

## BOOK EXCERPT



Piero Calvi-Parisetti

*21 Days into the Afterlife*

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Unless there is a gigantic conspiracy involving some thirty University departments all over the world, and several hundred highly respected scientists in various fields, many of them originally hostile to the claims of psychical researchers, the only conclusion the unbiased researcher can come to must be that there does exist a small number of people who obtain knowledge existing either in other people's minds, or in the outer world, by means as yet unknown to science.

Prof. H. J. Eysenk, Chair of the Psychology Department, University of London

A medical doctor with post-graduate education in public health and disaster management, Dr. Piero Calvi-Parisetti has worked for some twenty years in the international humanitarian aid sector, serving in various capacities both in the field and at headquarters, for the International Red Cross and for the United Nations. Combining humanitarian practice, policy and research, he has written extensively on the subjects of disaster response and humanitarian coordination and is the author of several books and technical publications. He is currently Professor of Emergencies and Humanitarian Action at Milan's Institute for International Political Studies and a visiting professor at the Universities of Rome, Italy, and Geneva, Switzerland.

I regard myself as a pretty normal person... Perhaps, because of my background and of my job, I might even be considered a touch more balanced and inclined to rational thinking than your average person...

The things you and I are going to discuss — at quite some length, if you'll bear with me — have attracted the interest of some of the finest minds on the planet. The list, once you consider it, is quite impressive. It includes Nobel Prize winners, scores of world-class scientists and more PhD's than you would bother to count. Let me give you a couple of examples. If you Google the term "electronic voice phenomena" you will end up with over one million results. Disgracefully, the vast majority of those results link back exactly to the psychologically weak and the easily deluded that we were discussing before — people going around in cemeteries with tape recorders and thinking they can hear voices from the dead in the hiss when they play back the tape. This has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with the genuine but relatively rare examples of "EVP" and with the stunning experiments conducted in controlled laboratory conditions that we'll discuss later.



[T]o begin with, let's look at the tiny episode that got me started on this trail... [I]t happened to my wife. She's the person I know best and trust most in the world. There's no point in me singing her praises here — just understand that, for me, anything she says carries the same value as a personal, direct experience I might have had myself...

We both have what I would define a cultural interest in spirituality and feel a sense of affinity with the Buddhist teachings, but spooky, otherworldly things were simply not part of our interests and certainly not on the menu of our conversations. And then, one day, she comes up with this memory of hers. Let me bring her into the discussion now and tell you the story herself.

I must have been about sixteen or seventeen at the time, as I was studying for my final exams at secondary school. Every night, as I was trying to get to sleep, I was kept awake by a persistent, rhythmic knocking on the wall just next to the headboard of my bed. At the beginning, it didn't bother me too much, but as time went on it really began to disturb me. I remember asking my Dad at breakfast time one day if he could hear it and he said it was probably a bird stuck in the loft and he would check it out. I said I thought it was highly unlikely — unless that particular bird was wearing clogs! However, he did dutifully check out the loft, there was no bird and the knocking continued.

He then investigated the pipes to see whether it was a plumbing problem — nothing could be found and the knocking continued. As time went on, my nights became increasingly sleepless as I tossed and turned to the knocking sound, but there was nothing to do. I just had to put up with it.

Then, one morning, as I made my way out of the house to school with my hand on the front door handle, either my Mum or my Dad called out something to me. I swung round to see what was wanted, and as I did so the bottom right hand corner of my coat caught the lid of a Chinese pottery ornament my Dad had recently purchased at a local market. As the lid tipped over, so did the bowl and its contents.

To my astonishment and consternation, I saw what looked like cigarette ash spill out from the bowl. Although my Dad was a smoker I knew he certainly wouldn't have used

this precious ornament as an as an ashtray. At that moment, both my Mum and Dad came into the hall to check out the noise and the three of us looked at each other in silence. I immediately made a connection with the contents of that porcelain bowl and the knocking on the wall and concluded that this must have been the spirit drawing attention to something that wasn't quite right. My parents did the necessary and the knocking on the wall ceased from that day onwards.



So, after we talked this thing over for a while, I decided to look up on the Internet if anything serious had been written on a subject on which I then had pretty much the same opinion as you have today. I found a book by one very reputable British psychology professor — a book and an author we'll come back to pretty soon — and, now, that blew *me* away.... Let me just tell you that those 572 pages pretty much changed my entire outlook on life. And they were followed by nearly another 20,000.



