

What happens after physical death?

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(translated by Rogier Fentener van Vlissingen)

The world is not left by death but by truth, ... (T-3.VII.6:11)

A Course in Miracles teaches that our physical existence is an illusion, and that we are not really in a body. Therefore, in reality nothing happens at all when the body dies. Within our dream existence, however, death is an unknown event that often engenders fear—something we very much like to repress, making it invisible. That is absolutely not warranted. Familiarity with the meaning of “physical death” could be particularly helpful in light of your own death or that of a loved one. In this article, I explore what happens—in a spiritual sense—during the body’s dying process and after its death.

The Course’s view of death

There are numerous spiritual books and sources—old and newer—that provide information about what happens around death and afterwards. However, these do not necessarily contain the most accurate and appropriate messages. After all, within every culture, but also within every time period, new needs arise that determine the kind of information that is provided about this topic. Information provided about death should therefore preferably be attuned to the present time period and spiritual level of the culture. A lot of spiritual information about physical death is expressed within the context of a dualistic thought system, which suggests that all forms (bodies—physical or astral), levels, and spheres really do exist. This can be confusing for those coming from a *non*-dualistic thought system, like that of *A Course in Miracles*. How should information about astral and light bodies and various “cosmic” spheres and levels be seen in

that context? This article lays the foundation for shedding light on this topic from the perspective of the metaphysics of the Course. Because the Course itself barely deals with the subject, the information in this article is based on what I, via hearing an inner voice, came to understand about it from Jesus. For the sake of clarity, the personal guidance that was granted me from Jesus in this regard (and which therefore does not come from the Course) has been italicized.

We cannot die

Most importantly, as the Course makes perfectly clear, we can never die. God has created only eternal Life, and we are as He created us:

There is no death. The Son of God is free. (W-pI.163)

However, when the Son thinks he has separated from his Source and leads an individual existence in a dimension of time, space, and perception, in a body that seems to grow older, become ill, and die, then within that dream it seems as though a transition takes place around the death of the body. Just like everything else within our dream, the process of dying and what *seems* to happen afterwards can be used either by the ego (to anchor us deeper in the dream and make it seem real) or by the Holy Spirit (to help us see through the illusion and awaken from the dream).

Do not postpone the choice

The goal of the Course is very explicit: to have us detach from the ego completely *during our life on earth*—a process that subsequently is completed at the time of bodily death. In spiritual literature, there is a common idea that, even in the “afterlife,” there is still plenty of time and space to ponder whether you want to choose for the ego or against it—for or against a separated existence in a

body—and to make that choice. There are descriptions of how, on various astral and mental levels, you gain all kinds of experiences, receive instruction, and learn lessons, so that you can decide later whether to reincarnate in a physical body or—for the very few who would be ready to do so—to ascend to “higher” levels in order to finally merge completely into oneness with God.

That idea, however, certainly is not given any credence by the Course. The reason is that, for starters, it might be conducive to postponing the choice within one’s earthly lifetime. It is all too tempting to think: let’s first have a look at how much beauty there is to experience after death, in the astral spheres of light, where you apparently can so easily create what you want and indulge your desires. Who says I would so easily want to pass all that up, just like that?—in many books, after all, the astral realms are described as very attractive and gentle (except for those minds that end up in the “hellish” layers, but that seems to be the exception)—even though these books make the point that all this, too, is an illusion. Of course, everyone is free to think this way and postpone their choice to awaken if they so choose, but please know that this idea directly contradicts what the Course teaches.

The second reason the Course does not support the idea of “development” or “learning lessons” on the astral planes after death is that, in reality, there really is not all that much to consider, to learn, or even to choose at that point. What is in fact the case is that the body-identified mind is in an even greater state of crisis and disarray when it thinks “its” body is dying (or is already dead) than it is during the phase in which it thinks it has a physical existence on earth. That means the chance that the mind would “come to its senses” during that period is much smaller—and certainly not any greater—than it is during earthly existence.

Of course, it is possible in principle for the mind to let go of the ego during the dying process or after death occurs. But, again, if that has not happened during one's life on earth, that chance is simply very small, unless someone is really "very close" to it already and is holding on to only a last sliver of ego. In all other cases, the mind (that is identified with the body, after all) experiences death so intensely as a crisis situation that, out of fear, it would sooner get anchored even more firmly in the ego than it would let go of it during the dying process or after death occurs. The Course emphasizes therefore that the "work" (of forgiveness) has to be done *before* bodily death. In summary, forgiveness needs to be done during earthly existence, for postponement does not work.

