

Q and A with P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D., Ph.D. (Hon.)
An in-depth look at the near-death phenomenon

May 2004



P. M. H. Atwater, L. H.D., Ph.D. (Hon.), is one of the original researchers in the field of near-death studies, having begun her work in 1978. She is one of the very few top NDE researchers



who have actually had a NDE. [Her website](#) is filled with very interesting NDE research information and articles of hers. Her contribution to near-death studies is considered to be one of the most important as her first two books, [Beyond the Light](#) and [Coming Back to Life](#), are deemed the Bibles of the near-death experience by researchers and a multitude of experiencers and enthusiasts. Using her firm understanding of police investigative techniques as a protocol, she has specialized in original fieldwork and research that also included sessions with significant others. Her findings are contained in six books (see right). Some of her findings have now been clinically verified. Her research is referenced in the distinguished Lancet medical journal, December 15, 2001 ([the landmark Dutch study by Pim van Lommel, M.D.](#)). For more information about Dr. Atwater's contribution to near-death research, [download her press kit here](#). On this page, Dr. Atwater answers questions submitted to her.



QUESTION: Please take a look at these atheism pages - [www.ebonmusings.org/atheism/ghost](#). Here, Adam describes the amazing story of how your personality can dramatically alter after a certain brain disease or terrible accident. He even uses this fact as evidence that God does not exist. But as I disagree with him, I'll not go into detail but I have another question.

As you explained a few months ago in the near-death newsletter, we can talk about our spirit, soul, and mind. Spirit = divine life energy, our 'life fuel.' Soul = our personality, or just the pure core of ourselves? If it is just the pure core of our being, it means that we are all the same, and after death, we don't have our personality and character anymore. We will be just identical balls, clones of the same divine energy.

This is the conclusion I draw, reading the amazing and true story from the website of ebonmusings. Until today, I can be a loving husband and a social, intelligent business man. Tomorrow I can be a nervous, disoriented and more violent man who doesn't care about his wife anymore. This is absolutely stunning, a scary and embarrassing idea that this can happen any time!

I understand that after brain damage, the interface between soul and behavior is disturbed. But you also can say, if I would have a much bigger, more perfect brain, I would have been much more clever and with more abilities.

So, who are you and who am I really? Thanks for answering. - *Arjan*



P.M.H. Atwater's answer: You've asked a big question, one that no one can really answer in an evidential way except to present data and discoveries that suggest that there is more to us than our body and our personality. Nonetheless, I will try.

Millions of near-death experiencers, past lives from deathbeds, children who remember past lives, and from various other sources - all of this - and it is an impressive collection of voices - says that we are not our bodies nor are we our personalities. We are divine beings, a soul, currently resident in human form to learn and grow, help others, and make the world a better place for our being here. We can check the veridical reports from these people, what they saw in the out-of-body component of their experience, what they were told from beings on the other side of death's curtain that turned out to be accurate (information they could not possibly have known before), but we cannot check nor verify their philosophical statements, at least not with our mind. Only our heart can do that.

After over a quarter of a century of near-death research with thousand of people, adults and children, and being a near-death experiencer myself, I have no doubt, absolutely no doubt whatsoever, that life in some form is ongoing for all of us and that God is real and God exists. The way of this differs according to how various people interpret it, however, and within the constraints of language and stated belief systems. But the core truth is the same, regardless of country or religion or atheistic claims. Before birth, after death, unending life.

With that said, let's tackle your dilemma. Anything can happen to us during our lifetime on earth. Sometimes we have control over what happens and sometimes we don't. When tragedy strikes or setbacks of whatever type, we have a choice of how we will respond to the situation. Are we going to let it get the best of us? Or, are we going to fight back? Or, are we going to use the situation as a learning experience to improve our lives or somehow make things better? Three basic choices. And, the choice is ours to make.

I am certain you know as many stories as I do about people who made choice one, two, or three, and what resulted. In my own mind I find myself flashing back to that day at the age of four when I had polio, and I was told that I would never walk again. I remember thinking to myself, "Oh yeah, watch me." I was walking within weeks. Or when I was flunking in class because I couldn't read right or respond correctly. It took me three years to correct the problem, but correct it I did and by myself through out-loud drilling techniques (how did I know to do that? - I just did). Come to find out as an adult that I was born with synesthesia and dyslexia. In those days there was no such thing as "learning disabilities" or classes for "gifted" children. Kids like me were considered social outcasts. I was always a fighter. To this day, no one can tell me I can't do something. I take everything to God and go from there. I figure, there's no source higher than God so why should I be satisfied with the opinions of anyone or anything lesser. This attitude got me in a lot of trouble as a researcher. But, then, that's another story.



