Heaven is *Not* a Distant Place



Pratibha A. Dabholkar, Ph.D.

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To Julie, my beloved daughter and soul mate angel,
who has taught me so much from heaven

and

To Papa, my beloved father, who has been my guardian angel
for most of my life

and

To all my soul mate angels, whether known or unknown to me
at this point

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Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Heaven Is Closer Than We Think	2
Departed Loved Ones Are Guardian Angels	3
Healing (and Learning) Through Ongoing ADCs	6
Amazing Aspects of the Spirit Dimension	8
Guidance for Our Earth Lives	13
Spirituality vs. Religion	18
A Different View of Reincarnation	19
Other Phenomena Show Closeness of Heaven	20
Verification of Spirit Experiences	21
Perceiving Spirit Experiences as Negative	24
Conclusion	26
Glossary	27
Appendix Describing Different Types of ADCs	29
Annotated Bibliography	47
About the Author	52

Heaven is *Not* a Distant Place

by Pratibha A. Dabholkar, Ph.D.

Introduction

Most people rarely think of heaven, focused as they are on the hassles of daily life. Young people especially may not think of heaven at all, viewing it merely as an eventual destination at the end of their long lives. Old people may also avoid thinking of it, not knowing quite what to expect. But the truth is that heaven is very close to us and being aware of this can enrich our lives.

Why do I conclude that heaven is so close? My conviction is based on years of scholarly research into the literatures on after-death communication (ADC) and near-death experience (NDE). It is also based on drawing new and thoughtful implications from the two streams of literature, taken separately and together.

Why do I assert that this knowledge can enrich our lives? For those who are bereaved, knowing that heaven is close to us is comforting, especially on understanding that our departed loved ones are our guardian angels and it is possible to be joyfully connected with them for the rest of our lives. For those who have not lost loved ones, understanding what heaven is all about can expand their view of eternal

life, why we came to earth to begin with, and what we should value and enjoy while we are here.

[For those unfamiliar with ADCs, NDEs, and related phenomena, please read the Glossary (pp. 27-28) first.]

Heaven Is Closer Than We Think

Two widely experienced phenomena tell us that heaven is *not* a distant place and that we are *never* alone. First, bereaved people throughout the ages have received after-death communications (ADCs) from departed loved ones conveying that they are happy in the spirit dimension (heaven) and yet they are always *with* the bereaved, watching over them. For example, when a grieving widow expressed how sad she was since her husband "went away," her husband's spirit responded telepathically that he had not left her. He told her he was still with her *and* in heaven. In another example, a soldier's spirit appeared at the foot of his parents' bed and told them he was fine and with God. When the mother asked where exactly he was, he said he was right next to them, and then faded away. There are thousands of such ADC reports corroborating how close we are to the spirit dimension.

Second, people who have had near-death experiences (NDEs) have met departed loved ones in the Light (a word they use interchangeably for God and for heaven) and realized that there is only a thin

partition separating the physical and spirit dimensions. They knew this because the spirits of their loved ones told them that they had been watching over them. Others met unknown beings of light and discovered (by looking through family albums after their return) that the spirits who helped them in heaven were their own departed relatives who they had not met on earth. Many understood that the two dimensions were close from their personal experience while in the spirit world—they could easily look in on people they loved on earth and see what was going on.

One major implication of both phenomena is that heaven is close to us, far closer than we think. The second important inference is that our departed loved ones are our guardian angels, who stay near and watch over us. Why do I call them angels? NDE literature has revealed that there is no difference between spirits who have reached the Light and angels. Even ADC literature reports numerous instances where departed loved ones have specifically communicated to the bereaved that they were angels.

Departed Loved Ones Are Guardian Angels

Many people recount stories of being saved by guardian angels. They were caught by an invisible force as they were falling, or heard a voice telling them to take an alternate route which saved them from a mishap, or were miraculously shielded from a bullet

during war or strife. Others have been awakened by their loved one's voice to escape a fire or to save a baby from being strangled by its blanket. Thousands of such instances are recorded.

Some people attribute such protection to unknown angels and others are convinced it was their own loved ones. People in the latter group typically have received ADCs from their departed loved ones indicating that they are watching over them. Some in the latter group have not received such ADCs and yet intuitively understand that their loved ones' spirits are their guardian angels. Those who attribute it to unknown angels are simply unaware that we all have soul mate angels (souls in heaven connected to us with eternal love) watching over us.

There are also hundreds of accounts of guardian angels helping people find their way when they were lost and find lost objects through an instinctive urge to look in a particular place. Some people have been guided to find objects or papers which they knew nothing of but which helped them monetarily, legally, or emotionally. In every single report, the person receiving the help knew it was their departed loved one guiding them. It is plain that our guardian angels not only guard us, but guide us when they think it necessary. Sometimes such help appears at the last moment in a crisis indicating that we are generally responsible for our lives and our angels help us only if

we have not been able to do something that has to be done and there is no time left.

For those who have never felt angelic protection or guidance, and never received spirit communications, there is no need to be disheartened. We cannot perceive the majority of spirit phenomena and yet they exist. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss doctor and leading researcher on death and dying, has drawn a parallel to a dog whistle that humans cannot hear but we acknowledge that dogs can hear it. She has written that similarly most people lack the ability to perceive higher vibrations from the spirit world but in fact they are all around us.

If you have lost loved ones but have not received ADCs, it is important to know that your departed ones' spirits continue to be close to you. Ignoring or denying this fact is a reductionist view (reducing everything to what we can see, touch, and measure) and severely limits us in a spiritual sense. If you have *not* lost loved ones, there are *other* soul mate angels watching over you, as will be explained later.

It is not necessary to personally receive ADCs or experience NDEs to understand more about heaven and our guardian angels. We can learn interesting aspects about spirit communications and guardian angels through the experiences of others or through reading. In fact, the objective of my writing this book is

to help readers understand such phenomena and their important connotations.

Healing (and Learning) Through Ongoing ADCs

We know from ADC literature that our loved ones in the spirit world can communicate with us in many ways including telepathy, dream visitations, and visitations when we are awake (seeing an apparition, smelling a special fragrance, hearing a beloved voice, or feeling a familiar touch). There are also thousands of cited examples of ADCs in the natural world through birds, butterflies, other wildlife, flowers, plants, sunlight, sunsets, and rainbows. Bereaved people have also received ADCs in the material world through lights, radios, televisions, and telephones, as well as through music boxes coming on suddenly or favorite objects being moved. (See Appendix for more details.)

