

Study Guide for Thanatology 502X: Evidence of the Afterlife

By John Griffin, PhD

(Please note: This document is approximately 15 pages long.)

AREAS OF EVIDENCE

In assessing the evidence for survival of death and an afterlife, we will consider the following three areas:

- Shamanism and Yoga: here we are dealing with some of the most ancient psycho-spiritual practices of humanity where we find traditions of what are described in parapsychology as Out-of Body Experiences (OBE or OOBE). This experience of the liberation of consciousness from the body in an OBE has some striking similarities to the Near-Death Experience (NDE). Accounts of mediumistic contacts with the spirits of the dead are also prevalent in shamanism.
- Universality of belief in an afterlife in the religions and wisdom traditions of humanity.
- Research by psychologists, parapsychologists, and medical professionals - results obtained through scholarly collection and appraisal of data and painstaking tests conducted according to scientific methodology in the disciplines of psychology, parapsychology, and medicine. Areas of parapsychological research which have yielded results strongly supportive of belief in survival and the Afterlife are: Out-of-Body Experiences (OBEs); mind at large and remote viewing; hauntings and "voices from the dead"; investigations of reincarnational experiences.

The following three areas have been carefully investigated by psychologists, parapsychologists, and many medical doctors with positive results, with the first being of particular interest to medical professionals.

- NDEs - Reports from antiquity to the present day regarding Near-Death Experiences.
- TDEs - Threshold-of-Death Experiences (TDEs). This is my term for what has usually been referred to as Death-Bed Visions. People do not necessarily have to literally be on their death-bed for these experiences to occur. When they occur, however, it signals the close proximity of death.
- ADCs - After-Death Communications (ADCs), either directly to someone still living in a physical body - usually a spouse - or, expanding the use of the term, through the psychic abilities of a medium. These may be in the form of so-called poltergeist ("noisy ghost") activity with inexplicable sounds, usually raps and knocks, and the

uncanny movement of physical objects. Or they may be apparitional, through spoken words, or in communications through psychic mediums. Although there are fraudulent mediums there are also some who have proven their genuineness under very rigorous scrutiny and testing. Here, an ancient saying comes to mind, "There are counterfeits because there are genuine valuables."

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EVIDENCE FROM SHAMANISM AND YOGA

Out-of-Body Experiences (OOBE or OBE), which we will encounter later in the section on the evidence from parapsychological research, are rather commonplace in accounts from various Shamanic traditions around the world. The religious traditions of India claim methods of obtaining direct, experiential knowledge concerning the afterlife state. Mystical, transpersonal practices were obviously an important part of the Indian religious tradition from a very early period, as is shown by the discovery of small sculpted figures on ancient seals in Yoga-type postures from the great Indus Valley civilization in northwestern India of the second millennium B.C.E. Shamanic elements are also present on these figure-seals, which has led scholars to believe that an early practice of Yogic meditation was mixed with a type of Shamanism in ancient India. Up to the present day, Shamans (usually women) in East Asia contact the spirits of the dead with impressive results. Although the practices have largely died out in modern, westernized countries like Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, there are still practitioners of these ancient arts in these countries who are conversant with mind beyond the body and the afterlife.

In common with Shamans, the adepts of Yoga in India and Tibet, both Hindu and Buddhist, were reputed to be able to develop the power of "magical flight." As Professor Mircea Eliade puts it:

"...the idea that saints, yogins, and magicians can fly is to be found everywhere in India. For rising into the air, flying like a bird, traversing immense distances in a flash, and vanishing are among the magical powers that Buddhism and Hinduism confer on arhats and magicians... We know that among many peoples the soul is conceived of as a bird. Magical flight assumes the value of an 'escape from the body' - that is, it translates ecstasy, the liberation of the soul, into plastic terms. But while the majority of human beings are changed into birds only at the moment of death, when they forsake their bodies and fly into the air, shamans, sorcerers, and ecstasies of all kinds realize 'emergence from the body' in this world and as often as they wish. The myth of the bird-soul contains in germ a whole metaphysics of man's spiritual autonomy and freedom."

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition there is an "emergence from the body" technique known as Pho-wa. Dr. Evans-Wentz describes this art in his book *Tibetan Yoga*:

"Mastery of the Art of Pho-wa primarily confers the yogic power to bring about in oneself, at will, essentially the same process as that which under normal conditions is called death, there being the difference that in natural death the principle of consciousness departs from the human form permanently, whereas in yogically-induced death the departure may be but temporary."

