



Dying to Understand



CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

**Written by
Dr Colin Dicks**

Introduction

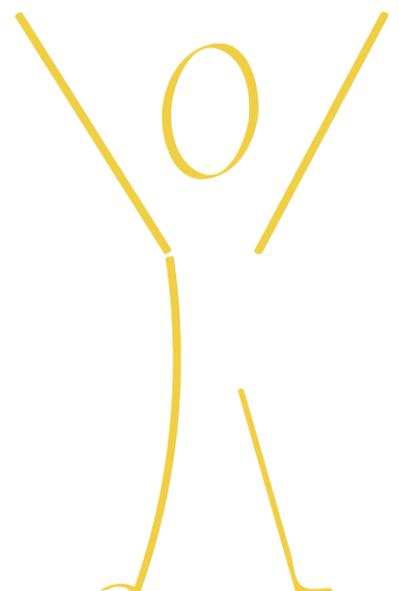
What do you believe happens when someone dies?

The physical events occurring after death are obvious. For us as spectators, we see the effects as the body struggles to function and ultimately stops. There is no longer a response to stimulus. The light goes out of the eyes, the pupils dilate, and physical death is said to have occurred. It is easy to assume that it is all over, but in reality, it is only the beginning. Death is not the end.

There is compelling evidence to suggest that physical death is not the end of our journey. Death is simply the doorway to the next part of our journey. Where this doorway leads is of great importance because we can, by our choices, influence our destiny.

This is the heart of spirituality; to recognise that we are spiritual beings. There is evidence to suggest that, at the time of death, our souls are liberated from our failed and broken bodies. By this we are compelled to consider a bigger picture of our existence. We are invited to consider the possibility of God. We are comforted by the hope of being reunited with the souls of those who have gone before and the souls of those who will follow.

Let's explore some of the evidence, as well as the limitations of this evidence, and perhaps make some comments about dying along the way.



Where is the proof?

It would be great if there was scientific proof of spirituality; a photo of God or an equation to explain the mysteries of the afterlife would be very useful. Without scientific evidence it is difficult to prove or disprove spirituality. To begin, we need to understand and accept the limitations of science.

The scientific process starts with a hypothesis or an idea. It then frames a question and collects information or data to prove or disprove the question. From this process a scientific conclusion is made. It only works if there is something that can be measured. If there is no measurable data, good science will argue that no conclusion about a matter can be made. Poor science will argue that because there is no measurable data, something like spirituality does not exist. Because we cannot measure spirituality, we have to consider other evidence.

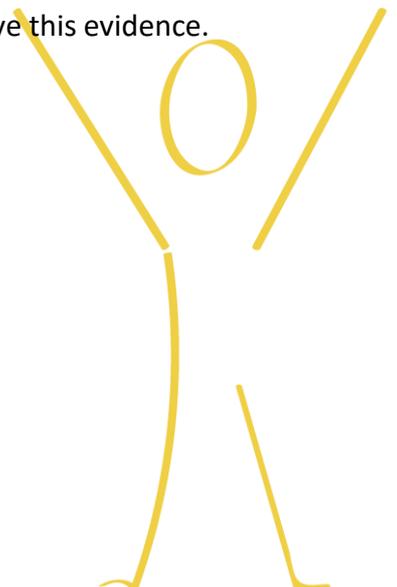
The first source of evidence is historical and cultural. Early civilisations believed in an afterlife. The myths and legends of the Vikings and Valhalla, the Greek culture with Thanos transferring the souls across the mythical River Styx or the magnificent pyramids argue that there is more to our existence than pure biology.

Add to this the many cultures today that believe the souls of the dead return to their ancestors after this life. These beliefs are common to many indigenous people such as the Native Americans, Aborigines, Maoris or the people of African culture. Can we ignore this level of evidence?

