

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Life After Death

Deepak Chopra

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About the Book

What happens when we die?

In *Life After Death*, Dr Deepak Chopra, the world-famous pioneer in the field of mind-body medicine, addresses one of the fundamental questions of existence. Drawing upon personal experience, the wisdom of ancient Vedic philosophy and state-of-the-art particle physics, Chopra helps us overcome our fears about dying and to consider the fantastic possibilities that may await us in the afterlife.

This is the book that Dr Chopra has been preparing to write his entire life. In it, he considers the theory that death is an illusion of the senses and that the soul survives in an ongoing spiral of refinement, ending in enlightenment. Thought-provoking exercises offer a first-hand experience of these and other ideas, helping you to make sense of your own spirituality whatever path you choose to follow, and offering you your very own map of eternity.

About the Author

DEEPAK CHOPRA'S many books have become classic texts of health and spirituality as well as national bestsellers. He is the founder of the Chopra Center for Well Being (www.chopra.com) and the president of the Alliance for a New Humanity (www.anhglobal.org).

Also by Deepak Chopra



Creating Health

Return of the Rishi

Quantum Healing

Perfect Health

Unconditional Life

Ageless Body, Timeless Mind

Journey into Healing

Creating Affluence

Perfect Weight

Restful Sleep

The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success

The Return of Merlin

Boundless Energy

Perfect Digestion

The Way of the Wizard

Overcoming Addictions

Raid on the Inarticulate

The Path to Love

The Seven Spiritual Laws for Parents

The Love Poems of Rumi

(edited by Deepak Chopra; translated by Deepak Chopra
and Fereydoun Kia)

Healing the Heart

Everyday Immortality

The Lords of the Light

On the Shores of Eternity

How to Know God

The Soul in Love

The Chopra Center Herbal Handbook

(with coauthor David Simon)

Grow Younger, Live Longer

(with coauthor David Simon)

The Deeper Wound

The Chopra Center Cookbook

(coauthored by David Simon and Leanne Backer)

The Angel Is Near

The Daughters of Joy

Golf for Enlightenment

Soulmate

SynchroDestiny

The Book of Secrets

Fire in the Heart

The Seven Spiritual Laws of Yoga

(with coauthor David Simon)

Magical Beginnings, Enchanted Lives

(coauthored by David Simon and Vicki Abrams)

Praise for LIFE AFTER DEATH

“Deepak Chopra has written a masterpiece that is long overdue in our spiritual culture. *Life After Death: The Book of Answers* is a bold and comforting guide into the afterlife. Eternity is the true home of the soul, yet we fear to explore experience of death and our place beyond now. Deepak has brilliantly accomplished this journey on our behalf.”

—CAROLINE MYSS, author of *Anatomy of the Spirit* and *Sacred Contracts*

“Here is the paradox: life’s greatest mystery—death—seems to be its opposite and its very denial. However, anyone who reads Deepak Chopra’s penetrating and insightful investigation into this great mystery with an open mind will come to realize that the opposite of death is birth, not life. Life, which in essence is consciousness, is eternal and has no opposite. There is no death, only the metamorphosis of life-forms, consciousness appearing as this or that. This is the liberating truth the book continuously points to.”

—ECKHART TOLLE, author of *The Power of Now*

“Wide-ranging and thought-provoking, this book puts the question of life after death in a vast perspective. It is an excellent antidote to any self-imposed limitations we may have on our thinking about the nature of life, death and consciousness.”

—RUPERT SHELDRAKE, Ph.D., biologist and author of *The Presence of the Past*

“Who is not curious about what happens after death? And even when there are many answers available, both ancient

and modern, even some based on new science, the question ‘What does Deepak Chopra have to say about this?’ is an important one for our age. Well, finally, Deepak’s answer is here, and it is very affirming on meaningful questions. I like that. Need I say more? This is a great book for your easy reading.”