My little musings point out that indeed all of us can change our lives by changing our attitudes and beliefs. It's as simple as that, irrespective of anyone's insistence to the contrary. But the question still remains, what about illnesses and injuries that are so damaging we are unable to make choices, have no control, or are turned into something we are not (and we can't turn back). As you pointed out, you could be a nice enough fellow one day, but the next, because of trauma to the brain, literally become an entirely different person - perhaps a nasty one.

Here we must address the soul. We all have one. Some people call this our Higher Self or Divine Self. It truly is our core essence, the truth of who we really are. Once you have seen your soul or merged with your soul or have a sense of your soul, there's no mixing it up with the face you see in the mirror, your name and how you look, your personality. Those are "extras," the particular "packaging" that enables you to take on human form and live on the earth plane. Why would we want to do that if we are Divine Beings? Because here is where we test out and experience the curriculum of what we need to learn so we can rejoin with Source, so we can be the Co-Creators with The Creator that we were meant to be. Earth life enables us to mature as a soul. It is an extremely valuable experience, one to be grateful for.

What do souls look like? Sparks of light. And they are beautiful, and the sound of their music transcends the loveliest sounds you have ever heard, or ever will. Some people see souls as balls of light or spheres of light or as light beings. But if you look past the trappings, as I did when I died, well, there's that spark, winking at you. Ah, such bliss!

Time and space do not have the same meaning to a soul as it does to our human self, neither does tragedy or success. The soul learns from everything that occurs, good or bad. Nothing is ever wasted. Nothing. The soul is not limited in form or experience as we are. Thus, if we should suddenly, through tragedy, become something we aren't or be maimed, this does not affect the soul. Only what we learn from the event affects the soul. You've oft heard it said that what happens to us in life is not as important as what we do about it. This is true. (This truth is certainly apparent in near-death research, for instance. It is not the scenario that is the most important, it is how we respond to the aftereffects. That's what determines value and meaning.)



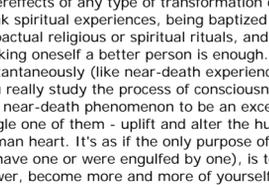
Souls make choices, too. Sometimes what we go through is not for us. It is for another. You see this a lot with child experiencers of near-death states that are infants and toddlers. When you do the type of research I do, which is very thorough, you come to recognize that it is the health-care giver or the parent or the family or the kids at school or the church members or the people throughout that individual's community, that are the most affected. The child came back to life FOR THEM. They were the ones most affected; theirs was the opportunity to change and learn and grow BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CHILD. Sometimes the child is helped, too, when older, but the initial event was for the others, not the child. Ever so many in my research base, adult or child, that were crippled or were born with terrible health

problems, said they came in this way by choice. One fellow with cystic fibrosis said he was born with this disease so he could learn more about love and how to express it. Not everyone who had serious handicaps like this fellow said anything like that, but the majority did. The soul's choice is always growth oriented, which includes cleaning or clearing out anything negative or unfinished (from previous incarnations) that might be holding it back from attaining its goals. That means forgiveness and compassion and reconciliation are important to the soul. The soul's plans can seem strange to our human thinking, but I can assure you there is sense to them and more love than you can imagine. Haven't you heard that near-death experiencers, once on the Other Side, report, almost to a person, that suddenly all the puzzle pieces of life fall in place and they know or are shown the whys of life. Life makes sense when seen from a larger perspective.

Still, there's that idea of being just another ball or another spark, nothing to distinguish us from other souls - the idea of all souls being alike. Energy-wise, potential-wise, that is true. We are all alike in that regard. And, we are all alike in the sense of our desire to rejoin with Source, to carry out or out-picture God's Greater Plan. But any idea that our makeup is the same, our experiences and what we learned from them, how we grew, is the same, well, forget that nonsense. God loves variety. If it were not so there would be no such thing as free will, choice. Souls differ from what they have made themselves to be, from what they have gleaned from their various experiences. No two souls are alike any more than no two snowflakes are alike. Our patterning is the same, basically we all look alike. But what fuels us, the mark of our "personality" (how we have developed), differs greatly. We don't lose what we learned. It "colors" us.