The next compelling evidence of an afterlife is found in religion. Whether it is the concept of re-incarnation or whether it is a belief in a god with a specific name, religions all agree on the following three points:

- There is an afterlife
- There is accountability for the way we live this life
- There is a reward to follow

You don't have to be religious to agree that millions of people believe this evidence.

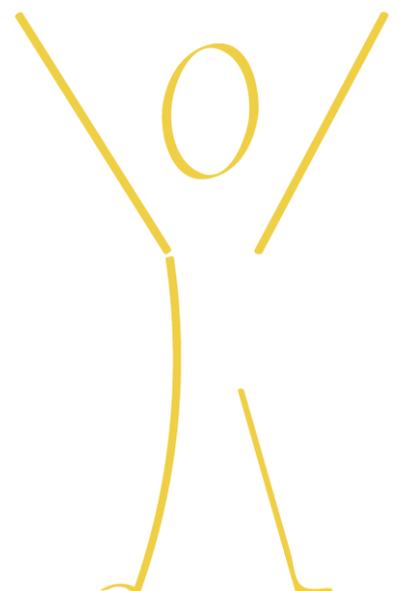


Perhaps the most compelling evidence of an afterlife are near death experiences (NDE's). These are fascinating accounts from people who have died and then returned, for whatever reason, to live and tell the tale. Typically, near death experiences have the following things in common:

- a sensation of being dead, with a clear description about the spirit/soul leaving the physical body, and an immediate release from the physical suffering associated with the injury or illness
- ongoing consciousness and awareness of themselves and events around them
- either a sense of going to heaven that encompasses a bright light or seeing God, and being surrounded by great joy, peace, love, happiness and often being reunited with loved ones, *or* a sense of going to hell with all the dread that we associate with this
- a return to the physical body and experiencing the physical suffering associated with the injury/illness when the spirit re-enters the body
- a life changing event and often a reluctance to talk about it

It may be difficult to accept the vagueness of the cultural or religious evidence, but personal stories and experiences are hard to ignore. Can we really say people who have had a NDE are imagining it?

There are no hard facts so it takes some element of faith to believe in an afterlife. The question is not so much whether there is an afterlife or not, but if there is an afterlife what should we be doing to prepare for this?



Simple steps to explore spirituality and the afterlife

Step 1 - Don't ignore it

There is too much at stake *if* there is an afterlife. The last thing anyone wants to do is to arrive at a party and not be dressed for the occasion or even worse, not have an invitation. If there is an afterlife, make sure you're invited. Do your homework, have an open mind.

Step 2 - Do some research

Don't rely on the general opinions of others who don't know either. Your doctor nor your hairdresser is the best source of information about spiritual matters.

Spend some time considering your questions and read about the possibilities. There is a wealth of information on the internet, but not all will be useful, good or honest. Try finding reputable information.

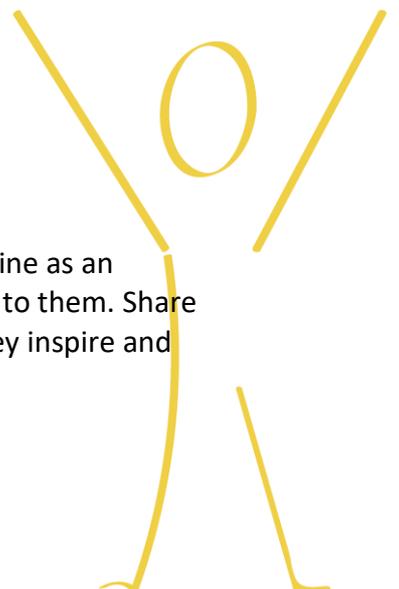
Step 3 – Think, but don't only think logically

The spiritual dimension is invisible. If you can see it, it may not be a good thing as it isn't logical. To consider spirituality requires a different way of thinking. Consider what you have previously been taught and try to ponder the abstract and eternal matters, such as those listed below. Don't be afraid to challenge yourself. Try and read between the lines.