The obvious reason for ADCs is to comfort the bereaved and help them heal. The underlying reason is that our loved ones in heaven want us to know that they still love us and that they are close to us. When they communicate through telepathy or visitations, the most frequent messages are “I love you” and “I’ll always be with you.” Many communications also tell the bereaved not to grieve and to be happy. The implications of all these messages are that our departed loved ones want us to look beyond the physical world to understand that we are still

connected to them and always will be so. This knowledge helps not only those left behind on earth but our loved ones in the spirit world as well.

Although grief is natural when someone close to us passes away, prolonged grief hurts us and also hurts our loved ones in heaven. After World War I, many soldiers' spirits gave ADCs saying they were distressed when their families continued to grieve for them indefinitely. Of course we need to grieve after a serious loss but we also need to focus on healing. Being open to loving ADCs can help us heal.

Instead of trying to "move on" when someone we deeply love passes on, we can be connected with these spirits in a joyous, ongoing relationship that helps both parties. It advances those left behind because we gain a deeper understanding of the universe. It advances our angels because by connecting with and guiding us, they fulfill their own soul purpose of helping others in meaningful ways. Ironically, many writers of ADC books do not understand this. Their interviews have a large percentage of one-time ADCs and they seem to ignore all the examples of ongoing ADCs as well as their meaningful implications.

But some people *do* understand and acknowledge ongoing ADCs, even in professions typically not open to such phenomena. For example, in his interview with researcher Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino, Catholic

Monsignor Jean Vernette said, “Our departed ones are present with us.... We can talk to them and they can hear us.... And they are ready to lend us their real and effective help if we ask for it.”

Many recipients of ADCs have experienced physical and psychological healing through a renewed sense of deep connections with their loved ones in heaven. Some people, who had not believed in anything beyond the physical world before their ADC experience, changed their views radically. Others said that ADCs completely altered their ideas about God and heaven. Contrary to what they had learned in religion, namely that good souls have moved on to heaven and so cannot be “here” anymore, they realized that good souls can continue to be connected with us after death.

Several recipients talked of looking through a door, window, or hole into another dimension and being given a privileged view of heaven. Some said that the ongoing ADCs they received allowed them to put things in perspective—they learned not to worry about minor issues and to see what was truly important in life.

Amazing Aspects of the Spirit Dimension

There are many important facts about heaven to be learned from NDE literature. People who have had NDEs (i.e., near-death “experiencers” or NDErs) explain that the spirit dimension is our real home.

They knew with certainty that they had been there before and said that it was a joyful homecoming.

They describe heaven as filled with the deepest love, accompanied by brilliant light, and indescribably more beautiful than earth. While they were in the Light, they felt one with God and one with the universe. They realized that we all come from God, that the goodness of God is deep within us, and that our true selves are apparent in heaven.

Corroborating this, religious scholar Phillip Berman notes that Jesus said, “we came from the light” and “the kingdom of God is within you.” Berman also points out that Meister Eckhart, a fourteenth-century German theologian, wrote, “God is at the center of Man” and eighteenth-century rabbi Shmelke wrote, “All souls are the same. Each is a spark from the original soul, and this [original] soul is wholly inherent in all souls.” All of these quotes imply that God or the divine Light is inside each of us just as NDErs realized.

At the same time, as mystics have experienced, there are different levels of consciousness in the spirit world, and each of us goes to the level where we are most comfortable. NDErs too have described varying degrees of vibrations in the spirit dimension that are associated with souls at different levels of spiritual advancement. If they explored a lower level than the one they went to, they felt dull and less alert. If they

explored a higher level, they experienced a buzzing, uncomfortable feeling. They had the sense (or were told by beings of light) that they could move comfortably to higher levels only when they advanced spiritually.

Journalist Mally Cox-Chapman points out that people quoting Jesus as saying “his Father’s house has many mansions” are mistranslating because the original word was not “mansions” but “monai” which means way station or stopping place on a journey. A correct translation of the original sentence would indicate therefore that heaven has different levels spirits can rest in before moving higher, corroborating what mystics and NDErs have discovered.

As mentioned earlier, the spirit dimension is filled not just with light but with love. The spirits that NDErs encountered (whether known or unknown to them) appeared as beings of light, emanating the deepest love. The NDErs themselves felt expansive love for everyone and everything while they were in heaven and realized that nothing else mattered.

Knowing that love is the driving force of the universe gives us an insight into the process of ADCs. Louis-Marie Vincent, professor of biology and physical chemistry, pointed out in his interview with Valarino that energy is transferred and transformed through waves and molecules, and if we view love as the

highest form of energy, we can see that it can be transferred to other types of energy including light, heat, electrical energy, and so on. This explanation offers a perspective into how our departed loved ones use love energy to move objects in the natural and material worlds in order to communicate with us.

There are also numerous NDE reports that the Light they encountered was "pure consciousness." Any questions they had were answered instantaneously after the thought arose in their minds. The answers simply popped into their minds at once and they felt linked to a universal consciousness. NDErs also said the passage of time in the Light was not felt. The whole experience could have taken thousands of years or could have happened in an instant—it made no difference. Time was not relevant.

These concepts are difficult for us to understand, especially about time being irrelevant because it guides almost everything we do on earth. Professor Vincent drew on the theory of relativity to explain both these aspects of the spirit world. He explained that because space and time are tied to mass or matter, and because the spirit dimension has consciousness and information but no associated matter, it is an "atemporal" dimension, or one in which time does not flow. He further explained that communication in the spirit realm is instantaneous precisely because time is not relevant.

Physicist (and physician) Regis Dutheil, also interviewed by Valarino, has given unusual and interesting explanations for aspects of the spirit dimension. He described it as "superluminal" space-time, by which he meant it was beyond the speed of light, "located on the other side of the light barrier." Unlike physicists who believe tachyons to be merely hypothetical, Dutheil explained that "superluminal matter or tachyons" (particles that travel faster than light) constitute "consciousness" in the spirit realm; and because all tachyonic matter constantly emits light, all beings in that universe are luminous. Dutheil even addressed immortality by saying it can be shown mathematically that tachyonic matter can last forever.

Dutheil stated that "our subluminal universe [earth] is only a holographic projection of the fundamental universe [heaven], where information and meaning are located." He clarified that this does not mean that we are illusions, but simply a different level of reality, just as our reflection in a mirror is real, but not as real as we are. This conception not only fits with Plato's Cave allegory but matches countless NDE reports that the spirit dimension is far more real than life on earth.

