



The Spiritual Component in Wholistic Healing

By Daniel Benor, MD, IJHC Editor-in-Chief

Abstract

Many people in modern society believe that spirituality is no more than antiquated cultural/ religious/ magical beliefs; denial of death; coping mechanisms for unresolved grief; other forms of wishful thinking; or mental aberrations. Growing numbers and varieties of research studies confirming reports of spiritual experiences contradict these disbeliefs. Because spiritual aspects of wholistic healing are often dismissed in these ways, I briefly summarize some of this research here, in an expansion of part of my editorial for this issue of IJHC.

Key words: spirituality, wholistic healing, spirituality research

Out-of-Body Experiences (OBE)

The OBE is a relatively common experience. OBE reports have been found in 17 to 27% of populations surveyed in several countries (Hart 1954; Irwin 1980; Sheils, 1978). Ordinary people have been reporting for centuries that occasionally they are conscious of themselves outside their physical bodies. An Out-of-Body Experience (OBE) often occurs spontaneously during states of sleep (natural or due to anesthesia) or in crisis or trauma situations. People typically feel themselves floating in the air above or standing by their beds. They might initially think that they are dreaming until they observe their physical bodies, still in bed, peacefully asleep. They might experience themselves as having ghost-like astral bodies or might feel themselves to be a ball of light or a totally disembodied point of consciousness.

Supporting the possibility that the OBE is more than a dream or imaginary experience are reports of OBEs from the blind (Kenneth Ring and Sharon Cooper, 1997). Laboratory studies confirm the accuracy of observations during OBEs, which are sometimes also called *remote viewing* or *traveling clairvoyance* (Jahn & Dunn, 1987). The US military studied remote viewing, in which a support person sits by the subjects and guides them in their psychic explorations of distant locations. This was explored as a spying technique for a while but reportedly was abandoned for reasons that are not clear (McMonaegle, 1993).

Near-Death Experiences (NDE)

In a composite picture of the Near-Death Experience, people typically feel they are moving out of their bodies in spirit form, passing through a long tunnel towards a bright light at the end. They may hear strange and beautiful music; may meet angels or other spirit-like beings who welcome them warmly; and may see or in other ways sense the presence of relatives who had died earlier and speak with them. There is a tremendous sense of well-being and calmness; of knowing and understanding about

one's own life and relationships, as well as about the meaning of existence in general. These experiences peak in an encounter with a blinding white or golden light that appears to embody an all-knowing, non-judgmental, all-accepting, all-loving being. Many experience an instantaneous but complete review of all the events in their lifetime, under the guidance of the Being of Light. The review is totally accepting and non-judgmental on the part of this Being, but people may feel regrets and criticisms of themselves over errors or poor choices around things they did or did not do.

There are striking anecdotal reports from credible witnesses who have detailed spiritual experiences after physical death, following their return to life (Alexander, 2012; Bailey & Yates, 1996; Taylor, 2009). These reports are common in cultures around the world, and there is a surprising uniformity to NDEs in reports from around the world. Scientists have also researched experiences of people who came close to death, or were actually declared dead (on the basis of total lack of responsiveness and flat EEGs) but returned to life.

Pre-Death Experiences

Seeing visions and hearing voices are common in many people who are approaching their death. Most commonly, they report seeing deceased relatives or may see angels who have come to welcome them back to the world of spirits. These visions may appear as solid and sound and as real as ordinary perceptions, or may have qualities that immediately distinguish them as visionary – such as a mistiness or inner sources to the perception. These experiences often include a unique white light or a Being of Light. The inner experiences feel absolutely real, often even more real than everyday experiences. Pre-death dreams and visions have a quality of uniqueness that clearly distinguishes them from ordinary experiences. The visions and dreams convey information that is coherent, useful, and relevant to others in addition to the one perceiving them. Relatives, friends and medical personnel who witness these pre-death experiences often find them very real and deeply moving.

Melvin Morse, MD, is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Washington who has researched Near-Death and Pre-Death Experiences for many years. Morse (1994) presents excellent discussions on the very positive effects of these experiences, with a treasure trove of examples from people he treated and people who reported NDEs after reading his books. The pre-death experiences often ease the processes of parting between those who are dying and those still alive. They soften the pains of bereavement. Most importantly, they open people to spiritual awarenesses. People approaching their death, along with those close to them, find peace in the reassurances these pre-death experiences offer, strongly suggesting that death is a transition rather than an end to existence. Death of a child or other person who is particularly dear to us may be shifted from being a complete tragedy towards also being a spiritual awakening.

Reincarnation

Eastern religions, traditional cultures and healers around the world maintain that the spirit of man survives to an afterlife and returns to live again. Many ordinary people (Stevenson, 1974), particularly children (Stevenson, 1987) spontaneously open to memories of previous lives. Others connect with these memories in the course of psychotherapies of various sorts.