Death does not offer a solution

Accordingly, Jesus says in the Course that dying is not a solution, nor will it bring salvation.

There is a risk of thinking death is peace,... (T-27.VII.10:2)

You see in death escape from what you made. But this you do not see; that you made death, and it is but illusion of an end. Death cannot be escape, because it is not life in which the problem lies. Life has no opposite, for it is God. Life and death seem to be opposites because you have decided death ends life. Forgive the world, and you will understand that everything that God created cannot have an end,... (M-20.5:2-7)

After "passing away" and in between all one's various earthly lives, the mind remains completely at the astral level and therefore within the realm of perception. The "exit" from our dream existence, the end of fear, is therefore *not* attained through death. Acceptance of the Atonement is the only "exit": letting

go of the ego and the wish for separation. The only way to obtain lasting peace is to choose for awakening, here and now:

And death is opposite to peace, because it is the opposite of life. And life is peace. Awaken and forget all thoughts of death, and you will find you have the peace of God. (T-27.VII.10:4-6)

Our journey after death: two possibilities

When we die, which is to say that only our body dies, there are two possibilities as to the state of our mind. This has consequences for how events unfold after death. That is, the condition prior to death determines the condition after death. (And this has nothing to do with the way in which someone dies, nor with his age at death.)

The first possibility is that, at the time of death, the ego is still operating in the mind. The mind still sees itself as separated and cherishes that separation to a greater or lesser degree, and therefore still contains guilt. What happens in that case is that the mind immediately, or after a short break, concentrates on a new earthly life. Just like a television viewer who zaps to another program on a different channel when one program ends. (Below, we look in greater detail at what really happens on the astral plane: the break between lives.) It can be quite sobering to realize that nothing in fact changes as a result, but at the same time it is very helpful to know how it all works.

The second possibility is that the mind has let go of the ego completely during an earthly existence: it no longer cherishes the wish for separation, and guilt has been wiped out. With that, the mind has reconnected to what the Course calls the Holy Spirit—it has united with the Will of God. In that case, the mind travels

past the astral plane very quickly and then enters Heaven: oneness with Christ and God. (This, too, we shall review more closely later on.)

Passing away and what follows immediately afterwards

First, let us look at what happens at the moment of the body's death. I received the following guidance from Jesus about death and the "look-back" (or "life review") that takes place next:

The first thing you notice when the moment of death arrives is that you start to feel sort of fuzzy, or even sleepy, which is somewhat comparable to the moment when, during your normal earthly life, you are just nodding off to sleep. But it still feels quite different, because the actual process that takes place is not that your body is falling asleep, but that you are letting go of it altogether. This obviously applies only to a prepared death, such as, for example, by sickness or old age, and is less prominent in the case of a sudden death.

Next, you will notice that you enter into a "region," so to speak, that I would like to call the "astral realm," because that is the most common nomenclature, at least in the Western world. In this "region," you still feel like a sort of a "person." The mind still remains somewhat separated at this stage, but in a lighter fashion, because the physical body has been let go of already. Numerous unresolved emotional and psychological issues will surface in this region. In general, if there are any unresolved issues still locked up in the mind, these will manifest as a type of perception, or a certain experience, sometimes with very specific images and even memories of events that are associated with it.

As they themselves testify, people who have nearly died often experience a review of the life that was ending. It is a rerun of the “movie,” so to speak. That is what Jesus is referring to here. When the mind has already let go of the physical body (that is, has ceased projecting this body), it still projects a psychic, or astral, body. All issues from its past life (or multiple earthly lives) that had not been processed yet will show up in this phase. Usually, there is a great deal that has been neither processed nor forgiven, and all of this appears like images in the mind’s eye. Even when complete forgiveness has taken place and the mind is therefore free, there may still be some unresolved issues, which will surface on this astral plane, but they will not form a hindrance anymore to continuing the journey back to God.

Therefore, the dying process has not yet come to an end when doctors declare the body dead, or when brain death occurs. Jesus told me that the phase immediately following the relinquishment of the body, the period of time during which one experiences his life-review on the astral plane, can last for several hours. And, he added, for that reason it would be advisable to leave the body of a deceased person alone, at rest, as much as possible for the first few hours, if at all feasible. That is helpful for the mind because it minimizes disruption of the process that it must go through on the astral plane. What happens to the body afterwards no longer really matters, for the mind no longer notices anything here.

