

The surviving presence of our consciousness

***Opening our minds to experiences
that transform our materialist worldview***

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Since we in the modern Western world have managed to free ourselves from the dominance of various Christian worldviews, the mainstream worldview in the West has become secular and materialist in its orientation. The people who subscribe to this worldview have convinced themselves that Sacred entities like Goddesses, Gods and angels do not exist; that the material world is all there is; therefore, that we only live once and that, when we die, our life will be over forever. In this worldview, our consciousness is considered a product of our brain cells. This means that the non-physical life of our consciousness supposedly depends one hundred percent on the physical life of our brain cells – and that when our brain cells die, our conscious experience must come to an end as well.

Since the time of the Enlightenment this worldview has gradually become the foundation of all the sciences. Not just of the ‘hard sciences’ – like physics and biology –, but indirectly the materialist worldview has also formed the foundation of the other scientific disciplines – like sociology, psychology, history, archaeology and economics. And it is also the worldview that is still spread by the various media channels every day all across the world. Therefore, it is not just the worldview of scientists anymore, but globally it has become the dominant worldview of people in general.

It is not always realized what kind of influence the materialist worldview has had, and still has – on the way that we live our daily lives,

make our plans and decisions. The idea that this one material life is all that we have, has inspired us to fill our own life with as many experiences as possible – and to make it as comfortable as possible for ourselves, protect this comfort, often with little or no regard for the effect of our lifestyle on other people, the planet, and future generations. It has also intensified our fear of death: we don't want it to end, don't want to think about the nothingness that awaits us after death and create a life for ourselves in which death does not seem to exist.

With respect to the corona crisis that started in 2020, Charles Eisenstein has explained to what extent the materialist worldview has exposed our fear of death, resulting into a war on death: 'The surrounding culture (...) lobbies us relentlessly to live in fear, and constructed systems that embody fear. In them, staying safe is overridingly important. Thus we have a medical system in which most decisions are based on calculations of risk, and in which the worst possible outcome, marking the physician's ultimate failure, is death. Yet all the while, we know that death awaits us regardless.' (...) 'Ours is a society of death denial, from its hiding away of corpses, to its fetish for youthfulness, to its warehousing of old people in nursing homes. Even its obsession with money and property (...) expresses the delusion that the impermanent self can be made permanent through its attachments.'¹ In other words, trying to stay young as long as possible, hiding all the signs of aging as much we can, and extending our physical life as long as possible with the help of medical technologies, are manifestations of our urge to keep the reality of death at a distance from our present life. Do we realize, I wonder, what the consequences will be if we collectively continue to subscribe to this worldview?

Invitations to leave the materialist worldview behind

It should have become quite obvious to anyone that our human world, and also the surrounding natural world in which our human world is embedded, cannot bear a continuation of the materialist worldview very much longer. It has been largely responsible for generating the current polycrisis – which, in my view, at heart is essentially a spiritual crisis that has been manifesting itself on a planetary level in several interrelated sub-crises like the

ecological crisis. We can expect that this crisis situation will not improve as long as we collectively keep thinking in materialist terms about life.

But the good news is that there is already a post-materialist worldview in the making for a while, that unfortunately, hasn't reached the majority of people yet and also not the mainstream world of science and media. This new worldview is generated by a growing number of experiences and developments in scientific research, which show us that we do not live at all in a world in which matter is the source of everything. These experiences, which include near-death experiences, after-death communication and reincarnation, reveal that consciousness is primal and that its existence precedes matter. The scientific research supporting the revealed reality of these experiences began already more than a hundred years ago with the rise of quantum physics. It gradually developed further during the twentieth and twenty-first century toward a post-materialist science through various – scientifically founded – theories, in which the power of *invisible fields* play a central role: a non-material dimension of life that exists beyond the world of matter and precedes it.

What all these experiences and insights of scientific research clearly point to is that consciousness is not at all produced by our brain cells. Instead, all these experiences and insights are telling us that our consciousness has been there before we were born, that it will not disappear when we die, but will survive the death of our physical body. The knowledge that consciousness represents the source of life, and that our own individual consciousness is not dependent on the life of our physical body, forms a good antidote to the denial and fear of death that Eisenstein referred to. The more we lose our fear of death, the more we are ready to live our life fully, fearlessly. So it is very important to integrate the notion that the existence of consciousness precedes the existence of matter into our worldview, and let it transform our materialist worldview into a new one, and do this on a planetary level. If we manage to do that, I am quite sure that this is going to have beneficial effects on all levels of life, not just our human life but on the entire natural world in which our human life is embedded, however unimaginable that might be at this moment.

Then, as members of the Earth Community, we turn the worldwide polycrisis into a major challenge, and realize that today we are living on the

verge of a planetary paradigm shift. I am definitely not the only one who is thinking this. As Thomas Kuhn has shown us in 1960s, before paradigm shifts can take place there will be a period of resistance, a period in which people try to hold tightly to the old paradigm. We can see this happening all around us at the moment. In this period we can expect fierce resistance – in the first place from people in powerful positions in large organizations, corporations but also from politicians, who have founded their entire self-image and career on the old materialist paradigm. But besides that, their power is made possible by their ‘followers’ – the ‘ordinary’ people who support them because they believe that these ‘rulers’ take the right decisions for them. By the way, I am definitely not thinking in conspiracy terms about this situation: most people, who hold on to the old paradigm and struggle against the new one, do this without even realizing it. This is probably also true for the majority of people who are not in powerful positions, but who were raised in a culture in which the materialist worldview shaped their upbringing and their thinking. Together they represent a considerable part of the population that is forming a bulwark of resistance and is blocking the current transformation process.

Therefore, before I pay further attention on to the experiences and scientific research that reveal the primacy of consciousness to matter, first I am going to pay attention to the ins and outs of the material worldview and the way it has impacted our lives. We have to ask ourselves seriously, what the consequences will be when the materialist worldview manages to keep dominating the social, economic and political scene for another while.

A privileged life of comfort and its shadow side

Let me start by saying that undeniably the materialist worldview has brought us many valuable things, like the various technological inventions that have made the lives of a lot of people much more comfortable. This touches also a lot of aspects of my own life in the Netherlands. I realize very well that I am in a very privileged position here, compared to many other people living elsewhere in the world. In this privileged position, I am definitely very grateful for being able to live in a house that has direct access to an electrical network, to clean water, and that it is located near shops that always have a rich variety of food in store. And it is wonderful

that through wireless digital communication from this comfortable place I can be in direct contact with people all over the planet. Through the Internet I can build bridges between people with different cultural backgrounds across the world and in an instant we can freely share newly generated ideas without intervention of authorities. In this way, the Internet has helped me, and is still helping me every day, to feel a more wholesome part of the Earth Community.

But, of course, there is also another side to this development as well. In recent years we have become increasingly aware of the fact that the ideas that we communicate through the Internet need not be that wonderful or peaceful at all, and can also contribute to processes of polarization and to the generation of conflicts. Science might have provided us with technologies that already use advanced knowledge from quantum physics that far surpass Newtonian materialism, but many human minds that use these technologies have often not made that transition yet – for that would also involve the acceptance of the idea that consciousness is the basis of life and not matter.