Does all this make our humanness lowly? Something cast off at death as hardly necessary? Some "wise ones" say yes. I say no. And I'll back up that statement with as close as one can get to evidence. One of the findings I made in researching the near-death phenomenon, is that its aftereffects are the same or similar to the aftereffects of any type of transformation of consciousness (things like vision quests, peak spiritual experiences, being baptized by the Holy Spirit, kundalini breakthroughs, impactful religious or spiritual rituals, and so forth). Even a lifetime devoted to making oneself a better person is enough. Some of these transformations happen instantaneously (like near-death experiences); some occur little by little over time. If you really study the process of consciousness transformations (and I do not consider the near-death phenomenon to be an exception), you discover that all of them - every single one of them - uplift and alter the human body and the human brain and the human heart. It's as if the only purpose of such transformations (whether you chose to have one or were engulfed by one), is to enable you to handle more and more power, become more and more of yourself, to merge with your own soul, become one with the One. And the more whole we become, the easier and more enjoyable and more loving our life is. Yes, we can merge with our souls, become whole, become one, in our lifetime. In my opinion, that's the real purpose of a religious or spiritual life, to rejoin our "lesser self" with our "Higher Self" - to heal all separation or sense of separation, to be who we really are and act accordingly.

I have found that there are clearly two main urges in the human being (besides basic survival), and that is the urge to procreate and the urge to recreate/renew/revitalize. And we have all the "equipment" we need to do both. I delineate this in many of my writings (especially [Beyond the Light](#), and [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences](#)). Or, [get on my website](#) and purchase the model to I am developing that explains this - Phase II is available.



Do not be fooled by what you see around you or feel within you. Just know there is more and that you are more. Maybe, at least for now, that is enough to know.

Oh, I almost forgot to say that in May of this year my latest book came out (from the A.R.E. Press). That book is entitled [We Live Forever: The Real Truth About Death](#). You might get a copy. It addresses many of your concerns.

Many blessings,
 P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D., Ph.D.
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"We cannot keep the life we have on the earth realm, not our possessions or attachments or relationships. What we can keep is our memories and our feelings of what we have integrated into our heart of hearts from the experience of being here, plus the love we have shared with others." - Dr. P.M.H. Atwater.

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Books by PMH Atwater



We Live Forever: The Real Truth About Death
 by P.M.H. Atwater
 Based on Atwater's 25 years of research, personal stories, and her own NDE in 1977



The New Children and Near-Death Experiences
 by P.M.H. Atwater
 An expansion of Atwater's original book "Children of the New Millennium" taking it to another level.



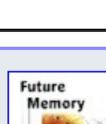
The Complete Idiot's Guide to Near-Death Experiences
 by P.M.H. Atwater
 This is the "encyclopedia" of the NDE and the most complete book done in the field of NDE studies.



Beyond the Light
 by P.M.H. Atwater
 An in-depth study of the NDEs of over 3,000 adult experiencers.



Coming Back to Life
 by P.M.H. Atwater
 Looks at all aspects of the NDE and its aftereffects including possible changes in the brain.



Future Memory
 by P.M.H. Atwater
 Deals with the transformation of consciousness and what that might portend to future memory.

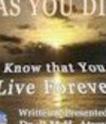


Children of the New Millennium
 by P.M.H. Atwater
 An in-depth study of child NDEs and how these children compare to the new children being born today.

Videos by PMH Atwater



Beyond the Light
 featuring P.M.H. Atwater
 Dr. Atwater shares her testimony of three life-changing NDEs with host Mary Lou McCall.



As You Die
 featuring P.M.H. Atwater
 Available in CD-ROM, DVD, and VHS formats! Atwater leads people through the wonderful journey which begins as one lays hovering between life and death, then leads them away from any fear and despair towards a peace and unconquerable hope, knowing that as we die ... we live forever!

Ebook by PMH Atwater



A Book of Columns
 by P.M.H. Atwater
 This ebook contains all of Dr. Atwater's columns from the IANDS newsletter "Vital Signs" from June of 1981 until 2004. Proceeds go to support IANDS and its mission.