[T]his “stuff” [telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, micro PK, macro PK] has been proven to exist by thousands of carefully designed experiments, amounting to *several million* individual trials over a period of nearly one century. Such experiments have been carried out by the same institutions and using the same well established methods employed by any other branch of modern science. Hear me well here: the experimental evidence accumulated so far is so significant that the current view — *shared even by the most hardcore skeptics* — is that there is no need of any additional proof that psi exists.



Meta-analysis is a rather complicated statistical technique for combining the findings from independent studies. It is most often used to assess the clinical effectiveness of healthcare interventions and it does this by combining data from two or more randomised control trials. Let's make one example: you have probably heard that Aspirin is used in patients who have a heart condition in order to prevent blood clotting and lower the risk of myocardial infarction.... How was the effectiveness of this preventive measure initially assessed? Through the usual scientific method employed in such cases: some 25 Universities carried out clinical trials. The problem is that, although practically all trials showed that there was indeed a positive effect, statistics came in the way: in only five trials out of 25 it was certain that the positive effect was *not* due to chance. In the other 20 trials, the routine statistical analysis showed that the positive effects might have been obtained by chance. A reviewer who was skeptical of Aspirin's ability to reduce heart attacks *might* then have looked at these trials and remain unconvinced.

And here is where meta-analysis comes into place: such a technique was employed to review the Aspirin trials collectively, and the results were published in 1988 in the *British Medical Journal*. The outcome of the analysis was widely described in the news media as a medical breakthrough: when the results of all the studies are *combined* through meta-analysis, chance is clearly ruled out. Meta-analysis declared that Aspirin is indeed effective in reducing heart attacks, and, as we all know, Aspirin has been used world-

wide for the last 20 years with excellent results....

[T]his is exactly what happened with psi experiments. Considered individually, psi experiments have been successful, but issues remained with repeatability and — especially — with the lack of a theory predicting psi effects. This has fuelled the skeptics' doubts for over a century. When studies are combined through meta-analysis, however, *there is no doubt that the psi effects are real*. Please make sure you understand this: the same, exactly the same scientific method employed by medicine, biology, chemistry, physics and any other branch of science proves beyond doubt that psi exists.



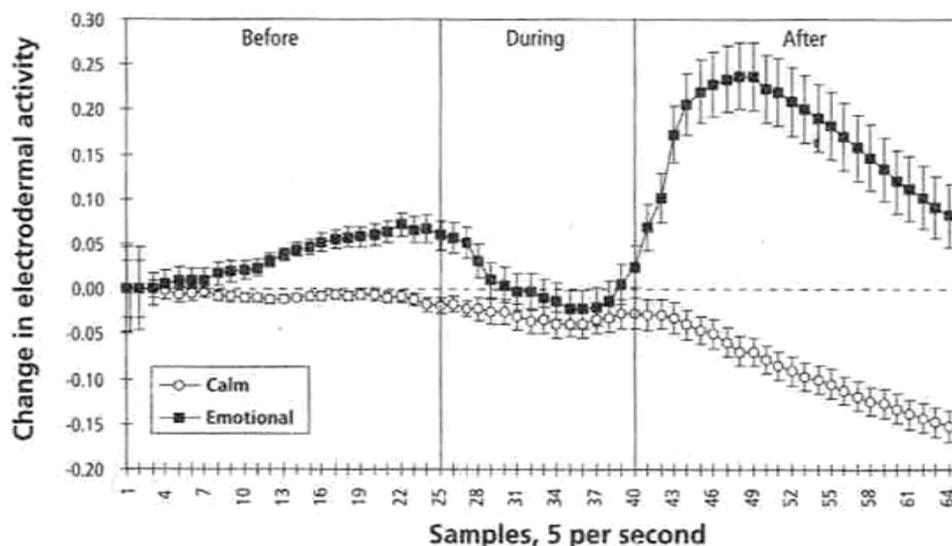
Remember that I wanted to discuss parapsychology research with you first as I think of it as a good primer — a good method to get you thinking out of the box. Mind you — I didn't say *making you believe*, I said thinking out of the box. As I said from day one, I am just presenting evidence for you to consider. When we'll get to the really weird stuff, it will be *you* drawing the conclusions. For now, I find it interesting that you appear to be going through the same bewilderment I went through when I started studying these subjects. Before we leave PSI, we still have to cover three areas of evidence, saving my favourite one for last.