In this respect, we seem to have a tendency to ignore the consequences of new scientific insights. This ignorance actually goes back to the early days of quantum physics. Max Planck already stated in 1944: ‘There is no matter as such. All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force which brings the particle of an atom to vibration and holds this most minute solar system of the universe together. (...) We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent Spirit. This Spirit is the matrix of all matter.’ I am not sure whether Planck himself realized that this also involved a transformation of our ideas about our consciousness. But it is a fact that collectively the rise of quantum physics didn’t transform the human mind: most of us kept clinging to our egocentric identities and materialist worldview. And as is well-known in this regard, we used that newly acquired knowledge about the nature of the atom and the natural world to create the atomic bomb, and to build a nuclear arsenal of more than 5000 nuclear bombs spread over several countries – of which even a small portion could already destroy our entire civilization.

Now that we – a century later! – have started using the knowledge of quantum physics, for instance, in our digital communication systems, many

people still have not understood that this must have consequences as well for our ideas about the nature of our consciousness. Many people don't seem to realize that all the cells of their own body, including their brain cells, consist of atoms. From within their materialist worldview people could use these communications systems, including of course the Internet, to spread their feelings of hatred, populist ideas that feed on these feelings hatred and to generate collective projections on scapegoats. Besides this, it has also allowed the materially rich and comfortable world of the West to continue to exist amidst another human world, in which millions of people are materially poor and suffering on a daily basis. In this respect, it should actually be no surprise that these suffering people in large numbers decide to flee the unbearable situation in their country and dare to risk their lives to find these more materially rich and comfortable countries...

Domination by the left hemisphere of the brain

Because in the materialist worldview we believe that our consciousness is produced by our brain cells, it is logical to locate this worldview somewhere in the brain as well. Of course, this creates a rather strange position from the start: how can our consciousness that is produced by brain cells and therefore must also be located within the domain of the brain, have knowledge about brain cells of which itself is the product? Did our consciousness somehow manage to observe the brain cells *from within*?

When we consider the fact that our brain consists of two hemispheres, a right and left hemisphere, we can locate the materialist worldview more specifically in the left hemisphere, which happens also to be the dominant hemisphere in Western culture. From within this left hemisphere we not only try to exert control over the right hemisphere, but also over the rest of our body, in particular the heart. In other words, in a materialist worldview the head rules over the heart.

It is interesting to mention here the ideas about the two hemispheres that were developed by the English psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist and that he has written about in his book *The Master and His Emissary*. In this book, he has argued that persuasively that originally the situation has been very different. According to him, the right hemisphere is the older of the two and matured earlier in our individual lives, and a similar earlier maturation of the right

hemisphere has happened in the collective development of our species. He has pointed out that a balance has existed between these two – basically asymmetrical – hemispheres, in which originally there was a natural primacy of the right hemisphere, and the left hemisphere functioned as a servant of the right one. According to him, at some historical point in the ‘ancient world’ a cultural shift has occurred that eventually led to the domination of the left hemisphere and the suppression of the right one. As both hemispheres have very different qualities, this shift to the left hemisphere also involved a shift in these qualities. As McGilchrist has pointed out, the right hemisphere is, for instance, open to new experiences and understands life in a holistic way, whereas the left hemisphere wants to exert control over our lives and experiences the world in the form of separate entities.²

The collective shift of the emphasis from the right to the left hemisphere has also made the rise of the materialist worldview possible. It is in this reversed situation, with the left hemisphere dominating the right one, that the materialist worldview felt itself at home. This explains, of course, why materialists identify strongly with the ego and with competition, and with experiencing themselves and the world around them through a sense of separation, as these capacities reside in the left hemisphere. And it also explains why they consider other capacities like empathy, cooperation, experiencing the whole and interconnectedness, putting and understanding things in their context, as secondary or even as irrelevant.

The ego’s sense of permanency and separation

It is quite obvious that our ego is essentially an immaterial entity, but materialist people who strongly identify with it, have given it a certain permanent status. As Eisenstein has pointed out, attachments provided by money and property strengthen the illusionary belief of the ego’s permanence. The ego does allow for some change, but then it must always be a linear, cumulative kind of change. This cumulation could consist, for instance, of adding a higher social position or status to the feeling of identity, or the new ownership of a larger house, in a better neighbourhood, or an achievement in a new field of interest. People with a materialist

worldview generally think that building a reputation, protecting it and if possible enlarging it, are very important.

As mentioned above, through the left hemisphere of our brain we experience the world through a sense of separation. This sense of separation characterizes the (undeveloped) ego and concerns our own identity, our relationship with other people and with the surrounding natural world. When we look at other people, and at the plants and animals around us, we do indeed appear to see individual entities that are separated by clear boundaries with spaces in between. People with a materialist worldview also tend to experience their lives to be separate from the lives of other people, who of course, also clearly live in other material bodies. When consciousness is produced by our own brain cells, then there is also a clear separation between my personal consciousness and the consciousness of other people. Therefore, any intrusion into the personal space of a materialist thinker, tends to lead to protective, defensive or offensive behaviour: to conflict situations.

At the root of this sense of separation between people lies the much deeper feeling of being separated from the surrounding natural world. People with a materialist worldview generally think that human life primarily exists in the context of a human society, and that building a human civilization has basically coincided with conquering the forces of nature. They have put themselves in a superior position to it. From the position of the ego, which considers itself to be a subject, everything in the surrounding world consists of mere objects. Therefore, the people with a materialist worldview do not feel much restraint with exploiting the natural world around them – which include plants, animals, mountains, rivers, the oceans, the air above us, and, of course, also other human beings.

A limited, but arrogant worldview

Due to the identification with the ego and its location in only one half of the brain, the materialist worldview is essentially a very limited worldview. This hasn't stopped the people who subscribe to this worldview from being very arrogant about our place in the world. Considering themselves to be the most highly evolved species on this planet, with the most powerful brain, they think they are the masters of life and are unwilling to believe

that there might be any other higher, more powerful authority on this planet. This makes it quite hard for materialists to realize and to accept that the centuries of dominance by their own worldview – with roots that even go back millennia – have largely been responsible for generating the current planetary polycrisis. As said, this crisis includes the ecological crisis, that has manifested itself because we, driven by the materialist view of life, are destroying the very context – the planetary matrix or web of life – that is surrounding us everywhere at all times and is making our physical life possible. In the materialist worldview taking responsibility for this crisis situation would entail: admitting that we humans have not been the masters of life after all.

I am certainly not the only one who has come to realize the severity of this situation. For instance, the English philosopher Rupert Spira has pointed out in this regard: ‘For centuries our culture has been dominated by the materialist view of reality. It is not necessary to point out the devastating effects of this view, the extent of suffering and conflict in society speaks for itself. (...) Humanity cannot survive the materialist paradigm. If our species, and countless others, are to survive, we will have to replace the matter model with the consciousness-only model.’³

For a few decades, an increasing number of people have become aware of the dangers and limitations of the materialist worldview, but some people have been aware of it even much earlier. More than two hundred years ago the English painter, poet and visionary William Blake (1757-1829) considered this worldview, which he associated with the ideas of Isaac Newton, to be limited to ‘the single vision’ of ‘Newton’s Sleep’, and he warned for its inherent destructive power. The indigenous peoples that European colonists came into contact with were also aware of the dangers of the materialist worldview of the Europeans. The Native American Chief Seattle famously expressed in the 19th century that whatever we do to the earth – to the natural world around us –, we do to ourselves. Actually, the same applies the other way around: what we do to ourselves, we do to the earth. These thinkers have shown us that we do not need to have scientific evidence to arrive at a truthful vision.

