

Life after Death

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Preface

"I was lying in a room in the intensive care unit of a Seattle children's hospital," recalls Dean, a sixteen year-old boy, whose kidneys had stopped working. "Suddenly, I was standing upright and moving very quickly through dark space. I could not see any walls, but I thought that I was in a kind of tunnel. Although there was no wind, I felt that I was travelling with great speed. I did not understand where I was flying to or why, but I could feel that at the end of my flight something very important was waiting for me and I wanted to arrive at my destination as quickly as possible.

At last I arrived at a place filled with light. It was here that I noticed someone next to me. He was tall with long golden hair dressed in white vestments girded with a belt in the middle. Even though He did not say anything, I was not afraid, because

of the feelings of love and peace flowing from him. If it was not Christ, then it must have been one of His angels." After this, Dean felt himself return to his body and then he awoke. This brief and yet, very intense experience left a deep impression in Dean's soul. He became a very religious young man, which had a positive effect on his whole family.

This is one of the typical accounts collected by an American doctor-pediatrician Melvin Morse, published in his book Closer to the Light [7]. His first encounter with such an event of transitory death was in 1982 when he revived nine year-old Katherine who had drowned in a public pool. Katherine told him how, during the time she was dead, she met with a nice lady who called herself Elizabeth; this was probably her Guardian Angel. Elizabeth greeted Katherine's soul lovingly and talked with her. Knowing that Katherine was not ready to come into the spiritual world, Elizabeth allowed her to return to her body. At the time of this event, Dr. Morris' medical career had him working in a hospital in Pocatello, Idaho. The child's account had such a profound effect on a man who, until then, was skeptical of anything spiritual, that he decided to explore deeper what happens to a person immediately after death. In Katherine's case, Dr. Morse was especially astounded at the details with which she was able to describe what she had observed, both at the hospital and at her home, during the time she was clinically dead. Dr. Morse checked into and confirmed the accuracy of her "out of body" observations. It was as if she had been an eyewitness to the events that had transpired during the time that she was dead.

After his transfer to Seattle's Orthopedic Children's Hospital and later to Seattle's Medical Center, Dr. Morse began to systematically examine the question of dying. He questioned many children, who had experienced clinical death, comparing and documenting their accounts. Additionally, he remained in contact with his young patients through adulthood observing their mental and spiritual maturity. In his book Closer to the Light, Dr. Morse insists that all the children whom he studied grew up to be more serious, moral, and spiritual than the average adult. All of them accepted their experiences as a manifestation of God's mercy and a sign from above that they should live in uprightness.

Until most recently, such accounts of the afterlife could only be found in the realm of religious literature. Worldly magazines and medical journals, as a rule, avoided publishing such material. An overwhelming majority of physicians and psychiatrists reacted very disapprovingly to any spiritual accounts and did not acknowledge the existence of the human soul. It is only within the last twenty years, at the very, so-called triumph of materialism, that some doctors and psychiatrists have begun to seriously examine the existence of the human soul. A catalyst for this movement was Dr. Raymond Moody's well-received book Life after Life [1], published in 1975. In it, Dr. Moody collected a series of first-hand accounts of near death experiences. Initially, Dr. Moody's interest in the subject was sparked by stories related to him by some of his friends. As he began to collect these stories, he realized that there were large numbers of people who had out-of-body experiences during the time they were clinically dead. This

shocked him. However, many of these people, did not relate their stories to anyone to avoid embarrassment or worse, the questioning of their sanity.

Soon after the appearance of Dr. Moody's book, the sensation-hungry press and television media widely publicized the contents of his book. A firestorm of discussions and public debates on life after death issues followed. This caused a flood of doctors, psychiatrists and spiritual leaders, some of whom felt their field of expertise had been infringed upon by an incompetent source, to launch independent investigations to review the data and results published by Dr. Moody. Many of them were very surprised when the accuracy of Dr. Moody's observations were verified. Specifically, that upon a person's death, their existence does not cease, but on the contrary their soul continues to hear, think and feel.

Among serious and systematic studies on dying, Dr. Michael Sabom's book "Recollections of Death" should be mentioned. Dr. Sabom is a professor of medicine at Emory University and a staff doctor at the Atlanta Veteran's Hospital. In his book one can find detailed histories and a penetrating analysis of the subject matter.

Also of value is the systematic documentation of Psychiatrist Dr. Kenneth Ring, published in his book "Life at Death." Dr. Ring compiled a list of standardized questions for people who had experienced clinical death. The names of other doctors who studied this topic are mentioned in the bibliography. Many of them started their observations as skeptics, but having seen an increasing number of incidents supporting the existence of the soul changed their perspective.

In this brochure we will exemplify several stories of people who survived clinical death and we will compare these with the traditional Christian teachings of the afterlife and make comparative conclusions. In the addendum we will examine the Theosophical teaching on reincarnation.

What the Soul sees in the hereafter

Death is not as many imagine it to be. All of us at the hour of our death will see and experience much to which we are not accustomed. The purpose of this brochure is to expand and detail our understanding of the inevitable separation from the transitory body. Some think death is a sleep without dreams. You close your eyes, fall asleep and there is nothing more, just darkness. Sleep ends in the morning, but death is eternal. Many are very frightened of the unknown and of the question, "what will happen to me?" So, instead, they choose not to think about death. However, deep within us there is always the knowledge of the

inevitable and an accompanying sense of disquiet. Each one of us will have to cross that boundary. We should contemplate it and prepare ourselves.

Some say, "What is there to contemplate or prepare for? It's beyond our control. Our time will come and we will die — that is it. While there is time, we must take everything we can from life. Eat, drink, love, achieve power and glory, earn money, etc. Don't dwell on anything unpleasant or upsetting and certainly don't think about dying." Many follow this ideation.

Yet at times each of us may have more disturbing questions: "What if that's not the case? What if death is not the end? What if I find myself in a completely new place with my abilities to see hear and feel intact?" And most importantly, "what if our future beyond the threshold depends in part on the way in which we lived this life and what we were before we crossed the threshold of death?"

From a compilation of the accounts of survivors of clinical death, we can glimpse what the soul sees and experiences upon its separation from the body. During the process of dying, when a person reaches the limit of enfeeblement, he can hear as the doctor pronounces him dead. Then he sees his double, a lifeless body, lying below him surrounded by doctors and nurses trying to revive him. This unexpected scene shocks the person, who for the first time looks upon himself from outside of his body. It is at this point that he begins to realize that all of his abilities — to see, to hear, to think, to feel, etc. — continue to function, but now completely independent of his outer membrane, the flesh. Finding himself floating above the people in the room the person instinctively tries to make them aware of his presence by touching or speaking to one of them. But to his dismay, he is completely cut off from everyone. No one hears his voice or notices his touch. At the same time, he is puzzled by his feelings of relief, peace and even happiness. There is no longer that part of himself, that "me," which suffers, which needs and is always complaining about something. Having experienced such ease, the soul usually does not want to return to its body.

In the majority of documented cases of temporary death, after a few moments of observation, the soul returns to the body and thus ends its knowledge of the afterlife. However, on occasion the soul continues to travel further into the spiritual world. Some liken this condition to travelling through a dark tunnel. After this the souls of some arrive in a world of great beauty where they sometimes meet deceased relatives. Others arrive in a realm of light and meet a being of light from whom feelings of great love and understanding radiate and warm the soul. Some insist that it is our Lord Jesus Christ while others say it is an angel, but all agree that it is someone full of good and compassion. Still others arrive in dark netherworlds where they describe seeing loathsome and cruel beings.

Sometimes the meeting with the mysterious being of light is accompanied with a "review" of life during which a person remembers his past and judges the moral value of his actions. After this, certain people see something similar to a barrier or boundary. They can feel that if it is crossed, they will not be able to return to the physical world.

Not all people, who revive after death, experience all of the stages described above. A significant percent of people returned to life could remember nothing of what happened to them "on the other side." The mentioned occurrences are placed above in order of their frequency from greatest to least. Based on Dr. Ring's facts only one in seven people who remember their out of body journeys speak of seeing a light or speaking with a being of light.

Thanks to the progress of medicine, the reanimation of the dead has become a somewhat standard procedure in most modern hospitals. Before, it was almost never attempted. Consequently, there exist differences between accounts of life after death in ancient, traditional, and modern literature. Religious books of the older era describe the appearances of the souls of the dead who tell of things they have seen in heaven or hell and of their otherworldly meetings with angels or demons. This first category of accounts should be considered descriptions of a "distant cosmos" in as much as they tell us of a spiritual world far removed from our own. Whereas the second category of contemporary accounts, as detailed by the doctors, primarily describe the "near cosmos" i.e. the first experiences of a soul who has just left the body. They are interesting in that they complement the first category of accounts and provide us with a clearer picture of what awaits each of us on the other side. Between these two categories is the story of K. Uekskuell, published by Archbishop Nikon in the "Trinity Pages" in 1916 under the title of "Incredible to many, but a true happening" which encompasses both worlds the "near" and "distant." In 1959 the "Holy Trinity Monastery" republished this story as a pamphlet. We provide it here in condensed form. It encompasses elements of both the older and modern day accounts of the afterlife.

K. Uekskuell (pronounced Ick-school) was a typical young intellectual of pre-Revolutionary Russia. He was baptized as a child and grew up in an Orthodox environment, but as was customary among the intellectuals, was indifferent towards religion. On occasion he went to church and celebrated Christmas and Easter and even took Holy Communion once a year, but he considered a lot of Orthodoxy to be old-fashioned superstition including the teaching of life after death. He was sure that death was the end of man's existence.

