After Death Communication
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Quotations on the Subject

“Never was there a time when I was not, . . . nor will there be a time when we shall cease to be. . . . As a man casts off his worn-out clothes and takes on other new ones, so does the embodied soul cast off his worn-out bodies and enters others new.” – The Bhagavad Gita

“I died a mineral and became a plant. I died a plant and rose an animal. I died an animal and I was a man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying.” – Rumi

“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” – Teilhard de Chardin

“When the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.” – Kahlil Gibran

“To fear death, my friends, is only to think ourselves wise, without being wise: for it is to think that we know what we do not know. For anything that men can tell, death may be the greatest good that can happen to them; but they fear it as if they knew quite well that it was the greatest of evils. And what is this but that shameful ignorance of thinking that we know what we do not know?” – Socrates

“Extensive clinical and experimental research and anthropological observations have provided further support for the hypothesis that to some degree we only see what our culture tells us we can see, only know what our society tells us we can know.” – Willis Harman & Howard Rheingold

“We have no evidence whatsoever that the soul perishes with the body.” – Mahatma Gandhi

“God knows the depths of our heartache and loneliness, how much we long to be reassured that our loved ones are in his care. As we remain open to his will and timing. He may send comfort just when we most need it, from those who live on the other side of the veil, in the Eternal Light.” – Joan Wester Anderson

“After all, it is no more surprising to be born twice than it is to be born once.” – Voltaire

“Miracles do not happen in contradiction to nature, but only in contradiction to that which is known to us in nature.” – Saint Augustine
“Some of the most important modern studies indicate that people do have experiences from outside the space-time world and that these do not represent regression or mental deterioration.” – Morton Kelsey

“Contacting departed loved ones is not only a deep-seated human desire, but . . . also a fundamental part of the grieving process.” – Raymond Moody

“Death ends a life, not a relationship.” – Jack Lemmon

“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.” – Antoine de Saint-Exupery

“In spite of its reputation as the most powerful arbiter of reality, it is nowhere written down that science is the only or the best gateway to what is real. We invented the scientific method, it did not descend from on high.” – Larry Dossey

“The truth is sort of mysterious and sometimes has nothing to do with facts.” – Oliver Sacks

“The secret of understanding dreams is to recognize that there is something within us which is connected to a greater store of wisdom and perception that we normally think of ourselves as having. If we are able, through whatever means, to access this ‘something’ we will be able to move deeply into areas of understanding which otherwise might seem impossible.” – Alexander Lukeman

“The dream is the small hidden door in the deepest and the most intimate sanctum of the soul.” – Carl Gustav Jung

“Six weeks after his death, my father appeared to me in a dream. . . . It was an unforgettable experience, and it forced me for the first time to think about life after death.” – Carl Gustav Jung

“Once upon a time, Chuang Chou dreamed that he was a butterfly, a butterfly fluttering about, enjoying itself. It did not know that it was Chuang Chou. Suddenly he awoke with a start and he was Chuang Chou again. But he did not know whether he was Chuang Chou who had dreamed that he was a butterfly, or whether he was a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou.” – Chuang Chou [or maybe a butterfly]
Our Objectives

1. Discuss how people who have died continually communicate to us through our memories of them and through their ongoing influence upon us.
2. Discuss how we often have mystical, unexplainable feelings of the presence of deceased people, how normal/common that is, and how those feelings can help us heal in the midst of our grief.
3. Explain how dreams can be used as a tool for ongoing communication with the deceased as well as a tool for healing.
4. Explain various therapeutic tools to use in our grieving to give us a sense of pleasure and peace in understanding that ongoing presence of the dead amongst us.

The Phenomenon of Anemnesis

Some of My Experiences of Communication with the Deceased

Common Categories of Experiences with the Dead

From my own personal experiences, experiences others have shared with me, and experiences I have read about, I have come up with the following categories of ways people have been aware of receiving some kind of contact with/from the deceased.