It is true that collectively we have gotten more aware today of the ecological crisis that is confronting us in the form of climate change. But as

long as our ecological thinking and action keeps a materialist foundation – and the natural world is considered to consist of mere matter with no consciousness as long as there are no brains to produce it –, it is not going to help us very much with reevaluating our place in the planetary web of life and repairing the damage that we have done to it in a structural way. In this respect, we need to do much more than just creating new technological inventions, like electric cars and solar panels. Albert Einstein already knew what kind of dilemma we are dealing with here, when he said: ‘We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.’ To move in the direction of a solution, we need a profound change in our worldview, a change in our basic idea of what consciousness is and what it can do.

A daytime, linear worldview from without

People with a materialist worldview tend to dislike the natural process of cyclical change, which includes the cycles of the daytime *and* the nighttime, of summer *and* winter, of life *and* death. I think many people, including myself, have not been aware of the fact that the materialist worldview to a large extent has always been a worldview that is only related to the daytime part of our life, to the part of life in which we can clearly see the world around us. Although it claims to inform us about the totality of life, it has only dealt with the world that during the daytime we can sense through our five senses, in particular the sense of sight and touch. When the world is viewed and analyzed through our senses (or by equipment that extend our senses), the tangible material world appears to be the only world that really exists. Then the conclusion is easily drawn and confirmed that matter must be the foundation of life.

By using microscopes, we have managed to include the atomic and subatomic world into this worldview; and by using telescopes, we have managed to include the surrounding cosmos into this worldview. But, due to the objective method of scientific research, the materialist worldview has always been limited to researching everything from without, even when it uses equipment to enter a living (or dead) body to study the smallest details of its internal organs, cells, atoms and beyond. When materialist scientists work in a dark space, they must first switch on a light, or use sensitive

equipment that helps them to extend the reach of their senses, to be able to detect whatever they are researching.

The daytime focus of the materialist worldview has also been responsible for projecting linear thinking on cyclical life. We have witnessed this in our economic thinking, in which – up to quite recently at least – growth has been considered a linear process, a continuation in a straight line to a higher level. We don't have to look further than our own body, to know that growing to psychological and spiritual maturity does not happen in a linear way, but is part of a wavy, cyclical process of development. A worldview that would seriously include the nighttime and cyclical processes, and even recognize that the presence and power of the darkness is in fact central to a balanced state – of an ever changing balanced duality, as visualized by the Taoist symbol of yin-yang –, would necessarily have to be a subjective worldview that is built on experiencing the world from within.

Avoidance and attraction of enemies, of death and misery

In the cyclical reality we cannot exclude death from life. As every living plant that is rooted into the earth is showing us, life can only grow on the foundation of death. I already pointed to the fact that avoidance and fear of death lies at the heart of the materialist worldview. Materialists do their best to avoid thinking about their own death, and to center all their attention on their life, in their opinion the only life they will ever have. Paradoxically, however, they also invite the confrontation with the reality of death. By the belief that this one physical life is all that we have, together with the focus on acquiring and defending material possessions – which includes personal landownership and state ownership of large pieces of land with boundaries around it to keep others out – we create the idea of the enemy, who imposes a threat on us. Since the materialists are convinced that we live only once, they are also convinced that by killing enemies they get rid of their enemies forever. In their view, by killing their physical bodies they disappear completely from the planet. In this respect, the manifestation of conflicts and warfare in our world, and the suffering and misery that results from this, is inextricably connected to the presence and the power of the materialist worldview.

This worldview is essentially a dualistic worldview, which is based on the belief in the existence of absolute opposites, Friend versus Enemy, Good versus Bad, Life versus Death. This dualistic worldview entails not only a force of avoidance, but also a force of attraction: materialists cannot let their enemies live their lives in peace, let them be, but they keep searching and confronting them, reminding them that they are still their enemies. A hostile mind needs an enemy to project his or her hostility on.

A mechanistic worldview excluding spirituality

Paradoxically, materialists also tend to be abstract thinkers, interpreting matter in mechanistic terms. In the words of the philosopher Rupert Spira: ‘A world made of matter is an abstraction, and it is this calamitous assumption that lies at the root of our materialistic culture and it responsible for separating all objects and others from the intimacy of ourself, thus enabling us to disrespect and degrade our environment and treat other people and animals in unkind and unjust ways.’⁴ It is almost logical that they must think of their consciousness, which in their view is a mere product of their brain cells, in mechanistic terms as well, as something that essentially works like a complicated machine, like a computer. In the materialist worldview, the cultural accomplishments of our species, which has resulted in the building of a civilization on a planetary scale, are connected directly to the evolutionary development of our brain. And, thereby, we have put ourselves on the top of all the evolutionary developments on our planet.

People with a materialist worldview have by definition excluded the spiritual dimension of the natural world. They have put themselves above nature, in a position of control, and treat it as a collection of objects or resources that is solely there for human use and exploitation. In their view, the spiritual dimension of nature simply doesn’t exist – there is no such thing as an animated natural world, just a world filled with chunks of matter, including ourselves. Spiritual experiences of people that point to the existence of an animated natural world simply do not fit into the materialist worldview. They undermine the foundations of the materialist self image as ruler over the natural world, and that doesn’t feel OK to them. This can explain why materialists do their best to ignore spiritual experiences of

people, or refuse to take them seriously, and – when these approaches haven't been successful – fight against them with a disproportional fierceness.

New insights into the nature of consciousness

Now I am going, as promised, to pay attention to the experiences and scientific insights that are changing our ideas about the nature of consciousness, and, through that, also undermine the conception of reality of the materialist worldview. To that end, below I will first focus in separate sections respectively on near-death experiences, after death communication, reincarnation, terminal lucidity and memory storage. Subsequently, I I am going to discuss briefly the scientific developments in the field of consciousness, as they have manifested themselves from the beginning of the 20th century. These developments were generated by the discoveries in quantum physics, which more or less appear to synchronize with the developments in depth psychology. Of course, a lot can be said about these. In this article I must limit myself to briefly mentioning the various developments.

All these experiences and developments have only come together at the end of the 20th / the beginning of the 21st century and are gaining momentum in our time. The new insights into the nature of consciousness, that are central to them, appear to come just in time, now that our modern society has globally entered a polycrisis that touches all areas of life.

The reality revealed by near-death experiences

First I will pay attention to the reality that is revealed by people who have gone through a near-death experience. Many people are probably not aware yet how revolutionary the experiences of these people are and how much they are going to help us all to understand our life – including its relationship with death – much better.