Understanding the complex nature of that wondrous dimension allows us to get a deeper glimpse into how our guardian angels are able to communicate

with and protect us. NDErs relate that when they were in the Light, they could communicate telepathically, go anywhere they wished in an instant, and enter people or objects as needed to help or to communicate. Such abilities explain telepathic ADCs, dream visitations, visitations while we are awake, and being saved by guardian angels in a variety of circumstances. These abilities also help explain ADCs in the natural and material worlds.

Guidance for Our Earth Lives

Reading about NDEs allows us to understand how we should live our lives on earth. The universal lesson learned during NDEs is that love is all that matters. Caring for people, all creatures, and nature is what we are meant to do. A focus on materialism, money, competition, or ego is misguided and keeps the soul at a low level. By helping people in positive ways and cherishing the natural world you will not only enjoy your life more deeply, but will grow spiritually.

NDErs were also told by the beings of light that all of us are supposed to use our unique talent to make a contribution. So it is important to figure out your natural aptitude and what you really enjoy doing, as long as it is something positive. Then you can spend time in this activity whether as a job or as a hobby. In doing so you will be using your particular talent to help others and will enjoy what you are doing as well. In

addition to being a loving and thoughtful person, this too is our soul purpose.

The other critical guidance from NDE literature relates to the life review. Almost every NDE report includes the experience of a 3-D panoramic life review, which for some souls ranged from early childhood until their current age on earth. It is clear that an extended version of this review is something we will all experience when we die, so it is important we learn what this review entails.

The life review process that NDErs describe teaches us further about what we need to do in our earth lives. In this review we see how we have affected others for better or worse so far, and fully experience the outcomes of all our actions (every little thing we did) from the perspectives of the recipients of our actions. We palpably feel all the pain we have caused as well as the happiness we have spread. The objective is to help us understand through actual experience what we did (or did not) do well so we can internalize this learning for our spiritual growth.

NDErs recount that even events they had forgotten, or what they considered unimportant, had been recorded. People forcefully felt the wrong they had done *even as children*, in what many would consider to be insignificant events—such as throwing away good food (and causing grief to their mothers), stealing a

playmate's crayon (and causing confusion and sadness for the playmate), and so on. Think about children who are deliberately mean or bullies. They will have to fully experience everything they did from the perspective of the people they have hurt.

When you think of all the things people can do as adults that may harm someone, you get an idea of the fairness of the life review and its purview. Although it is not meant as a punishment, you have to experience everything you did to others so you can learn and progress spiritually. The life review is obviously a remarkable way to deal with all the real and perceived injustices in the world. It is God's perfect plan.

In teaching classes on uplifting supernatural phenomena, I have been impressed when students told me how knowing about the life review that NDErs went through changed their own lives. For example, each time they started an argument with their spouse or partner, they caught themselves, thinking, "This is not something I want to see in heaven." They admitted that this type of brake on their unkind behavior was turning them into better people and making their relationships happier.

Some students admitted that, with the life review in mind, they tried not to drive aggressively, realizing they would have to undergo all the undue stress they were creating in other drivers. Actually, in such cases,

the life review would show not only the stress they created in others, but alternate scenarios where they could have hurt or killed innocent people. Anyone who thinks they got away with reckless behavior (driving or otherwise) that could have harmed others is quite mistaken. The NDE literature tells us that the life review often shows alternate outcomes for a person's actions so they can fully internalize the learning.

Even when someone is hurt unintentionally it is experienced in the life review. An Englishman who had an NDE experienced an incident from his life when at age six he casually threw a stone across railroad tracks. His friend's dog immediately ran to retrieve the stone and was killed by a train that thundered by. The boy had no intention to hurt the dog. He had tossed the stone mindlessly. And yet the man experienced all the pain of the dog's death as well his friend's grief. The reason was that even at age six he should have known that the dog loved to fetch and that railroad tracks were dangerous places. Mindlessness is not an excuse.

Think about the ramifications of this for those who text while driving. These are adults (not six-year-olds), who should know full well that what they are doing can kill, hurt, or paralyze others, but they do it anyway. If they harm innocent people and ruin their and their survivors' lives, they will experience (in their life review) all the shock, pain, misery, and grief they caused—simply because they could not wait to read or

send messages safely. Even if they "get away" with not hurting anyone while texting and driving, they will view alternate scenarios in their life reviews (as for any thoughtless behavior) and experience all the pain and misery they could very easily have caused.

Those who deliberately commit crimes and serious misdeeds will have even more extended life reviews, which could be "hellish" depending on the extent of harm they have caused. They will experience all the terrible things they did to others as well as to everyone else who suffered as a result of a particular deed. For example, a man who sold a gun to a criminal had an NDE and fully experienced (in his life review) the pain felt by all the people killed with that gun and the grief caused to the surviving families of the victims. The person who actually used that gun would conceivably feel all of this to a deeper extent.

But hell need not be permanent as most religions (especially western religions) tend to assert. NDErs attest that even low-level souls can advance once they have *fully* experienced how they hurt others and learned deep lessons from this.

While we are on earth, we do not need a life review to know the right thing to do. It is clear from NDE literature that the ultimate lesson of the life review is that we have to treat other people, animals, and nature with love and thoughtfulness. After all, whatever we do

to everyone and everything, we are essentially (and eventually) doing to ourselves. It is the Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you") in action. Interestingly, a paraphrasing of this injunction is in every religion.

Spirituality vs. Religion

Nevertheless, most NDErs realize that, contrary to what some of them believed prior to their experience, religion *per se* is unimportant. As many of them express it, the *only* religion that God cares about is love. Some NDErs did see Jesus, Buddha, or other religious figures based on their beliefs. But God is the same no matter what visions are created to comfort those who are religious. Those NDErs who did not need religion to guide their lives before their experience but were spiritual (believed in God and led good lives) simply saw the brilliant Light and felt its immense love. Some were even told that this was the reality of God. Of course, if someone needs religion for moral support, fellowship, or to help the community, that is fine, especially if the religion preaches universal love. All paths of love lead to God.