In the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thodol)*, we find the Pho-wa technique put to use as part of the transitional guidance process at death which the

Bardo Thodol (meaning "liberation by hearing on the after-death plane") sets forth:

"... it confers the yogic power to direct the departure of the principle of consciousness of another person, or to influence the principle of consciousness of a person not long deceased, in such manner as to afford it spiritual guidance in the after-death state and in the choosing of the womb at the time of its rebirth... On the other hand, when the yogin is performing the rite of Pho-wa on behalf of one who is dead, he may, in extraordinary circumstances of need, project his own consciousness-principle, embodied in the 'astral' form, in order to influence the 'astrally' embodied consciousness-principle of the deceased if he be - as he is most likely to be - in the somnolent condition which immediately follows the death-process in the case of all persons save those who are masters of yoga. Upon being awakened on the Bardo (or 'astral') plane the deceased is made to comprehend the need of exercising his own yogic powers if, luckily, he has developed any prior to his decease. More ordinarily, however, the yogin who performs the death-bed or funeral rites, in accordance with the Bardo Thodol, does not so project his consciousness. He aims to act from the human plane directly upon the consciousness principle of the person dying or just deceased. If the person be dying, the yogin employs a sort of yogic suggestion, intended to guide the dying person through the death-process and thence onwards through the state intervening between death and rebirth. When death has already occurred, the yogin directs the progress of the consciousness-principle in the Bardo world by means of telepathy."

This is remarkably similar to the methods employed by the mother of Dr. Benito Reyes, the founding president of World University in Ojai. In her role using the Filipino folk art of Pho'O, she acted as a death coach for dying persons, guiding them through the deathing process both in and out of the body. Dr. Reyes was convinced as a child of the reality of an afterlife wherein our consciousness not only continues but can become even more primary as a means of creative expression and experiencing bliss. At age sixteen he had his first Out-of-Body Experience. From that point he began to develop his philosophy of conscious dying, which was later supplemented by doctrines from India and Tibet and reinforced by findings from parapsychological research.

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2. EVIDENCE FROM RELIGIONS AND WISDOM TRADITIONS

Belief in an afterlife is found in most religions around the world; an accompanying belief in the ability to communicate with the dead is also widespread.

- Ancient India: It has already been noted under Shamanism and Yoga how the concept of a conscious entity independent from the body which survives death has been present in Indian spirituality for thousands of years. An unliberated entity remains subject to karma and is usually reborn into another body. This remains a central tenet of Indian belief.
- Ancient China: the "ancestors" were believed to survive death and remain in touch with their offsprings on this side of life. They were honored and propitiated.
- Ancient Egypt: after death, the soul was judged in a symbolic weighing of the heart in a scale with a feather representing truth or right conduct. If the heart was dark with untruth and heavy with misdeeds then serious consequences occurred. If, on the other hand, the soul was light with truth and good deeds then a "coming

forth into Light" occurred (which I believe is the best translation of the so-called *Egyptian Book of the Dead*). This phrase may remind us of reports of coming into the Light in the Near-Death Experience.

- Ancient Greece: Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato believed in an afterlife where good deeds were rewarded and evil doers suffered punishments designed to eventually change their behavior. They also believed in Reincarnation, which was part of the universal educative process.
- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: these three great religions came to essentially share a similar belief in the survival of death and an afterlife where the virtuous are rewarded and the evil are punished. Reincarnation was not repudiated by some of the more mystical in these traditions.

RESEARCH BY PSYCHOLOGISTS, PARAPSYCHOLOGISTS, AND MEDICAL DOCTORS

Direct, Unmediated After-Death Communication (ADC):

Some parapsychologists view the poltergeist (noisy ghost) phenomenon as being essentially a psychokinetic (PK) effect generated by the psychic energy of someone still living, but appearing as if a discarnate spirit is involved. However, I believe that there are cases where the evidence shows clearly that a spirit is communicating through direct physical manipulations. The two following cases which I cite demonstrate this kind of evidence. With the Fox sister initial communications, a skeleton was reported to have been found in the cellar as directed by the coded rappings. A stronger case, because more recent and better attested by contemporary witnesses, involves the physicalistic phenomena which was initially experienced in the Pike affair, which was later given confirmation through the mediation of several well-known psychic mediums.

Interpreted as a type of direct After-Death Communication (ADC), the poltergeist effect involves a physical manifestation of some kind that seems completely beyond the norm and which can be interpreted as a communication by an entity or entities from the other side of death. The famous case of the Fox sisters began in such a way. In 1847 the Fox family, which included two adolescent daughters, moved into a house in New York. Over the next several months, the family was kept awake at night by strange and inexplicable raps and bangs. Finally one night, the two sisters began mimicking the sounds which were then repeated by the rapping in a seeming form of communication. The communicator identified himself, through a devised code, as the spirit of a peddler, Charles B. Rosna, who had been murdered in the house. Following the spirit's instruction, the cellar was dug up and a skeleton was found. The story became a sensation in the newspapers and the sisters became celebrities. Though the sisters tried to preserve a normal life, the newspapers and the public pursued them and the publicity spurred the development of the modern-day spiritualist movement.