At one point in his life, he contracted pneumonia. He was seriously ill for a long time and was hospitalized. He did not think of his impending death, instead he counted on recovering soon so that he could return to his usual routine. One morning he suddenly felt much better and he thought that he was finally over his illness. However, to his surprise this made the doctors even more concerned. They even brought him an oxygen tank and soon after he felt a chill followed by a complete dissociation from his surroundings.

In his own words: "All of my attention was concentrated on myself...a certain state of division within me...there appeared an inner person... the main one, who had a complete indifference to the external one (the body) and to what was transpiring with him...It was amazing to see and hear everything, and at the same time to feel an estrangement toward everything. Thus, for example, the doctor asks me a

question; I hear and understand that which he asks, but I do not reply. I do not give an answer, because I feel there is no reason for me to speak with him... I suddenly felt myself drawn somewhere downward with irresistible force... I exerted myself and began tossing about... "Agony," I heard this word pronounced over me by the doctor...but, I was not afraid... No, I felt no physical pain whatsoever, but undoubtedly I was suffering. I felt heavy within and weary... I, however, only felt an insurmountable striving towards somewhere, an attraction towards something... I felt more clearly that I, as a whole, could not unite, that something had to separate within me... I almost screamed out loud, and made an attempt to free myself, to tear myself from that force which was attracting me, and suddenly I felt a calm within myself... I opened my eyes, and everything that I saw in the course of that minute, down to the slightest details, registered in my memory with complete clarity.

I saw that I was standing in the middle of a room; to the right of me, standing around a bed in a semi-circle, was the whole medical staff... I was surprised at what they were doing there, since I was not there but here. I moved forward to see. There on the bed lay I... I do not have any recollection of experiencing anything like fear when seeing my double; I was only perplexed: how can this be? I wanted to touch myself — my hand went right through as through a void. I also could not reach the others. I could not feel the floor... I called the doctor, but he did not react. I understood that I was alone and a feeling of panic came over me.

Glancing [at my body] "Am I not dead perhaps?" But this was difficult to comprehend. Since I was more alive than before and felt and was aware of everything. After a while the doctors, walked out of the ward, both assistant doctors were standing about and trying to explain the stages of my illness and death, and the old nurse turned to the Icon, crossed herself and audibly expressed the accepted wish in such cases:

"May he inherit the kingdom of heaven, eternal peace to him." And hardly had she uttered these words, when two Angels appeared at my side; for some reason in one of them I recognized my Guardian Angel, but the other was unknown to me. Having taken me by the arms, the Angels carried me right through the wall of the ward into the street. It already had grown dark. Snow was silently falling in large flakes. I saw this, but I felt neither the cold nor in general the difference in temperature between the room and the outside. Evidently these like phenomena lost their significance for my changed body. We began to ascend quickly." — We will continue Uekskuell's story a bit later.

Thanks to new studies in the realm of reanimation and a comparison of the many near death experiences, it is now possible to compile a detailed schematic picture of what the soul experiences soon after separating from the body. Of course each case has its peculiarities which are absent from others. It's natural to expect this since the soul enters the other world like a newborn with undeveloped senses. For this reason, the first impressions of those who "dive" into this "other world" are very subjective. However in their similarities they help us create a fairly complete,

if not comprehensive, picture.

We shall list here the most distinctive moments of otherworldly experience taken from contemporary books on life after death.

1. Seeing a double. Upon dying, a person does not immediately realize his state. Only after seeing his "double" lying breathless below him and becoming convinced that he is incapable of making himself known to the living, does he realize that his soul has left its body. Sometimes, as in an unexpected accident or other sudden death, the soul does not recognize its body and thinks it is someone else, who looks like them. The seeing of one's "double" and the inability to attract the attention of the living creates a shocking impression on the soul, so that it is not sure if it is a dream or reality.

2. Continuous consciousness. All, who have had a life after death experience, witness that they maintained their feeling of self, all of their mental and sensory abilities and their free will. In fact, their vision and hearing became more acute; their thought acquires precision and becomes extremely energetic, the memory clarifies. People who had long ago, due to illness or age, lost certain abilities regained them anew. They could see, hear, think and so forth all without the aid of their physical being. It is amazing; for example, that a man blind from birth, upon leaving his body, could see everything that was being done to his body by the doctors and nurses. He later recounted everything he had seen in great detail. Having returned into his body he was again rendered blind. The doctors and psychiatrists who define the functions of thought and emotion as just electrochemical processes of the brain should look into the data gathered by the reanimating doctors in order to correctly understand man's nature.

3. Alleviation. Usually, death's precursor is illness and suffering. However, once it has left the body the soul rejoices that the pain is gone and there is no longer any pressure or choking. The mind is clear and the senses tranquil. The person begins to accept his soul, and the body becomes secondary and no longer necessary, as does the rest of the material world. "I leave, and the body — an empty shell" explained one man with near death experience. He watched the operation on his heart like "an uninvolved bystander." Attempts to revive his body did not interest him. Apparently, he had made his peace with his past life and was ready to start a new and better life. He did, however, retain love for his family and concern for the children whom he was leaving.

At this point, it is important to mention that there is no rudimentary change in the character of one's personality. The uniqueness of the personality remains as it was. "The supposition that upon discarding the body the soul begins to know and understand all things — is untrue. I came into this new world the same as I had left the old." (narrated K. Uekskuell).

4. The Tunnel and the Light. Soon after seeing its body and surroundings some souls continue into the other spiritual world. While others, not noticing the first, go directly to this second stage. The passage to the spiritual world is described by

some as a journey through a dark space, reminiscent of a tunnel at the end of which they come into the realm of unearthly light. There is a painting of the 15th century of Hieronymus Bosch "Ascent to Empyrean" that depicts a comparable travel through a tunnel. It must be that even then this experience was known by some.

The following are two modern-day accounts of this stage:

"I heard the doctors declare me dead. At the time, I was swimming through a dark area. There are no words to describe this condition. I was surrounded by darkness and only far in the distance could I see a light. It was very bright, although at first it seemed small. As I came closer the light grew. I was being carried towards the light and I could feel that it emanated good. Being a Christian, I remember the words of Christ, who said, "I am the light of the world," and I thought. If this is death, then I know who is waiting for me [1, pg. 62].

"I knew that I was dying" another man recalled. "I could do nothing to relay this as no one could hear me. I was outside my body. This is for certain, since I could see my body on the operating table. My soul had left the body. Consequently, I felt lost, but then a special light shone. At first it was pale, then it became a bright beam. I felt its warmth. The light enveloped everything, but did not impede my ability to see the operating room, doctors, nurses and all the rest. I could not understand what was going on and then a voice out of the light spoke and asked me if I was ready to die. He spoke as a man even though there was no one there. It was, evidently, the Light which was asking me... Now I understand, that He knew that I was not ready, but was in a way testing me. From the time the light began to speak, I felt a well-being; I felt safe and He loved me. The love coming from the Light was unimaginable and indescribable" [1, pg. 63]

All who have seen the otherworldly light and have tried to describe it could not find the right words. The light was unlike the one known in this world. "It was a light, void of darkness, complete and full." [5, pg. 66]. Most testimonies speak of the light as a morally good being, not an impersonal energy. Religious people identify the light as an Angel or even as Our Lord Jesus Christ — in either instance as someone bringing love and peace. On meeting with the Light they do not hear separate words uttered in a recognizable language. The Light communicated with them by way of thought and in such a way that everything was so clear that to conceal any thought from the Light was completely impossible.

5. A review and judgement. Some near death survivors describe a session during which they reviewed their lives. Sometimes the review happened during their vision of the Light, who asked them, "What good things have you done?" Though, there was an understanding that the Light already knew the answer, but wanted to raise their awareness of the moral value of their actions in life. Immediately after they are asked, their spiritual eyes allow them to see their life, from early childhood, unfolding before them like a slide-show. A series of quickly changing pictures, each detailing an episode in which the person can clearly see all that has

happened to him. During this time, the person re-lives these scenes and morally re-evaluates everything he had said and done.

Here is a typical story, illustrating the process of review. "When the Light came, he asked me: "What have you done in your life? What can you show me? (Or something to that effect). And then these pictures started to appear. They were very perceptible, colorful, three-dimensional and moving. My whole life passed before me... here I am, still a small girl, playing with my sister... then scenes from my home... my school... here I am getting married... everything quickly passing before my eyes in great detail. I again re-lived these experiences... I saw an event, where I was vain and cruel. I felt ashamed and I wished it had never happened, but it was impossible to change the past" [1, pg. 65-68].

From a collective look at many of these stories of life-reviews, it is important to include that these experiences have always left a deep and beneficial impression on those who have had them. Indeed, during the review a person is forced to re-evaluate his actions, prepare a summary of his past and in so doing, judge himself. In daily life, people hide the negative sides of their personality and in some ways hide behind their good deeds in order to appear to others to be better than they actually are. Most people become accustomed to this hypocrisy, and stop seeing their underlying nature that is often proud, vain and covetous. But, at the time of death this mask is removed and a person sees himself as he really is. Especially those actions which were painstakingly hidden from the world, are seen in full panoramic 3-D, — each word is heard, long forgotten events are experienced anew. All of life's accomplishments, social and economic: position, diplomas, titles and so forth, lose their meaning. The only thing that is evaluated is the moral worth of each action. Then the person must judge himself not only for what he has done, but also how he has through his words or actions affected other people.