Though Western society has generally been skeptical about reincarnation, many well-known personalities have shared this belief, including Beethoven, Emily Dickinson, Henry Ford, Benjamin Franklin, J. W. von Goethe, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Harry Houdini, Aldous Huxley, Jack London, Thomas Moore, Mark Twain, and many more.

There are several lines of evidence strongly suggesting that reincarnation may, in fact, occur. A variety of approaches may bring forth memories of alleged previous lifetimes. Studies with hypnosis and a range of other psychotherapies report that immediate symptom relief for physical and psychological problems may be obtained when some patients relive experiences and/or release

emotions from traumas they report they experienced in previous lifetimes (Weiss, 1994;1995;1996). These reports of cures from traumas closely parallel the common reports of people who experience traumas in their current life and find relief from addressing their memories of their present-life traumas through psychotherapy, Energy Psychology and other such therapies.

Some of the most dramatic evidence comes from individual cases, particularly young children, in which clear memories of apparent previous lives are reported spontaneously. In a few exceptional instances there is even recall of languages unlearned in the current life, with ability to converse in those languages.

Apparitions

Spontaneous sightings of apparitions (ghosts; spirits) are common. Usually these are unplanned, unpredictable occurrences. Apparitions typically have an ethereal, filmy, partly transparent appearance, although they may in some instances seem as solid as living beings.

In most instances, apparitions appear to be (by clothing styles, information conveyed in words and use of language, etc.) the spirits of people who died previous to the spirit encounter. Apparitions of the living may occur, especially around times of danger, crisis or death. It is not uncommon around the time of an accident that someone closely related to the person in danger would see an apparition of that person, occasionally perceiving the specific danger as well, with no normal means of communication that could have conveyed the perceived information. Apparitions of dying people may appear to their dear ones around the time of their death, often when the dying person was many miles away, announcing their departure and saying farewell – either explicitly or tacitly.

The most common occurrence of apparitions by far are bereavement apparitions, with 2 out of 3 people who have lost someone close to them reporting having seen, heard or intuitively sensed the presence of the departed (Vargas, et al.,1989). In many such cases, very meaningful information is imparted by the deceased. In most cases the message that life continues after death, and that family and close friends await the living when they will come to the end of their life offers the greatest comfort.

Not surprisingly, very few people will mention they have seen a bereavement apparition because they themselves worry they may be wishful thinking or crazy, and are worried others will think they are losing it due to their grief, or perhaps even psychotic.

In cultures that have unbroken traditions of spirit awareness, the living may continue relationships with the spirits of those they knew in life who have left physical existence.

Careseekers can be introduced to spirit helpers who can offer advice, support and healing. In general, afterlife perspectives and awarenesses may considerably broaden the possibilities and options open to careseekers. A succinct few words of caution here, however, from a Native American who suggested that afterlife advisors may in some cases need to be listened to with a grain of salt: “Dead no make smart.”

Mediumistic (channeled) experiences

Mediums or *channels* are people who report they can communicate with the spirit worlds. Mediums may receive spirit communications telepathically. Sometimes the medium visualizes the spirit and can describe physical details, such as stature, color of hair and eyes and other physical details that are verifiable by the sitter as having been characteristic of the channeled person prior to their passing from the physical world. In some cases the channeled words may be spoken in tones of voice and styles of speech very similar to those of the deceased. Spirits have been credited with passing vital

messages through mediums to relatives and friends when such information was available to no one but the deceased (Klimo, 1991).

Gary Schwartz (2002) reports highly significant accuracy with careful content analysis of readings by five prominent mediums. The statistical probabilities that these numerous, verified details challenged by mediums could have occurred by chance are less than one in two and a half billion. I have found no other systematic assessments of mediumistic readings.

Quantum physics converges with mystical and spiritual experiences

Quantum physics, a major modern advance over conventional, Newtonian physics, teaches us that matter and energies are two aspects of the same thing. Whether we perceive a thing as matter or as energy simply depends upon how we examine it (Capra, 1975). The body is no different from any other piece of matter. Conventional medicine is still practicing in the limited and limiting Newtonian model, which does not take into account the biological energy aspects of careseekers.

Applied intuitive awarenesses: Many forms of healing

Many complementary/ alternative therapists sense the biological energies (bioenergies) in and around a person's body. They have come to understand that these bioenergies function as templates for the physical body. The bioenergies also reflect and interact with people's emotions, mind, relationships and spirit.