The ego-mind: projecting all over again

If at the point of bodily death the ego still lingers in a mind, that mind remains confined within the astral plane and does not rise any higher. The mind feels compelled to project a new earthly existence in a body. There may be a shorter or longer rest period on this astral plane, but, in any event, it is only temporary.

Jesus emphasized that, in most cases, the (ego-)mind projects a new earthly life very rapidly:

What happens next is that the mind immediately starts to focus on another life. That means that, as soon as the mind has seen the “movie” of the death of its body and the life-review that goes with it, it promptly directs its attention to another “television-monitor,” so to speak, where it watches how conception takes place. Then it imagines that it resides for a time as an embryo in the mother’s belly, and next physical birth takes place. Thus begins a new life in the worldly sense of the word.

The ego-mind cannot “allow” itself (from its own point of view) to let go of its identification with a bodily existence. The mind “has to” immediately project another body with which it can identify. The ego, after all, strives to obliterate the mind (the decision-maker) from consciousness and to transfer this consciousness entirely to the body and ego identity, the “I”-persona. As long as guilt has not been relinquished in the mind, a virtually unending series of bodies and earthly lives needs to be projected. This also suggests the idea of reincarnation (having multiple earthly lives), but it is all just a dream—they are all equally illusory.

Journey through the astral plane

It is also possible that the (ego-)mind might project an astral body for a while. Pertaining to the voluminous literature, channelings from entities, and such about astral spheres and the events that can take place there, I received the following guidance from Jesus:

What happens initially when a mind has made its transition and has seen its earthly body (with which it is identified) die is that it suddenly finds itself in a different, usually somewhat lighter realm.

Consciousness obviously persists, since this is a property of the projecting mind and has nothing to do with any body at all. Therefore, what happens, in most cases anyway, is that the mind has now projected a somewhat different landscape and sees itself there, in a somewhat different—usually a bit lighter—body that is often referred to as the “astral body,” or “light body,” in various books. It is of the essence to remember that what remains constant is that the mind converts its own thoughts into images that it projects and makes into perceptions. Naturally, nothing at all changes in the working of this mechanism after the so-called physical body dies.

*As a consequence, minds that project primarily on the basis of guilt and fear, anger and hatred, will now think they find themselves in a very dark and hateful environment, the so-called “hellish” layers of the astral world. Most minds, however, prefer to project—at least temporarily—a much lighter environment, and so they think they find themselves in what at first glance seems to be a nearly paradisiacal situation: a light, often sunny, and very pleasant environment where all kinds of (formerly earthly) desires can now still be realized belatedly, merely by the power of the mind. What needs to be understood, however, is that these projections are only **temporary**, which the mind “permits” itself, so to speak, in order to process its (physical) death, but that they do not offer any real satisfaction or true happiness because of the ongoing separation from God and the*

distortion of the original creative power of the mind, the goal being the making of perception.

*In many spiritual books, there is discussion—often extensive—about all kinds of instruction that so-called deceased souls (“minds,” in Course terms) receive after physical death, through which they can gradually grow towards a complete longing for unity with God and then actually make that transition. However, in reality, minds generally project all these “astral” images for only a very brief period of time, and the only real learning that takes place is only **within the mind itself**. This is something that, of course, does not change at all, regardless of whether that mind projects a physical body or some other type of body. We therefore must say that when this type of “spiritual” information is offered in books, it could very easily result in our minds making the illusions of the ego—the dream of these minds—real, and it also suggests that the eventual choice **against** the ego and separation and **for** God can easily be postponed until after so-called death.*

From the point of view of the Course, it should therefore be emphasized very strongly that the only choice that can be made takes place only within the mind, and that, as has been said earlier, postponing this decision until after the death of the physical body is generally not desirable, because chances are very slim indeed that the right choice—against the ego—would be made at that point.

Margot: Does that mean that some minds project a new earthly life almost immediately and thus promptly see a conception of another

earthly body, and that others first project an astral life in an astral body for a while?