Here is how another person described his review. "I felt myself outside of my body, floating above a building, and I could see my body lying below. Then a light surrounded me, and within it I could see a vision of my whole life. I became incredibly ashamed, because of what I saw. Many things, which I had previously considered normal and had justified, were now obviously wrong. Everything was extremely realistic. I could feel that I was being judged and some higher intelligence was guiding and helping me to see. What amazed me most is that I could see not only what I had done, but also how my actions had affected others. It was then that I understood that nothing goes unrecorded and that everything, even each thought, has a consequence" [2, pg. 34-35].

The next two excerpts from people who have experienced life after death demonstrate how the review has taught them to look at life differently. "I did not tell anyone about what I had experienced in the moments of my death, but when I returned to life, I was troubled by a desire to do something good for others. I was so ashamed of myself." "When I returned, I decided that it was imperative to change. I felt repentant and my former life did not satisfy me. I decided to start a

new way of life" [2, pg. 25-26].

Now let us imagine a career criminal: a liar, a trickster, a cheat, a thief, a killer, a rapist, and sadist, who has caused much anguish to many people. Death comes upon him and he sees all of his evil deeds in all their terrible details. At this moment, his long sleeping conscience, awakened suddenly by the Light, begins to mercilessly reproach him for each of his abominations. What indescribable torment, what despair must grip him, when he can neither forget nor alter all that he has done. This shall, in truth, be the beginning of intolerable inner suffering from which he can never escape. The acknowledgment of the evil he has done, the injury to his soul and the souls of others, will become his "undying worm" and "unquenchable fire."

6. A New World. Certain differences in the descriptions of LAD experiences can be attributed to that fact that the other world is completely different from the one into which we were born and where all of our basic understandings were formed. In the other world, space, time and objects have an entirely different substance to which our senses had been accustomed. The soul entering the other world could be likened to an underground worm that has crawled out to the surface for the first time. It is the first time that it feels sunlight and notices it's warmth, sees beautiful scenery, hears the singing of birds, smells the sweet smells of flowers (assuming, for the purpose of comparison, that a worm could have these senses). All this is so new and wonderful, that he cannot find the words or examples necessary to explain this to the other subterranean inhabitants.

In a comparable way, people who arrive in the other world when they die are at a loss to explain much of what is seen or felt. For example, they stop perceiving distances, which is such a basic attribute of our world. Some insist that they could move themselves effortlessly by thought from one place to another, regardless of how far off it might be. In such a way, a soldier seriously wounded in Vietnam left his body during the operation and watched the doctors' efforts to revive him. "I was there, but the doctor was there and in another way was not. I touched him and my hand just went through him... Then I suddenly returned to the battlefield, where I had been injured, and saw the medics' picking-up the wounded. I wanted to help them, but I returned just as suddenly to the operating room. It's as if one can materialize at will either here or there in the blink of an eye" [5, pg. 33-34]. There are other similar stories of instantaneous transit: "[It's a] purely mental and pleasant process. I wish to be somewhere and I am there." "I have a big problem. The things which I wish to convey, I am forced to do in three dimensions... but what really happened was not a three-dimensional realm" [1, pg. 26].

If you ask a person, who was clinically dead, how long did his condition continue, he usually cannot answer. These people were completely unaware of the passage of time. "It might have been a couple of minutes or a couple of thousand years, there's no difference" [2, pg. 101, 5 pg. 15]. Other survivors of clinical death apparently went to worlds farther removed from our own material world. The saw nature "on the other side" and described it in terms of rolling meadows, a bright

green unlike any on earth, birds, animals, singing, music, gardens and meadows of unusual beauty, cities... alas, they could not find the words to competently relay their impressions.

7. The countenance of the soul. As the soul leaves the body, it does not immediately recognize itself. As, for example, the marks of age disappear, the children see themselves as adults and the elderly see themselves in their youth [3, pg. 75-76]. The extremities, arms and legs, lost for any number of reasons appear whole again. The blind can see.

One worker fell from a billboard onto high-voltage wires. As a result of his burns he lost both his legs and part of his arm. He experienced temporary death during his operation. After leaving his material body, he did not immediately recognize it because of the extensive injuries it had sustained. However, he was even more surprised to notice that his spiritual body was completely unhurt [3, pg. 86],

On the Long Island peninsula in the State of New York, lived a seventy-year-old lady who had lost her sight at eighteen years of age. She had a heart attack and was taken to the hospital where she had a near death experience. After her resuscitation, she told the doctor what she had seen while the doctors attempted to revive her. She precisely described all the different machines the doctors used to revive her. This was incredible since the machines in question had not yet been invented when she became blind. She also told the doctor that she had seen him in a blue suit. Of course, once revived she was blind as before [3, pg. 171].

8. Meetings. Some people tell of meeting relatives and friends who were already dead. These meetings happened either with a backdrop of this world or at times the other world. For instance, one woman who experienced temporary death heard the doctor telling her living relatives that she was dying. Leaving the body and rising up, she saw her dead relatives and friends. She recognized them and they were happy to see her. Another woman's dead relatives greeted her and shook her hands. They were dressed in white, they were happy and looked very content... "Suddenly they turned their backs to me and started moving away from me. My grandmother looked over her shoulder and said to me: "We'll see you later, but not this time. My grandmother had died at the age of ninety-six and here she looked to be a healthy and happy forty or forty-five [1 pg. 55]

One man tells about dying from a heart attack while his sister was at the other end of the hospital dying from a diabetic attack. "When I left my body, I unexpectedly met my sister. This pleased me, because I loved her very much. While talking to her, I was following her, but she turned to me and told me to remain where I was explaining that my time had not yet come. When I awoke, I told my doctor that I had just met with my newly departed sister. The doctor did not believe me. However, at my insistence, he sent a nurse to check on her condition and was told that she had just recently died as I had told him" [3, pg. 173].

The soul crossing over into the world beyond the grave, if it does meet someone, primarily meets the souls of those who were close to it in this world. Here,

relatives seem to pull one soul to another. For instance, in such a way, an elderly father saw his six deceased children. "There is no age there," he recalled. Now, this is not to say that the souls of the departed wander wherever they will. The Orthodox Church teaches that after the death of the flesh, the Lord designates a temporary place of repose for each soul — either in heaven or in hell. Therefore, the meeting of deceased relatives should not be viewed as a given, but an exception made by the Lord for the benefit of people, who must return to life on earth. It seems they could be described as glimpses rather than actual meetings. One must confess, there is much that is beyond our understanding.

A majority of the stories told by people who have seen "the other side" tell of the same occurrences, but the details differ. Some see what they expected to see. Christians see angels, The Mother of God, Jesus Christ, the saints. Non-religious people see temples of sorts, figures in white or youths or sometimes nothing at all. They only feel a presence.

9. The Language of the Soul. In the spiritual world conversations do not take place in any language known to man or any other language. Apparently, thoughts are communicated directly. This is why people returned to life have difficulty relating in any specific words that were communicated to them by the Light, the angels or whoever it is they met. [1, pg. 60]. Therefore, if all thoughts are heard in the other world, it is in this world that we must learn to always think what is right and good so as not to shame ourselves in that world by way of uncontrolled thoughts.

10. The Threshold. Some individuals finding themselves in the other world tell of seeing something resembling a boundary. Some describe it as a fence or bars on the edge of a field. Others as the beach of a lake or ocean, yet others as a gate, stream or cloud. Thus, it is hard to determine what this border represents. It is important, however, that all perceive it as a boundary, which if crossed will not allow one to return to the previous world. After it, the journey through eternity begins [1, pg. 73-77; 5, pg.51].

11. The Return. Sometimes the recently departed is given a choice on whether or not to return. For instance, the Light might ask, "Are you ready?" It was so for a soldier heavily wounded in the field of battle, who saw his mangled body, and heard the voice. He thought that Jesus Christ was speaking with him. He was given the opportunity to return to the world, where he would live as a cripple, or remain in the world beyond the grave. The soldier chose to return.

Many are pulled back by a want to complete some earthly mission. Once returned, they insisted that God had allowed them to return because their life's work was incomplete. Moreover, they were sure that their return was of their own choosing. The choice having been allowed because it flowed from a sense of responsibility, as in some cases where mothers wished to return to their young children, and not for some self-serving purpose. But, there were those who were returned to the living not by choice. Their souls, already filled with joy, love and peace, in a state of happiness, whose time had not yet come, heard the voice commanding them to

return. Attempts to resist the return to the flesh were futile. An unknown force drew them back.

The following is an event from the story of one of Dr. Moody's patients. "I had a heart attack and found myself in a black nothingness. I knew that I had left my body and was dying... I asked God to help me and soon slipped out of the darkness. Before me, I saw a gray fog and people beyond. Their figures were like those on earth and I saw houselike buildings. Everything was covered with a golden light, very soft, not harsh like the one on earth. I experienced otherworldly joy and wanted to cross through the fog, but my Uncle Carl, who had died many years ago, came out and barred my path. He said, "Go back, your task on earth is not complete. Go back, now." And so against her will she returned to her body. She had a small son, who would have floundered without her.

The return to the flesh is sometimes instant, sometimes coinciding with the electric shock or other techniques of reanimation. All sensations vanish and the person feels himself back in his bed. Some feel as if they enter the body through a push. At first feeling uncomfortable and cold. Sometimes, before returning to the body there is a short period of unconsciousness. The doctors who revive patients and other eyewitnesses say that the moment of return to life is often accompanied by a sneeze.

