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Mysticism, Illness, Miracles and Death

by Jon Mundy Ph.D.

All things are lessons, God would have me learn.
A Course in Miracles

We have seen that, while it would be nice to just “know” the truth, to just “see” the truth and “be” the truth and while that’s possible, most often we have to “learn” the truth through experience. Why is someone born blind? Why does one body seem to have some form of imperfection while another seems nearly perfect? Sometimes, even when we exercise, eat right, and lead a healthy life style, our health can change suddenly as from the outside, for no clear reason.

The plan for July and August of 2007 was to vacation with my family, visit my extended family and friends, and to give several lectures and workshops. That’s not what happened. Nearly three weeks were spent in the hospital and the remainder recuperating at home.

Sir Alistair Hardy lists illness as the sixth major cause of mystical experiences. Several of our well known mystics had visions which were prefaced by or with illness. Julian of Norwich (1342-1413) for example, suffering from a severe illness and thinking she was about to die, had a series of visions which were the sources of her major work *Sixteen Revelations of the Divine*.

I’ve had five NDE’s (Near Death Experiences). A friend once joked that perhaps I had nine lives. Each of these experiences also included a *revelation* or *vision*. They also contained some *hallucinations* which I now realize had very little to do with revelation. Each “vision” has enabled me to go deeper into understanding the nature of the mystical experience and this mystery we call life. The first vision happened at the age of nine when I had my tonsils removed. It was not too profound. I simply found myself being “hurled” though space. Comets and stars whirled past me as I jettison by them or, so it seemed.

I’ve already told you about the second experience in 1976. This was clearly the most profound. I deliberately stepped into this experience not knowing it would be as profound as it was. I literally did not think I could come back and was very surprised when I did. It became clear to me that there is no time, that we are not bodies; there is no world, life does not begin at birth or end at death. I saw clearly that there is no duality no opposite – only One Love, One God, only One Eternal Truth. The words Love or God or Life or Truth or Eternity are synonyms and they are the only Reality.

Twenty-two years later, there was a third experience in 1998, when I had a quadruple bypass at Columbian Presbyterian in New York City, where Helen Schucman received much of *A Course in Miracles*. The surgeon, Dr. Memet Oz, who is the now famous Dr. Oz and often seen on Oprah, is the monthly consultation to *Readers Digest Magazine* and is the author of several number one best sellers, the first being *YOU: The Owners Manuel*. (About taking care of our bodies.) I wasn’t afraid of this experience and did not think I would die. It was also the next to

the least profound experience, yet an important event. The vast majority of people who come out of bypass surgery report similar experiences, primarily a much deeper appreciation for all of life.

After this experience, came the wonder of looking at life and the joy of talking with my wife and taking walks in August. I spent some time every day observing the white Ladies Mantle, Black-eyed Susan's, the blue Bachelor Button, and the small white butterflies, all with bees buzzing busily moving about. Even though these bodies are temporary, being alive in the moment of Now can be a magnificent experience to be enjoyed to its fullest.

In 2001, there was a fourth NDE experience in connection with cancer and the removal of a tumor the size of a lemon along with 18 inches of colon followed by 30 weeks of chemo. This time I took a good look at death. What I discovered is that before the ultimate state of existence can happen there must not be a "me" wanting something to happen. Only by *letting go* or not "needing" to exist, is it possible to become aware of the whole of existence.

And then six years later, a fifth experience in 2007. The last Sunday in June, I led a workshop for "Peace on Cape Cod." I left the Cape late in the afternoon arriving home exhausted. The next morning I was covered with dozens of blackish, swollen and inflamed (probably mosquito) bites all over my arms.

I don't remember any of the next few days. This is what I am told. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday, I was extremely exhausted and complained of severe body aches and fever. On Friday morning, while standing in my office, my assistant Fran asked what I was doing, I said I was sleeping. She said, "Standing up?" Fran called my wife Dolores who asked me some more questions to which my answers again were nonsensical. An ambulance was called and we were off to the hospital emergency room. I began to have non stop seizures and was put on life support.