Think deeply about the revelation that God cares only about love toward all and not about any particular religion. What a travesty it has been for people throughout the ages to inflict wars, torture, and cruelty in the name of religion. Imagine the life reviews of the

misguided people who perpetrated this kind of horror so needlessly on others. Even trying to convert others to the beliefs of a particular religion is wasted zeal and not what God wants. All we need to do is to love everyone. We are all part of God.

Related to this thought, all kinds of bigotry and racial or ethnic prejudice are against God's plan. If we all come from God, we are all one at a deep level, as NDErs and mystics have realized. This is why we have to experience everything we did to others from their perspectives, because in essence we did it to ourselves.

A Different View of Reincarnation

Most NDErs (78 percent, according to Professor Kenneth Ring) believe in reincarnation after their experience and see how it fits with God's eternal plan. But they view it as an option one can choose for soul advancement rather than it being imposed on souls in the way that eastern religions tend to assert.

Viewed this way, reincarnation is not a question of reward and punishment. It is simply an option to grow spiritually. Some may come back as part of an ethnic group they had been unkind to, not as a punishment, but to deeply experience how such unkindness feels from the other perspective. Others may choose a life of deprivation as a way to learn important lessons about fortitude and forbearance. Some may choose a normal

life but focus on overcoming some deficit in their character. Others may come back to teach even while learning some individual lessons for growth.

NDErs explain that between earth lives, souls carefully plan their next earth life and choose their missions and experiences to progress spiritually. The planning process may take many years in earth time. Immediate family and close friends are usually soul mates with interconnected roles to play in helping one another accomplish plans on earth. This fits with Professor Ian Stevenson's rigorous reincarnation research where he came across cases in which family members had different relationships in their past lives.

Several NDErs have shared that for a particular earth life, some soul mates in a cluster choose to stay back in heaven to watch over the others as they live their earth lives. This revelation has a heartening implication for those who have not experienced deep loss. It tells us that even those who have *not* lost loved ones have *other* soul mate angels watching over and guarding them, as mentioned earlier.

Other Phenomena Show Closeness of Heaven

In addition to ADCs and NDEs, other unusual phenomena show that the spirit dimension is close to us. People in comas who recover often say they went to heaven and back and that the transitions were quick

both ways. Their descriptions of heaven are very similar to those who had NDEs, including experiencing the Light, meeting loved ones, and having life reviews.

Those who have had spontaneous out-of-body experiences (OBEs), with or without full-blown NDEs, corroborate that the spirit world is very close to our physical world and that navigation between the two dimensions is effortless as a spirit. Even those who had such OBEs *without* leading to NDEs experienced aspects of the spirit dimension such as telepathic understanding of people's thoughts, going anywhere they wished just by thinking of it, and being able to move through physical objects.

People in the process of dying peacefully sometimes report that they have been to heaven. Although their narrations are not as detailed as NDE reports (because they are physically weak when they relate their experiences), they often mention light, love, and angels. It seems to have been easy for them to get there and return, and they appear to be looking forward to their transition. In fact, some say they only came back to say goodbye.

Verification of Spirit Experiences

If you still harbor some doubts about the reality of the spirit world, this section is for you. People who recovered from comas and those who had OBEs in

hospitals were able to recount *in great detail* what took place in the room they were in, as well as elsewhere in the hospital, *while they were comatose, being operated on, close to dying, or had already flat-lined*. They accurately recounted exact medical procedures (even unusual ones), what was said around the patient, and even what some doctors were thinking (given their telepathic, mind-reading abilities in the spirit state).

It is even more remarkable that blind people in these circumstances (comas or OBEs) have given the same level of accurate reporting as the sighted people. Some of them were congenitally blind (i.e., from birth) and still were able to describe medical equipment, procedures, and so on. Interestingly, the vision experienced in OBEs far exceeds normal human vision. It includes seeing all around at once (360 degrees), seeing near and far with equal clarity, and seeing in much greater detail than in human vision. This is because in the spirit realm we see with consciousness instead of eyes.

All that sighted (or blind) people recounted was impossible to see (or perceive) from where they were lying down *and* in their condition, and yet all of it was fully verified by medical personnel present. This type of evidence has convinced many doctors and nurses about the reality of the spirit dimension. It should be enough for anyone who demands proof that our soul (or consciousness) can exist outside the brain.

Similarly, there is verifiable evidence for several types of ADCs in the literature. For example, departed people have given information in dream visitations that was used to uncover evidence that legally cleared their names. Other ADCs led to discovering newer wills, hidden bonds, or problems with gravesites. Hundreds of ADCs have been urgent, telepathic communications that saved the recipients from harm (of which they were totally unaware).

NDEs too have verifiable aspects. While in heaven, NDErs have met spirits of people they did not know had died. Others met spirits unknown to them and only discovered after their return on looking through photo albums that these were relatives they had never met. The experience itself—lucid, organized, and positive—cannot be caused by any drugs or medications. Several respected doctors have asserted this in the literature.

Peacefully dying people have expressed surprise on seeing spirits of relatives who they were unaware had died recently, thus providing verification that this was no hallucination. The dying have also reported "going" somewhere on earth—to a childhood home or to visit a friend, and have recounted what they saw there. Even though relatives present tended at first to write this off as rambling thoughts, they were astonished to discover that what was related exactly matched what was

actually going on at the place the dying person said they had visited.

Perceiving Spirit Experiences as Negative

All the positive spirit experiences described so far are perceived as negative by a small proportion of those who experience them. In the case of ADCs, a very small number of recipients view these as negative. This includes those who are closed to communications from the spirit world due to archaic religious ideas about avoiding spirit contact. It also includes those who think that ADCs imply that the loved one has not yet gone to heaven. So they desperately pray for them to go away (to heaven), not understanding that the departed loved ones *are* in heaven and still can communicate with them. Finally, this group includes those who have "moved on" with their lives and are uncomfortable thinking about departed loved ones.

Different studies report that anywhere from 1-20 percent of NDEs are perceived as negative, although many of these change to positive during the experience itself. Negative NDEs are experienced by those who resist death, either consciously or unconsciously. On leaving the body, they feel trapped in an uncomfortable space and do not reach the Light. Of these, those that get tired of getting nowhere and pray to God for help, immediately reach the Light. A few remain in the uncomfortable situation without praying for help and

come back without experiencing anything positive. In addition, life reviews can be hellish for some people as discussed earlier, depending on the extent of harm done by them to others.