12. A New Attitude towards Life. People, who have been to the other side, usually undergo a change. By the testimony of many, they try to live a better life. Many have become stronger believers in God, changed their way of life, become more serious and pensive. Some have even changed their professions to work in hospitals or senior centers, so they can help those in need. All the stories of those who have survived a death experience tell of phenomenon completely new to modern science, but not to Christianity. Later we will look at these modern experiences of the other world in the light of Orthodox teachings.

An Evaluation of Life after Death Accounts

After a familiarization with modern books on life after death the reader develops the impression that death is not frightening. That a person arriving in the other world is automatically assured of experiencing peace, happiness, and an abode in an all loving and all forgiving Light. In this way, there is no difference between the righteous and sinful, believers and unbelievers. These circumstances have caused certain Christian thinkers to be wary and treat such literature with skepticism.

They wondered: "Could not these visions of light be the devil's wicked trickery, sent to allay the vigilance of Christian? — Live as you like, you'll still go to heaven."

For this reason, researchers John Ankenberg and John Weldon respond negatively to all modern literature on the "near death" experience. Seeing in it only occultist trickery [9]. Nevertheless, a careful examination of the accounts of people who experienced clinical death bring one to the determination that a majority of them had actual visions and not the devil's deception. The crux of the problem lies not with the experiences, but with the interpretations by doctors and psychiatrists distant from Christianity.

Firstly, by no means are all survivors of life after death found worthy to see the Light. We have already mentioned the detailed studies of Dr. Ring in which we see that the Light graces a relatively small percentage of people that have near-death experiences. Dr. M. Rawlings [4], who personally revived many of the dying, asserts that the percent of people that see darkness and terror is equal to the percentage that see the Light. Dr. Charles Garfield is of the same opinion. He says, "Not every man dies a pleasant and peaceful death... Among the patients questioned by me, almost as many have experienced unpleasant conditions, encounters with demon-like beings, as have experienced pleasant conditions [10, pg. 54-55].

There is reason to believe that many people, consciously and unconsciously, choose not to discuss their terrible postmortem experiences. In Dr. Rawlings' opinion, some visions are so horrifying that the subconscious of people who have them reflexively erases the images from their minds. In his book, Dr. Rawlings provides us with examples of such amnesia. Psychiatrists treating people with severe childhood trauma, such as rape or abuse, know of this type of selective forgetfulness. Besides, people who have had bright and pleasant visions are much more likely to want to share them than those who had terrible ones. After all, what a person sees there, on the other side, should reflect what he has earned here, in our world, by way of a good or a wicked life. Thus, two factors give a bias to the preponderance of reports: (1) the process of selective amnesia and (2) people's unwillingness to proclaim their wickedness.

Carl Osis testifies that while researching the question of death among Hindus it was determined that approximately one-third had at the time of death feelings of fear, depression and extreme anxiety at the appearance of the "yamdoots," the Hindu angel of death, and other terrible beings from beyond. (esr Osis, Karl and Haraldson, Erlendur, "At the Hour of Death," New York, Avon Books, 1972, pg. 90). Evidently, the Hindu religion with its pagan mysticism can contribute to the nearing of a person with the otherworldly forces of evil resulting in distressing visions at the time of death.

From the writing of the Holy Fathers, we know that the devil's beguilement — is a genuine danger. Apostle Paul warns "...*For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light*" (2 Cor. 11:14). Notwithstanding, the devil does not have the power to beguile all, when and as he would like. God restricts his actions. If a man is

proud and thirsts to see something super-natural, wonderful, something that others are not worthy to see, he is in great danger of mistaking a demon for an angel.

In spiritual literature this condition is called "enchantment" (from the word "seduction" or "allurement").

In peril of falling into such a state are many willful novices, self-satisfied ascetics, self-proclaimed prophets and healers, as well as people engaged in foolish mysticism, such as; transcendental meditation, yoga, spiritualism, occultism and so forth.

From the accounts of those who had postmortem experiences, there seems to be no indication that they engaged in such practices. In most cases, these were ordinary citizens who by way of some physical ailment died, but thanks to the efforts of their doctors and the success of modern medicine were revived. They were not expecting supernatural visions and, to all appearances, what they saw was allowed by the grace of God so that they might approach their lives with greater thoughtfulness. It's hard to agree with the idea that the Lord allowed the devil to mislead these victims, uninitiated in the spiritual world. Moreover, in accordance with stories gathered by Dr. Morse [7], this same Light was seen by many children who, considering their purity and innocence, are under the protection of the Almighty.

In orthodox books on life after death there are stories of the appearance of demons to the dying and of the soul going through a series of trials (this is detailed below). However, from these stories we see that the demons usually begin to intimidate the soul only after the Guardian Angel has come to escort the soul to the Throne of God. Also, in the presence of the Guardian Angel the demons are obliged to appear in their actual, odious forms.

Regarding the contemporary descriptions of the Light, there exists the difficulty of accommodating them with traditional Christian accounts. In orthodox literature, the Kingdom of Light is described in relation to heavenly ascent, whereas in modern literature, people see the Light before crossing the mysterious boundary that separates the two worlds. We think that the people who have had these experience have not yet been to the actual heaven or hell, but have only had a foretaste of them. When the angels appeared to the saints they emanated light. At Mt. Tabor the apostles saw spiritual Light although still in the physical world. God in His mercy reveals this marvelous Light as an encouragement towards a righteous way of life. Contact with this Light invariably pours out feelings of peace and happiness. The devil's light, on the contrary, brings with it a feeling of revolting disquiet. It fills a person with a sense of superiority and promises of knowledge, but it has no love — it is a cold light.

In addition, the life reviews that people underwent in their contact with the Light, during which they were forced to morally re-asses their actions, and the resulting improvements in their lives all compel us to think that their visions of the Light

were good and not deceptions. After all, *"You will know them by their fruits"* (Matt. 7:16). Does not the devil seek to turn man away from God? How could it be that he would help people strengthen their faith and increase their good deeds?

Nevertheless, in a wider scope, the faithful should always be extremely careful with all visions or mystic experiments. Due to the significant increase in incidents of resuscitation after clinical death, some doctors have proposed creating a new branch of science to study the soul and life after death. There is no doubt that it is possible to gather, compare, and organize the accounts of what the soul sees in the other world. It must be understood, however, that the role of the doctors and psychiatrists is limited to the compilation of individual incidents. Inasmuch as, we, the living, being cut off from direct contact with the spiritual world, cannot plan or control postmortem conditions as we would a laboratory experiment.

We must also remember that man's life is in God's Hands. Only He determines the moment of death and the destiny of every soul on separation from the flesh. For this reason, attempts to produce experiments in this field are in conflict with the Will of God and bring the experimenter into contact with the fallen spirits of that world. As a result, the data will be inaccurate and the conclusions will be false. In regards to this, Hieromonk Seraphim Rose writes the following: "Many present day researchers acknowledge or at least sympathize with occult teachings in the realm of the out of body condition, only because it is based on an experiment, which is also at the root of science. But, experimenting in the material world differs in essence from experiments in the realm of out of body experiences. In the material world, the objects of study and the laws of nature are morally neutral and can consequently be objectively studied and corroborated by others. On the other hand, the current objectives of study are hidden from man, not easily captured and frequently display their own will with the purpose of deceiving the observer." [8, pg. 127-128]. This happens because the spiritual sphere closest to us is filled with demons, consciously evil beings, who are specialists in the realm of deception. They gladly partake in any experiments and give the experiments their own spin.

Because of this, we must take seriously Hieromonk Seraphim's warning. And so, in our time a string of researchers, having started with authentic medical cases of clinic death, have moved on to personal examinations of out of body experiences. Without the guidance of Christian teachings and the many centuries of knowledge and experience of the Orthodox Church, they started studying the condition of the "astral" body and fell into the labyrinths of occultism. Unfortunately, this happened to Dr. Moody, the female psychotherapist E. Kubler-Ross, and several others. As an example, Dr. Moody, who published three valuable books full of authentic data, began to experiment in the areas of Theosophy and transcendental meditation. He recently published a book on this theme, titled "Coming Back," in which he lays out the typical Hindu gibberish regarding reincarnation. (Please refer to the conclusion for an unraveling of this teaching).

The Stories of those who committed Suicide

While the souls of people who died naturally experience relief and happiness, suicide victims, quite to the contrary, experience confusion and torment. A specialist in the field of suicide summed up the fact very well: "If you leave life with a restless soul, then you will arrive into the other world with a restless soul." Suicide victims commit suicide to "end it all," but, as it happens, it is only their beginning in the other world. Here are a few contemporary accounts that illustrate the otherworldly state of suicide victims.

One man, who loved his wife dearly, killed himself when she died. He hoped to reunite with her for eternity, but things turned out quite differently. When the doctor revived him, he said: "I was in a place quite different from where she was... It was a dreadful place... and immediately I realized that I had made a huge mistake" [1, pg. 143].

Some revived suicide victims described arriving in a kind of prison or dungeon and they felt that they would have to remain there for a very long time. They recognized that this was their punishment for violating the established law, which requires that each person must suffer his share of sorrows. Having willfully thrown off the burdens placed upon them, they must carry even more in the world to come.

Another man, who survived death, tells the following: "When I arrived there, I understood that two things are absolutely forbidden — to kill oneself or to kill others. If I had decided to kill myself it would have meant throwing into the Face of God the gift he had bestowed upon me. To kill someone is to disrupt God's plan for that person" [1, pg. 144].