Imagine a person — the subject — looking at a computer screen. The screen shows nothing for five seconds, then one image for three seconds, then nothing for ten seconds, and then the cycle starts again with a different image. The images are selected at random by the computer from a pool of 900. 583 of them have no emotional value (landscapes, portraits, objects, etcetera) and the remaining 317 have an intense emotional connotation: explicit sex or violence. What would you expect after the subject has been shown neutral images?

*Nothing much. The skin conductivity of the subject should remain largely unchanged.*

And this is precisely what it happens. Look at the graph below and concentrate on the line with the white markers. They trace the subjects' reactions during the cycles with emotionally neutral images. What do you notice?



*That the subjects are not particularly emotional before and during the period in which the images are shown, and then their emotional level goes even down during the two five seconds periods of blank at the end of the cycle.*

Very good. Apparently, skin conductivity goes down because subjects get bored. Now, look at the black dots, which trace the response to the cycles showing emotionally charged images. What happens after the images have been shown?

*There is a big peak in skin conductivity. The subject get emotionally aroused and sweats.*

Good — as you would expect. Now tell me: what happens before the images are shown?

*There is a... BUT THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE!*

I'm sorry. It may well be impossible but it's there to see. Somehow, the subjects' minds know that an emotionally charged image is going to be shown before it actually appears on the screen, and the body reacts in anticipation. This is pure nontemporal behaviour. This is precognition shown in laboratory conditions, at the University of Nevada, and replicated with exactly the same results by the University of Amsterdam.



You've heard about the life transformation that NDErs [persons having undergone a near-death experience or NDE] go through with a remarkable level of consistency after their experience, and what did you automatically think?

*That it would be nice to have one. All the psychological changes you mentioned seem very desirable.*

Yes, very, very good! They are indeed very desirable. Only, research shows that you *don't need to go near death and then come back to achieve such transformation*. There is solid evidence that just learning about NDEs can bring about these changes. The more people get to know about this particular subject and study it, the more these psychological changes become apparent, *without the need of having an actual NDE...* Now, ask yourself — if just learning about the NDEs can bring about positive psychological changes, what about learning about the whole shebang — from PSI to NDE, from mediums to instrumental transcommunication, from energy-based phenomena to reincarnation studies? Wouldn't the changes be more profound, more long-lasting, more life-transforming?



To understand what mental mediumship is all about, I see no better way than to look at one story involving Gordon Smith, considered Britain's most accurate medium today. I particularly like Gordon, not only because of his astonishing gift, but — and perhaps mainly — for his adorable, low key, humorous personality. He embodies the quintessence of the real medium, in that all he does is done out of compassion and with the aim of relieving the suffering of people who have lost a loved one. Although he has become a bit of a world celebrity and is an established TV and printed media personality in the UK, he keeps making his living by cutting hair in his native Glasgow. "The Psychic Barber," as he is sometimes known, never asks for money for his private sittings.

Here is the story, as told by Gordon himself in his book *The Unbelievable Truth* (Hay House, 2005).

What does it mean to be a medium? What do I actually do? It is not always easy to explain. Saying that I communicate with disincarnate spirits who have gone on after physical death seems strange to some people. What sort of messages are passed on? What convinces people that their loved ones really are communicating with them? I've often thought that a good way to explain the process would be to film someone before they came to see me and ask them to share their story and what they hoped to gain from the encounter.

In January 2004, that very thing happened during the filming of a BBC documentary in which a couple who had lost their son in a car accident the year before were brought to see me. The director of the film had not allowed me to have any prior knowledge of the couple at all, not even where they were being brought from. This should actually be standard practice, as the less the medium knows about a person, the more convincing the evidence they may receive from the spirit world. In this case, unknown to me the couple had been filmed for some time before our meeting.

On a cold February morning, I was waiting in the library of the London Spiritual Mission, where the sitting was to take place. . . . Once the film crew decided they were ready to begin, a couple who I would imagine were in their forties were asked to sit opposite me and I explained to them how the sitting would proceed. Normally, I "tune into" the spirit world by asking the spirit people if they would like to come and contact their loved one, but this time, even as I began to tell the couple how it may work, I could hear the voice of a young man shouting the name "Andrew" over and over in my ear. With this I knew I had a communicator from the spirit world.