Due to the developments and improvements of modern techniques during the 20th century – like reanimation and transplants of body organs – it has been increasingly possible to keep people alive, who would have died before. Due to those developments and improvements, the reports of mysterious experiences that some people have on the verge of death have

increased a lot as well. These kinds of experiences have been reported all through history and quite likely happened in prehistoric periods as well, but in our time they seem to have happened more frequently. They always happen during the short period when the heart has stopped beating and the blood circulation has stopped completely. As people were not prepared to have these kinds of experiences and feared that people might think they were mad, initially they tended to keep these to themselves. But in the 1970s these experiences caught the attention of the American philosopher, psychiatrist and physician Raymond Moody. This inspired him to record a number of them, and write a book about this phenomenon in 1975, entitled *Life After Life*. To him we owe the term *near-death experience* for these kinds of experiences.

Since Moody published his book, many other articles and books have been published about this phenomenon. There have been scientifically oriented articles and books, discussing more cases in this field and offering additional research, which has given the near-death experience a firmer scientific basis. Well-known researchers with published articles and books are, for instance, the Dutch cardiologist Pim van Lommel, the American psychiatrist Bruce Greyson, the American social anthropologist Marilyn Schlitz or the British biomedical scientist Penny Sartori.⁵ But they are certainly not the only people who have paid attention to the phenomenon of the near- death experience.

Interestingly, since a few decades also people who have had a near-death experience themselves started to write about their experience and the tremendous transformative impact it has had on their lives. In this regard, I think, for instance, about the fascinating stories by Anita Moorjani, Eben Alexander, and Nancy Rynes.⁶ Nowadays there are also many firsthand stories about near-death experiences that can be watched and listened to on YouTube – for instance, on the YouTube channel of Anthony Chene Production.⁷ The first episode of the Netflix documentary *Surviving Death* from 2021 is dedicated to near-death experiences, which features both the latest research in this field and some firsthand stories.

When you read or listen with an open mind to these stories, you cannot escape the notion that the people talking about their own experience are all very open-minded and honest, and that their stories are truthful, authentic.

In most cases, their worldview was transformed completely by the impact of their experience. When they had a secular, materialist worldview before their experience, it was transformed into a spiritual one that could give room and meaning to their experience. When they had been practicing a particular religion before their experience, they might continue to practice their religion, but their conventional religious worldview was expanded into a deeper, more spiritual one after. Importantly, none of them remained pure materialists.

In their near-death experience they had experienced that, while they had been separated from their physical body, they continue to live and remained conscious. This had convinced them that their consciousness was not dependent on the life of their physical body and that it would also continue to exist when this body would really die in the near future. During the experience they had entered a dimension that they didn't know that existed and in most cases this experience was very overpowering for them. They did not feel the pain anymore that was connected to their physical body and experienced unconditional love everywhere around them, embodied by unknown spiritual beings and often also by some of their dead relatives. In this dimension, the conscious experience of themselves, of who they really are, had intensified and expanded a lot. Their sense of time seemed to have disappeared. In most cases, the near-death experience had started by leaving their body, rising above it and observing accurately what was happening in the physical world, both in the room where their body was lying and beyond that. Often they appeared to be able to move through walls – and even to enter the minds of others and read their thoughts and experience their feelings directly. So, their near death-experience was usually also an *out-of-body experience*. Nearly all of them reported that their life in the spiritual dimension of the near-death experience felt much more real to them, than their life in the physical world.

When the people finally returned to their body, at first most of them didn't like the idea at all of returning to the physical life they had left behind. But their life changed for the better when they eventually managed to integrate the new vision they had received during their near death experience into their lives. Because of the impact of their near-death experience, they had lost their fear of death completely, and this was a

lasting change. From that newly acquired fearless position, they felt inspired to participate much more fully in the life around them and to contribute to it in a much more loving, empathic and authentic way. And they felt driven to tell their story to the world.

The near-death experiences all happened during the short period when their heart had stopped beating, the blood circulation had stopped completely and their brain had stopped functioning. The fact that people during their near-death experience could leave their body during this period and make observations – like seeing themselves lying down from without, observe what people were doing and talking about, sometimes in other rooms – and that later these proved to be accurate, is very significant. The reality that unfolded during these experiences is showing very clearly that our consciousness apparently can exist separately from our brain and physical body, and even seems to become more powerful without this physical brain connection. The suggestion that consciousness is primal to matter and will survive when our physical body dies is very strong.

After death communication

There are other experiences worth mentioning here that point to a survival of our consciousness. There are, for instance, many reports of so-called *after death communication*. This refers to communication by dead people with relatives or friends who are still alive. Sometimes this happens directly with the relatives or friends, sometimes a medium plays the role of intermediary receiving messages from the persons who have died. Below I will pay attention to a few books on this theme, with the knowledge that it is just a small sample of many books that are published in this field.

The English author Colin Wilson – who started in the 1950s by writing about the outsider in society, but later expanded this research into various occult and psychological themes – has also investigated the evidence for life after death: in his book *Afterlife* from 1985.⁸ In this book, he has paid attention to various people who have been involved with research in this field, from the 19th century until the present. He has looked at the possibility of a continuation of life after death from many different angles. He admitted that he started with his investigation as a skeptic, open to any result, but in

the end found the evidence for the survival of our consciousness quite convincing.

More recently, in 2003, the American psychotherapist Jane Greer published her personal research into the phenomenon of after death communication (which she has called *transcommunication*) in her book *The After Life Connection*. As a psychotherapist, initially she wasn't much involved with this phenomenon, but this changed when her mother, with whom she had been really close all her life, died of a brain tumor. Before her mother died, she promised to keep their communication going. Greer found out very quickly that indeed she kept getting striking messages from her mother that indicated very clearly that her life hadn't ended with her death and that their relationship hadn't ended either. Greer experienced her presence through various manifestations: through energies, through animal visitations, through music and dreams.⁹ Understandably, dead people often use other means of communication than using speech or words, because the physical organ that produced speech and words could not be used any more. Therefore, other means like playing with electricity, and creating synchronistic events are used, that perhaps initially we would not associate with means of communication. Greer has emphasized that we first have to open our minds to it, to be able to recognize it as a form of communication when we are confronted with it.

Greer considered the messages she received from her mother very comforting and healing, and she found out that many other people had similar experiences. This comforting and healing aspect inspired her to write a book about it. Importantly, she has pointed out that not just mediums or specific sensitive people have access to this psychic energy, but that we can all open ourselves to this psychic energy. According to her, children still have access to this energy, because they are still in tune with their gut feelings. Therefore, opening to communication with our departed loved ones, really involves a form of reconnecting to a part of ourselves that we have gradually lost during the process of growing up. In her book, she shows what we can do to activate this transcommunication with dead loved ones, relatives or friends in our own lives.