Yes, you have put it correctly. What will be projected, therefore, depends completely on the preferences of the mind itself. But because they are all only dream images, actually none of it even matters; as long as the mind lingers in the domain of perception, nothing really happens. What does matter, of course, is the decision to leave the domain of perception (and of time and space as well) altogether.

Near-death experiences

Near-death experiences (NDEs) need to be seen in this light. About this, Jesus said:

What I want to clarify for you in this regard is the experience of people who have had, for example, near-death experiences and claim to remember that after dying they found themselves in a very gentle, light, and loving environment. Such reports have given rise to the idea that after death a period of rest starts, as a sort of break between lives. But in truth, this is not at all the case, for the mind that still harbors unconscious guilt needs to have at its disposal a new body (physical or astral) onto which to project that guilt. Thus the illusion that it is a body is maintained. A period of rest would unduly disrupt that illusion. That is the reason why the mind immediately focuses on a new movie of a new body. Experiences like NDEs stem solely from the profound wish of humanity that real peace and light and love will follow physical death. Note the Christian Church dogma of an “afterlife.” But this is not at all the case, for the ego does not allow

the briefest moment of respite outside of the realm of perception in between lives. So this does not happen in reality, but what really happens is that minds themselves merely project images of what they imagine to be a period of rest and then experience those images as real. But in reality, as long as it listens to the ego, a mind cannot allow itself to be free from a body even for a moment because it is too firmly identified with it.

Margot: So these “beautiful” images, such as those experienced in NDEs, are projected temporarily by the mind itself, but very quickly the mind looks only at images of conception and a “new” earthly life, also projected by itself, so that the illusion of life on earth is not interrupted?

Yes, that is in fact what happens. The projection of “beautiful” images happens for a brief time only, but long enough to give the mind the idea that it gets a little momentary rest. Or that I myself, Jesus—or other deceased loved ones, if that happens to be someone’s preference—come to take the mind to Heaven. But very quickly, the “trusted” images of a new earthly life surface again, and then the mind forgets the beautiful images it saw in the interim, so that the illusion is indeed not interrupted.

Margot: Still, many people derive consolation from NDEs.

Yes, but by the same token these can very easily be misused by the ego to suggest that no “work” (in the sense of forgiveness) needs to be done during one’s earthly life, because, after all, death will take care of one’s salvation. Everyone needs to realize that that “work” (in the

sense of salvation) really does have to be done during their earthly existence. Having said that, it is equally true that the Holy Spirit of course uses everything that is made by the ego—and that means He can use NDEs, too—for His own purposes. Because of that, NDEs can be helpful by diminishing the general fear of death. As far as the people, or minds, who have experienced an NDE themselves are concerned, very often they have been touched by it so deeply that afterwards they much more readily put their life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that is very helpful.

Contact with the deceased

I also asked questions about what happens when someone feels contact with a deceased person, and about how this all takes place within time.

Margot: And when someone feels contact with a deceased loved one, then that mind itself is no longer focused on its current life but is already watching another life. Does that mean that the person seeking that contact conjures up the image of the deceased person as he had known him in his own mind?

Yes, you could say that when someone seeks contact with a deceased loved one, he indeed conjures up the images, so to speak, in his own mind to communicate with him. But because time is not real, oftentimes that mind (of the deceased person) really is indeed still communicating with the living person. The mind of the deceased person who is called up is thereby actually active in multiple lives at the same time, but it is not conscious of that itself.

Margot: While this mind watches the new “TV monitor,” is another part of itself able to communicate with relatives from another earthly life, without the part that is focused on its new life being conscious of it in most cases?

Yes, that is indeed exactly how it happens. You formulated that correctly.

Margot: And is it true that the next life on which the mind is concentrated is always “further ahead” in the timeline, in order to maintain the illusion of linear time?

No, it is certainly not necessary that there be a so-called sequential order in time between successive lives, because the mind is aware of only one life at a time, so there is no need for that. Rather, it is a holographic whole, in which all imaginary lives in fact happen randomly in parallel to one another and after each other. Only the human brain, under the guidance of the ego, translates this into linear time, successive time periods. But at the level of the mind itself, that plays no role whatsoever.