There are reported NDEs of atheists (who were basically good people) also being trapped in a negative space until they asked God for help. These cases made me wonder why good people could not go to God (even if they were atheists) until I realized three possible reasons for this. First, most likely not believing in life after death, they may have resisted death like others who experienced negative NDEs. Second, we are meant to be not only loving but wise. And wisdom includes realizing that this incredible universe did not happen by chance but was created by a powerful and loving consciousness. Many renowned scientists, including Albert Einstein, have recognized that the universe *had* to have a creator. Third, it makes sense that if someone does not recognize the Source of everything, how can that person go to the Source? It is reassuring to know, however, that as soon as the atheists prayed to God for help, they too went to the Light.

Spontaneous OBEs associated with NDEs are almost always positive as the experiencers are overwhelmingly grateful and happy to be pain-free. Only a few reported to being dazed at first but they too recovered and learned to enjoy their new freedom. For a small percent of spontaneous OBEs not associated

with illness or injury, the experiencers were confused or felt anxious about not being able to come back to their bodies. But as soon as they felt any anxiety, they were immediately back in the body.

Studies on DBVs found that 10-15 percent of these were perceived as negative. Those that fit this group either did not believe in the spirit world, or were afraid of death, or were not yet ready to die. For those who had repeated DBVs, if their attitudes changed in the intervening period, the DBVs also changed to positive.

Conclusion

It is important to know and to remember that heaven and our soul mate angels are close to us. Knowing that loving angels (who are our own eternal soul mates) are nearby and watching over us should make us happy and grateful. It can also broaden our understanding of the universe and our role in it.

We also need to remember as Berman puts it, that we not only “go” to the spirit dimension when we die, but we “come” from this same world when we are born. Being aware of heaven as we live our earth lives can keep us balanced. Understanding the implications of the life review process can help us live up to our soul purpose of being loving and wise, and caring for others.

Glossary

An **after-death communication** (ADC) is a message, a sign, a vision, or a felt presence whereby a departed loved one communicates with loved ones on earth. It may be a single occurrence or ongoing, and is almost always perceived as positive and uplifting. It is typically aimed at assuring those left behind that the departed soul is well, happy, and capable of far more in the spirit dimension. ADCs also often indicate that the departed spirit is constantly watching over their loved ones in the physical dimension. (Various studies in the U.S. and in Europe report that ADCs have been received by 10-30 percent of the general population, and 50-70 percent of widows and widowers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that ADCs received by bereaved parents are as frequent as for bereaved spouses.)

A **near-death experience** (NDE) is a situation where a person, who is near death due to trauma, illness, or injury, experiences the spirit dimension. Most NDEs are perceived as positive and uplifting, filled with immense peace, joy, and love. A typical NDE starts with an out-of-body experience, then rushing through a tunnel toward brilliant light, and then reaching the Light, where there is a sense of merging with God, boundless love, and perfect knowledge. During the experience, souls meet departed loved ones (or unknown beings of light) and go through a life review. Most are told that they have not yet fulfilled

their life's purpose, and they return to the body. (According to the International Association for Near Death Studies, 4-15 percent of people in the U.S., Australia, and Germany have had NDEs; also, in the U.S., about 282,000 people have an NDE every year.)

A spontaneous **out-of-body experience** (OBE) is where the spirit leaves the body temporarily and can observe the body from an external vantage, as well as observe other people, objects, and activities. Some OBEs occur near death without any other aspects of an NDE. Other OBEs are part of an NDE itself, usually before the typical tunnel experience. Spontaneous OBEs can also occur without the person being near death. (The prevalence of spontaneous OBEs should be higher than for NDEs because almost every NDE starts with a spontaneous OBE, and in addition, such OBEs often occur even without NDEs.)

A **death-bed vision** (DBV) is where the dying person sees spirits (usually known to the person) and consequently is happy about the prospect of dying. About 90 percent of DBVs are from the spirits of very close relatives. Most people who have DBVs stop feeling pain and are ready to go to the spirit dimension. (A century ago, dying people tended to be conscious before death and the incidence of DBVs was high. In recent times, various studies report that only 10-30 percent of dying people are conscious before death, but of these, 50-70 percent receive DBVs.)

Appendix
Descriptions of Different Types of ADCs

ADCS in the Natural World

Bird ADCs

ADCs using birds appear to be particularly frequent at or after funerals, memorial services, or ashes immersion. Flocks of geese, ducks, and even wild turkeys have been reported to swoop down and land right near the bereaved; everyone present recognized it as a sign of assurance from the departed one. Others have seen cardinals or doves appear on their deck right after a funeral and stay there for unusually long times.

People seem to know intuitively that bird sightings after the passing of loved ones are ADCs. Bird feeders that had been unable to attract birds were suddenly filled with a variety of birds. Grieving people saw unusual birds appear near them even when no trees or bushes were nearby. Many bereaved people saw the type of birds that their departed ones had loved—such as pelicans, seagulls, herons, or finches—even in unusual situations. This reassured them of the very personal signs they were receiving.

Some found bird nests close to their patios or decks, and enjoyed watching baby birds. Most of these people realized that it was a special gift from their departed

loved ones who were using the metaphor of “new life” to signify that their lives were also continuing but in a new circumstance.

A huge number of people have received ADCs involving hummingbirds. This beautiful, tiny bird seems a perfect analogy for the spirit—brilliant and iridescent in its glorious new world and able to fly so very fast. In addition, hummingbirds have behaved in unusual ways in several cases such as sitting on the bereaved person’s finger or very close on a branch and not flying away for a long time. Such behavior convinced the bereaved that these were ADCs.

It is not surprising that our loved ones in the spirit world use birds to communicate with us. The beauty and grace of birds is something people admire instinctively and their flight represents the capabilities of our souls after our earth lives. Related to this, most bird ADCs are given shortly after the passing of the loved one and seem aimed at instinctive healing.

Some people continue to receive bird ADCs although not as dramatically or as often as in the early mourning period. And yet these instances bear the characteristics of earlier ADCs in the sense that the bird chosen or the circumstance under which it appears has a special connection to the departed one. These ongoing ADCs seem to be more of a hello (“I’m still with you”) than an urgent message to help healing.

Butterfly ADCs

ADCs through butterflies are extremely common. As in the case of birds, butterflies are often seen at funerals, memorial services, and in cemeteries. Sometimes they stay by a bereaved person's side for a long time, even perching on shoulders. People have reported that after loved ones died, butterflies crossed their path for several days even in the heart of a city with few trees around.