The American author Betty Kovacs, who was educated in and worked as a teacher in Comparative Literature and Theory of Symbolic-/Mythic

Language, has also written an interesting book about after-death communication, entitled *The Miracle of Death*.¹⁰ After her mother, her son and her husband all three had died in separate car accidents, she kept communicating with them, not just about personal things but also in general about the current state of our world. It convinced her that death is not an end but just a transformation. She had worked for decades in an academic environment and through the after death communication she increasingly became aware of the limitations of the mainstream materialist science. Her exploration ‘had rooted itself all too long in the academic world where the rational mind had been conditioned to believe in the fiction of its superiority over all the other mental functions.’¹¹ The fiction that she is talking about here, is, of course, the materialist worldview. According to her, the latest discoveries in physics are going to help us to transform this worldview and take the after death communication that she has been experiencing seriously as well: ‘As we attempt to reeducate our minds with the new perceptions of reality being developed by modern physics, we are creating a new worldview that not only has enough space for individual, transformative experiences, but, in fact, *requires* it.’ In that new worldview, ‘the real death in our culture is not physical death, but the death of this innate knowledge about reality.’¹²

It is important to emphasize here that it is well-known that there have been charlatans working in the field of mediumship. But fortunately there are also mediums that have proven to be genuine mediators. The messages these dead people communicate to the living relatives or friends, often are limited to informing them that they are OK and need not worry about them, and that feels very comforting to these living relatives or friends. The Netflix documentary *Surviving death*, mentioned earlier, pays attention to these mediums in two episodes.

Reincarnation

Besides after-death communication, there is also the phenomenon of *reincarnation*. Most religious worldviews have included a belief in reincarnation. The monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, at least in their institutionalized forms, are the big exceptions in this. But despite this, belief in reincarnation has a very long history, even going

back into prehistory. The fact that reincarnation has largely been considered a religious phenomenon, might help to explain why materialist scientists – who are primarily concerned with rational thinking, objective knowledge and analysis of facts – have not taken reincarnation too seriously and haven't paid much attention to it yet. But of course, in the materialist worldview, the possibility of reincarnation was also a priori excluded. Research into it would entail a direct questioning of the materialist worldview. Since the 19th century there have been some thinkers and researchers in Western culture who accepted reincarnation as a reality – like the people who were involved in the Theosophical Society and the Anthroposophical Society, including Helena Blavatsky, and Rudolf Steiner. Besides this there was also the Society for Psychical Research, which was founded in 1882 in London and was concerned with research in the parapsychological field, which included also reincarnation. But at the time such research was not really taken seriously by the mainstream scientific world. And this dismissive attitude has continued during the 20th century.

Fortunately, in this regard there seems to be a change in the air. At the end of the 20th and the start of the 21st century, there have been some brave scientific researchers who have dared to investigate reincarnation – although their research still has not managed to reach the attention of the materialist scientists. The American psychiatrist Ian Stevenson is one of those researchers, who has done extensive research into this field and whose research was continued by Tim Tucker after he died. Their research has shown that very young children all over the world have memories about a previous life. These children surprised their parents (or other caretakers) when they started telling them intimate details about their previous life. When action was taken to check and verify the information, first it was checked carefully whether these children could not have got their information through other sources. And when that possibility was excluded or very unlikely, an attempt was made to verify the information about this previous life. Often they possessed information about unknown people and places, that they could not have received through another source, but that after research turned out to be correct. The American philosopher and religious scholar Christopher Bache, who has spent most of his life researching the nature of consciousness, has written a very interesting book

about reincarnation, entitled *Lifecycles*. In this book, he dives deeply into the theme of reincarnation and points to the significance of Ian Stevenson's research in this field.¹³

Terminal lucidity, hydrocephalus and memory storage

Next to near death experiences, after death communication and the reality of reincarnation, there are other indications that our consciousness is not produced by the brain cells. In this respect, Bruce Greyson has pointed to a phenomenon that he has called *terminal lucidity*. With this term he refers to the fact that some people who have been suffering from dementia for years unexpectedly have a clear mind again on the very last day of their life, just before they die. Many people have experienced this phenomenon firsthand with relatives or friends who suffered from dementia but whose old familiar identity unexpectedly returns to them just before they died. The English psychologist Steve Taylor has written an interesting blog about terminal lucidity, entitled *The Enigma of Terminal Lucidity*. In this blog, he has pointed out that there is no explanation for this phenomenon yet, but he has added the following: 'Terminal lucidity suggests that human consciousness may have a more complex and mysterious source. According to the philosophical approach that I term 'panspiritism', consciousness exists beyond the human brain, as a fundamental and universal quality. The brain's role is not to produce consciousness but to transmit it, so that universal consciousness can become our internal consciousness.'¹⁴

Bruce Greyson has also referred to another curious phenomenon that indicates that our consciousness cannot be produced by our brain cells: there are reports of people who had been able to think clearly and fully participated in society, but whose skull appeared to be filled largely with fluid instead of brain cells. This was revealed, when a scan of their brain was made. The English neuroscientist John Lorber has researched this phenomenon, which is called *hydrocephalus*. The patients he researched held high positions in organizations, in which they appeared to function as good as the other people.¹⁵ This raises the question of course: how could they have been using their mind for many years, when research shows that they have no or hardly any brain cells? Also this phenomenon confirms that our consciousness cannot be a mere product of the brain.

Eben Alexander has brought in yet another phenomenon – from his own near-death experience – that according to him clearly indicates that the brain is not producing our consciousness: the assumption that our memory is stored in our brain cells. Due to a meningitis infection and the resulting coma of 6 days, in which he had his near death experience, his brain was severely damaged. When he woke up from this coma, all of his memory was gone: he couldn't remember anything, not even who he was. In the months after he had woken up, his brain gradually recovered and his pre-coma knowledge and his memory gradually returned. Interestingly, some memories even returned more complete than before his coma and were also more vivid. He newly remembered details from his early childhood. This all made him wonder where all his memories had been in the meantime. Apparently, they had been stored somewhere else, outside his brain, and during the restoring process his brain had regained access to this source. And how could it be that the details of his memories had become more complete and vivid? Taken together with the fact that everyone's brain cells are regularly renewed and somehow memories are retained during this renewal process, it confirmed to him that in general our memory is not stored in the brain. And this also fitted into the notion that consciousness is primal to matter.¹⁶

Scientific research into the nature of consciousness

It is worth mentioning here that it is not only by a growing number of personal experiences that people with a materialist worldview are confronted these days. As indicated earlier, the materialist worldview has already been questioned by quantum physics for more than hundred years. Earlier in this article, I have already quoted a statement by Max Planck from 1944, about consciousness being primal to matter. Since the 1920s the research of quantum physics has continued and has inspired several scientists, philosophers and other thinkers to develop new ideas about the nature and power of consciousness, that unfortunately were never taken seriously by mainstream materialist scientists and were more or less disqualified by getting an 'alternative' or 'controversial' label stuck on their work.

The development of depth psychology in the 20th century offered an important contribution to the scientific research into the nature of consciousness – and, related to that, into the nature of the part of our mind that we are not aware of, of the unconscious. Sigmund Freud focused primarily on the way the repressed parts of our consciousness lived on in the unconscious part of our mind, and, from there, continued to influence our lives. The Swiss psychologist and pupil of Freud, Carl Jung, expanded Freud's notion of a personal unconscious mind. Jung suggested that next to a personal unconscious there existed also a *collective unconscious*, in which the complete psychological and spiritual heritage of humankind is stored. According to him, we don't have direct access to it, but indirectly we do, through the symbolic manifestation of archetypes in our lives, both in our dreams and waking life.