Guides, companions, and soul groups

According to lot of channeled materials and books, some minds have contact with guides or angels (Jesus himself, for example) who are on the astral plane, and they are being helped in that way. I asked Jesus to say something more about this:

What happens is that the mind itself projects these images in accordance with its own culture or preference. Of course, that can be

done from both the ego mind as well as the right mind. Therefore, it is quite possible that, during or after one's so-called passing away, one will see or hear a person or a guardian, including possibly myself, or experience a contact with him in some other way, and that is certainly helpful for the mind in order that it go through this transition in the right way.

Margot: Can you also tell me something about the "soul groups" that people talk about so much? For instance, I read somewhere that a mind (or soul) cannot merge into oneness with God until all souls in his soul group have come to the point of making that choice, so that they merge into oneness collectively, as a group.

It should be stated emphatically that this is definitely not true—fortunately. A mind is never in any way dependent on another "individual" mind in order to follow its path to God and complete the journey, and that has to be very clearly understood. An "individual" mind can choose to remember its unity with God—to accept the Atonement for itself—at any moment, as this is nothing but a recognition of what always has been and always will be.

When there is talk of "soul groups" and similar ideas, then we might think of a cluster, or chain, of special relationships (with family members and other important persons in our earthly life), often with great mutual emotional dependence and attachment through guilt. It is these destructive ego-patterns that serve to keep us away from God and Heaven. As you know, one of the main goals of the Course is to help you disengage from this tangle of special relationships, so that you are completely free to follow your own path, if you so choose,

without being delayed by others who may possibly still have to make their choice.

When the ego has been let go of

The aim of the Course is to help us, by means of forgiveness, let go of the ego completely during our earthly life and thereby awaken. This new state of mind is also referred to as the “real world” in the Course. When a mind is in that state at the moment of its physical death, the process of awakening is completed: the complete return to Heaven and the merging of consciousness into the one and total love of God and Christ. In the Course, Jesus symbolically puts it this way: “The last step is taken by God Himself.” The word “Heaven” in the Course means the awareness of complete and abstract oneness; Heaven knows no layers or levels.

When you perceive yourself without deceit, you will accept the real world in place of the false one you have made. And then your Father will lean down to you and take the last step for you, by raising you unto Himself. (T-11.VIII.15:4-5)

Also in this case, the first thing that presents itself after the physical body is released is the astral plane. Jesus says the following about the right way of passing through this region:

You need do nothing more than contemplate very calmly all the images and memories that arise and then make the firm decision to bring your whole mind in line, that is to say, that it absolutely wants only the fastest possible return to God, without any delay. So the only thing you need to remember at that moment is that you want only to return to God, and that you do not want to delay it. Purely by your

own thoughts, all the images and perceptions will quickly disappear and then you are completely free to begin to reunite with God, there to remain forever and ever.

God's last step

When guilt is gone from the mind, any unresolved issues that may arise on the astral level do not form an obstacle, but they just disappear eventually. Then you pass through the gate of Heaven, so to speak; the last remnant of individual consciousness dissolves. You enter oneness; you arrive at your true Identity, the Christ Self, united with God. That is the “last step,” which is taken by God, although clearly God does not actively do anything, because He reaches for His children constantly. Love attracts us to Itself like a magnet, so to speak. And without guilt, which stands like a shield between God and us, there is nothing that stands in the way of this, for He has an enormous attraction for us.

For still deeper than the ego's foundation, and much stronger than it will ever be, is your intense and burning love of God, and His for you.
(T-13.III.2:8)

From our current perspective and frame of reference, it cannot really be comprehended how this will be. But Jesus described it as follows:

What happens next is that slowly but surely you will gain an awareness of starting to dissolve completely. However, that means only that your so-called “personality” now dissolves completely. And that is exactly the intention, for now your mind will again unite completely with the radiant and serene light of God's reality, and that will unquestionably be a joyful realization for you. You will begin to notice that, as of that moment, everything runs fairly well,

automatically, and smoothly, and “you” practically do not need to do or think of anything, because you gradually dissolve completely and thus attain your oneness with God and myself, and thereby enter into Heaven. What happens from that moment on cannot be described in words, but I assure you that it will be the most lovely experience that you will have ever tasted in even the slightest way, and of which you have at most caught only a few fleeting glimpses here on earth.

As of that moment, “you” become a co-creator in Heaven and you will know only about uniting in love and extending love continuously, together with myself and all your loved ones, who will be present there exclusively and only in spirit.

And so ends the ancient, senseless journey through separation, the “time of terror.” And we all return to our Father’s Arms, in our home with God, which we had never left.