Reports of spirit communication through strange raps and bangs, somewhat reminiscent of communications devised by jailed prisoners, have continued to the present day with one of the more well-known cases reported by Bishop James Pike. Having completed a doctorate in jurisprudence at Yale University and serving on the law staff of the Securities and Exchange Commission, he was ordained an Episcopal priest after serving in the Navy in WWII. His ministry moved from acting as student chaplain at Vassar College and Columbia University to becoming Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City before being appointed bishop of northern California. Then his son, who had been heavily into experimenting with LSD and other drugs, committed suicide. Following this tragic event, poltergeist phenomena manifested

around Bishop Pike. Others were involved as well and there were several witnesses. The physical phenomena were stunning. Bishop Pike was the type who was not afraid to go where the evidence seemed to obviously lead. While in England, he contacted two colleagues in the Anglican Church who he knew were members of the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies. A seance with reputable medium Ena Twigg was arranged and Bishop Pike believed he was in contact with his dead son. He was also told through the psychic communications to contact the Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship when he returned to America to continue the communications.

Back in California, Bishop Pike joined the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara where he helped motivate a fellow member, a philanthropist for whom I would later work, to more deeply investigate psychic phenomena and survival of death. While living in Santa Barbara, Pike attended evidential seances with expatriate English psychic George Daisley. Then Pike met Arthur Ford while attending a television interview in Toronto on the subject of parapsychology. Ford, a veteran psychic, was willing to perform a seance for Pike, recorded by television cameras, prior to the interview. The result was highly evidential and is now considered a classic psychic event. Even more information regarding Bishop Pike's dead son and events surrounding his death were brought out at a later seance at Ford's home in Philadelphia. All of this is detailed in Pike's book, *The Other Side*.

EVIDENCE FROM PARAPSYCHOLOGY

Modern science since its establishment has tended to be either antagonistic or agnostic concerning the existence of an afterlife following death. However, some scientists have pursued investigations, using scientific methodology, into the question of psychic phenomena and life after death. The scientific discipline of Psychical Research, later to be more commonly known as Parapsychology, arose in response to the widespread popularity of Spiritualism in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Mediumistic contact with spirits of the dead has a very long history. The account in the Old Testament of King Saul's contact with a spirit, through the channel of a medium, is an example of this type of phenomenon which was even recorded in a non-sympathetic context. Judaic and Christian traditions acknowledged that such contact was possible but there was an atmosphere of ambivalence and fear around the subject, especially in Christianity despite the heralded psychic abilities of Jesus Christ and his declaration that his followers could do the same and more. The widespread outbreak and popular acceptance of after-death communication in western culture, beginning in the middle part of the nineteenth century, and its organization into a Spiritualist Society coincided with the ascendancy of science with its challenge to religious belief in general.

Some individual scientists and a few small scientific teams undertook investigations as more and more spiritualistic mediums appeared on the public scene. Fraudulent mediums were unmasked, but some apparently genuine mediums were also encountered. Extensive testing of the medium D.D. Home by the famous chemist Sir William Crookes and other scientific researchers produced incredible displays of psychic phenomena and no detectable fraud. By the 1880s the scientific establishment could not ignore the challenge of psychical phenomena. In 1882 the Society for Psychical Research was established in England, with its membership including some of the best scientific minds of the day. An American chapter was later formed.

Members of the American Society for Psychical Research and their counterparts in the British Society for Psychical Research undertook a joint research project soon after the creation of the two societies. Their subject was Mrs. Piper, an American medium

whose abilities were closely studied over a span of some forty years by such prominent researchers as Professor William James, Professor James Hyslop, Dr. Richard Hodgson, and Sir Oliver Lodge.

As the late D. Scott Rogo chronicled in his book *Parapsychology: One Hundred Years of Research*, elaborate precautions were taken by the researchers against any possibility of fraud. Private detectives were hired by Mrs. Piper's chief investigator in America, Dr. Richard Hodgson, to follow her to determine if she made any attempt to find pertinent information about deceased persons in old records or oral accounts for use in her mediumistic messages. Initially a thoroughly biased debunker regarding mediumistic communication with the dead, Hodgson later conceded that he believed there could be no explanation other than after death communication for Mrs. Piper's astoundingly accurate information about people she did not know and had no way of knowing about. All of the researchers became convinced of Mrs. Piper's genuineness as a medium for paranormal communication after compiling records attesting to the fantastic accuracy of her many messages while in mediumistic trance. However, there were differences of opinion on the source of her information. James and Lodge felt that it might be attributable to a highly developed E.S.P. ability - a kind of super E.S.P. - on the part of Mrs. Piper, rather than coming from discarnate entities. Hodgson and Hyslop did not believe that E.S.P. could adequately explain the phenomenon and were convinced that it represented evidence of survival of death and communication from the "other side."