The overall impression of reanimating doctors is that suicide is severely punished. Dr. Bruce Greyson, a psychiatrist at the emergency ward of Connecticut University, having studied the matter declares that no one who has experienced the transition from life to death and back again would have their life shortened by any means [3, pg. 99]. Even though the other world is incomparably better than ours, this world has vital preparatory significance. Only God decides when a person has matured for eternity.

Forty-seven-year-old Beverly tells us how happy she is to be alive. As a child, she suffered extremely at the hands of her cruel parents, who abused her daily. Even as an adult she cannot speak of her childhood without emotion. Once, when she was seven, having been brought to despair by her parents, she threw herself

headlong against the cement, dashing her head. During her clinical death, she saw playmates surround her lifeless body. Suddenly, a bright light surrounded Beverly and an unknown voice spoke to her, "You have made a mistake. Your life is not yours and you must return." To which she responded, "But nobody loves me and nobody wants to take care of me." "This is true"; the voice answered, "and in the future nobody will care for you. Therefore, learn to care for yourself." After these words Beverly saw a dried-up tree and snow all around her. Then warmth came from somewhere melting the snow. Immediately, leaves and ripened apples sprang from the dried-up branches. She approached the tree and began tearing off the apples and eating them with great enjoyment. Then she realized that as in nature so in each life there are periods of winters and summers that combine to form a singular fullness in God's plan. When Beverly awoke, she treated life differently. As an adult she married a good man, had children and found happiness [7, pg. 184].

The Orthodox Teaching on Life After Death

Although daily convention shows us that death is the unalterable lot of every man and a law of nature, the Holy Scripture teaches us that initially death was not in God's plan for man. Death was not a rule established by God, but, rather, a parting from God's way and a terrible tragedy. The Book of Genesis tells us that death became part of our nature as a result of the first human beings' transgression of God's Commandment. In accordance with the Bible, the purpose of the Son of God coming into the world was to return to man his forfeited eternal life. This is not referring to the soul's eternal life, which by its being is not subject to ruin, but to the immortality of the whole person, consisting of body and soul. The realization of the unity of soul and body will happen simultaneously for all people at the universal resurrection of the dead.

In certain religious and philosophical systems, (such as Hinduism or Stoicism), there is the thought that the most important part of man is his soul and that the body is only a temporary shell in which it develops. When the soul reaches a certain level of maturity, the body becomes useless and must be thrown off like worn-out clothing. Freed from the body, the soul ascends to a higher step of existence. Christianity does not share this understanding of human nature. Giving precedence to the spiritual origin of man, it continues to see him basically as two essences, each complementing the other, the spiritual and the material. Purely spiritual beings also exist; such as angels and demons. Man's design and purpose are, however, different. Thanks to his body, his nature is both more complex and richer. God's union of the soul and body is an eternal union.

When the soul abandons the body at death, it finds itself in an alien environment.

Indeed, it is not called to exist as a spirit and it finds it difficult to adjust to the new and unnatural condition. This is why, for the purpose of obliterating all of the destructive consequences of sin, God willed the resurrection of the people He created. This will come about at the Second Coming of Christ, when by his Almighty Word the soul of every man will return to its renewed and transfigured body. We must emphasize that it will return not into a "new shell," but will unite, once again, with the body in which it resided, a body transfigured, incorruptible, and suited to the new order of being.

Concerning the temporary state of the soul from the time of its separation from the body to the day of universal resurrection, the Holy Scripture teaches us that the soul continues to live, feel and think. "For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him." said Christ (Luke 20:38, Matt. 22:32, Acc. 12:7). As death is a temporary separation from the body, the Holy Scripture refers to it as the departure [deceased, *decessus*, *decedere*, go away], separation, falling asleep (2 Pet 1:15, Phil. 1:23, 2 Tim. 4:6, Acts 13:36). It is evident that the word repose or sleep does not refer to the soul, but to the body which after death seems to be resting from its works. The soul, having left the body, continues a conscious life as before.

The truth of this assertion is seen from the Savior's parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16th Chapter) and from the miracle at Mt. Tabor (Matt. 17:3, Mark 9:4, Luke 9:30). In the first, the Gospel's rich man, being in hell, and Abraham, being in heaven, discuss the possibility of sending Lazarus to earth to the brothers of the rich man to keep them from hell. In the second, the prophets Moses and Elijah, who lived long before Christ, speak with the Lord of his coming suffering. Also, Christ told the Jews that Abraham saw His Coming, apparently from heaven, and rejoiced. (John 8:56). This passage would not make sense if Abraham's soul were in some unconscious state as is taught by some sectarians regarding the soul's existence after death. The Book of Revelation in general terms speaks of how the souls of the righteous in heaven react to the events taking place on earth (Rev. Chapters 5-9). All of these passages in the Scripture teach us to believe that the soul continues to be active after its separation with the body.

The scripture also teaches us that after death God appoints a place of temporary abode corresponding to that which it has earned while living in the body — heaven or hell. The appointment in one or the other place or condition is preceded by a so-called informal judgement. The informal judgement must be distinguished from the final judgement that will take place at the end of the world. Regarding the informal judgement, the Scripture teaches us: "*For it is an easy thing unto the Lord in the day of death to reward a man according to his ways*" (Sirach 11:26). And further, "*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,*" seemingly on an individual basis (Heb. 9:27). There is reason to believe that in the first stages after death the soul needs the guidance of its guardian angel. For example, in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus the soul of Lazarus is taken to heaven by angels. In accordance with the teachings of Our Savior, the angels take care of "these small ones," that is to say children, (literally and figuratively).

The Orthodox Church teaches the following regarding the condition of the soul before the Last Judgment:

"We believe that the souls of the dead are either blissful or in torment from their deeds. Having been separated from their bodies, they immediately step over either to happiness or to sorrow and mourning. Besides which they feel neither complete bliss nor complete torment since either one of these states will be conferred on each after the Universal resurrection, when the soul will unite with the body in which it resided either virtuously or dishonorably (Epistles from the Eastern Patriarchs regarding the Orthodox faith, article 18).

In this manner, the Orthodox Church discerns two conditions of the soul in the other world: One for the righteous and another for the sinner — heaven and hell. It does not accept the Roman-Catholic teaching of a middle state in purgatory inasmuch as the Holy Scripture makes no reference to a middle state. The Orthodox Church does teach that the sufferings of a sinner can be eased and even taken away through prayers and good deeds done in their memory. This is the reason for presenting a book of remembrance at Liturgy with the names of the living and the dead.

The Soul on its Way to Heaven

We have already mentioned several contemporary accounts about the review that some people experience when they leave their bodies. Obviously, this stage has something to do with the informal judgment or as a preparation for it.

In the lives of the saints and in spiritual literature, there exist stories about Guardian Angels taking the soul after death and accompanying it to heaven to worship before God. Frequently, as the soul is ascending to heaven, demons, upon seeing the soul, surround it intent on scaring it and carrying it away. This is because, according to Holy Scripture, after their expulsion from heaven, the fallen angels took over the area, if it can be called that, between heaven and earth. This is why Apostle Paul calls Satan "*the prince of the power of the air*" and his demons, spirits of wickedness in "heavenly" places, that is to say, in the sky or heavens (Eph. 6:12, 2:2). These wandering spirits of the heavens upon seeing a soul led by an angel approach it from all sides reproaching it for sins committed throughout its life. Being extremely insolent, they attempt to frighten the soul, bring it to despair and thus take hold of it. During this trial the Guardian Angel bolsters the soul and defends it. This is not cause to think that the demons have some power over the soul, because they too are subject to God's Judgment. They are spurred on to brazenness by the fact that the soul in its time on earth was submissive to them

in certain things. Their logic is simple, "since you behaved as we do, then your place is with us."

In church literature these meetings with demons are called "trials" (from the Church Fathers, this theme is discussed by: St. Ephraem the Syrian, St. Athanasios the Great, St. Macarius the Great, St. John Chrysostom and others). The most detailed development of this idea is by St. Cyril of Alexandria in his "Word on the exodus of the soul," published in the "The Following Psalters." A pictorial depiction of this path is seen in the life of Saint Basil the New in the 10th century, when the reposed Saint Theodora recounts what she saw and felt after leaving her body. Further accounts can be found in the book "Eternal Mysteries from Beyond the Grave." While reading these accounts, keep in mind that much is described figuratively, because the arrangements of the spiritual world do not resemble ours.

K. Uekskuell, whose story we stated above, describes a similar meeting with the wicked ethereal spirits. This is what happened after the two angels came for his soul: "We began to ascend quickly. And by the degree of our ascension, increasingly greater became the expanse of space that was revealed before my eyes. And finally it took on such terrifyingly vast proportions that I was seized with a fear from the realization of my insignificance in comparison to this desert of infinity. Here also certain peculiarities of my vision became apparent to me. Firstly, it was dark and I saw everything clearly in the dark; consequently my vision received the capacity of seeing in the dark; secondly, I was able to include in the field of my vision such a vast expanse of space, which undoubtedly I would not have been able to do with my ordinary vision.

The conception of time was absent in my mental state at this time, and I do not know how long we were moving upwards, when suddenly there was heard at first an indistinct noise. And following this, having emerged from somewhere, with shrieks and rowdy laughter, a throng of some hideous beings began rapidly to approach us.

