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Did Edgar Cayce Have a Near-Death Experience?

By Neil Helm, MA, Scholar in Residence, Atlantic University

Edgar Cayce told Harmon Bro that he had drowned as a young child. When I read about this experience, I began to consider the possibility that Cayce had had a near-death experience (NDE) combined with an out-of-body experience (OBE), during which he went to the other side and met God, probably in the form of Jesus. Such experiences are common in NDEs. We do know that Edgar, after his drowning experience, began reading the Bible, opened himself to God, and received psychic gifts such as precognition: the ability to look into the future and discern past events. These gifts are also often reported after NDEs.

After conducting research for decades in my former career, I began a formal study of NDEs after moving to Virginia Beach from the Washington, DC area in 2009. My wife and I wanted to be more active in the A.R.E. and Atlantic University, and I completed an MA degree in Transpersonal Studies. My master's thesis was a study of the spiritual aspects of NDEs. I chose this subject to research, and better understand, my own NDE that I experienced at age five.

My Childhood NDE

In 1944, my mother took my two older brothers and me to Central Montana to visit relatives. A cousin took us to a hot springs swimming area in a rural setting. I was frustrated to see that my mother and brothers could swim, as I had never been swimming, but I thought I could accomplish this physical feat. After a few strokes, however, I began to sink and inhale the hot water. As I took a last gulp of the water, I thought that drowning would be painful. At that instant, a powerful calm and serenity overcame me and I had a profound near-death experience that I remember in lucid detail to this day.

My spiritual body left my physical body and floated by a beautiful meadow across a lake into a tunnel. All of this was serene and I had no fear of

the tunnel, especially as I could see a light at its end. As I came out of the tunnel, the entire right wall was covered with a light that could only be called unique. The light manifested itself as God. There was no equivocation—this was the Light of God. I have a clear vision of standing in front of the Light and it flowing over me like a mist of total love and forgiveness. Then, God said: “It Is Not Your Time.” My spiritual body then returned to my physical body in the hot springs. My middle brother dove into the water, and pulled me to the surface. My cousin, a physician, resuscitated me.

God's Gifts and Messages

At age five, I couldn't comprehend “piercing the veil” and going to the “other side,” but I knew I had met God and within an hour after my resuscitation, God communicated with me, guiding me not to tell my experience to my parents, who would probably call it a hallucination or to my young friends, who would not understand it.

I never had imaginary playmates like Edgar, but one of my first gifts from God was the ability to communicate with some species of animals—especially horses and dogs. In addition to my inner knowing and on-going conversations with God, He asked me if I wanted additional psychic gifts like telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition—the ability to look into the future and to better understand past events. While I didn't understand it all, I just opened myself to God and as I began to acquire these gifts, God made it clear that I was to use them only to His honor and to help humankind. No horse races!

Researching NDEs

I didn't tell anyone about my experience until I was 31 years old. It was then I discovered, in 1975, that Dr. Raymond Moody had just finished a book about NDEs—*Life After Life*. After reading the book and finding people who were interested in investigating NDEs, I began to do more investigating of NDEs and

extraordinary spiritual experiences. Edgar Cayce's name quickly appeared and I read Thomas Sugrue's *There Is a River* and other books on this incredible man from Kentucky. In reading about Edgar's gifts, I found many similarities to people who have had an NDE. They tell of traveling to the other side, and talking with family members, spirit guides and divine beings. They also report experiencing after-effects of the NDE—becoming more spiritual and developing paranormal abilities, such as being able to open the Book of all Knowledge, also known as the Akashic Records.

Many, and perhaps most, children do not remember or fully understand their NDE. But I started in early 2013 to try to find some real evidence of Edgar's NDE.

Reading Harmon Bro's *A Seer out of Season*—I found something! Harmon Bro, a graduate student, along with his wife June, were working for Edgar in 1944. Edgar, knowing that Bro was planning to write his PhD dissertation on Edgar's life, was providing Bro with some highlights from his earlier years. Bro writes of Edgar: "He told of how he had drowned and been pronounced dead in his youth and how the invisible playmates of his childhood had returned to him once as an adult" (1989, p.426). Edgar was making certain that this important event in his young life was documented for his memoirs. Bro wrote down these discussions, and it is important to follow the flow of Edgar's memory—he drowned and his invisible playmates came to him. I hypothesize that Edgar drowned, had an NDE, and probably had his first out-of-body experience, an experience that he would continue to have more than 14,000 additional times. The invisible playmates, a visit from an angel, and the multitude of gifts that Edgar received from God, such as the ability to put himself in a trance and receive information from the Book of Knowledge were, I hypothesize, the results of his spiritual development, first made possible by his NDE.