No one knew what was wrong. I remained unconscious for most of this time while my fever continued to rise to 106! You can't sustain a 106 temperature and survive too long. At this point a brain is fried; mine, however, was just temporarily scrambled. I lost 37 lbs in about the same number of days. Finally a national laboratory made a diagnosis. Three weeks later, after I came out of the experience, my neurologist, cardiologist and internist each told me privately that they had not expected me to live.

Hallucination and Visions

I've now had enough of these experiences to begin to distinguish between hallucinations and "visions" and I can understand how someone who is having a hallucination might think it was a vision. I was fascinated with the rawness or the closeness and intimacy of everything. I could also see how I was bringing my judgment on to everything.

At one point in the night, I awoke and held up my right hand looking at it with amazement as though I had never seen a hand before and thinking; "This is a hand. What an incredible thing a hand is." I was also wondering how I knew the name of this thing called a hand. This was a hallucination! Two nurses came in to take blood and insert some IV's. I was convinced that this was happening outdoors in the center of the little town of Washingtonville near where we live. This was a hallucination! The nurses were indeed there but it was not happening outside. My

wife was there a lot and I kept asking her to marry me. As we're already married -- this was a hallucination!

There were deeper elements. I was so sick I thought I was on the verge of death. I was, in fact, so sick that I would have liked to die, except it was unpleasant to think of what this would mean for my wife, daughter, friends, and other family members. I thought also that I had unfinished work to do, so I struggled to stay alive.

I saw once again the gigantic multicolored grid with zigzagging lines that I saw in 1976. This is impossible to describe in words because it involved another dimension. It is more than a grid, it is a holograph in which everything is connected. It is infinite, running in all directions.

This experience was longer than the others and I learned more perhaps because I'm older. For more than two weeks, I came briefly to this world, left and then returned again. It was clear that what we call *reality* in this world is not reality. There was another state I visited which was "dream-like" and I could, with time, see that this was not reality either but a world of my own making. Neither what we think of as the ordinary world is real nor is the world of our dreams. These are hallucinations! There were also moments of reality, of "vision" of "perfect love" often when people were present (nurses, doctors, family members, and friends) for whom I felt the deepest love. I knew they were trying to help me. How could I feel anything except love for them?

From the standpoint of the ego, death is the final witness to the reality of the body. If the body dies, it must have lived -- which means its creator, the ego, must be real. From the mystic point of view, there is only Life. God is Life. God is Love. These sentences are tautologies. They can be read from the left or the right and they still make sense. A little logic also tells us that, if God is Life and God is Love then Love is Life and Life is Love, so the more in Love with Life someone is the more they know of Life, and the more alive someone is the more they know of Love and thus of God.

People living deeply have no fear of death.
Anais Nin, *Diary*, 1967

Reincarnation

Knowing that life is not limited to a body makes it possible to let it all go if necessary. And when I was so sick, I didn't think I had any choice, I was going to have to let go and die. Looking closely at death, it was also clear to me that there is no reincarnation.

*In the ultimate sense, reincarnation is impossible.
There is no past or future,
and the idea of birth into a body has no meaning
either once or many times.
Reincarnation cannot, then, be true in any real sense.*
A Course in Miracles. Manual for Teachers. Section 24

Modern Cosmology

According to the cosmologists, there is something holding the visible universe together and it's not just gravity. Gravity works within our own and other planetary and galactic systems but it is not a sufficient force to explain why the Universe is not literally flying apart. *Something* is keeping everything together. The physical universe, what we call "atoms" makes up 4% of the

universe. Another 21% is made up of dark matter. Although *Dark Matter* is not observable, scientists know that galaxies, clusters of galaxies, and the universe as a whole contain far more matter than that which interacts with electromagnetic radiation and can therefore be seen.