"Evil Spirits!" — I suddenly comprehended and appraised with unusual rapidity that resulted from the horror I experienced at that time, a horror of a special kind and until then never before experienced by me. Evil spirits! O, how much irony, how much of the most sincere kind of laughter would this have aroused in me only a few days ago. Even a few hours ago somebody's report, not only that he saw evil spirits with his own eyes, but only that he believed in their existence as in something fundamentally real, would have aroused a similar reaction! As was proper for an "educated" man at the close of the nineteenth century, I understood this to mean foolish inclinations, passions in a human being, and that is why the very word itself had for me not the significance of a name, but a term which defined a certain abstracted conception. And suddenly this "certain abstracted conception" appeared before me as a living personification. Even up to the present time I am not able to say how and why at that time, without the slightest trace of doubt, I recognized evil spirits to be present in that ugly sight.

Undoubtedly only because such a designation of it was completely outside of the normal order of things and logic, for if a similar hideous sight appeared before me at another time, undoubtedly I would have said that it was some kind of fiction personified, an abnormal caprice of one's imagination. In short, everything else but in no way, of course, would I have called it a name by which I would have meant something which cannot be seen. But at the time, this designation of its nature took place with such rapidity, that seemingly there was no need to think about it, as if I had seen that which already was well known to me long ago; and since, as I already have explained, at that time my mental capacities functioned with such incomprehensible intensity, I therefore comprehended just as rapidly that the ugly outward appearance of these beings was not their real exterior; that this was some kind of an abominable show which was probably conceived with the purpose of frightening me to a greater degree; and for a moment something similar to pride stirred within me. I then felt ashamed of myself, for man in general, because in order to arouse fear in man, a being who thinks so much of himself, other forms of being have recourse to such methods which we ourselves use with respect to small children.

Having surrounded us on all sides, with shrieks and rowdy sounds the evil spirits demanded that I be given over to them, they tried somehow to seize and tear me away from the Angels, but evidently did not dare to do this. In the midst of their rowdy howling, unimaginable and just as repugnant to one's hearing as their sight was for my eyes, I sometimes caught up words and whole phrases.

"He is ours: he has renounced God," they suddenly cried out almost in unison. And here they lunged at us with such boldness that for a moment fear froze the flow of all thought in my mind.

"That is a lie! That is untrue!" Coming to myself I wanted to shout, but an obliging memory bound my tongue. In some way unknown to me, I suddenly recalled such a slight, insignificant occurrence, which in addition was related to so remote a period of my youth that, it seems, I in no way could have been able to recall it to mind.

I recalled how during my years of study, once having gathered at my friend's, after having spoken about school studies, we passed over to discussing various abstract and elevated topics — conversations which often were carried on by us.

"Generally speaking, I don't like abstractions," says one of my comrades, "but here you already have absolute impossibility. I am able to believe in some kind of power of nature which, let us say, has not been investigated. That is to say, I can allow for its existence, even when not seeing its clear cut, definite manifestations, because it may be very insignificant or combined in its effects with other powers, and for this reason difficult to grasp; but to believe in God, as a Being, individual and omnipotent, to believe — when I do not anywhere see clear manifestations of this Individuality — this already becomes absurd. I am told: believe. But why must I believe, when I am equally able to believe that there is no God. Why, is it not true? Is it also not possible that He does not exist?" Now my comrade turned to me for

support.

"Maybe not," I let escape from my lips.

This phrase was in the full sense of the word an "idle statement": the unreasonable talk of my friend could not have aroused within me a doubt in the existence of God. I did not particularly listen to his talking; and now it turned out that this idle statement of mine did not disappear without leaving a trace in the air, I had to justify myself, to defend myself from the accusation that was directed against me, and in such a manner the New Testament statement was verified in practice: We really shall have to give an account for all our idle words, if not by the Will of God, Who sees the secrets of man's heart, then by the anger of the enemy of salvation.

This accusation evidently was the strongest argument that the evil spirits had for my perdition. They seemed to derive new strength in this for the daring of their attacks on me, and now with furious bellowing they spun about us, preventing us from going any further.

I recalled a prayer and began praying, appealing for help to those Holy Ones whose names I knew and whose names came to mind. But this did not frighten my enemies. A sad ignorant Christian only in name, I now, it seems, almost for the first time in my life remembered Her, Who is called the Intercessor for Christians.

And evidently my appeal to Her was intense. Evidently my soul was filled with terror, that hardly had I remembered and pronounced Her name, when about us there suddenly appeared a kind of white mist which soon began to enfold within itself the ugly throng of evil spirits. It concealed them from my eyes before they could withdraw from us. Their bellowing and cackling was still heard for a long while, but according to how it gradually weakened in intensity and became more dull, I was able to judge that the terrible pursuit was gradually being left behind.

The feeling of fear that I experienced took hold of me so completely that I was not even conscious of whether we had been continuing our flight during this terrible meeting or whether it stopped us for awhile. I realized that we were moving, that we were continuing to move upward only when the infinite expanse of space again spread itself before me.

Having passed through some of its distance, I saw a bright light above me, it resembled, as it seemed to me, our sunlight, but was much more intense. There, evidently, is some kind of kingdom of light.

"Yes, namely a kingdom, full of the power of light," guessing by means of a special kind of feeling yet not understood by me, I thought. Because there was no shade with this light. "But how can there be light without shade?" Immediately my perplexed conceptions made their appearance.

And suddenly we were quickly carried into the field of this light, and it literally

blinded me. I shut my eyes, brought my hands up to my face, but this did not help since my hands did not give shade. And what did the like protection mean here anyway?

But something different happened. Majestically, without wrath, but authoritatively and firmly, the words resounded from above: "Not ready!"

And after that thereafter an immediate stop came to our rapid flight upward — we quickly began to descend.

But before we left this realm, I was endowed with the capacity to learn of one most wonderful phenomenon.

Hardly had the said words resounded from above when everything in that world it seems, each particle of dust, each slightest atom, responded to these words with their accord, as though a multimillion echo repeated them in a tongue unable to be perceived by hearing, but perceived and understood by the heart and mind, expressing its unison with the decision so decreed. And in this unity of will there was such wonderful harmony, and in this harmony so much inexpressive, exalted happiness, before which all our earthly charms and raptures appeared like a gloomy day without sunlight. This multimillion echo resounded in the form of an inimitable musical chord, and one's whole soul extended out towards it, wholly responding to it in a state devoid of any cares and in an ardent transport of zeal to be at one with this omnipresent, most wonderful harmony.

I did not understand the real sense of the words that were directed to me, that is to say, I did not understand that I had to return to earth and again live as previously. I thought that I was being carried to some other different parts, and a feeling of timid protest stirred within when before me. At first as hazily as in a morning mist, the outlines of a city were denoted before me, and following this, streets well known to me also became clearly visible.

Here I saw the building of the hospital, which was known, to me.

Approaching my lifeless body the Guardian Angel said "Have you heard the decision of God?" and pointing to my body commanded me : "Enter into it and prepare!" Following this both Angels became invisible to me."

K. Uekskuell continues to describe his return to the flesh, which had been lying in the morgue for thirty-six hours and how the medical personnel where astonished by the miracle of his return to the living. Soon after, K. Uekskuell went to a monastery to live out his live as a monk.

Heaven and Hell

The Holy Scriptures' teachings regarding the delight of the righteous in heaven

and the suffering of the sinners in hell can be found in the brochure "The end of the World and Future Life"(missionary brochure of our parish, number 47). What is heaven? Where is it? In conversation people refer to heaven as up "above" and hell as down "below." People who have seen hell during their clinical deaths always described its approach as a descent. Although, clearly, up and down are relative terms, it would be incorrect to think of heaven or hell as simply different conditions. They are two distinct places though they defy geographical description. Angels and the souls of the dead can only be in one particular place, be it heaven, hell or earth. We cannot denote the location of the spiritual world; it is not within the "coordinates" of our space-time system. That space is different and, although it has its beginnings here, it expands in new directions beyond the reaches of human mind.

Countless incidents from the lives of the saints show us how that spiritual space interacts with the space of our world. In such a way, the residents of Spruce Island saw the soul of Saint Herman of Alaska rising in a column of fire; the Elder Seraphim Glinisky saw the ascending soul of Saint Seraphim of Sarov; and the Prophet Elisha saw the Prophet Elijah taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. As much as we would like to penetrate into this new world, we are prevented by its existence outside of our three-dimensional world.

Most contemporary accounts of clinical death describe places close in proximity to our world, on this side of the threshold. Still, we come across accounts of places that resemble heaven and hell as described in the Holy Scriptures.

For instance, in the works of Dr. George Ritchy, Betty Malts, Maurice Rawling and others there are depictions of hell: "serpents, fiends, unbearable stench, and demons." In his book "A return from tomorrow" Dr. Ritchy tells of his own experiences in 1943 when he saw depictions of hell. The bondage of the sinners to the cravings of this world was unbearable. He saw murderers that were, so to speak, chained to their victims. The murderers cried out and asked for forgiveness from their victims, but they could not be heard. These were purposeless tears and requests.

Thomas Welch tells how he, while working as a lumberjack in Portland, Oregon, slipped and fell into a creek and found himself crushed by giant logs. It took workers more than an hour to find his body and pull it out from between the logs. Not seeing any signs of life, the workers concluded that he was dead. Thomas, meanwhile, in a temporary state of death, found himself on the shores of boundless flaming ocean. He was frozen by fear of the fiery sulfur rushing towards him. This was the fiery Gehenna that cannot be described in words. There, on the shore of the fiery Gehenna, he recognized the faces of a few people who had died before him. All of them stood in absolute horror of the rolling fiery surges. Thomas knew that there was no chance of leaving this place. He began to regret that he had previously shown so little concern for his salvation. Oh, if only he had known what awaited him, he would have lived very differently. Then he noticed someone walking in the distance. The face of the stranger showed great strength

and goodness. Thomas understood that this was the Lord and that only he could save his soul, condemned to Gehenna. A spark of hope was kindled in Thomas and he hoped the Lord might notice him. The Lord, however, was walking past him towards something in the distance. "Now, he will depart and then all hope will be lost." Suddenly the Lord turned His countenance and looked at Thomas. It was all that was necessary, just one look from the Lord. In an instant, Thomas was back in his body and alive once again. He had not yet opened his eyes when he could clearly hear the prayers of the workers standing around him. Many years later Thomas could remember everything he had seen there in great detail. It was an unforgettable experience (his experience is written in the booklet "Oregon's Amazing Miracle," Christ for the Nations, Inc. 1976.).