Butterflies are closely associated with the spirit dimension. Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who wrote extensively about death and dying, noted that our lives on earth are like caterpillars; when we die, our bodies are shed like cocoons and our souls are set free like butterflies. She used this analogy in talking to dying children. She also reported that during the Holocaust, children about to be sent to the gas chamber, instinctively drew butterflies on the walls of their barracks, signifying that their souls would soon be free.

Sometimes in the weeks that follow a loved one's passing, the bereaved have wondered if the butterfly that came to them and then flew away was just a butterfly flitting along and not an ADC. But as soon as they had this thought, the butterfly flew back to them, often brushing their cheeks to signify a kiss. Like ADCs through birds, butterfly ADCs can also be ongoing.

Through Other Wildlife

Deer and rabbit ADCs are common in the early grieving period. Perhaps these animals are chosen for their gentleness. In some cases, the departed ones particularly loved these animals so it was a special reassurance. Foxes are seen in ADCs too and the bereaved knew it was not just a sighting of wildlife because the fox did something unusual such as coming close to the house, peeking in, and so on.

Another memorable wildlife sign is through dolphins. Bereaved people have reported seeing dolphins right after immersing their loved one's ashes. Sometimes, a whole school of dolphins has magically appeared exactly at that time. Others have reported that as they walked along a beach during their healing process, they prayed for a sign from their loved one and immediately a lone dolphin appeared and swam alongside them for a considerable time.

In addition to the instinctive joy people feel on seeing dolphins, there is symbolism here, as in the case of birds and butterflies. Birds indicate the flight and soaring of spirits, butterflies denote the freedom of a newly released soul, and dolphins symbolize intelligence combined with joy and playfulness which well represents the magic of the spirit dimension.

Using Plants and Flowers

Using plants or flowers is a common ADC theme, often given soon after the death of the loved one. Withered flowers from funeral arrangements have rejuvenated and bare rose bushes have suddenly bloomed. Plants that had never borne flowers were found covered with blossoms. The bereaved recognize all such magical instances as messages from their loved ones. The symbolic message of course is that the departed ones are still alive and blooming and they want the bereaved to stop grieving.

Sometimes, ADCs through flowers take place long after the passing of the loved one. People have found poorly faring plants suddenly blooming on their or the departed person's birthdays. Some bereaved people have prayed for a sign after several months and immediately found flowers they or their departed one enjoyed on their car's windshield or their front porch, with no explanation of how they got there. It is possible that the spirits telepathically guided some kind souls to do this. (See more on telepathic communications later.)

ADCs have also been given by moving one branch of a bush or tree when everything else is still and there is no breeze. The bereaved know instinctively that their loved one is saying hello. Heart-shaped leaves have appeared near the bereaved on walks or while sitting

outdoors. This too has been perceived as a direct message from departed loved ones.

Sunsets, Sunlight, and Rainbows

Bereaved people have also felt their loved one's presence through unusually beautiful sunsets or sky-spanning rainbows. Seeing these glorious sights immediately after thinking deeply of their loved one convinced the bereaved that these were special signs.

Several people have experienced sunlight streaming on them exactly when they felt anguished at their loss. Others have seen tiny rainbows appear near them precisely when they were feeling their loss palpably. The recipients understood through these synchronous experiences that their loved ones were right there with them and flooding them with sunlight (or giving them personal rainbows) to tell them not to be sad.

ADCS in the Material World

Through Objects

The unexplained moving of objects is a common experience of the bereaved at an early stage of grief. They notice that a photograph or some loved object of the departed is in a new place, even though there is no one else in the house who could have moved it. Some bereaved people actually saw objects *being moved*

which must have been startling, but perhaps it was the only way to get them to notice.

Grieving people have encountered books falling off tables or out of bookcases, opened to a passage which gave them much comfort. It was usually in answer to whatever they had been pondering in dealing with their grief. In every case, there was no doubt in the bereaved person's mind that this was an ADC from their loved one to reassure and help them.

Some bereaved people report that mechanical music boxes (which needed to be wound to be played) came on automatically. In a few cases the boxes had not worked for a long time, convincing the recipients of supernatural help when they suddenly came on. These reports mentioned that either the departed had loved the music box or the song itself was meaningful.

Using Electrical Devices

ADCs are often given through electrical devices. Bereaved people have noted lamps flickering when they thought of the loved one. It was not a case of bulbs going out or lamps being faulty. It only happened when they were particularly sad. Others have experienced fans, television sets, radios, and computers coming on automatically. In each case, the bereaved knew it was their loved one trying to comfort them.

Another common experience of the bereaved is that whenever they turned on the radio, a favorite song of the departed one would start playing, particularly in the early grieving period. Most recipients were moved by the synchronicity of these ADCs.

In a dramatically direct communication through an electrical device, the spirit of an American soldier killed in World War I communicated with his mother through the wireless, using Morse code. As a young boy, he had convinced her to learn the code so they could have fun with it. Now, he informed her of his death through the wireless *before* she had official notification.

Via Telephones

ADCs are sometimes received through the telephone. Some people received phone calls (from an unknown number) at the precise time of a loved one's death but no one spoke. Others heard the phone ring and actually heard the departed one's voice for a brief moment. In these instances too, they found out later that the person had passed on at that exact time.

In some intriguing examples, such phone calls were received even when the phones were not working because they had been disconnected. Some even heard a phone ringing when the phone had been turned off or in the absence of a phone. A few report receiving text

messages (again from an unknown sender) using phrases that the departed one used. In most of these cases, the departed person had used the phone extensively in his or her life to stay connected and so it seems a natural way for them to communicate.

Spirit Visitations

Visitations (whether visual, auditory, olfactory, or sensory) have been reported when the recipient was fully awake or half-asleep, which is the hypnagogic state between wakefulness and sleep. This does not mean that the latter type of visitation was imagined. As dream researchers know, the hypnagogic state actually allows communication between the spirit and physical dimensions more easily because we are at a higher level of spiritual consciousness in that state than when we are fully awake.

Visions

Visions are perhaps the most vivid of all spirit visitations. Many receivers of visions were in bed and some were half-asleep. Others report visions when they were not in bed and fully awake. The described visions seem very similar irrespective of whether the recipient was awake or half-asleep.

Bereaved people have seen a full or partial vision of their loved one, especially in the first few days after the

death and often in moments of intense grief. In many such instances, the grieving people had been focused on how weak, ill, or otherwise physically troubled, their loved ones had been. The visions of the spirits as healthy and happy, and often as younger versions of themselves, helped the bereaved understand how different their loved ones were in their new world and that there was no need to worry about them.