Professor Hyslop, another dedicated skeptic and debunker like Hodgson who became convinced that Mrs. Piper was indeed communicating with persons in the afterlife, cited several questions which he felt the E.S.P. hypothesis did not address:

"Why are the data given selective and not haphazard? Why are these data often confused, showing lapses of memory by the communicators? Would telepathy explain that? Why are trivial data so often selected - that type of data most suggestive of survival? Why are some communicators better able to control the medium than others? (Hodgson, in his incomplete third report, showed that suicides have problems in trying to communicate). Why do some entities proxy for others? And why do these communicators converse among themselves during the sittings? Why does one communicator often interrupt another with a different line of thought and evidence?"

Over time, and after amassing more research data on a number of seemingly genuine psychics, two other problems with the E.S.P. hypothesis became obvious to psychical researchers. In many cases, a medium would give information which was unknown to the person to whom it was being given. A subsequent check through another source would reveal the accuracy of the message. There were also "cross-correspondences," where communications given through different mediums were specifically related to each other. Some of the most complex and evidential "cross-correspondences" were received from purported discarnate communicators who, while alive, had been actively involved with the British Society for Psychical Research.

When F.W.H. Myers died in 1901, most of the founding members of the Society for Psychical Research were also deceased. It was obvious that these researchers would attempt to communicate if at all possible. Given their experience in the S.P.R., it would seem reasonable that they would attempt something particularly evidential in the way of communication. By this time, the S.P.R. was working with other seemingly gifted psychics besides Mrs. Piper and messages from the now deceased "old guard" of the S.P.R. were being received.

As scripts from the monitored seances of these mediums were analyzed for content

and accuracy by S.P.R. researchers it became apparent that many of the scripts, given through different mediums, related to each other in some sort of pattern. The varied references, which had come through the different mediums, formed a recognizable, coherent message only when put together. None of the mediums seemed to be aware of this overall pattern and plan when they received their parts of the message. They also were unfamiliar with the symbolic nature of the messages, couched as they were in classical and poetic forms with which the scholarly personalities of the alleged communicators had been completely familiar in their earthly lives. English higher education imparted a strong background in the classics and Meyers was a classicist by educational emphasis.

After the death of the famous magician Harry Houdini in 1926, his widow offered \$10,000 to any medium who could bring through the secret code which Houdini agreed to communicate to his wife, the only other person who knew it, after his death if he possibly could. In early 1928, the famous medium Arthur Ford brought through a message from Houdini's mother which purported to clear the psychic air so that Houdini himself could communicate. After receiving Ford's message from the mother, Houdini's wife wrote to Ford to state that aside from "one or two trivial inaccuracies... there was nothing in the message which could be contradicted." She also said that if the message had been received when Houdini was still alive, it would have made a tremendous difference in his life. In late 1928, Ford brought through apparent messages from Houdini himself. Finally, the secret code was communicated and forwarded to the widow. A seance was arranged with Ford, and Houdini communicated directly to his wife. Her positive declaration afterwards provoked a firestorm of controversy and criticism. On January 9, 1929, Beatrice Houdini wrote and signed the following declaration, which was countersigned by three witnesses:

"Regardless of any statements made to the contrary, I wish to declare that the message, in its entirety, and in the agreed upon sequence, given to me by Arthur Ford, is the correct message pre-arranged between Mr. Houdini and myself." (Ebon, 1970)

Arthur Ford served as a mediumistic channel for a great number of after-death communications, including seances conducted under the auspices of members of the Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship. One of those messages was finally proven accurate many years after the initial communication in a case in which I was directly involved. A message was received through Ford at the home of an Episcopalian minister in San Diego from the spirit of an ethnologist. It provided information for an anthropologist who had not yet arrived in San Diego. The message was conveyed to him, but its accuracy was not fully established until many years later through contact with the surviving widow of the ethnologist.

Both the British and American Societies for Psychical Research have continued their activities up through the present day, amassing an increasingly impressive amount of evidential material on the question of the survival of death and the nature of the after-life. Over the years they have worked with several extraordinary mediums, such as Leonore Piper, Gladys Leonard, and Eileen Garrett.

In her book *The Mediumship of Mrs. Leonard*, author Susy Smith focuses on the scientific inquiry into the mediumistic abilities of Gladys Osborne Leonard undertaken by these pioneer psychical researchers. As she states near the beginning of the book:

"It is with this band of patient workers that this book will be primarily concerned. They, with their determination and perseverance, their willingness to sit for many hours taking notes in stuffy, semi-darkened seance rooms, have made Mrs. Osborne Leonard the most carefully researched and documented medium in history. For over fifty years

she was studied by some of the best investigators of the British and American Societies for Psychical Research."