Pastor Kenneth E. Hagin remembers that in April of 1933 when he lived in McKinney, Texas his heart stopped beating and his soul left his body." After this, I began to descend lower and lower. The lower I went, the darker and hotter it became. As we went deeper, I noticed the flickering of ominous flames, presumable hell's, on the walls of the caves. Finally, a large flame burst through and began to pull me. Many years have passed since then. To this day I can picture that hell's flame.

Having reached the bottom of the chasm, I felt the presence of a spirit next to me and it began to lead me. At this moment, above the hellish dark a powerful Voice was heard. I did not understand what was said, but I felt that it was the God's Voice. From the force of this Voice, the whole of the nether world trembled. Immediately the spirit which had been pushing me, let me go and a wind lifted me back up. Gradually the light of this world began to shine. I was, once again, in my room and I jumped into my body like a man jumping into a pair of pants. I saw my grandmother, who started telling me "Dear, I thought you had died." After a time, Kenneth became a pastor in one of the Protestant churches and dedicated his life to God. He wrote about his ordeal in a brochure entitled "My Witness" [4, pg. 91].

Dr. Rawlings dedicates a whole chapter of his book to stories of people who had been to hell. In one of the stories there is a huge field where sinners battle without rest, maiming, raping and killing each other; the air full of their agonizing cries, obscenities and curses. In other stories there are places of fruitless labor, where cruel demons oppress the souls of sinners by forcing them to carry loads from one place to another [4, Chapter 7].

The unbearable torments of hell are well illustrated by the following two stories from orthodox books.

An enfeebled man after suffering for many years finally prayed to the Lord for an end to his suffering. An angel appeared to him and said: "Your sins require cleansing. The Lord offers you to exchange one year of suffering on earth for three hours of hell. Choose." The sufferer contemplated his choices and decided on three hours in hell. Then the angel took him into the pit of hell. All around was darkness, narrowness — everywhere evil spirits, the cries of sinners, and suffering. The soul of the enfeebled began to experience indescribable fear and pain, but

only echoes and the surging hellfire answered his screams. No one noticed his groans and bellows; all of the sinners were occupied with their own suffering. The sufferer felt that centuries had passed and that the angel had forgotten him. Finally the angel appeared to him and asked, "Well, how are you brother?" "You tricked me!" exclaimed the sufferer. "Not three hours, but many years I have been here in intolerable pain!" "What years?" the angel asked, "only an hour has passed, and you still have two to go." Then the sufferer begged the angel to return him to earth, where he was willing to suffer as many years as required, if only to leave this place of terrors. "Very well," answered the angel, "The Lord will show His Great Mercy." Finding himself back on his sickbed, the sufferer from that point forward bore his sufferings with meekness, always remembering hell's terrors, which are incomparably worse. (from the letters of Sviatogortz, pg. 183, 15th letter, 1883).

Here is the story of two friends. One went to a monastery and led a saintly life and the other remained in the world and lived sinfully. When the sinful friend died, his friend the monk prayed to God for knowledge of his friend's fate. Once, while the monk was in a light sleep, his friend came to him. His friend began to tell him about the intolerable agonies he was experiencing and how a tireless worm was gnawing at him. Having said this, he lifted his clothing over his knee revealing an awful worm, which covered the length of his leg and was consuming it. The lesions on his leg exuded such an odor that the stench woke the monk. He jumped from his cell and the stench from his cell spread through the monastery. As the stench did not decrease with time, all of the monks were forced to move to a different site. The monk who saw hell's prisoner could not rid himself of the stench which clung to him for the rest of his days (from the book "Eternal Mysteries from Beyond the Grave" a publication of St. Panteleimon Monastery, on Mount Athos).

In contrast to these visions of terror, the descriptions of heaven were always bright and joyful. Such is the story of Thomas N., an eminent scientist, drowned in a pool when he was five years old. Fortunately, a relative noticed him and pulled him from the water and took him to the hospital. When the other relatives gathered in the hospital, the doctor told them that Thomas was dead. To everyone's surprise, Thomas awoke. "When I was under the water," Thomas later recounted, "I felt that I was flying through a long tunnel. At the other end of the tunnel, I saw a light that was so bright that I could touch it. There I saw God enthroned and below people or maybe angels surrounding His throne. When I came closer to God, He told me that my time had not yet come. I wanted to remain, but I unexpectedly found myself back in my body." Thomas insists that this vision helped him find the right path in life. He wanted to become a scientist to more deeply understand the world that God created. Undoubtedly he has had great success in this endeavor.

Betty Malts' book, "I Saw Eternity," released in 1977 describes how she died and then found herself on a marvelous green slope. She was surprised that even with three incisions from her operation she could stand and walk freely and without pain. Above her, was a bright blue sky. There was no sun, but light was

everywhere. Beneath her bare feet the grass was green, like no green on this planet, and each blade seemed to be alive. Although the hill was steep, her feet moved easily, effortlessly. She could see bright flowers, shrubs and trees. To her left, she saw the figure of a man in a robe. Betty thought to herself, "Could this be an angel?" They walked along without speaking. She felt that he was not a stranger and that he knew her. She felt young, healthy and happy. "I had everything that I had ever wanted; I was everything I had hoped to be; and I was going to where I had always wished to be." Then her life flashed before her eyes. She saw her own selfishness and was ashamed, but she felt love and concern around her. She and her companion came to a wonderful silver palace, "but it had no towers." Music and singing could be heard. She heard the word "Jesus." The palace had walls of precious stone and a doorway of pearl. When the gates opened, for a moment, she saw a street in golden light. Even though she could not see anyone in the Light, she knew that this was "Jesus." She wanted to enter the palace, but on remembering her father was returned to her body. This encounter has brought her closer to God. She now loves people.

Saint Salvianus of Albi, a hieromonk of Gaul during the 6th century, was returned to life after being dead for the better part of a day and told his friend Gregory Tursk the following: "When my cell was shaken four days ago and you saw me dead, I was lifted by a pair of angels and taken to the heights of heaven. There, under my feet, I could see not only the insignificant earth, but also the sun, moon and stars. After this, I was taken through a gate brighter than the sun and led into a building where all the floors shined with silver and gold. That Light defies description. That place was full of people and stretched so far in all directions that I could not see its end. The angels cleared a path before me through the crowd and we entered the place upon which our gaze had rested when we were still afar. Above this place, hovered a bright cloud, brighter than the sun, and from it I heard a voice, like the sound of many waters.

Then I was greeted by other beings; some were in priestly clothing, others in usual dress. My guides explained that these were the Martyrs and other Saints. While I stood, I was fanned by a pleasant fragrance; it filled me in such a way that I felt no need of food or drink.

Sometime thereafter, the Voice from the cloud said, "Let this man return to earth as he is needed by the Church." And I fell down to the ground and cried: "Alas, Alas, Lord, why have You shown me all of this if only to take it away?" But the Voice answered, "Go in peace. I will watch over you until such time as I will return you to this place." Then I went back, crying, through gates by which I had entered.

Another extraordinary vision of Heaven is related by St. Andrew the Christ Lover, a Slav, who was born retarded and lived in Constantinople in the 9th century. Once, during a harsh winter Saint Andrew was lying in the street dying from the cold. All at once, he felt unusual warmth and saw a beautiful youth shining like the sun. This youth took him to heaven, the third firmament. This is what Saint Andrew described upon his return to earth.

"By God's will I spent two weeks in a sweet vision... I saw myself in heaven and I wondered at the untold charm of this beautiful and delightful place. There were many orchards full of tall trees. Their swaying tops pleased my sight and their branches emitted a delightful fragrance. The beauty of these trees could not be compared with any on earth. The orchards were filled with innumerable birds with gold, white and colored wings. They sat on the branches of these heavenly trees and sang so that I lost myself in the singing...

Next, I saw myself standing on heavenly firmament and a youth with a face bright like the sun and dressed in royal purple walking before me. As I followed him, I saw a tall beautiful cross that looked like a rainbow and around it flame-like singers, who sang unto and praised the Lord, crucified for us on the cross. The youth, who walked ahead of me, approached the cross and kissed it. He motioned for me to do the same...

Kissing the cross I felt untold gladness and felt the fragrance more than before. Going further, I looked down and saw below me something like the depths of the ocean. The youth turned to me and said, "Do not be afraid for we must go even higher" and he gave me his hand. When I grabbed it, we were already at the second firmament. There I saw amazing men; their happiness cannot be related in the language of mankind. And so we rose above the third firmament, where I saw and heard the numerous powers of heaven, singing and praising God. We approached a curtain that blazed like lightning. Before it stood youths of flame... And the youth, who had guided me, said, "When the curtain opens, you will see the Lord Christ. Then bow down to the Throne of His Glory..." And so a sort of flaming hand opened the curtain, and I, like the Prophet Isaiah, saw the Lord Himself sitting upon the most high and exalted throne, and Seraphims flew about Him. He was dressed in royal purple garments, His Face glowed and He looked upon me with love. Seeing this, I fell down before him, bowing to the Almighty and to His Throne of Glory. What happiness filled me when I looked upon His Countenance, words cannot explain. Even now, remembering this vision I overflow with inexpressible joy. In trepidation I lay before my Master. Then all the heavenly forces sang a most-glorious and unutterable song, thereafter, not knowing how, I was again in heaven (the third firmament)."