In these visions, the spirits looked at the recipients meaningfully or smiled at them, communicating implicitly that they were well and happy. The spirits of people who had been paralyzed showed they could dance; those who had lost limbs in accidents showed they were whole again; if they had been ill and weak, they showed how full of energy they were; if they had lost their hair to chemotherapy, they now had a full head of hair; and those who had been grumpy due to their pain and suffering, smiled broadly to show their happiness in the spirit world.

Several of the visions were accompanied by light. Most recipients of visions reported feeling loved and peaceful, but for a few it was a sad experience to see their loved ones just for a moment and lose them again. In many reports, the apparitions spoke briefly (usually telepathically) to the bereaved, told them they were loved and that they would always be with them, watching over them. Sometimes, a vision was seen before knowledge of the loved one's death. The

recipients of such visions were confused and only later discovered that the loved one had passed away at the very moment they saw them.

There are many instances of children reporting that their departed grandparents (or other relatives) visited them at night. The parents understood these as real visitations because the spirits often conveyed something that the children could not have known—such as things the parents did or said when *they* were children. The visions were probably given to the children (instead of to their parents) because children seem more able than adults to see spirits.

Auditory ADCs

Spirit visitations can be auditory as well. Bereaved people have heard their loved one's voice, often just saying their name, and sounding as if it was coming from another room. Others have heard a departed one's distinctive laugh. In some cases, more than one person heard such ADCs at the same time. This was probably done to dispel any idea of its being a hallucination.

Grieving people have also heard door bells ring (or approaching footsteps) but found no one at the door even though they reached there in an instant and could see the whole street. Others have heard the piano playing when there was no piano in the house.

Auditory spirit visitations have also occurred in the hypnagogic state. In the case of couples who had promised to use knocking as a sign from the spirit world, the bereaved partners often heard three distinct and forceful knocks when they were just falling asleep. Three seems to be a typical number in such reports. Some people heard such knocks even without any prior discussion of such signs; but they interpreted these correctly as ADCs anyway.

Olfactory ADCs

Another form of spirit visitation is through smells. Bereaved people report smelling a familiar fragrance and knowing without doubt that their loved one was near and communicating with them. Across ADCs, the smells range from all kinds of flowers to after shave, perfume, coffee, and favorite foods. All the receivers were struck by the intensity of the fragrance and the special association it had with their loved one.

Many bereaved people report that when they were particularly sad, the room suddenly flooded with the fragrance of roses. No roses were in the house and it convinced the bereaved of their loved one's presence.

People have awakened to strong smells of breakfast foods the departed had enjoyed fixing, and known that their loved one was saying hello. Others have walked into an empty house where the departed person had

lived and found it filled with the tantalizing smell of fresh-baked cookies, muffins, or other delicacies the departed one had loved to bake and share.

Sensory ADCs

Spirit visitations are often felt as a physical touch. Some feel a gentle touch on the face or arm, others feel their hair being tousled, and some feel a hug. For many, the physical touch is exactly what the departed soul did in his or her earth life—a pat on the shoulder, an arm around the back, or a kiss on the cheek.

Many sensory ADCs occur in the hypnagogic state. Widows have felt their husbands' arms around them as they were falling asleep. Parents have felt a little hand on their cheeks after losing young children. Others have felt pressure on the bed as if someone is sitting down or getting up. People about to undergo medical procedures have felt someone stroking their heads or their arms, either during the previous night or just before surgery. Some people have even felt the touch of departed pets as a familiar pressure against their legs.

A few cases of sensory visitation have occurred before knowledge of the death. In each instance, the person knew their loved one was ill or close to death. But just as they were getting ready to visit, they felt a hug or a distinctive touch and knew the person had passed on. Some of them even felt flooded with peace.

The time of death was later found to be the same time they felt the touch.

Dream Visitations

It is natural for the bereaved to dream about their departed loved one. Many such dreams play an important role in the healing process by providing insights and clues just as other dreams can. But simply dreaming of your departed loved one does not mean it is an actual visit from that spirit.

However, spirit visitations can and do occur in dreams and can be called "dream visitations." Some ADC authors think this is because we are in a more relaxed state when we dream. To the contrary, the dream state can be far more stressful for the bereaved than the waking state. This is because the subconscious mind tries to work through issues associated with the loved one's death and plays back traumatic memories we may decide not to focus on while awake.

So it is *not* a relaxed state that allows dream visitations but a different level of consciousness. It is widely accepted today by scholars that the dream state is at a higher level of spiritual consciousness than the waking state. This allows easier communications between the spirit realm and our physical world. As a result, our departed loved ones can communicate with

us directly in dreams (and in hypnagogic states, as discussed earlier).

Most people can differentiate between dreams of departed loved ones and dream visitations. The former are like any other dream although for the bereaved these may be very emotional or upsetting. In contrast, dream visitations are very real, extremely vivid, charged with positive emotion, and memorable. They seem like real visits because they are.

Unlike normal dreams that are often forgotten, dream visitations can be recalled accurately. Whereas sensory feeling is low in dreams as a rule, hugs are vividly felt in dream visitations. Also, the content of dream visitations is clear and logical as opposed to typical dreams which can be bizarre or convoluted.

There are numerous reported instances of dream visitations. The departed spirits sometimes look like themselves on earth and at other times they look angelic or like beings of light. Just as in the case of waking visions, the spirits look healthy and happy, no matter what condition they were in when they died. Sometimes, spirits assure the bereaved that they are well and that they did not suffer, especially if they died in accidents. Mothers who lost babies typically had dream visitations from the spirits as babies. However, if a mother continued to worry about the baby, the

next dream visitation was as an adult to show that the spirit was mature and could take care of itself.

Some bereaved people report still feeling the hugs from their dream visitations even after waking up. This is particularly common when the visitation takes place prior to some important event. The recipients felt great peace after such visitations, understanding that their loved ones were telling them that they are always with them, and will be there for the important event as well.

But not everyone understands or finds comfort in dream visitations. In a few reports, the grieving person was upset to see the departed one looking well and happy; they attributed this to their own wishful thinking. They were unable to conceive that their loved ones were now in a different world where they were *indeed* well and happy.