VISUAL EXPERIENCES: Sometimes the deceased can be seen in a place they commonly inhabited while living: in a particular room, standing in a familiar place, sitting in their typical chair, walking in an area they used to walk.
AUDITORY EXPERIENCES: The voice of the deceased can sometimes be heard; sometimes a conversation can even occur between the living and the dead. Messages of encouragement are common. Comfort can be conveyed. Advice and warnings can be given.

OLFACTORY EXPERIENCES: The deceased cologne or perfume might be detected. Additional familiar aromas might be sensed: a food item they used to prepare, a pipe tobacco they use to smoke, their unique body smell.

TACTILE EXPERIENCES: The feeling of being touched by the deceased: an embrace, the holding of a hand, a hand on a shoulder.

EXTRA-SENSORY EXPERIENCES: Intuitive experiences: indefinable feelings of the deceased presence, unexplainable serendipitous or synchronistic experiences, psychic connections.

EXPERIENCES CONVEYED THROUGH A CHILD’S CONSCIOUSNESS: Children are often not conditioned to only accept the usual. “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities; in the expert’s mind there are few.” “God has hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to babes.”

EXPERIENCES CONVEYED THROUGH NON-HUMAN BEINGS: The deceased are often experienced through animals, birds and even insects. The appearances of these beings in unusual places and at unusual times are a common phenomenon.

EXPERIENCES CONVEYED THROUGH DREAMS: Dreams of the deceased are frequently quite vivid, often having a quality that makes them different from normal dreams. They might even take the form of a lucid dream.

EXPERIENCES CONVEYED THROUGH SIGNS AND SYMBOLS: The deceased can be perceived as communicating through a variety of objects: songs, pennies, clocks, flowers, jewelry, mementos, sunrises and sunsets, rain, rainbows.

How to Open Ourselves Up to More Experiences with the Dead

(A.) JOINING A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCES LIKE THESE: Many grief groups are open to the sharing of after death communication experiences: some Compassionate Friends groups, some hospice grief groups, parapsychology groups, Internet focus groups. You could contact a member of one of these groups to see if their group might be open to the sharing of these kinds of experiences. It often helps to surround oneself with people who are familiar with these experiences, and not always surround oneself with doubters and naysayers.
(B.) ENHANCING THE DREAM EXPERIENCE: SHAPING OUR DREAMS

Improving Dream Recall

1. Your thoughts/attitudes going into sleep are extremely important: talk yourself into remembering your dreams.
2. Place a notepad and pen/pencil close to your bed.
3. Awake naturally.
4. Close your eyes (preferably don’t open them at all), lie still, and let the dream images return to your consciousness.
5. After recalling what you can in one body position, gently move to another sleep position for more content, and then gently move to another.
6. Record your dream as soon as it comes to you: immediately, a couple hours later, or a couple days later.
7. Share the dream with a friend (or verbalize it to yourself in front of a mirror): this will further help you remember it.

“As you give dreams an important role in your life, and time to attend to them, they will come more easily, more often, and be of more value to you.” – Patricia Garfield, Creative Dreaming, p. 221.

Common Dream Themes of Dead Loved Ones

1. “I'M SUFFERING” DREAMS: The deceased is perceived as once again experiencing the pain and suffering associated with his/her death – sometimes exaggerated or extremely distorted. These dreams can actually help in processing Worden’s Task I.

2. “I'M O.K.” DREAMS: The deceased can often be perceived as younger and healthier, even radiant. The deceased reassures dreamer that there is no need to worry. Dreamer awakes feeling uplifted – perhaps convinced of eternal life.

3. “I'M NOT REALLY DEAD” DREAMS: Extremely common. The dreamer might be taken aback, even shocked, to see the loved one alive. Sorrow, confusion, anger and terror can even result after we awake and realize it was a dream. These dreams can be therapeutic, forcing us to go beyond Kubler-Ross’s stage of denial.

4. “GOODBYE” DREAMS: The deceased communicates the message “It’s now time for me to leave.” The goodbye message can be verbal or through gesture or some kind of intuitive communication.