I started by saying, "There is a young man on the other side and he is asking for Andrew." Immediately the man answered "I'm Andrew." Then I heard another name. I turned to the woman and said, "You must be Margareta." "No," she answered, but then it changed and I told her, "I'm sorry, he has changed it to Greta." This time she smiled and said that was her name.

Their son was now communicating at high speed, often so fast that I had to slow him down, but this was characteristic of how he behaved in life, so his mother told me. He told me that his name was Nige, short for Nigel, and that he and his friend were together in the spirit world as they had been both involved in the same accident. He went on to ask after other family members, told me to tell his sister to go back to her studies and mentioned a Mr. Trainer, who turned out to be a tutor at college. Then he asked me to mention Ilkley. This is where he had been brought up and where he had spent much of his time with his teenage friends.

Nige wanted to convince his family that he was still very much part of their life. He asked me to ask his father why no one was wearing his watch, which was at home in a blue box. His father said he wanted to, but hadn't got around to putting in the new battery that it needed. Then Nige told his mother that he had been with her that morning when she had picked up three letters from behind the front door and he knew she had wanted to bring the large picture of him to the sitting, touched his face and put it back. He also said that she could feel his presence when she walked through the lane at the back of her house. All this was accepted by Andrew and Greta.

Nige also asked me to tell them that he had been with them when they had gone to Ilkley Moor and stood on their favourite large rock. The camera and sound men were shocked at this, as they had filmed the family walking on Ilkley Moor the previous day and An-

drew had stood on his son's favourite rock and said that he would say that it was like standing on the top of the world. At the close of the sitting the crew got again a bit spooked when young Nige asked me to tell them all that he and his friend were fine and he really was standing on top of the world.

Afterwards Greta and Andrew told me how moved and uplifted they had been by the sitting. They felt that their son's personality had really shone through and their overwhelming impression had been that he really was communicating with them. They were absolutely amazed that his spirit had been with them when they had been filmed on the moors and that he had then been able to tell them about it through my mediumship.



What is extraordinary in mediums like Gordon is not only the level of accuracy, but the incredible consistency.... However, when you start considering the ocean — truly, an ocean — of evidence collected during the last 150 years in this field, you realize that very high-level mental mediumship is rare, but not exceptional....

There are a lot of skilled mentalist magicians, some honestly making a living in the entertainment business, and others just taking advantage of other people. Now, consider this: nobody, I mean *not one single cold reader*<sup>1</sup> has ever accepted to be tested under the same strictly controlled conditions used to test mediums in universities and psychic research centers.



First you have to learn about Rev. David Kennedy, a Church of Scotland minister, and his wife Ann, who died in her forties from an incurable disease. During the last days of her life, Ann insisted with Rev. Kennedy that she would find a way to come back and communicate with him. At the time, Rev. Kennedy acknowledged this out of love for her, although the concept of an afterlife from which spirit people could communicate was against his faith.

We understand that the death of his beloved wife tried the Reverend to the extreme. In the midst of a nearly full blown clinical depression, remembering the vow she he had made on her deathbed, at some stage he went to see a Spiritualist medium called Lexie Findletter. She gave him a message from a woman called Ann who claimed to be his wife, but David's skepticism and religious conditioning didn't allow him to accept it. David says, however, that as he was leaving the room Lexie told him "Your wife is determined to communicate with you and she'll find a way."

About a week later, we find David feeling even worse, also tormented by the thought of not having given the spirit of his wife a real chance to communicate. At some stage, he

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<sup>1</sup> [S]killed people can extract information by talking all the time, saying a lot of generic things and interpreting the body language of the sitters to understand if they've got anything correct. If they feel that they hit something, they can build on that until they arrive at something significant. This is technically called "fishing" (the talking all the time in generic terms) and "cold reading" (looking for signs that some of the generic statements is correct, and building on that).

says out loud to the empty room “Come on, Ann, give me a sign, something that no one could possibly know, please.” Picture him as he collapses to the sofa, terminally sad and worried about the sermon he would have to prepare for his service later in the day, and dozes off.

Next thing he knows is that the phone is ringing loudly. He jumps up from the sofa, realizing he’s got just five minutes to prepare the sermon and find a clean minister’s collar. He fumbles around the room looking for old notes and he can’t remember where his collars are. Meanwhile, the phone keeps ringing. After what seems like an eternity, and still not having found what he was looking for, he picks up the phone and answers angrily, “Can I help you?.”