Why did Cayce not speak more of this profound event in his life? First, the phrase "near-death experience" was not coined until Raymond Moody wrote his seminal book on NDEs in 1975, some 30 years after Edgar's death. Second, while Edgar believed in past lives, traveling to the other side, and meeting Jesus, these subjects were not popular with many people in Christian circles during the first half of the 20th century.

Results from the Vault

My continuing NDE research on Edgar's drowning led me to the big vault where all of Edgar's readings are carefully stored. I found some original notes by Edgar's father, Leslie—often called the Squire. Leslie Cayce writes that his son Edgar was an outdoor boy who liked to hunt and fish. "On one occasion after some very heavy rain had filled the ponds, lakes and lowlands to overflowing. Edgar decided to go fishing. He got his little fishing pole, hook, and line and started out perfectly alone." While Leslie did not date this story, he implied that little Edgar was quite young, I suspect around age five—similar in



age to my NDE. The heavy rain had caused Edgar's favorite pond to overflow onto a generally shallow area where some fish were now stranded. Edgar put down his pole and was happy wading out into the shallow water and just picking up fish with his hands and throwing them on the bank. However, in his enthusiasm Edgar ventured toward what was a deep hole some 10-12

feet deep. He slipped down the steep sides of the hole. Edgar had to stick his hands and feet in the muddy side of the hole to try to pull himself out.

Luckily, a hired man on the farm came along with horses and a wagon of logs or rails. He saw the fishing pole, fish along of the road bank, and Edgar's hat floating in the water, and he knew "that he [Edgar] was about to be drowned—or had been." Leslie, writing about these memories for newspaper writers, was trying to tell the story of how little Edgar was strong and resourceful, so he wrote that Edgar was coughing water and was out of the hole when the hired man grabbed his hand and pulled him out. I suspect that Edgar had in fact drowned and the hired man pulled him out and applied simple resuscitation skills that were generally known and brought the boy back to life. Remember, Edgar told Harmon Bro "he had drowned and been pronounced dead in his youth" (p.426). The hired man loaded Edgar on the wagon and took him back to his mother. Leslie then wrote that Edgar's mother was frightened by hearing what had happened and "what he had seen." I suggest that Edgar was telling his mother about his drowning and what he had seen as part of his NDE.

After reading hundreds of NDE accounts, I am

Continued on page 46



Atlantic University Summer 2014 Course Offerings

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Introduces students to the field of transpersonal studies as it relates to psychology, philosophy, science, and human development. Including a blend of both the theoretical and the practical, the course is designed to provide students with a background in knowledge related to the transpersonal.

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Teaches skills associated with the introverted side of life as it relates to transpersonal themes of personal development found in mythology, including study of the practice of dream interpretation, meditation, and imagination.

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Psychology of Creativity (TS5150)

The study of creativity is a complex affair requiring an integrated multidimensional approach. This course presents such an approach through a didactic and experiential process of investigation.

Becoming a Teacher of Finding Your Mission in Life (TS6005)

Develop skills and methods that will allow you to clarify your own mission in life so you can help others find theirs. The strategies for creating a personal mission statement are drawn largely from the material found in Edgar Cayce's nearly 2,000 life readings—clairvoyant, spiritual counseling discourses given to individuals between 1923 and 1944—material that provides a framework that is easily adaptable to contemporary seekers. Requires a practicum.

Spiritual Applications of Self-Hypnosis (TS6110)

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Courses offered for both Master's degree students and for non-credit Continuing Education students.

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Near-Death Experience, continued from page 45

comfortable with the idea that Edgar's remarkable life is the result of his meeting God, perhaps in the form of Jesus, during his NDE. After his experience, Edgar asked for his own Bible, and opened himself to God. All of Edgar's gifts and abilities followed. Soon after his experience, Edgar was visited by his invisible friends. Later, an angel came to him in the garden. He could sleep on a book and acquire the knowledge within. Similar experiences are often related by children who have had an NDE. Edgar's more dynamic gifts such as putting himself in a hypnotic trance, where he could acquire universal knowledge to look into past lives and future events, are spectacular in their scope but nonetheless similar to psychic gifts others have received. Edgar understood this and told Bro: "I don't do anything you can't do" (p.178). God directs us in ways only He understands. When you open yourself to God, many wonderful things happen. Having an NDE seems to be a rapid way of traveling to

the other side and meeting God. However, it is not the only way to have this sacred experience. Edgar said you can do it in dreams. I know people who are able to have an intimate relationship with their God through dreams, meditations, and prayers. We are all special children of God doing His and our mission in many unique and different ways. ▲

References: Bro, H. *A Seer out of Season: The Life of Edgar Cayce*.

Moody, R. *Life After Life*.

Sugrue, T. *There Is a River: The Story of Edgar Cayce*.



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