6. “HI! HOW ARE YOU!” DREAMS: The dream involves what could be described as a sort of casual interaction between the dreamer and the deceased: a simple check in. These types of dreams are common after the intense period of mourning has passed.

Sample Affirmations for Dream Encounters with Loved Ones

1. “Tonight I will dream of my departed loved one. I will let him/her determine the agenda of our meeting.”
2. “Tonight I will have a dream meeting with _________. We will address unfinished business: mine towards him/her and hers/his towards me.”
3. “Tonight ________ will introduce me to all the people he/she has met since he/she died.”
4. “Tonight ________ and I are going to fly together, hand in hand, going to places where we have previously had good times together.”

Coping with “Angry Ghost” Dreams
Patricia Garfield, The Dream Messenger, p. 95

1. Confront and conquer by force. When faced with a menacing dream figure, confront it. If it continues to threaten you, or physically attacks, counterattack it, fighting by yourself or getting help. In apparent life-or-death situations, kill the dream figure. If destruction proves necessary, allow the spirit of the conquered figure to continue to exist in a helpful form. When you have successfully proved to yourself that it is possible to triumph over dream enemies, move on to the next step.

2. Confront with confidence. Turn around, face the menacing dream figure, gaze directly into its eyes, and challenge it. Ask it “Who are you?” “What do you want?” “Why are you doing this?” Be willing to listen to reasonable answers and discuss them.

3. Confront with friendliness. Question the hostile dream figure in a friendly manner, while continuing to maintain eye contact.

4. Offer reconciliation. Make a bargain with the threatening figure. Befriend it. Offer to change behaviors if appropriate.

5. Request help. Ask the dream figure to give you a gift, solve a problem, guide your future, or grant any other request you wish to make.

6. Enter the dream figure’s body. Can you understand it better from this perspective?

7. Enjoy the dream figure. Interact with it in positive, pliable ways – swim with it, fly with it; be happy with it. If reconciliation and dialogue have been fruitless, separate yourself from this dream figure, at least for the time being.

8. Bless the dream figure. Surround it with golden light. Open your heart to it. Let it merge with you. Love it despite all.

9. Seek out any hostile dream figures or situations. When you feel confident of your ability to cope with dream dangers, then deliberately seek out and find them. Take
this step only after considerable success in dealing with the hostile figures that spontaneously arise in dreams. Move from the safe, protected spaces of your dream to the dangerous ones; go from the light into the dark, from high places to low places, from the present into the past. Enter the eye of the storm, go into the tidal wave, face the worst. You may want to carry with you special protective devices and be accompanied by a helper.

(C.) CREATE YOUR OWN RITUALS OF REMEMBRANCE AND COMMUNICATION:

MEMORY BOOK

A person could make a “memory book” to remember and honor the deceased. This memory book is designed to be an ongoing, ever-expanding memorial.

1. The cover of the book could be made from some special material (a former article of clothing, a favorite pattern of the person who has died).

2. The book could hold several items:

   A. Birth certificate.
   B. Various photographs.
   C. Menus from favorite restaurants.
   D. Reminders of vacations taken.
   E. Person’s favorite passages from literature or scripture.
   F. Newspaper announcements (school events, marriage, retirement, etc.).
   G. Letters sent and received.
   H. Funeral service program.
   I. Sympathy cards.

3. If an entire family is doing the project, each family member could be responsible for gathering materials from a particular time in the deceased person’s life or from a particular role that person had (father, husband, businessman, golfer, etc.).

4. At first every other page could be blank. The blank pages would be used in the future to make comments, thoughts, feelings, additional remembrances.)

MEMORY QUILT
AN ALTAR OF/TO/FOR THE DECEASED

Many cultures encourage having altars dedicated to lost loved ones. The altar would be on top of a small table exclusively used for that purpose. On the altar there can be several items. Some examples:

A. A favorite picture of your loved one
B. A candle that is often burning
C. A fresh flower
D. A ring or other jewelry owned by your loved one
E. An important memento reminding you of the person
F. The person’s obituary

MEMORY COLLAGE

MEMORY JAR

A grieving person might want to set aside a memory jar to help in the grieving process.