“Your wife Ann is with me,” says a voice. “She tells me that your clean collars are in the bottom drawer of your wardrobe and the speech you prepared last year for this service is in the top drawer of your desk. Incidentally, my name is Albert Best.<sup>2</sup> Goodbye..” ..

That particular day, after having found the items he was looking for exactly where described by Albert, David went on about his business as well as he could. During the following weeks, David then made contact with Albert to understand what was going on. Albert explained that Ann had appeared to him in spirit form and provided information about the collar and the sermon. After a few meetings, the two men understand that there is a pattern at work: if David sent out a thought to Ann as he was alone in the house, within a short time Ann would appear to Albert and he would be on the phone to David. Things even got nearly out of control, as Albert was once quoted saying, “Tell your wife to stop bloomin’ bothering me, it’s the middle of the night!” ..

David Kennedy, as we know already, could not accept the idea of messages from the other side because of his faith. However, the longer the communications went on, the more baffled he became. At some point, he made a request to his wife: she should provide a piece of information that he himself was not aware of — something he would have been able to confirm with a member of the family. If that information came, he would have finally accepted the idea of her survival.

The next time Ann appeared to Albert, she told him to tell her husband to call her sister and ask about the ballet shoes. When David did so, his sister in law was astonished that he knew of the private joke that had been a secret between her and her sister for many years.



Prof. Ian Stevenson ... studied at St. Andrews University in Scotland and at McGill University in Montreal, where he received a B.S. in 1942 and an M.D. in 1943, graduating at the top of his class. In 1967, Stevenson was appointed as Director of the Division of Personality Studies (later renamed Division of Perceptual Studies) and, for a period was also Head of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia in the US.

Stevenson was indeed the founder of scientific research into reincarnation, and was

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Best — possibly the most formidable medium the UK has seen during the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century — was a close friend and in many ways a mentor for Gordon Smith.

best known for collecting and meticulously researching cases of children who seem to recall past lives without the need for hypnosis and for his extraordinary work on birthmarks in relation to apparent memories of previous lives.

The problem with Prof. Stevenson is that he published only for the academic and scientific community: his over 200 articles and several books — densely packed with research details and academic argument — are in places difficult for the average reader to follow. Just take as an example *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*: this is a two-volume, 2268-page examination of cases in which persons were born with birthmarks or birth defects related to traumas purportedly suffered by a “previous personality,” and medical records associated with such cases. I myself have read the 396 pages of *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, published in 1974 by Virginia University Press, and I can assure you that it was no small feat!...

Prof. Stevenson carried out field research about reincarnation in Africa, Alaska, British Columbia, Burma, India, South America, Lebanon, Turkey, and many other places, and he reviewed over 3,000 individual cases. He describes his general approach as following an “almost conventional pattern”:

The case usually starts when a small child of two to four years of age begins talking to his parents or siblings of a life he led in another time and place. The child usually feels a considerable pull back toward the events of the life and he frequently importunes his parents to let him return to the community where he claims that he formerly lived. If the child makes enough particular statements about the previous life, the parents (usually reluctantly) begin inquiries about their accuracy. Often, indeed usually, such attempts at verification do not occur until several years after the child has begun to speak of the previous life. If some verification results, members of the two families visit each other and ask the child whether he recognizes places, objects, and people of his supposed previous existence.

In investigating such spontaneous life recall cases, Prof. Stevenson would carefully question both the family of the living child and the family of the deceased to ensure that they had no contact and that no information would be passed between them. He would obtain detailed information about the deceased, including information not fully known to anyone involved, such as details of the will, which he would use to verify that the child actually did know the information required. He would also personally and carefully vet each case to ensure that no other method of obtaining the information was possible for these children. This includes ensuring that the children were physically distant from the previous life described by them to rule out local knowledge being passed to the children. It also includes ensuring that their parents had never met nor had mutual friends who could have conveyed this information to the children. The interview process even includes taking possessions from the dead person and requiring the children pick out the objects amongst a field of random objects....