The remaining 75% of the universe is made up of what cosmologists call *Dark Energy*. No one is quite sure what dark energy is. There is, however, some kind of force acting in opposition to gravity which holds everything together even though the Universe is expanding. Why don't we call this thing which has no form which has no dimension and cannot be measured – Mind? We might also call it Love, for like Mind, Love has no form, no dimension and it too cannot be measured. A mystic is someone who goes beyond physics and studies metaphysics. The question then is, how do things work on the level of mind?

Nothing matters except insofar as we, our minds, make something “matter” by bringing it into form physically or mentally. When distinctions created by our minds are taken to be real — especially the distinction between "subject" and "object," "I" and "other," "self" and "world," "we" and "they" — we lose sight of reality's wholeness and fall into an illusion of separation. This imagined separation is the cause of suffering.

The mystic strives for a higher vantage point, a realm wherein there is no separation, and time stops. From this perspective, there is no judgment of the world, and there are no problems. We may continue to act in the world but we need not “worry” about the world because we are driven by the instinct of spirit. The activity of Spirit is eternal; the activity of the ego is limited and destined to end in time. In so far as we find this world a confining place, we live in hell. When we are able to experience the unbounded vastness of Spirit, we find Heaven. We can then “reflect” Heaven here in our daily, ordinary lives.

*The mind is its own place, and it can make
a hell out of heaven or a heaven out of hell*
John Milton *Paradise Lost*

There are many states of being, none of which are physical. Love is real and Love does not have a form. Eternity does not have a form. God does not have a form. Truth does not have a form. All there is, is Life but Life does not need a form. The body is ephemeral. To say that life is eternal does not mean that we go from one body to another. That is actually a limiting idea. Who wants to go from story to story to story, from soap opera to soap opera?

How many millions of people believe in reincarnation? It is a *belief* not a reality. Think of how many millions of Christians believe Jesus suffered, died, and bled for our “sins.” Yet, the idea of *vicarious salvation* is also a belief. Jesus willingly went to the cross to show us there is no such thing as death, not to atone for our sins. Ernest Holmes, founder of the *Science of Mind*, did not believe in reincarnation. As he expressed it

*I am certain that people pass from this world to the next. . .
except that they are no longer using the physical body.
I do not believe that people return to this world by way of reincarnation.*

Either something is true or it is not true. When the Course says that *reincarnation cannot be true*, we should take it to mean what it says. The Course also says, *What conceals the truth is not where you should look to find the truth*. The dissolution of the body is simply the quiet laying down of the body and the transformation from a dream of death to an awareness of Life.

Only the body disappears and the body doesn't have anything to do with who we are in eternity. There is no death because all there is, is Life and what is all encompassing can have no opposite. God is all encompassing. There is no opposite to God. God is our source and our Home and the only true place of rest.

*When your body and your ego and your dreams are gone,
you will know that you will last forever.
Perhaps you think this is accomplished through death,
but nothing is accomplished through death, because death is nothing.
Everything is accomplished through life, and life is of the mind and in the mind.
The body neither lives nor dies, because it cannot contain you who are life.*
A Course in Miracles

Anything which rusts, or rots or decays or is turning from one form back into another form is not permanent and therefore not eternal. Only the mind, only Spirit is eternal. There is a line in Martin Luther's hymn, *A Mighty Fortress*, which says, *The Body They May Kill, God's Truth Abideth Still. His Kingdom is Forever.*

The ancient Greeks used to have a saying -- "*soma sema*" -- "*the body is a tomb.*" The body is the ego's chosen home. It is also its prison. The message of the mystic is that we have nothing to lose. To lose a body is just to lose a body. Death of the body is not the end. It's not the beginning. It is a continuing. Krishnamurti says death is no big deal. It is birth into this world we should be concerned about.

*If the story of the wandering Jew be true,
indeed if there was a man who could not die,
would he not be the unhappiest of men?*
Soren Kierkegaard

Those who die before they die.
Don't die when they die.

Jon