1. A large jar is placed in a convenient place.

2. Whenever the survivor has a memory of the person who died, he/she writes that memory on a piece of paper and places it in the jar.

3. The survivor then periodically takes some time (perhaps the first day of each month) to sit down with the jar and review the memories that had been placed in the jar since the last review.
YOUR LOVED ONE’S IMAGINED ETHICAL WILL

Within the Jewish tradition, a person nearing death will not only write a will decreeing what should be done with his/her physical properties and financial resources, but this person will also write an “ethical will”. The ethical will states what this person has learned from life (it’s important lessons) and what this person wishes to advise for his/her survivors regarding guidelines for future living.

This activity would involve the survivor writing what he/she imagines their loved one would write in an ethical will. Write a document (as if being written by your departed love one) to you, declaring what your loved one has learned from life and what guidelines your loved one wants you to follow regarding your own life. Sign this ethical will as your loved one would sign it.

AN EMPTY CHAIR DIALOGUE

FORGIVING YOURSELF

FORGIVING YOUR LOVED ONE
A LETTER TO FINISH THE UNFINISHED

After a griever has extensively examined his/her grief with a counselor or friend, examining the negative and the positive aspects of the relationship with the loved one, reviewing the history of the relationship (all the key events and gamut of feelings), exploring the various implications of the loved one’s death, he/she could be encouraged to write a letter to this person to give some finish to all that is unfinished. These would be the steps the griever would take:

1. Set aside at least an hour in a place where you will not be disturbed.

2. Begin the letter in the typical format addressing this person by the name or title that best represents how you remember him/her. [Examples: “Dear Mom,” “Dear Tommy,” “My Dearest Sweetheart,” “To My Best Friend.”]

3. Follow the addressing with a sentence similar to this: “I have been examining our relationship lately and I have discovered that there are several things I need to say.”

4. After the opening sentence, write about all the things for which you feel you need to apologize, the things you did and said for which you are feeling some regret. Have 2-5 sentences in this section.

5. After apologizing, write 2-5 sentences covering those things for which you want to offer forgiveness, the things your loved one did or said that made you sad or angry.

6. After offering forgiveness, write 2-5 sentences covering some of the positive feelings you had towards this person, feelings that you could have expressed more often during this person’s life. Cover the various things you appreciated, admired, and loved about this person.

7. End the letter in a way that somehow summarizes the letter’s contents, being sure to use the word “goodbye” somewhere in that closing.

Just writing this letter can be quite therapeutic. Its benefits can sometimes be enhanced by reading it to an empty chair, imagining your loved one in the chair. It could be posted in a place where you would see it often. You could read it before a mirror. You could put it in a photograph album that has pictures of your loved one.
A SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE

The usual funeral service occurs within a week of the death, a time when most grievers are still somewhat in a state of numbness and confusion. It might help to have an additional service six or twelve months (or three or five years) after the funeral service, a service that can receive adequate planning, free of that numbness and confusion.

1. Choose a place: a church, a place frequented by the deceased, or one’s home.
2. Choose an officiant: a minister, a good friend of the deceased, or a family member.
3. Choose attendees: selected family members, selected friends, selected business and community associates.
4. Choose a format: especially selected readings, speakers, music, food and drinks.
5. Send out invitations clearly indicating the purpose and design of the service.

A DEATH ANNIVERSARY PRACTICE

A PRACTICE CONNECTED TO A SPECIAL MEAL (e.g. THANKSGIVING)

A PRACTICE CONNECTED TO A GIFT-GIVING HOLIDAY (e.g. CHRISTMAS)
(E.) ENHANCING THE DREAM EXPERIENCE: VIRTUAL DREAMS

A SAMPLE VIRTUAL DREAM

A. yourself  
B. a difficult journey  
C. a mystical, distant land  
D. a reunion with a loved one you have lost  
E. a message from that loved one  
F. a talking mirror

(F.) MEMORIES

Conclusion

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