The results are nothing short of stunning. I am tempted to report a few individual stories, to make you understand the absolutely incredible level of detail and consistency of the memories of the children, but I want to save time for later, when I’ll tell you another quite extraordinary story which captures the issue of past memories quite well. The bottom line is that, after this enormous and painstaking work and after hav-

ing thoroughly considered all possible alternatives, Prof. Stevenson's characteristically understated conclusion was: "I think a rational person, if he wants, can believe in reincarnation on the basis of evidence."



Prof. Stevenson considered 895 cases of children who claimed to remember a previous life (or were thought by adults to have had a previous life), and found birthmarks and/or birth defects attributed to the previous life in 309 (35%) of the subjects. The birthmark or birth defect of the child was said to correspond to a wound (usually fatal) or other mark on the deceased person whose life the child said it remembered. Stevenson thoroughly investigated 210 of such cases. When he was able to identify the deceased person, he would carry out almost a police investigation, collecting all available information from a large number of sources and finding strong correlations in most cases. Whenever possible, he would even try to obtain a medical document, usually a postmortem report. He was able to do so in 49 cases, and *in 43 of those he found an almost stunning correspondence between wounds and birthmarks or birth defects.*



...a beautiful story, not connected with Prof. Stevenson's work, but which I hope will help me conveying the sense of bewilderment that arises when studying his work. I can see no better way than to report to you the story as I learnt it myself, told by Tibetan Buddhist master Sogyal Rinpoche in his *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (Harper-Collins, 2002).

Of the hundreds of stories about reincarnation that could be told here, there is one that particularly fascinates me. It is the story of an elderly man from Norfolk in England called Arthur Flowerdew, who from the age of twelve experienced inexplicable but vivid mental pictures of what seemed like some great city surrounded by desert. One of the images that came most frequently to his mind was of a temple apparently carved out of a cliff. These strange images kept coming back to him, especially when he played with pink and orange pebbles on the seashore near his home. As he grew older, the details of the city in his vision grew clearer, and he saw more buildings, the layout of the streets, soldiers, and the approach to the city through a narrow canyon.

Arthur Flowerdew much later in his life, quite by chance, saw a television documentary film on the ancient city of Petra in Jordan. He was astounded to see, for the very first time, the place he had carried around for so many years in those pictures in his mind. He claimed afterward that he had never even seen a book about Petra. However, his visions became well known, and an appearance in a BBC television program brought him to the attention of the Jordanian government, who proposed to fly him to Jordan along with a BBC producer to film his reactions to Petra. His only previous trip abroad had been a brief visit to the French coast.

Before the expedition left, Arthur Flowerdew was introduced to a world authority on Petra and author of a book on the ancient city, who questioned him in detail, but was baffled by the precision of his knowledge, some of which he said could only be known by an archaeologist specializing in this area. The BBC recorded Arthur Flowerdew's pre-visit description of Petra, so as to compare it with what would be seen in Jordan. Flowerdew singled out three places in his vision of Petra: a curious volcanoshaped rock on the outskirts of the city, a small temple where he believed he had been killed in the first cen-

ture B.C., and an unusual structure in the city which was well known to archaeologists but for which they could find no function. The Petra expert could recall no such rock and doubted that it was there. When he showed Flowerdew a picture of the part of the city where the temple had stood, he astounded him by pointing to almost the exact site. Then the elderly man calmly explained the purpose of the structure, one that had not been considered before, as the guard room in which he served as a soldier two thousand years before.

A significant number of his predictions were accurate. On the expedition's approach to Petra, Arthur Flowerdew pointed out the mysterious rock; and once in the city, he went straight to the guard room, without a glance at the map, and demonstrated how its peculiar check-in system for guards was used. Finally, he went to the spot where he said he had been killed by an enemy spear in the first century B.C. He also indicated the location and purpose of other unexcavated structures on the site.

The expert and archaeologist of Petra who accompanied Arthur Flowerdew could not explain this very ordinary Englishman's uncanny knowledge of the city. He said:

*He's filled in details and a lot of it is very consistent with known archaeological and historical facts and it would require a mind very different from his to be able to sustain a fabric of deception on the scale of his memories — at least those he's reported to me. I don't think he's a fraud. I don't think he has the capacity to be a fraud on this scale.*