Mrs. Leonard achieved particular fame as the primary medium through which Sir Oliver Lodge's son Raymond, killed in WWI, communicated with his father and family.

Leonore Piper, as already noted, was also a particularly productive medium who was thoroughly investigated over many years by a number of psychical researchers with no evidence of fraud, conscious or unconscious.

John G. Fuller's book, *The Airmen Who Would Not Die* (1979), gives the full account of psychic medium Eileen Garrett's involvement in the late nineteen-twenties in a complex and strongly evidential series of communications. These messages were received mediumistically from a famous English air pioneer, Captain Walter Hinchliffe, who had died trying to cross the Atlantic in a more difficult reversal of the flight of Charles Lindbergh. Other, sometimes related, messages were later received from a group of airmen killed in the crash of R-101 - the so-called "Titanic of the Air" - a massive, ill-designed British dirigible, in 1930. Prior to its crash, the afterlife entity who had been Captain Hinchliffe tried to warn of the impending disaster through the mediumship of Eileen Garrett, but to no avail.

The wealth of technical information in the Garrett communications, the accuracy of information verified at a later date (years later, in some cases), and the fact that other psychics besides Eileen Garrett were also involved to some degree, make this one of the most evidential cases in the annals of psychic communication from the Afterlife.

Other notable after-death communications through the medium of psychic channels are the series of messages received through the mediumship of Margaret Flavell Taylor and Helen Greaves, both English mediums. In both cases the communicators were members of the clergy who were also educators with a deep interest in parapsychology and psychic communication. Two books resulted from these contacts, *Witness from Beyond* and *Testimony of Light*. Both cases are highly evidential because of the backgrounds and integrity of the persons involved and the high likelihood of communication from these two personalities if an after-life does exist as we maintain.

During the early seventies, I studied depth psychology and para-psychology with British psychiatrist and parapsychologist Dr. Laurence Bendit, who was then living in Ojai, California. Dr. Bendit's wife, Phoebe Bendit, was a psychic of considerable ability. He had become acquainted with her during a research project on psychic diagnosis and healing in which they both participated. Psychics who claimed to be able to diagnose and even sometimes heal disease had their psychic findings checked by follow-up diagnosis by the medical doctors who were part of the research project. Dr. Bendit was impressed by his future wife's personality, character and psychic ability. The latter was confirmed by her accuracy in psychic diagnosis. Phoebe Bendit later became one of the psychics discussed in *Breakthrough to Creativity*, a book by psychiatrist Dr. Shafica Karagulla. Dr. Karagulla's book and others by Laurence and Phoebe Bendit are among recommended texts for the course. In addition to her diagnostic abilities, Phoebe Bendit also was able to communicate with discarnate spirits. In one dramatic instance, she brought crucial information through to the wife of an early airman who had died in an airplane accident, somewhat reminiscent of the communications of Captain Hinchliffe to his wife through the mediumship of Eileen Garrett.

While commuting regularly to Ojai from Santa Barbara in the early seventies to study with Dr. Bendit, I would pass by the community of Summerland on my way. I always noticed a large stately home just beside the freeway and felt drawn to it in some way. It became even more obvious when it was painted yellow and turned into a

restaurant. Dr. Bendit and I talked about my strange attraction to this particular house. He knew more about the history of Summerland than I did and was aware that the town was originally founded as a Spiritualist colony. As we were discussing parapsychology as well as depth psychology and other matters, we speculated on whether this house might be haunted, to which I might be intuitively reacting. While having dinner at the house and doing some research, I synchronistically met a talented psychic medium there and had an encounter with a unique spirit who accurately corresponded with a spirit who appeared at Spiritualist seances held in the house in the nineteenth century (see *The Spirit of the Big Yellow House* in the online course Reader).

Another famous case involving psychic communications from discarnate spirits took place in Glastonbury, England, a most intriguing and inspiring country town in southwestern England which I thoroughly enjoyed visiting, primarily for research purposes. The site of a ruined Abbey which at one time had great renown and drew pilgrims from all over Christendom, it has associations with the legend-mythos of King Arthur and the Holy Grail. There were reports of miraculous healings during the Middle Ages. Dissolved by King Henry VIII, the Abbey fell into ruins but Glastonbury's fame began to revive in the early part of the twentieth century. By the time I visited there in the early seventies, it was again attracting pilgrims from all over the world. Aside from all the beauty, mystery, legend and high history attached to the spot, there is a rather famous parapsychological connection. This has to do with the "Glastonbury Scripts" and an evidential case of psychic archaeology which achieved tangible results which were believed to have been made possible through after-death communications from discarnate monks who once lived at the Abbey.

