

Throughout history humans have recorded in tales and accounts visions by those near death, and patients who are in and out of consciousness and about to take their last breath are witnessed by physicians and nurses to change noticeably. For a moment, a joyful expression as well as a peaceful state and painless movement are recalled. In a flash, that moment is gone, and the patient continues into coma or in his/her previous state of being. This phenomenon has been told time and again by doctors, nurses and others beside those near-death. It generated enough inquiry for the first scientific analysis on the subject in 1926 by physics professor Sir William Barrett. Barrett wrote in his book *Death Bed Visions* regarding the occurrences and what separates them from others:

"It is well known that there are many remarkable instances where a dying person, shortly before his or her transition from the earth, appears to see and recognize some deceased relatives or friends. We must, however, remember the fact that [hallucinations] of the dying are not very infrequent. Nevertheless, there are instances where the dying person was *unaware* (emphasis in original) of the previous death of the spirit form he sees, and is therefore astonished to find in the vision of his or her deceased relative one whom the percipient believes to be still on earth."³⁰

Barrett's work provided a starting point from which to continue serious case studies of DBVs. Interest in the phenomena increased, and in 1961 Dr. Karlis Osis released his book *Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses*, a case study consisting of testimony from hundreds of nurses and doctors witnessing some 35,000 near death patients. Testimony also indicated a pattern of deceased family members and loved ones, beings of light, and experiences of a calm and painless state. Dr. Osis released another book in 1971 from a 14-year study on death bed visions called *At the Hour of Death* with a co-author. According to an interview he gave to Dr. John White, "The experiences of the dying are basically the same, regardless of culture, education, sex or belief system, and their experiences cluster around something that makes sense in terms of survival after death, and a social structure to that afterlife." Of his analysis concerning the patients, he cited mood elevation without any "medication, sedation, lack of oxygen to the brain, or the nature of the illness", and claimed the patients' passing as peaceful, "a strange contrast to the usual gloom and misery commonly expected before expiration."³¹

Describing the typical experience of a DBV, Dr. Osis explains in more detail what one might see in such an experience:

“These visions were of two kinds; one was where they would see a person or a religious apparition – a hallucination that no one else could see. An invisible visitor would come into the hospital and the patient would talk with it. Usually it was a close relative or friend, but it might also be a religious figure such as Jesus or Krishna...The other kind of visionary experience was where the patient saw surroundings as if it were another place, another reality. You could call these scenes non-human nature. In almost every case, whether it was a figure or a landscape, the visions were of a positive sort. The hell-and-brimstone sort of place simply didn’t appear.”³²

Since these initial books covering DBV, many more have been released with similar experiences reported to hundreds of doctors and nurses.

Near death experiences appear universal. According to Dr. Raymond Moody those who are near death sometimes experience the same phenomena as others who are near death, giving further credence that the phenomena is not due to illusion presented by a medically dying brain. As far as any religious influence in a death bed vision, Douglas Fox notes in *New Scientist*, “The identity of the person seems to depend on your religion. Christians, for example, often meet Jesus or a dead relative while Hindus may see Yamraj, god of the dead.”³³ Other near-death experience case studies corroborate these differing accounts taking place. This indicates one’s perception of their respective religion. Since religion promotes hope and comfort, it would make sense that the individual would experience something akin to his or her religious beliefs. Another indication of the universality of DBVs is the common experiences of a euphoric state, but a culturally different perception of the experience. A team of Australian researchers report, for example, that Chinese near death experiences are dominated by feelings of bodily estrangement without a sense of peace, and that the Japanese see caves rather than tunnels.³⁴

We have a couple of problems here with regard to religious contentions and the metaphysical. Concerning religious exclusivism, the problem is that people of religious faith are seeing religious figures of their own religion. The fact that an Indian woman will in most cases see a Hindu entity contradicts Christian doctrines prohibiting false idol worship. Also, if, assuming Muhammed does appear to Muslims at near death and if it is really supposed to be Jesus, why would Jesus Christ appear to the dying as Muhammad? Would the individual even recognize the entity? Another problem with religious metaphysical contention here is the Bible or Talmud or Koran not once indicating that humans often see deceased-only relatives

and loved ones during near death visions. This seems like a very important notion left out from scripture which included endless repetitions of the local and trivial.

Details are included in the books of religious proponents who have experienced visions. The author will contend right off the bat that the theme is of a personal nature, rather than a scientific one, and that he is proud of it. With DBV scientific literature, however, rather than relying on one's own notion of what happened in a personal experience, the DBV appears to deal with what is being presented to someone, regardless of personal belief. To give an example of a near death vision, British neuro-psychiatrist Peter Fenwick's *Truth in The Light* includes testimony that he took from a witness concerning one patient's experience of a such an DVB. It involves the personal, but in a more surreal if not dazzling form, one that the Biblical scriptures cannot compare to in detail of wonder and *strangeness*. In it the witness describes the remaining seconds of his brother's life before passing away beside him.

“My brother was in hospital dying from emphysema. His breathing was very laboured, when all of a sudden he stopped and his breathing suddenly appeared normal. He looked at about 45 degrees upwards and smiled broadly, as if at something or someone: he turned to me and died suddenly in my arms. I am positive to this day that he wanted to tell me what he had seen. Those few seconds before he died will live with me for ever, it was so powerful.”³⁵

This personal testimony from a witness to the death of a loved one describes a deeper account, one that can be verified to validate the occurrence behind the claim. This is a process which has come to countless people for ages, and simply does not exist in the Bible. This is odd considering how many other featurettes are included in religious metaphysical claims. It isn't as if the concept were not simple enough to interpret.

Before modern times we could only imagine what the real after-life was like. The question of one has been debated, particularly concerning religion, and until studies conducted on the subject humans could only guess. Now we have a reference point for such metaphysical occurrences. They are documented, universal, and analyzed by doctors and scientists. The claims in DBVs also contradict religious claims concerning near death visions, not to mention that the Bible doesn't even mention DBVs, at least not in the literal sense. We can make a metaphorical claim that some DBVs are in the Bible, but let's be realistic, there is nothing whatsoever in the Bible

that goes on in DBVs. The authors of what would later be the books of the Bible must have missed deceased only relatives appearing us.

As expected with the discovery of this phenomena, so come the religious claims. Books with titles such as Mary Neals's *To Heaven and Back: A Doctor's Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again* by the Christian book distributor Waterbrook Press, *Heaven Is for Real: A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back*, told by a man named Todd Burpo and released by Christian book distributor Thomas Nelson, and Pastor Don Piper's book *90 Minutes in Heaven*, published by the Christian book distributor Revell are all examples of Christian authors' most recent attempt at hitching a ride on to modern scientific discovery. The reason author Mark Galli in *Christianity Today* uses the phrase "near Heaven experience" throughout the article in describing the event rather than rather than near death experience? The rise of near death books written by orthodox Christians. With this type of reasoning, should it matter that a word used to demean women is used in hip hop culture, a culture of the youth, and therefor is validated because of so much use of that word in popular culture? It most likely won't matter that the distributor of *Heaven Is for Real* which sold 8 million copies pulled the book after the person in the book admitted to lying about the whole thing, because theologians will likely claim that the "essence" of the meaning is what is important, and the show will go on. In a way, it doesn't even matter that the author Todd Burpo didn't know that a child was lying to him, not once, but for an entire book, because the reality is that Burpo wouldn't have been able to disprove it if he did know the boy was lying.