Practitioners of Therapeutic Touch, Healing Touch, Reiki, Qigong, craniosacral therapy, and other bioenergy healing modalities access these bioenergies for assessments of careseekers' states of being and alter the bioenergies to clear illnesses and promote healing. Hundreds of studies of healing have been published over the past 50 years (Benor, 2002; 2008; Council for Healing, Web link; Jonas & Jonas). Within the group of rigorous studies, close to three quarters demonstrate significant healing effects on humans, animals, plants, cells in laboratory culture, enzymes and more (Benor, 2002; 2008).

Many other forms of complementary/ alternative therapies involve bioenergy awarenesses, including acupuncture, shiatsu, applied kinesiology, polarity therapy, homeopathy and more.

Angels

Angelic beings have been reported for thousands of years. People who are very sensitive and open to communication with other realities may perceive hierarchies of nature spirits and angels. One of the best descriptions of angels comes from Dora van Gelder (1978). She described a wonderful panoply of these entities, whom she saw and interacted with from childhood – just as she would interact with a live person. She explained that her perceptions were not through her outer senses but through psychic awarenesses, for these creatures are not directly of the physical world, though they are intimately connected with it and interact with it. Van Gelder believed these are an evolutionary line of life forms existing in realms of more subtle substance than the physical world. Their life task is to support all aspects of nature in the physical world. There are very simple spirits who support rocks and minerals. More complex fairies attend to subtle energy aspects of the air and of bodies of water. There are also spirits of individual plants; of classes of plants; of particular geographic features (such as mountains and valleys); of geographic regions; of processes of nature (such as rain, wind and storms); and more.

Angels may intervene in times of crisis to prevent accidents or to help people in distress. In the intervention reports, many 'angels' are described as looking like normal people who appear out of nowhere, give their assistance, and then disappear again into nowhere. They are experienced as being wise beyond human comprehension and infinitely compassionate and loving, but at the same time dispassionately free of emotions of their own. They may reassure people simply by their

presence, or may intervene with information, advice, or even with a touch or with substantial physical assistance.

Pierre Jovanovic (1995), a French reporter, methodically gathered and published one of the most impressive series of encounters with angels around the world. These include meetings at times of great danger; during Near-Death Experiences; in states of religious practice (very prominently in the lives of saints); during serious illnesses; and many more. Skeptics will suggest that unconscious awareness of ordinary information, wishful thinking, misdiagnoses of medical problems that were alleged to have been cured, and other ordinary reasons can explain the reported angelic interventions, and that attributing them to angels is superstitious nonsense or religious misinterpretation. Another excellent collection of reports of angelic encounters is presented by Malcolm Godwin (1993).

Questions will always remain in the minds of researchers and rightly so. By continuing to ask questions we continue to learn ever more about our world. In general, many apparitions are reported to provide help to living people, with the assumption that they must have been angels. Once one accepts the existence of apparitions that appear to be surviving spirits of people who have passed on, or of living persons, any assumption that such apparitions are angels must be questioned. What may distinguish between the two possibilities is the fact that encounters with angels are usually profoundly transformative. In addition, angels are reported to provide help with physical problems, such as getting a car out of a ditch, where apparitions are unable to intervene in such ways.

Bernie Siegel, MD, reports an endearing interchange with his own guardian angel. He asked, "Is it OK if I give you a special name that will help me remember to call upon you immediately in time of danger or distress?" His angel readily agreed this was a good idea. Bernie continued, "From now on, your name will be *Oh Shit!*"

Requesting help from one's angels and watching for their interventions can confirm one's belief in angelic support in our lives. While it may seem trivial to ask for angelic help in minor matters, it has become common practice for many people to ask their road angel to help them find a parking space where and when they need it. This has been instructive to me, personally. When I ask for this help, my experience is that it is often provided. I have also learned to be very specific in my requests for angelic help, following one experience of this sort. The parking space I requested was available as I arrived at my destination, but someone else was pulling into it. This taught me to be more careful and clear in these requests. I have also found that I can put in a "standing request" for a clear entry lane on controlled access highways. I almost always find there is a broad, clear space between myself and the approaching cars so that I can drive directly onto the road without pause or danger.

In summary:

Spiritual awarenesses are reported in virtually every culture around the world. Anecdotal reports from diverse sources, across recorded history, are broadly consistent with each other. Research evidence exploring various spiritual phenomena are also broadly consistent. This suggests that spiritual awarenesses have a basis in realities that extend beyond our physical world.

Helping careseekers to understand that they can address their own bodies either as matter or as energy may open many new awarenesses and options for them. Relieving careseekers of their fears of death can be enormously empowering, providing expectations supported in research that consciousness continues after physical death.

Spiritual awarenesses can be of enormous help to careseekers in their self-healing. Even if caregivers do not accept that spiritual experiences have any objective reality, caregivers can be

supportive to careseekers in accepting that their spiritual experiences were meaningful and helpful to them.

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