Frederick Bligh Bond was an ecclesiastical architect and archaeologist who was selected to conduct archaeological investigations and excavations at the Glastonbury Abbey ruins, beginning in 1908. Bond decided to try psychic assistance to discover the location of the foundations and layout of "lost chapels" which he was unable to find through conventional archaeology. Through the help of various psychics using automatic writing, he claimed to receive the information he needed. In this way, the lost Edgar and Loretto chapel foundations were discovered by excavation in unusual locations where Bond would never have thought to dig. These communications demonstrate an example of the phenomenon of cross correspondence in that various and sometimes widely separated mediums were used at different times, including two in America, with coherent and cohesive messages resulting. Publication of a book about these events created such controversy that Bond was removed from the archaeological project and was not allowed to complete his work at Glastonbury. Although it was hard to argue with the results, some asserted that the information and directions came from the unconscious minds of the psychic sensitives involved, but I feel that an open-minded reading of Bond's books (see bibliography) will provide further convincing evidence of After-Death Communications. The "Glastonbury Scripts" are an interesting and provocative case study in mediumistic communication with cross correspondences and pragmatic results.

Dr. Benito L. Reyes of World University first became interested in the connection between the Out-of-Body (OBE) phenomenon and the survival of the death of the body through his mother. At age sixteen, Reyes had his own OBE and began to devote his considerable academic research talents to amassing evidence supportive of survival of consciousness apart from the body. Finally, as a university professor, he wrote a book on the subject, entitled *Scientific Evidence of the Existence of the Soul* which was first published in 1947 (now in its third edition). This was a pioneering work and, although there were antecedents of a scientific and scholarly nature, it is still considered a seminal and enduring book on survival and what constitutes the surviving entity. Dr. Reyes also included a well-attested study on what is now known as a Near-Death

Experience (NDE) - the case of Sotera Flandez (see *The NDE, Prediction, & Subsequent Death of Sotera Flandez* in the online course Reader). Her son had been a professor at Far Eastern University where Dr. Reyes also taught, so there was access to all aspects of the case and to the numerous witnesses involved. Mrs. Flandez had been given last rites and then "died". But during the wake-vigil she revived, shocking her friends and family. She related that she had been allowed to come back only temporarily to settle some affairs. This she did and then died, this time without reviving. She had predicted that her daughter, who was not ill at the time, would follow her in death a short time later and this actually happened. Apparently, her prediction helped prepare the daughter and family for this inevitable event.

Aside from his Out-of-Body Experiences, Dr. Reyes also had his own first-hand Near-Death Experiences. All of this firmly set his determination to continue to expand research and education into the process of dying, survival of death, and return to life in this world. Besides the various courses on thanatology and conscious dying in the World University curriculum, he commissioned a community service project in 1990 with the name International Association for Conscious Dying, now known as the International Association for Conscious Living and Dying (IACLD). A major part of its mission has been sponsoring conferences featuring outstanding researchers and authors in the expanding field of death and Near-Death research. Notable presenters at these conferences - held in Ventura, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and Tucson - include Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D., Raymond Moody, M.D., Melvin Morris, M.D., Kenneth Ring, Ph.D., Brian Weiss, M.D., and Drs. Benito and Dominga Reyes. Benito Reyes avidly pursued this quest until his final transition from earthly life in September of 1992, in what some of his students and colleagues at World University refer to, using his own favored term, as his FOBE (Final Out-of-Body Experience). In this quest and in his study of the nature and spectrum of consciousness, he drew more and more upon the wisdom which he encountered in Eastern cultures, particularly in India which he visited in 1950 as a Philippine government scholar and to which he later returned for several study-oriented visits.

In the modern era we find that many, if not most, of the historical beliefs regarding death and the afterlife are still with us. In some cases they are remarkably preserved, while in others (like many of the so-called "New Age" religions and philosophies) they exhibit evidence of remarkable synthesis and modification.

Contemporary psychical research in areas other than mediumistic communications has also added to the weight of scientific data related to the probability of survival of death. The number of scientific researchers in the field of parapsychology has steadily increased as has the number of institutions sponsoring their work. Private organizations and major universities are involved in a variety of psychical research projects, some directly addressing the question of survival.

Research with "Out-of-Body-Experiences" (OOBEs or OBEs), "Near-Death Experiences" (NDEs), and "Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation" offer some of the strongest survival evidence. These areas have been extensively documented and researched by a number of academic, scientific, and medical researchers.

