

“We shall try our best to do as you say,” said Crito, “but how shall we bury you?”

“Any way that you like,” replied Socrates, “that is, if you can catch me and I don’t slip through your fingers.”-Plato in Phaedo

Chapter 1

Soul-Survival

Out-of-Body Experience

Nineteen-year-old David Whitaker remembers the crash of metal on metal as the speeding Chevrolet Impala caved in the left side of his car. Then everything seemed to go blank. The next thing he remembers was hearing a terrible buzzing sound and feeling as if he were passing rapidly through a dark tunnel. After emerging into what seemed like bright sunlight he had the sensation of floating in the air near the wreckage and seeing himself slumped over the steering wheel of his demolished '86 Mustang.

As he watched in stunned disbelief, he could see passersby running toward the wrecked cars. Then he heard Karen screaming, and saw his girlfriend exit from the passenger side of the car, crying hysterically but apparently uninjured.

It all seemed unreal as David saw an ambulance screech to a halt, sirens wailing, and watched the paramedics carefully extricate his seriously injured body through the passenger door. After checking his pulse one of them muttered, “He’s dead.”

“So is this what it feels like to be dead?” wondered David. Looking around in bewilderment, he noticed diaphanous figures floating toward him as if in slow motion-his sister June, who died two years before of leukemia, and his Aunt Mary, who succumbed to a heart attack when he was a boy.

Other familiar figures were beginning to come into focus. Just then David heard one of the paramedics say, “Let’s give

THE MYSTERY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

him CPR anyway.” Immediately the men began applying cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

All of a sudden David heard that terrible buzzing sound and again felt himself whooshing through the dark tunnel. Next he remembers feeling excruciating pain on his left side and seeing the faces of the paramedics bending over him-then blessed unconsciousness. When he awoke he found himself in the intensive-care unit of the local hospital in critical condition but alive.

Fiction? No, say researchers, just a typical case of a person who has had an out-of-body experience (OOBE or simply OBE) and lived to tell about it. Many who have gone through an experience such as David’s are convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that in OBEs the soul temporarily leaves the body and returns.

After examining data on hundreds of similar cases, some researchers as well as others are convinced that personal consciousness survives death as an invisible entity popularly called the soul or spirit.

But OBEs are not the only strange phenomena that have persuaded millions that the dead are alive and conscious-and that they sometimes communicate with the living. Many who have never had an OBE insist that the soul or spirit survives death because they have actually seen their dead loved ones. Here is an example.

Apparitions

Some years ago when I lived in Paradise, California, I became acquainted with a couple by the name of Bill and Helen Schmidt. One day they told me about a strange experience they had recently had.

Francis, Helen’s eldest son by a former marriage, had recently lost his life while racing in the Indianapolis 500. His mother was watching the race on TV and witnessed the horrible pileup. The shock of hearing the announcement that her son had been killed was almost too much for her.

THE MYSTERY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

That night Helen couldn't sleep. Outside the moon was shining, its bright beams flooding her bedroom. As she lay awake crying, she hoped that somehow the terrible tragedy hadn't really happened.

Suddenly she heard familiar footfalls. Getting up, she went to the window and looked out. She couldn't believe what she saw. To her utter astonishment there was Frannie coming up the sidewalk toward her! There could be no mistake about it. She was wide awake. She pinched herself to make sure. This was no dream. It was her son!

Helen's heart skipped a beat as he approached. He passed so close to the window she could have reached out and touched him, but she was too awe-struck to do anything but stare. Frannie never looked at her. He never uttered a word. He just went by, looking straight ahead with an earnest, almost determined look on his face. Helen followed his movements as if entranced.

When Frannie reached the back yard, he stooped down and appeared to dig around some rosebushes Bill had bought Helen the week before. He then stood up, walked over to the grape arbor in one corner of the yard, and was lost from view among the shadows.

Rushing over to her husband's bed, Helen exclaimed, "Bill, Frannie's alive! I just saw him go by the window. He's under the grape arbor right now!"

Bill sat up, rubbed his eyes, and told his wife she must be having a nightmare. But Helen refused to be put off. She was so insistent, in fact, that Bill agreed to investigate.

Putting on their bathrobes the couple hurried to the back yard and searched under the grape arbor. There was no one in sight! Bill was about to say, "I told you so," when Helen remembered seeing Frannie doing something around the rosebushes and suggested they take a look.

Now it was Bill's turn to be surprised. He knew the rosebushes hadn't "taken" and that Helen had planned to dig them up that very day but hadn't done so because of her son's death. But now, as he looked at the plants in the moonlight, he

THE MYSTERY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

was dumbfounded. So was Helen. Not only were the plants alive; they were blooming!

This experience firmly convinced the Schmidts that Frannie was alive and conscious-and that he wanted them to know it.

But these are not the only evidences for soul or spirit survival.

Channeling

Recently a new fad called “channeling” has caught on in various parts of the world. Popularized by actress Shirley MacLaine, it is the practice of communicating with the spirits of the dead through mediums or “channelers” as they are called. In her book *Out on a Limb*, Miss MacLaine tells how Kevin Ryerson had his first channeling experience and what convinced him that a “discarnate entity” had spoken through him.

Here is what she quotes him as saying:

[A] spirit came through during one of my meditations. I didn't even know it. But someone ran and got a tape recorder and got the whole thing. When they played it back to me I freaked. I knew nothing about the medical information I had channeled through. I didn't know the voices that came through me either, and I certainly didn't make up the past-life information while fabricating a phony voice.

Conclusions

Instances such as these, and others that seem even more persuasive, have convinced many people that the dead are conscious and that under certain circumstances are able to communicate with the living.