There are cases where someone other than the bereaved received dream visitations meant for the grieving person. This may be because the intended recipients were not open to communications due to intense grief or rigid views about spirit contact. In each instance, the dreamer was told to pass on the message to the grieving, which they did, with mixed results. For the most part, the bereaved were grateful that their loved one was well and had communicated this to them through whatever means they could. But others

were either resentful that someone else received the visitation or simply refused to believe it.

Dream visitations have occurred even before the dreamer knew of the loved one's death. These visitations were both to inform and to comfort. In some of these dreams, the spirit actually said goodbye so the dreamer knew on waking that it signified death.

Sometimes dream visitations have specific purposes other than to connect with the bereaved and help them heal. The departed have messages to give about wills, finances, lost or hidden items, and specific future events. In almost all these cases, the knowledge thus imparted was later confirmed.

Telepathic ADCs

Telepathic ADCs are common and have a strong tendency to be ongoing. Some receivers report that the voice they hear in their minds sounds like the departed person's voice and even uses their idiosyncratic expressions. For others, it is not the departed loved one's voice that is heard. But the thoughts received are clearly external, often interrupting one's own thoughts, and through the message it is clear that it is telepathy from a known, loved one.

Special messages are communicated especially in times of intense grief. Typically, the messages say, "I

love you," or "I am fine, don't worry about me," or "I will always be with you." Sometimes, specific instructions are given about material things, financial concerns, or health related matters. As in the case of dream visitations, people have been led through telepathic ADCs to find lost wills or financial documents, as well as hidden items. Guidance is given when the bereaved are debating what to do with the departed one's belongings. Where the relationship might have been troubled, telepathic ADCs have provided explanations to soothe matters.

Telepathic communications are not always explicitly stated but instead manifested as a strong feeling about something. Even so, the bereaved have followed their strong, instinctive urge to look somewhere and found important documents, gifts, etc., in the same way as people who heard explicit directions in their minds.

The soldier's spirit mentioned earlier, who initially contacted his mother through Morse code, later communicated with her through telepathy and automatic writing. He wanted her to spread the word about spirit communications so that the families of the other departed soldiers would be comforted that their boys were still alive in the spirit world. His other constant message to his mother through telepathy was that their love was eternal and that one day they would be together.

Telepathic ADCs are often linked to guardian angel behavior. Our loved ones tell us by inserting forceful thoughts in our minds about when it is imperative to seek medical care, or to drive slowly, change lanes, or take alternate routes to avoid accidents.

There are many reports of telepathic ADCs being given to others (just as in dream visitations) to pass on a message to the bereaved. Usually these are given to friends or relatives who then feel an urgency to communicate the information to the bereaved. But sometimes such communications are given to strangers who happen to be nearby. The receivers of the communication simply perceive it as a thought and express it to the bereaved, having no idea that what they said was the perfect answer to what the bereaved had been debating in their minds.

A Brief Annotated Bibliography

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Barrett was a physicist and a founder of the Society for Psychical Research in England in 1882. He became aware of DBVs when his wife, an obstetrician, witnessed a patient having a DBV after giving birth. Barrett then interviewed hundreds of caregivers of dying people and found remarkable commonalities across DBVs as the spirits of loved ones came joyfully to fetch the dying.

Berman, Phillip. L. *The Journey Home: What Near-Death Experiences and Mysticism Teach Us About the Gift of Life*. New York: Pocket Books, 1996.

Berman had an NDE at age 16 when he nearly drowned. Later, after his infant daughter's death, Berman, as a scholar, began to study other people's NDEs. His book details actual NDEs and mystic experiences from a large number of people and draws insights about the lessons we can learn from these.

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This is a collection of ADCs given to women from their mothers' spirits. The ADCs include messages of love, continuing contact, and warnings against danger from the departed mothers to their daughters.

Callanan, Maggie and Patricia Kelley. *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying*. New York: Bantam, 1992.

Two hospice nurses describe cases of dying patients and tell caregivers how to make the dying experience

more peaceful. They relate how the dying often share death-bed visions and glimpses of the spirit dimension.

Cox-Chapman, Mally. *The Case for Heaven: Near-Death Experiences as Evidence of the Afterlife*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.

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Grey, Margot. *Return From Death: An Exploration of the Near-Death Experience*. Boston, MA: Arkana, 1985.

Grey had an NDE when she was gravely ill. She later explored NDEs from British and American individuals for her dissertation. She concluded that the experience was essentially the same regardless of background and that it changed the individuals' lives for the better.

Guggenheim, Bill and Judy. *Hello From Heaven!* New York: Bantam, 1996.

The authors, who coined the term after-death communication, share ADCs from interviews they conducted. They categorize these ADCs and briefly discuss what we could learn from these experiences.

Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Life After Death*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1991.

A pioneering researcher and author on the subjects of death and dying, Dr. Kübler-Ross has written four essays in this book to capture her thinking about dying, what happens afterwards, and what we should do while here on earth.

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This pioneering book by psychiatrist Moody stimulated research and philosophical thought into the near-death experience, thus labeled first by Moody.

Morse, Melvin, with Paul Perry. *Closer to the Light: Learning from Children's Near-Death Experiences*. New York: Villard Books, 1990.

Morse, a pediatrician, discusses several NDEs related to him by his young patients and explains how they opened his mind to spirit experiences.

Ring, Kenneth. *Lessons From the Light: What We Can Learn from the Near-Death Experience.* New York: Plenum Press Insight Books, 1998.

Ring, a professor, discusses how NDEs change lives and perspectives. He points out that readers who apply these insights and lessons to their own lives will embark on a better path, more attuned to the Light beyond.

Stevenson, Ian. *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1987.

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Valarino, a researcher and author, conducted thoughtful interviews on NDEs with an impressive list

of philosophers, scientists, and doctors. These interviews add greatly to our understanding of the spirit dimension. Three of these interviews (with Monsignor Jean Vernette, Physicist Regis Dutheil, and Professor Louis-Marie Vincent) are used in this book.

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Wambach, a psychologist and researcher, regressed 750 people to before their births and reported on what the subjects said about the spirit dimension and their experiences before, during, or after birth.

About the Author

Dr. Pratibha A. Dabholkar, university professor, was inspired by personal circumstances to make a deep study of uplifting supernatural phenomena (such as NDEs, ADCs, and DBVs). She writes books and teaches classes on these subjects to inform and enlighten. See www.love-and-learning.info for more information on the author, her inspiration, and her work.

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