Jung's research showed that on this deep level of the collective unconscious we are all inextricably connected with one another, and also with the natural world around us. This quality of the collective unconscious to connect us with others and the surrounding natural world, suggests that our mind is not just located in our brain, but also present in an invisible dimension outside us, and is not produced by our brain cells. In other words, Jung's ideas about the conscious and unconscious mind do not subscribe to the materialist worldview, and rather point to a worldview in which consciousness is primal. In this respect, it is interesting to mention that Rupert Spira considered Jung's term *collective unconscious* a bit misleading, because 'it implies that the contents of this field lie outside consciousness.' He prefers to call it 'the collective field of consciousness', to which the individual mind sometimes gets access – for instance, through dreams.¹⁷

Importantly, Jung was very conscious of the developments in quantum physics, which also questioned the materialist worldview. In this context, he was friends with the physicist Wolfgang Pauli, and corresponded with him about the relationship between psychological and physical matters. It is no coincidence, I think, that the developments in quantum physics and in depth psychology more or less synchronized with each other.

In 2007 an interesting collection of articles was published, entitled *Mind Before Matter*. It contains visions by scientists and other researchers about a

new science of consciousness, in which the presence of consciousness precedes matter. Researchers like Amit Goswami, Duane Elgin, Ervin Laszlo, Elisabet Sahtouris, Richard Tarnas, David Korten, Paul Devereux, Dean Radin and Anne Baring offered a contribution to it.¹⁸ In this regard, I must also mention the scientists who have discovered the presence of an invisible order, an invisible field or several invisible fields, that precede and generate the manifestation of the material world. I have put these scientific visions together under the heading of ‘field theories’. In this context, the theory about the implicate and explicate order by the physicist David Bohm is important. In his scientific vision life consists of an ongoing ‘holomovement’ on all levels, in which the (invisible) implicate order *unfolds* into the (visible, tangible) explicate order, and at some point *enfolds* back into the implicate order. This process of unfolding and enfolding is an ongoing process. Besides David Bohm, Ervin Laszlo and Rupert Sheldrake should also be mentioned. Laszlo has argued that our tangible material world emerged from an underlying field, that he called the Akashic Field. In this field also all the experiences, from the distant past to the present, are recorded – and, thereby, it is a dimension that is comparably to Jung’s collective unconscious. Sheldrake is famous for his ideas about morphic fields. According to him, every plant and animal species, including humans, have their own morphic field, which through morphic resonance helps to form their physical and psychological life. This process of morphic resonance doesn’t stop at birth, but remains active during our entire life. This is not the place to discuss the further details of these field theories. Important is here that these scientists have seriously looked at the power of consciousness. They all found out that consciousness is primal to matter, that its power remains present in the material world and is responsible for it animation.

I want to point here to specific research by Rupert Sheldrake, by which he has proved scientifically that the power of our consciousness can reach out beyond our physical body into the outer world. In his book *The Sense of Being Stared of*, Sheldrake has researched whether people can actually feel and be aware of other people looking at them from a distance. He found that this power – of the extended mind – really exists, and point to the fact that our consciousness/mind is not just located in our brain, but is extended into

the outer world.¹⁹ This power of our consciousness to be able to reach out directly into the outer world makes it also very unlikely that our brain cells have produced our consciousness. Sheldrake has also researched the power of telepathy, in particular between humans and animals, and has published the result of this in his book *Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home*.²⁰ He has found evidence that often dogs really know in advance when their owners are coming home, at different unexpected moments. With this, he has shown that there is telepathic contact between the dogs and their owners. Besides this, he has pointed out that not just pets have this telepathic power, but that many other animals possess this power as well.

It appears that telepathy is not just an exceptional power of some animals, but that it has once also been more widespread amongst humans. Sheldrake has also suggested this briefly in his book on telepathy among animals. Various indigenous people have shown that they still possess this power of telepathy. For example, the Dutch psychologist Robert Wolff has reported how at often unannounced, spontaneous visits to the Sng'oi tribe – 'the People' – in Malaysia he was repeatedly surprised by the fact that someone was already waiting for him to arrive: 'Half an hour from the village we were always picked up by someone. It seems that he – or she – had been waiting for us. When we arrived there this person quietly got up and walked the rest of the road ahead of us. There was hardly any talk. The People had no phone; they could not, in any way, know that we would come on a certain day, mid afternoon. My visits were often not planned, and dependent on whether I could leave home or my work.' Wolff could find no explanation for the fact that one way or another they were already aware of his arrival.²¹ The South African writer Laurens van der Post and the American anthropologist Bradford Keeney have told about similar experiences when they paid visits to the Kalahari Bushmen (who are now usually called the San).²² Among our own Celtic ancestors this power also seems to have existed and was known as 'the second sight'. In this respect the Scottish writer, academic and activist Alastair McIntosh had argued, for instance, that this power of second sight has managed to survive among the people in the Scottish Highlands, and in remote areas like the Hebrides, because 'these are parts of the world where indigenous people have lives

with one another, and their place, for a very long time.’ (...) ‘This immense continuity creates a different set of relationships to space and time, and its implications for the full human being, than is found in mainstream modernity, with its more shallow sense of temporality and its commodification of space.’²³

It is clear that the materialist worldview, in which consciousness is considered to be a product of the brain cells, is undermined further by the reported and proven existence of a power of our consciousness or mind that can extend a considerable distance into the outer world.

Post-materialist science and awakening experiences

Recently the new insights about the nature of consciousness have also inspired other scientists to get involved in research in this field, sometimes because a scientist him- of herself has gone through a awakening experience. This has been the case, for instance, with Eben Alexander and Marjorie Woollacott. They both have developed a new vision for the future of science. With regard to the materialist worldview, Alexander, stated the following: ‘I have come to see materialism as a completely failed worldview (especially over the issue of consciousness and the brain-mind discussion).’²⁴ Marjorie Woollacott, an American neuroscientist, has also come to the insight that we are on the verge of the awakening of the scientific mind.²⁵ Another scientist, the Brazilian computer scientist and philosopher Bernardo Kastrup, agrees that the materialist worldview is wrong and argues that it has even absurd implications – in his book *Why Materialism is Baloney*. He suggests idealism as an alternative, a philosophy ‘according to which all reality is fundamentally mental.’²⁶

Interestingly, some scientists, who subscribe to this new scientific vision on consciousness, have joined their forces by starting the Academy for the Advancement of Postmaterialist Sciences. Through this organization these scientists aim to spread the message of this new development within science – that they have labelled *postmaterialist science* – to the world, for instance by publishing books. In the first two books, entitled *Is Consciousness Primary?* and *Expanding Science*, articles by scientists from different scientific disciplines are brought together to share their new insight.²⁷

Another scientist worth mentioning here is the English psychologist Steve Taylor, whom I have already mentioned earlier. He has written a number of very interesting books, in which what he has called *awakening experiences* play an important role. These awakening experiences, that in our time seem to happen to more and more people, trigger a deep change in our awareness, in the sense of who we are as a human being.²⁸ Taylor emphasizes, that the change triggered by the awakening experiences, is usually temporary in nature. When they happen more frequently, they might shift our mind us into a more permanent state of *wakefulness*. Through these awakening experiences our egocentric sense of separation is transcended, and we feel more alive and connected to the world again, to other people and to the larger natural world. Of course, these awakening experiences also affect our worldview: we become less materialistic, more spiritual.