Various researchers have investigated the Out-of-Body phenomenon over the years, including Dr. Robert Crookall, a British geologist, Dr. Charles Tart, an American professor of clinical psychology, and Dr. Robert Morris, professor of psychology at the University of Edinburgh (whose parapsychology research group has now statistically established the validity of telepathy). Crookall collected and analyzed hundreds of OBEs, subjecting his collective data to a detailed content analysis in order to determine: whether the experience was hallucinatory; whether an apparitional "body" actually did

"project" during the experience; if some insight into the mechanics of the experience could be obtained. From the results of this content analysis Crookall argued that a release of consciousness from the body did occur during these experiences, in an "apparitional" form which could survive death. While at Duke University, Morris was part of the OBE research conducted with Ingo Swann and Keith Harary which yielded significant results.

Tart's research, undertaken at the University of California at Davis, focused on the laboratory study of subjects who claimed OBE ability. EEG and other electrical monitoring devices were used during the experiments. EEG rhythms during reported OBEs showed similarities to a dream state, but were sometimes so enigmatic that neither Tart nor Dr. William Dement, the well-known authority on sleep research, could classify them as either sleeping or waking states. Subjects were able to report, in an accurate manner, on what they could observe at target areas inaccessible to their physical positions during the experiments.

Other clinical researchers, at major universities and private research laboratories, have expanded on the pioneering efforts of earlier investigators and there is now a large body of research data indicating the validity of the OBE, an experience amazingly similar to the "magical flight," "bird soul," and "astral body" descriptions in shamanic and mystical traditions.

Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) could be described as an extreme, non-voluntary form of OBE. As the term implies, these are experiences, recorded by researchers, of people who claim to have nearly made the transition into the afterdeath state but who returned to life in the body instead. Their experience usually includes an impression of an OBE at a moment of trauma that would ordinarily be considered the moment of death. Other experiences beyond the body, in what seemed to be the first stages of the after-death state, often followed. The moment of trauma was, in many of these cases, actually pronounced as the clinical moment of death by medical personnel.

In sources as old as Plato's *Republic* we encounter references to what seem clearly to be Near-Death Experiences. In The Myth of Er which concludes the *Republic*, a Greek soldier named Er is seemingly killed in battle but revives days later to tell his tale of life on the other side. The specificity of names and places indicate that this may well be a true experience of a Greek soldier with some poetic license taken by Plato in the inclusion of famous Greek personages being reincarnated in the same batch with Er's in his return to his body.

Dr. Raymond Moody, a professor of philosophy who is also a medical doctor and psychiatrist, brought the NDE to the widespread attention of both the scientific community and the general public with the publication in 1975 of his best-selling book *Life After Life*. In over 150 collected accounts of NDEs, Moody found common experiences like floating out of the body at the moment of "death," meetings with departed relatives and friends, and an end to the fear of death. Another commonality in the NDEs collected by Moody is what he refers to as "The Review." All of the incidents in a person's life are "recalled," in an extremely rapid review, for the purpose of reflection upon the meaning and positive accomplishments of that life. This is reminiscent of the post-mortem judgments recorded in so many religious traditions, and especially with the ancient Egyptians.

Other professionals - such as Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Dr. Karlis Osis, Dr. Kenneth Ring, and Dr. Michael Sabom - have encountered similar experiences in their own, independent investigations of the phenomenon. Ring and Sabom polled near-death survivors, using sophisticated sampling and statistical techniques to confirm the data

Moody had collected anecdotally.

By the late 1980s, a considerable amount of data had been collected by researchers who had followed Moody and other early pioneers. In 1990 Dr. Benito Reyes' and the International Association for Conscious Dying, of which he was a founder and teacher in residence, organized the first of three consecutive annual conferences on the Conscious Dying process. Some of the leading figures in the field of NDE and survival research attended and spoke about their work. Among them were Dr. Moody, Dr. Kenneth Ring, and Dr. Brian Weiss.

Dr. Benito Reyes died just prior to the third conference in 1992, where he had been scheduled to speak. The outline of the talk he was going to give, delivered instead by his wife, Dr. Dominga Reyes, can be accessed on our website (see *An Outline of the NDE* in the online course Reader). After more than a half century of study, research, writing and lecturing in the death and dying field - plus having his own first-hand experiences of NDEs and many OBEs - he made the final transition from his body to what lies on the other side of death. His work in what he preferred to refer to as "Conscious Dying" is being carried on by World University in Ojai, where he was the president, and the International Association for Conscious Dying, now renamed the International Association for Conscious Living and Dying. Although some scientists are still reluctant to concede the reality of the NDE and its implications for survival of consciousness and what we focus our consciousness upon and our resultant behavior, there is a vast weight of evidence that has to be ignored in taking this position. A declaration by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross should be considered in this regard, as her work alone should provide ample evidence for survival:

Aside from issues involving NDEs and survival of death, there is also the very germane issue of reembodiment or rebirth. A tenet of belief for thousand of years in India and other parts of Asia, it is only in recent years that studies have been undertaken by scientists on this subject. Dr. Benito Reyes felt that this subject could be very profitably researched and that it could provide important insights and motivations for people in the West regarding what can, and according to traditional teachings, usually does happen after death and a certain period in the post-mortem world.