I believe that most of us think of death as a black curtain that falls and puts an end to everything — our being alive, our being conscious, our having feelings and memories. Basically like falling into a dreamless sleep, or slipping into the drugs-induced coma of anesthesia before surgery. Only, having died, we won't wake up — that's the end of it, just blackness and nothingness. Well, that is definitely *not* what spirit communicators consistently tell us. For instance, renowned psychologist Karl Novotny, who had died in Germany in 1965, came through his long time friend Grete Schroeder, who had suddenly and unexpectedly shown automatic writing capabilities, with lessons of psychology and psychiatry, subjects totally unknown to the medium, an accountant by profession. Asked by Schroeder to describe the process of dying, Novotny said:

It was a spring day, and I was in my country residence, where I rarely go. My health was poor, but I didn't feel the need to stay in bed — on the contrary, I decided to go on a walk with some friends. It was a beautiful evening. Suddenly, I felt very tired and I thought I could not go on. I made an effort to continue, and, all of a sudden, I felt healthy and rested. I quickened my pace, and took in the evening fresh air: I hadn't felt that good in a long time. What happened? Suddenly, I could feel neither tiredness nor the usual laboured breath. I went back towards the friends, who had stopped, and what did I see? I saw myself lying on the ground! My friends were agitated and desperate; one ran to find a doctor. I got near my 'other self' lying on the ground and I looked for the heartbeat: there was no doubt — I was dead! But I felt more alive than ever! I tried to talk to my friends, but they didn't even look at me or bother answering. So I got angry and went away, but an instant later I was back. It wasn't a pretty sight: all my friends, in tears, who were not taking any notice of me; and that dead body, identical to me, although I felt very good. My dog was yapping in agitation and could not decide whether to come to me or to the other one lying on the ground.... When all formalities were dealt with and my body was put in a coffin I understood I was really dead. I couldn't believe it! I went to see my colleagues at the University, but they could not see me either

and didn't answer to my calls. What should I do? I went up the hill where Grete lives. I saw her, alone and sad, but she couldn't see me either. I had to surrender to the truth. The very moment I realized I had left the material world, I saw my mother coming to me with an overjoyed expression on her face and telling me I was in the afterlife.

Nearly one hundred years earlier, the spirit of one Jim Nolan — died during a typhoid epidemic during the American secession war, speaking through medium Mrs. Hollis explained the transition process in very similar terms:

It was like waking up from a sleep, only with a feeling of bewilderment. I didn't feel ill anymore, and that surprised me greatly. I had a feeling something weird had happened, but couldn't understand exactly what. My body was lying on the bed of the field hospital and I could see it. I told myself 'What a weird phenomenon!' I look around and saw three of my comrades who were killed in the trench and whom I had buried myself. And still, they were there, in front of me! I looked at them with astonishment and one of them greeted me saying: 'Hello Jim, welcome to the spirit world'. I was deeply shaken and said 'My God, what are you saying? I'm not dead...!' 'No', said the other, 'you are more alive than before. But you are in the spirit world. All you have to do to convince yourself is look at your body'.

These two quotes describe a pattern common to any other description of the process of death I have read, and — if you remember — are practically identical to what the NDErs say about their experience: separation of consciousness from the body, awareness of all that goes on in the surrounding environment, impossibility to interact with the physical world and, very often, encounter with deceased loved ones, friends or other spiritual guides. I could bring to you literally dozens of similar quotes, but believe me — the substance is exactly the same: death, as far as we are told, is not a curtain followed by black nothingness.



William Stead, a British journalist ... was among the victims of the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. Within minutes from the tragedy, Stead's daughter received a message from her father through automatic writing, in which he announced he was dead and he indicated the exact time at which the transatlantic ship had collided with the iceberg. This, to the young lady's complete shock, happened before any information was communicated by radio and newspapers in the UK. In later communications, Stead, who was keen not to talk about his death but rather to describe his experience of the afterlife, said:

The arrival was marvellous. It was like coming out of a foggy and dark English landscape to find ourselves all of a sudden under the blue Indian sky. Everything was beauty and splendour. We knew that we were approaching the place where these souls, suddenly taken away from earthly life, would find their first home. Something that really surprised me was the colour of the surrounding landscape. It was pale blue, with different shades. I don't mean that everything — trees, houses, people — was blue, but the overall impression was of that colour. Light itself contained an intense blue radiation.