Bridging science and spirituality

When someone realizes that consciousness is primary to matter, the transformation it generates quite naturally also bridges the gap in their mind between science and spirituality. Therefore we can see that scientists, who have gone through the awakening process, usually opened their mind to the spiritual dimensions of life as well. The third book from the Academy for the Advancement of Post-Materialist Science, entitled *Spiritual Awakenings*, is dedicated to that theme and contains articles of several scientists who tell about their spiritual experiences. Steve Taylor has contributed an article to it as well.²⁹

Actually, bridging science and spirituality is not really a new trend, as it already started in the 1980s with bestsellers like *The Tao of Physics*, by Fritjof Capra, and *The Dancing Wi-Lu Masters*, by Gary Zukav. In fact, in between these and the more recent books by Steve Taylor, Marjorie Woollacott and Eben Alexander, a lot of other ones have been published to bridge the gap between science and spirituality. But despite the fact that more and more scientific researchers have dared to speak out about this, apparently, it still remains a huge change for the really convinced materialist scientists, who keep struggling fiercely to keep themselves and their scientific field on a safe distance from the world of spirituality.

In the academic circles of universities there is still a bias and even hostility toward spirituality. Sarah Durston – professor of developmental disorders of the brain at the UMC Utrecht in the Netherlands – has pointed out in an interview in the Dutch newspaper Trouw in June 2020: ‘It is (...) still not done to mention the word spirituality in the scientific debate; then you are immediately not taken seriously anymore. There is so much charge involved with it, while it is definitely part of human experience. In science, I think, first a new crisis is needed, because the system now really gets stuck. (...) There is a sound that change is necessary, but there are still too many people who want to keep the institute the way it is.’³⁰

Exclusion, labeling and protests

Often the people who have gone through a near-death experience have held back their story for quite a long time. I already referred to that earlier. They didn’t dare to tell anyone because they were convinced that people would not believe them, that they would be socially excluded and ridiculed. This was not farfetched at all in a cultural climate in which the materialist worldview was even much more dominant than it is today and no such thing as a survival of consciousness was possible or conceivable. At the time of their experience, they were often not aware themselves of the fact that these kinds of experiences actually existed. The term *near-death experience* was still unknown to them, and they had never heard anyone talk about such experiences. Fortunately, more and more people today dare to tell their story, or to write about it – to ‘come out of the closet’. And this inspires again other people to do the same.

Yet even today there is still some reluctance of people telling about their near death experience. They are aware that the content of their experience directly undermines the mainstream materialist worldview. When they do tell about their experience, usually their story still gets an ‘alternative’ or ‘esoteric’ label stuck on it. Even the books by scientific researchers who question the materialist worldview, like those by Pim van Lommel, Bruce Greyson, Rupert Sheldrake, Lynn McTaggart, Ervin Laszlo or Bruce Lipton, often get this kind of label still stuck on them – despite the fact that there are indications that acceptance of their research is growing.

The websites that communicate the stories of near death experiences, or that pay attention to new scientific insights that openly question the materialist worldview, are not the ones that people with a materialist worldview tend to visit. Books with firsthand stories of near-death experiences, books about after death communication and reincarnation, books with scientific research that focuses on the primacy of consciousness or books with philosophical investigations that dare to move beyond the materialist paradigm: all of these are usually put in the mind-body-spirit or spirituality section of a bookshop, purposely kept separate from the sections with 'conventional' books on scientific, economic, psychological, philosophical or nature themes. Even 'conventional' books on religious themes are usually kept separate – in a religion section – from the books that are considered spiritual. More often even, most books that are labeled 'spiritual' are not on display in bookshops at all, because their mind-body-spirit or spirituality section these days is often quite small, and, therefore, these books have to be bought online. So it is quite possible that people with a materialist worldview can easily avoid any confrontation with new developments in these 'alternative' or 'esoteric' fields – in which they usually have no real interest anyway.

It is understandable that materialist thinkers do not like the foundation of their worldview – which they have cherished their entire life and has become connected to the image of who they are – to be questioned and even to be considered utterly false. Therefore, it should actually not be a surprise that many materialist thinkers still tend to jump into a defensive position with regard to the research and stories about near death experiences. When ignoring the research and the stories doesn't work any longer, they use various arguments to deny the relevance of experiences like the near death experience – for instance, that they are merely hallucinations or that the brain cells had not fully died during these experiences and probably still were involved with producing the experience, or that these experiences are merely anecdotal, not founded on any scientific evidence. In this way, they seem able to convince themselves that these experiences do not question their materialist worldview and even fit very well into it, after which they can forget about them again and focus on other – in their view, more relevant – matters.

Integrating the survival of consciousness into our worldview

Imagine what would be the effect when everyone, wherever you live on our planet, would start taking the reality about the nature of our consciousness, as being primal to matter, seriously. What would happen when the worldview of every person in the world would be updated, adjusted or completely transformed, by integrating the newly revealed truth about place and importance of consciousness in our lives in it? And, consequently, by reviewing the place of our human world within the surrounding natural world? In other words, what would happen if we all would change to what we could call *a consciousness-centered worldview*?

When we have accepted and integrated the notion that consciousness is primal, this means that this has always been the case. When we know that our consciousness will survive, it has very likely lived before our birth and we realize that our consciousness must also have been embodied in other physical lives before it incarnated in our current physical body – even if we don't remember anything about it. This changes, even transforms, the relationship that we have with our past, in particular with our collective past. We start feeling more intimately connected to our own history and even prehistory, and are opening our minds to honestly review our ideas about our historical and prehistorical past. We realize that history and archaeology, and in fact all the sciences, have always researched their 'research objects' from within a materialist worldview. This certainly doesn't mean we have to reject everything and start anew, but researching from a consciousness-centered worldview might generate a shift in the picture of who we once have been, and of the cultural environments in which we have lived before. In this respect, we may start wondering whether we were once really that primitive and have really progressed from a life that has been 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' (as suggested by Thomas Hobbes) to the civilized state of modern life. As we have really been part of the lives in previous ages, we feel more open and connected to our ancestors, more inclined to develop a deeper understanding of them and let their cultural heritage enrich our present life.

When we are aware of the fact that our consciousness will continue after we have died, and will be physically embodied again, this will also change the way we look at our life at this very moment: it inspires us to take much

more care of it. We will stop denying the presence of physical death, the fact that our body will also die at some point. We will realize that death is not the end, but a temporary transformation into another dimension. When we know that we will be around again in some form or another, we will become much less focused on trying to stay young forever, to extend our bodily life indefinitely, and be more likely to accept the physical aging process as a valuable part of our life. We will be less inclined to make unnecessary conflicts with other people, and certainly less inclined to kill other people, as we know their consciousness will survive anyway and will return one day in another body. We will be less inclined to develop a nationalistic or sexist view on life, to have racial or religious prejudices, because – after all – one day our consciousness will probably be reborn in another country, in another gender, in another culture with another form of religion. And quite likely, we become more aware of the fact that in a previous life we have already experienced living in another country, in another gender, in another culture with another form of religion. We will start realizing that racial differences do not exist, that we are all part of one indivisible human race.