- What is the meaning of my life?
- What are the chances of life after death?
- What are the chances of there being a God or gods?
- What is eternity and how long is it? Isn't there an end to everything?
- What is the origin of everything...did it start with the "Big Bang" and if so, why did the Big Bang go bang?
- Can angels and demons be real?
- Is there a God?
- Where do ghosts fit in?

Step 4 – Find a mentor or someone you trust

Is there someone spiritual that you know and trust? Do their lives shine as an example or are they simply religious? If they are the real deal, speak to them. Share your thoughts, ask questions and get information. Most of all, do they inspire and empower you?



Step 4 - Consider religion cautiously

Religion requires us to approach with caution. Opinions can range from extremist views to flowery meaningless waffle. I think of religion as our limited interpretation of an unlimited God. Rather than look at the rules of any religion, it is important to look at the substance behind it.

Religion is not an answer any more than a menu is a physical meal. A menu tells you what to expect, but the real experience is the meal. Is there a religion that does good and affirms life? Is there a religion that is associated with blessing? Is there a religion that brings liberty and freedom? Is there a religion that talks about love?

Step 5 - Take some time to explore your spirituality

In the hustle and bustle of life, spirituality is easily ignored. Add to this your medical appointments or other commitments and spirituality will be at the bottom of the “to do” list. Make an effort to put it at the top of the list, even if it is for an hour or two.

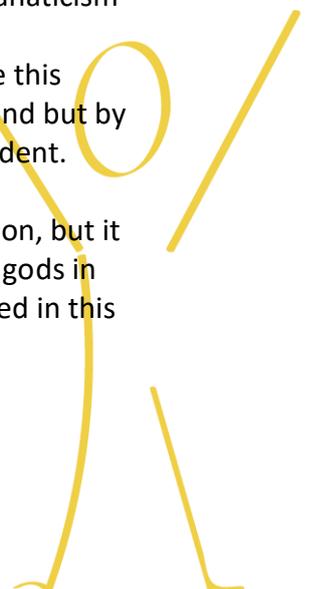
Try and go on a retreat with just you, no one else. It may be near a beach or a forest or somewhere peaceful and quiet with minimal distractions. Count it as your time—a gift to yourself. Don’t be enticed to switch on your brain by reading a book or watching television. Set time aside to purposefully be spiritual.

Step 6 - Have a conversation with God

If there is a God, what would you ask or say? What would you do if you were God? Have you considered God’s job description? How would you advise God?

We all have different views about God. These may range from atheism to fanaticism and everything in between. Your attitude will determine the nature of this conversation. Mostly, we struggle to have a conversation with God because this makes us vulnerable. It requires us to accept that we do not exist by our hand but by God’s hand. It takes away our assumed independence and makes us dependent.

This is not a bad thing. Being dependent on God is a step in the right direction, but it depends on which god you choose. With a choice of more than 300 million gods in Hinduism alone, it can be an impossible task. Why not ask God to be involved in this conversation?



Perhaps the following start to the conversation may help?

“Dear God – Help me to know you.

Then talk to God as if he is listening. He will answer you but not necessarily in the way you expect. It may be in a conversation or in a dream or by chance, or perhaps a confronting thought while you are watching TV. Keep your heart open and trust.

Step 7. Consider the exception

Atheism may seem to be attractive until the big questions are honestly considered. It is improbable that we have come to exist as a range of amazing species in a world with so much wonder, creativity and variety simply by random actions over time. The complexity of the design and the impossibility of this scenario argues against atheism. CS Lewis, the author of The Chronicles of Narnia series, was a committed atheist and he makes a compelling argument about why his argument against God failed.

In considering which god, consider the exception. All religions require us to reach up to God. There is only one exception, only one religion where God reaches down to us. This God is worth knowing.

Conclusion

When it comes to dying, consider this as a comma and not a full-stop. What comes after the comma is not readily obvious. It becomes more obvious the harder you look and, as with all treasures, it requires determination and patience to find this great treasure.

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