In contrast to the main traditions of Egyptian religion, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam, the religious traditions of India and Tibet do not envision an afterdeath state of an unchanging, eternal nature. A post-mortem "judgment" and reckoning is recorded in the sacred literature of Hinduism but, after a certain period in the post-mortem state, the individual is reborn into this world again unless a certain level of attainment has been reached. The following two quotations from the vast corpus of sacred Hindu literature known as the Upanishads encapsulate these concepts:

"As a man's desire is, so is his destiny. For as his desire is, so is his will; and as his will is, so is his deed; and as his deed is, so is his reward, whether good or bad. A man acts according to the desires to which he clings. After death he goes to the next world bearing in his mind the subtle impressions of his deeds; and, after reaping there the harvest of his deeds, he returns again to this world of action. Thus he who has desire continues subject to rebirth." (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*)

"He who lacks discrimination, whose mind is unsteady and whose heart is impure, never reaches the goal, but is born again and again. But he who has discrimination, whose mind is steady and whose heart is pure, reaches the goal, and having reached it is born no more." (*Katha Upanishad*) 5

This goal of escape from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth has been the preoccupation of Hinduism in India and of Buddhism in its place of origin in India, and

later on in Tibet, Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. The attainment of liberation (moksha for the Hindu, nirvana for the Buddhist) takes the liberated being beyond all realms of conditioned, phenomenal existence. It is considered as a path open to all and a goal which all will eventually obtain.

The concept of Reincarnation is not confined to religions originating in India but is also found in many other cultures, some of which would have seemingly had little opportunity for direct contact with the religions and philosophies of India. Head and Cranston, in their anthologies on reincarnation, cite dialogues on death and re-birth from most of the world's cultures and religions, including American Indian, Celtic, Judaic, Islamic, and Christian.

Intensive parapsychological research into the question of reincarnation did not begin until the 1960s. Some researchers in France and England looked into it in the latter part of the nineteenth century but there was little scientific interest in the subject, despite its obvious relationship to survival after death, until Dr. Ian Stevenson began his research.

Dr. Stevenson, the head of the psychiatry department at the University of Virginia, first gained prominence in the field of parapsychology in 1960 with his first prize essay in the American Society for Psychical Research William James commemorative contest. His essay, "The Evidence for Survival from Claimed Memories of Former Incarnations," reported on cases in which young children recalled past lives. In 1966 Stevenson published the book *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* and has continued to publish other books on the subject, as well as reports and papers on reincarnation in psychiatry, parapsychology, and sociology journals. His total collection of reports of this phenomenon now number over two thousand.

Dr. Stevenson recently undertook an extensive field trip encompassing his own state of Virginia, Beirut in Lebanon, and areas of India. Its purpose was to reassess cases of children who seemed to remember past lives. He was accompanied by Tom Shroder, a veteran journalist and editor at the Washington Post. The result was the book *Old Souls: Compelling Evidence from Children Who Remember Past Lives*. Shroder began the trek as a toughened skeptical journalist and ended convinced, by concrete evidence he cannot discount, that he had encountered an authentic phenomenon and a scrupulously honest researcher. Author Carol Bowman has also explored past life memories of children after having such memories surface in her own children. She found numerous cases of such memory occurrence which she documents in *Children's Past Lives: How Past Life Memories Affect Your Child*.

Reincarnated children, from various countries and cultures, usually offer corroborative information - sometimes in incredible quantity and detail - regarding their prior incarnations. Many of these have been traced and have proven confirmatory of the children's stories, at least in terms of their otherwise seemingly inexplicable knowledge of personal and sometimes very intimate and unusual facets of the deceased person's life. The children usually stopped speaking of their past lives as they grew older.

Many parapsychologists feel that the vast amount of carefully collected data in the aforementioned areas of psychical research bearing on the question of survival of bodily death have answered the question in the affirmative. However, controversy is still heated in the scientific community at large on this question and on the validity of parapsychological research, even though it has been generally conceded that telepathy and psychokinesis have been scientifically proven to exist. Can unarguable scientific proof of survival of death and the existence of an After-life be far behind? Perhaps. But more and more research is taking place, with constantly growing numbers of

researchers in the field worldwide. Researchers are now able to build upon, and extrapolate from, a diverse and extensive body of previous research. Someday this research may actually provide the kind of hard, unassailable scientific evidence on survival and even on reincarnation which will establish these age-old beliefs as universally accepted parts of modern life.

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