It will, for instance, also put the refugee crisis in a completely different light. We can have been refugees once ourselves, and can be refugees in some future incarnation. Therefore, we will be less inclined to consider them a priori strangers, problem cases. We will be more inclined to be curious about the different cultures, to be open to their backgrounds, to have empathy and compassion for them. We will be more inclined to treat them simply as other fellow human beings who are just asking us for some help and support.

This new worldview will also profoundly change the way look at ourselves and at our place in the world. It will make us realize that we all initially experience our own life from within, from within our own consciousness, and that in this experience we know again that essentially we are subjective and vulnerable beings. It will open our mind again to cherish these qualities again in ourselves and also in others. Then we will also realize again that as individual beings we have always been born to grow, in a psychological and spiritual sense; that, in this growth process, we gradually transcend our egocentric sense of separation and are brought in

closer connecting with the world around us. Earlier I have written an article on this theme, entitled *The courage to be who you truly are*, that you can download from my website.³¹

As a result of valuing the fact that not just our own consciousness but consciousness in general exists prior to matter – and so expresses itself not just through human bodies, but also through the other living beings on our planet, and even through the planet itself – we will feel more intimately connected to the surrounding natural world, feel more fully embedded in the landscape around us. We will be less inclined to feel superior to nature, and more inclined to build reciprocal relationships with all the other living beings – even with Mother Earth Herself – which we all recognize as other forms of consciousness. It will also open our minds to the invisible dimension of the natural world, to phenomena like telepathy, precognition and remote viewing, and consider these no longer ‘supernatural’, but inextricable parts of nature.

In a consciousness-centered worldview the focus will be on interconnection and belonging. We will still see that physically we are separate from each other and all the other living beings, but we will know that at a deeper level of consciousness we are all interconnected with one another. Due to feeling fully embedded in the larger body (including the larger consciousness) of the surrounding landscape, of Mother Earth, we will realize again that originally we have never been the private or public owners of the ground underneath our feet, but that we are all born as beings who belong to the land – a vision that has been kept alive by many indigenous communities. In other words, in the consciousness-centered worldview, we reverse the roles again: the land will come first, and from the second place we will do our best to take good care of it.

I am quite sure that the collective change from a materialist worldview to a consciousness-centered worldview will create a worldwide revolution of unprecedented proportions – but this will be a revolution from within, that can manifest itself without any bloodshed. It will lay the foundation of a truly ‘New World’, one that the European colonists a few centuries ago were desperately searching for, but could never find – simply, because they were searching in the wrong place.

How to generate a new, consciousness-centered worldview?

Not everyone will have experiences like a near-death experience. Not everyone has had contact with dead relatives or remembers details of his or her earlier incarnation. So, if you still have a materialist worldview, but already realize its limitations, what are you to do to open your mind to the primacy of consciousness that these experiences reveal? What can you do to transform your worldview to a consciousness-centered worldview?

Well, I will make a few suggestions here. First, of course, you can start by reading the stories that people have told firsthand of their experiences, or by listening to them on a YouTube channel; take them seriously and realize what it would have meant for them to have gone through such a transformative experience. You can also read some of the research as a back-up, but I'd say, start with a good few firsthand stories first.

Another thing you can do is to start realizing that in everything you think, do or experience your consciousness is always present. There is nothing you can think, do or experience without the involvement of your consciousness. That is, of course, because it is all powered by your consciousness. Even experiences in dreams while you sleep are powered by your consciousness. As pointed out earlier, Rupert Spira considered the unconscious part of our mind, in which our dreams take place, a part of our consciousness, and, therefore, suggested to use the term 'the collective field of consciousness' instead of Jung's term 'the collective unconscious'.

Fortunately, there are other kinds of experiences within reach of everyone that can help to expand your consciousness: *awe experiences*. The American psychologist Dacher Keltner has done extensive research into this phenomenon, resulting in many articles and in his book *Awe*, published in 2023.³² Awe experiences are the kinds of experiences that overwhelm you unexpectedly in positive way. They confront you with an experience that doesn't seem to fit into any of the familiar categories in your mind. They silence your thought chatter and for a moment you are completely speechless. They reawaken the sense of wonder you used to know as a child. They have a transformative effect that is in some of its elements comparable to the transformation that is triggered by near-death experiences. This is what the English journalist Lucy Jones has said about the awe experience in her book *Losing Eden*: 'Awe (...) can shift us away

from pure self-interest to be interested in others. It can help us bond and relate to each other. It can turn off the self, the day-to-day concerns, propel us into focusing on something bigger and hard to comprehend.’³³

You can experience awe everywhere anytime. You cannot plan these experiences. Visiting remote places in the natural world with overpowering views over a surrounding landscape or seascape, for instance, have a high potency for getting awe experiences. But you can also have a close look at a beautiful flower or a tiny insect, and realize how little you actually know about the life of this particular flower or insect. You can also go for a walk, preferably in a natural environment, and be aware of the gradual changes in the perspective of the landscape around you, and how many things can capture your attention that you had not really seen before. Or, while walking, you can become more aware of the fact that you are always surrounded on all sides by this landscape – that you are fully included *in* this landscape, your body in this larger landscape body, which sustains you all the time – and that most of the time you notice only a part of this landscape: what is right before you, and on a specific moment of the day or the night.

Important to remember is, that you should not keep unusual or mysterious experiences that you have had to yourself, no matter how strange your experiences have been. Share them with others. You will probably find out that these others will share similar unusual or mysterious experiences with you. A new worldview, like any worldview, thrives much better in a collective environment, in a community, than when it remains a private, unshared worldview.

The personal and collective benefits of transformation

I suspect that people, who stubbornly keep clinging to their materialist worldview, have not spent time seriously studying the research about the near-death experiences, after death communication, reincarnation, terminal lucidity and telepathy. And I also suspect that they have not read some of the – in my view, very authentic and convincing – firsthand stories about the near-death experiences, or have never listened without any prejudice to people talk honestly and passionately about these experiences. By doing so, they have not just kept themselves willfully blindfolded, but also contribute

directly to keep our entire culture blindfolded and stuck in a in a dead-end street. By not allowing to (re)open their minds to the message of these transformative experiences, they do not seem to realize how significant the insights that they offer us actually are.

So, let me recapture the essence of the message of my article in a nutshell. What are the significant insights that these experiences are offering us? They will help to change our idea about the nature of consciousness, which will be beneficial for us both on a personal and a collective level. On a personal level, it will change the way you look at your own life, at who you are as a human being and what is your place in the world around you. It will soften your fear and avoidance of death, and, thereby, will remove the inner blockages that have prevented you from growing psychologically and spiritually. It will allow you to rediscover that your life is so much more than just a meaningless, material affair – that there actually has always been, and continues to be a meaningful, spiritual dimension to the life you are living. On a collective level, the changes in our own personal life will be beneficial for our entire species, for all other living beings and even for the planet. They will contribute to creating the necessary cultural space for a positive future development of our human society and its connection to the natural world in which it is imbedded – from the direct vicinity to the planetary level. In this cultural space we can transcend the limitations of our attachments to separate religious or nationalistic identities and to start feeling a full member of the entire Earth Community. We will be aware of the fact that everything we think and do will affect to entire living world around us, and will always come back to us in some form. We will know that life is always about a continual reciprocal exchange – and that our life in our current physical body is temporary, but meaningful.

Leiden, July 2024

Notes

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