It is interesting to note that when Saint Andrew, not seeing the Virgin Mary, asked where She was, the angel explained: "Did you expect to see the Queen here? She is not here. She has descended to the unsettled world to help the people and comfort the grieving. I would show you Her Holy Place, but there is no time. You must return."

And so, according to the lives of the saints and the stories in orthodox books, we see that the soul reaches heaven only after it has left the earth and traveled the distance between the two worlds. Many times these trips include the snares and plottings of demons. The soul is always led to heaven by angels. The soul never arrives there without guidance. Even St. John of Chrysostom wrote about this: "And then the angels led Lazarus... for the soul does not go into that world on its

own for that it cannot do. For if we travel from one city to another, we have need of a guide, how much greater then is the soul's need in a guide having been taken from the body and presented with the life of the world to come." We must conclude that the contemporary stories of the Light and of the beautiful places are not actual visitations. Rather, they are "visions" or "foretastes" of them from a distance.

Obvious signs of God's Grace always accompany direct visitation of heaven. Sometimes through marvelous fragrance accompanied by a bolstering of man's strengths. For example, the fragrance so fed St. Sabellius that he did not need food or drink for three days and only when he spoke of it, did the fragrance disappear. The intimate experience of visiting Heaven is accompanied by a feeling of reverence before the Resplendence of God and an appreciation of one's unworthiness. Moreover, the personal experience of Heaven cannot be accurately conveyed, because the *"eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him"* and *"for now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face"* (1 Cor. 2:9 and 13:12).

Conclusion

The immortality of the soul, the existence of the spiritual world and life beyond the grave, these are religious themes. Christianity has always known and taught that man is more than a simple combination of chemical elements, that besides the body it has a soul which at the moment of death does not die, but continues to live and develop in a new surrounding.

In its two thousand years of existence, Christianity has amassed a wealth of literature on the world beyond the grave. In some instances, the Lord allows the souls of the departed to appear to friends or relatives to forewarn them of what awaits in the world to come and thus to encourage them to live righteously. Owing to this, religious writings have a significant number of accounts of: what the souls of the departed saw in the other world, of angels, of the devil's snares, of the joys of the righteous in heaven, and of the torments of the sinners in hell.

In the last quarter-century, many accounts of people's experiences during clinical death have been documented. A significant percentage of these accounts contain a description of what the person saw near the place of their death. In most cases these souls did not have time to visit, either heaven or hell. Although at times they observed those conditions.

Both, ancient religious stories as well as doctors' contemporary research, reiterate the Holy Scripture's teachings that after the death of the body some part of the person (call it what you will; the personality, consciousness, me, or soul) continues to exist, albeit in completely new surroundings. This existence is not passive in nature, because the personality continues to think, feel, want, etc., much as it did

during its earthly life. An understanding of this essential truth is absolutely necessary to correctly build one's life.

Nevertheless, far from all of the doctors' conclusions should be taken at face value. Sometimes they put forth opinions based on incomplete and sometimes inaccurate data. A Christian must check everything that concerns the spiritual world against the teaching of the Holy Scripture to avoid entanglement in the webs of philosophic machination or the personal opinions of authors who write about these themes.

The main value in the contemporary exploration of the life after death question is that it confirms in an unbiased and scientific way the truth of the soul's existence in the world beyond. In addition, they can help a believer to better understand and prepare for that which he will encounter immediately after his death.

Addendum

A Critique of the Teachings of Reincarnation

As a replacement for the Christian teaching of man's salvation through Christ, more and more we see the spreading of the pernicious, occultist and theosophical teachings of reincarnation. According to the ancient Hindu version of this teaching, the soul after death temporarily goes into the astral plain from which it reincarnates into a different form of life, such as a plant, insect, animal or human being. (We should probably add microbes and viruses to this list, as the ancient Hindus were not aware of these forms of life). The selection of the body is determined by the amount of Karma, the amount of deeds, good or bad, collected by the soul in its previous life. If a person was good, his body transfers to a more developed and nobler creature. If he was bad, than his soul is punished by a transfer to a lower class of creature. The process of reincarnation continues until such time as the soul frees itself from Karma by losing all interest in life at which time it blends with the absolute, Brahma, or according to Buddhism dissolves in Nirvana.

Teachings of reincarnation pronounce that as there was a time when man did not exist, so there will come a time when he will be no more. Man began his development from the lowest orders, as a plant or a fish, and will develop into something greater than man. Therefore, human beings are just transitory creatures. They are completely at the mercy of cosmic powers pulling them towards some unseen goal and will eventually be brought into condition that has no humanity.

There are several versions of teachings on reincarnation. In the west the more

humanized version is popular wherein the souls of people only reincarnate into other human bodies that are nobler or baser, but not into lower life forms.

The teaching of reincarnation in all its different forms goes against the teaching of the Holy Scripture regarding the nature and purpose of man. This false religion has objective facts in its favor and is founded in fantasy. Notwithstanding, it attracts converts by, on the one hand, promising a type of immortality of soul (in its primitive and heathen form) and, on the other hand, denying God's judgment and the punishment of hell. It frees a sinner from feelings of responsibility and fear for his inappropriate actions. The logical conclusion of the teaching is that even if a person commits many sins in this life, in his next reincarnation he can mend his ways. After an unlimited cycle of reincarnations each person will eventually reach the same end as all the other, a blending with the absolute. The only difference is in the quantity of cycles.

Additionally, the teachings of reincarnation provide an explanation for any passions or even transgressions a person might have. For instance, if a sodomite feels attraction towards another man, it is apparently because he was a woman in one of his former lives. If a wife is unfaithful to her husband, it may be that her lover was a husband in a previous life and so on.

However, the teaching is completely unverifiable fiction and its seeming appeal is in actuality extremely depressing. Firstly, what is it that reincarnates after a person's death? Evidently, it is not the soul with which we associate with our feeling of self (me). After all our feeling of self, our me, recognizes itself as single and unending being throughout the course of its life. Our "me" learns, acquires knowledge and develops its talents. As it turns out, all of this spiritual cargo, acquired with great effort, is erased and we start learning all over again from ground zero. At the moment of reincarnation the soul is a blank page. If a person suffers for bad Karma, collected in a previous life, he will never understand why he is being punished. After all, he can remember nothing. As a result, he bears the punishment for acts committed by him in a state of incompetence, which is not only unfair, but also not allowed in any system of law.

If all people, sooner or later, will reach the same goal, why labor or try to develop your good traits or do good deeds? And what kind of a reward is it to dissolve in Nirvana, where there is no thought, feeling or will? In the discernment of personality a sharp contrast is drawn between the theosophical teachings of reincarnation and the Christian teachings regarding man. Teachings of reincarnation abolish the personality or soul. According to them, in the cosmic evolution it is just a transitory embodiment and does not make up the core of the man. In reincarnations, a person's personality is not retained. In theosophy, the core element, retained during reincarnation is not personality, but individuality, which is explained as a combination of functions and indicators. Individuality is a purely biological category, established by an evolutionary process. Consequently, man's destiny is determined by cosmic forces.

The teachings of reincarnation do not in essence solve the problems of

immortality, because memory of previous lives is not retained which would be a prerequisite of a singular personality. The reincarnated becomes a different person, at times not even a person but something different. The theosophical understanding of the world is in conflict with personality and is, therefore, in conflict with man. The theosophical deity is without personality, as is his man. The deity, mankind and nature are all different forms of the absolute.

Christian teaching declares exactly the opposite. The core element that inherits eternity is the personality. Personality is created by God and carries in it the image and likeness of God. This is the great advantage of Christianity over theosophy. In Christian teachings man is continually developing and growing, can enter into communion with God, and to some degree be likened unto Him. All the while retaining his human nature. Man did not develop from the lower spheres of cosmic life. He was created by the Living God and in this likened unto Him. In view of this, man is preordained for eternal and conscious life.

Teachings of reincarnation also conflict with the Christian teaching of redemption. This is seen clearly from the Gospel's example of the wise thief, who in one moment inherited the kingdom of heaven by simply appealing to Christ (bypassing Hindu Karma). Redemption, created by Christ, frees man from the forces of cosmic processes and from the powers of fate. It gives, by the power of Grace, that which theosophy's endless cycles of wandering through cosmic corridors cannot.

Contemporary stories of life after death are valuable, because they foil the very root of occultist teaching regarding reincarnation. In all the accounts recorded by the reanimating doctors, the soul upon leaving the body continued to recognize itself as the same being that lived in the flesh. If it wanted to return to this world, it was only to finish some task. In meeting the souls of departed friends or relatives, the souls of those who later returned to life recognized them as living personalities and they were likewise recognized by their deceased relatives and friends. In all instances the souls of the departed retained their unique personalities.

By denying the retention of personality, teachings of reincarnation deny immortality and make man a toy of blind cosmic processes. It is as false as it is pessimistic.

Yet, Christ has risen! By his strength, we too shall rise in transfigured bodies for eternal and conscious life. Glory to Him unto the ages. Amen.

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