And in the early 1960's, in France, a deceased young man so describes his experience to his mother through the words of a medium:

Think of everything we consider magic or enchanting in nature on earth, like water,

stars, shells, fireflies and the singing of birds — that is only a pale reflection of our kingdom. Do you remember how I showed an early taste for beauty? It was just an intuition of what was to come. Here everything is shrouded in stars, covered in flowers, scents abound; imagine extraordinary vegetation.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, English medium Ernest H. Peckham received several messages from a spirit, reverend A. H. Stockwell, who had died 40 years earlier. Stockwell provided several details about his life, which Peckham and his group researched and found correct, and said that his mission in the afterlife consisted precisely in communicating to the living information about the afterlife. I would like to use a couple of quotes from him...

Hearing is such a poor vehicle to channel impressions when compared to seeing. How can one describe the beauty of a sunrise on the Swiss Alps, with its shimmering glory of multiple golden shades, using the chords of a musical instrument? And, how could I accurately and adequately describe to you the glory of spiritual existence using the raw language of the living? The landscape that opened up in front of me was of an incomparable beauty and seemed to expand infinitely in all directions. Above it, a blue sky of a mesmerizing beauty. But the most extraordinary feature of this landscape was that distant objects did not at all appear smaller in size as would be the case on earth. Perspective was literally transformed. And that's not all; as I realized that I could visually perceive objects from all sides at one time and not just from the one visible side as happens in the world of the living. This enhanced, expanded vision produces wondrous effects. When you look at the outer surface of whatever object, you can actually see inside it, around it and through it, because spiritual vision allows you to penetrate the object of observation in its entirety.



Although the substance is largely the same, the ways to describe the layered structure of existence differ somewhat from one quote to the next. I just want to give you one comprehensive description, provided by a spirit communicator through direct voice at one of the séances of Roberto Setti in Florence, which I found particularly beautiful.

The environment in which the individual evolves is composed of the physical plane, the astral plane, the mental plane, the akashic plane and the spiritual planes.

All planes of existence are around you: the world of spirits is within matter itself. But man, when incarnated, cannot perceive more than what his restricted physical senses allow. For every field of existence, the individual has different vehicles or bodies; the astral body is concerned with emotional life, sensations, desires; the mental body gives man all the faculties which are typical of the mind, intellect and thoughts; the akashic body or consciousness receives and transcribes the reality that man discovers and acquires through existence, transforming it in the very nature of the individual.

When the individual has ceased to exist, he abandons the physical body but remains nearby it for some time and is greatly disturbed by the distress of those left behind. He then goes through a life review and is often helped in this first contact with the spiritual world by people who died before him.

The astral world is very similar to the physical world: a very vast and wonderful world inhabited by a great multitude of individuals. The length of time souls spend at this level depends on the degree of spiritual evolution they have reached: evolved souls remain for just a short while, whilst less evolved souls create a virtual world for themselves which

enables them to tend to unfulfilled desires; and this until, tired and satisfied, a soul finds itself on the threshold of the next plane, the mental plane, the existence of which it hadn't even imagined until then.

In the mental plane, every creature is immersed in continuous meditation and contemplates experiences of the last incarnation: scientists keep on studying those problems they were not able to solve, so that in the next incarnation they will carry the solutions within themselves. Once all the material accumulated during the last incarnation has been worked through, the individual leaves the mental plane and the faculties he has acquired there are fed into the akashic plane that is the individual's consciousness. The akashic body retains the imprint of all the experiences lived during the various incarnations and gradually takes shape as the individual evolves. If the individual is not highly evolved, the akashic body is not sufficiently formed and therefore remains on this plane, quietly reviewing all past existences until it is ready for a new incarnation which will further expand his consciousness. If, on the contrary, the akashic body is sufficiently formed, the individual lives a lucid existence centered on the noble sentiments deriving from his acquired consciousness. From this plane of existence he radiates boundless love and limitless compassion towards others.

This is therefore the plane of universal brotherhood and love: the plane where you all will live consciously, understanding that all the difficulties that trouble you now are experiences necessary for your evolution, for your spiritual rebirth...



If I managed, as I hope, to somewhat arouse your interest and you want to know more about this fascinating subject, there is a colossal literature out there that just waits to be discovered. And, you may perhaps consider trying to get some firsthand experiences. This is what I will try to do myself in the future, as I have been repeatedly told that there is no substitute for direct experience: you may read and study all your life, but then you are exposed to the "real thing" and all that theoretical knowledge is swept away, dwarfed by one gigantic wave of insight.