—AMIT GOSWAMI, Ph.D., author of *The Self-Aware Universe*, *Physics of the Soul*, and *The Quantum Doctor*

“This fascinating, provocative and profound book is written with exquisite ease and with a very personal warmth that makes its invitations to expansion of consciousness all the more delicious and powerful.”

—ANDREW HARVEY, author of *The Direct Path* and *Sun at Midnight*

“What if life and death are like two locked boxes, each containing the key to the other? In this book Dr. Chopra looks at life after death from this intriguing perspective and proposes that death may not constitute the extinction of life, as usually imagined, but rather its extension by other means. He draws upon a dazzling array of sources, from ancient myths to the findings of modern science, to produce a work of compelling novelty on an eternal mystery.”

—ARVIND SHARMA, Birks Professor of Comparative Religion, McGill University

“Deepak Chopra has been my friend and mentor for nearly twenty years. Now, when we baby-boomers are finally admitting our own mortality, he has tackled the ultimate subject which fascinates us all: life after death. Drawing from many cultures, and emphasizing the idea of Karma from his own, Deepak interweaves mythical lore with first-hand spellbinding anecdotes to somehow make the subject

of death very useful and relevant to making the most time on the Earth here and now. A must-read for everyone who will die.”

—CANDACE B. PERT, PH.D., author of *Everything You Need to Know to Feel Good*

“In this remarkable book, Deepak Chopra turns to the anomalies in science that modern physicists are trying to explain, and considers how the rishis, the ancient sages of Vedanta, dealt with the very same questions. According to the ‘observer effect’ in physics, for example, the very act of looking at an electron forces it to leave the quantum soup of pure potential and take specific form. Vedic rishis believed that seeing is the ultimate act of creation—that through consciousness each of us shapes the universe we experience. By marrying science and wisdom in *Life After Death*, Chopra builds his case for an afterlife in which our most essential self, the seer that observes our experiences in this temporary home that we call the self, uses the end of this lifetime to pass over into the next. This is an intellectual and spiritual tour de force.”

—PROFESSOR ROBERT THURMAN, Columbia University, author of *Infinite Life* and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*

“In this book, Deepak brilliantly creates a remarkable tapestry for opening our hearts, minds and consciousness to explore for ourselves the mysteries of life, death and the mind. He cleverly interlaces mystical stories, childhood memories, thoughts on creation, scientific data about many areas, and questions that will allow the reader to reexamine and to question old beliefs about our own identity. With an open-minded approach, this book stretches our mind and our imagination to explore a reality of truth that is far beyond our physical reality.”

—GERALD G. JAMPOLSKY, M.D., author of *Love Is Letting Go of Fear* and founder of the International Center for Attitudinal Healing (Sausalito, California)

“If I had any doubts about the afterlife, I don’t have them anymore. Deepak Chopra has cast his inimitable light on the darkened corners of death. I think this is his greatest contribution yet.”

—MARIANNE WILLIAMSON, author of *The Gift of Chang*

“As I shuttled between East and West cultures, the greatest difference that I have found has been attitudes toward death and life-after-death. Deepak Chopra has combined East and West in his Being. He is familiar with Vedanta, the laws of Karma, and Hindu myths for he grew up in a Hindu family in India. But then he went to a Catholic school, where he learned the fathers’ take on death and afterlife. He is familiar with Western science so we have quantum physics and consciousness theories in the mix, and then he is a Western physician, which makes him familiar with Near-Death Experiences (NDEs). In this book he incorporates these parts of his Being to provide us with a masterful treatment of life-after-death.”

—RAM DASS

“Chopra illuminates, brilliantly, a wonderful variety of extraordinary experiences documented by scientists and engineers, and weaves them into a tapestry embracing different religious traditions, by grouping, comparing and analyzing them. This radical empiricism in the William James tradition succeeds beautifully, as did James, in putting the ‘burden of proof’ squarely on the reductionist materialists who have, for several decades now, while claiming to speak for science, been allowed to ignore the bedrock of science: facts.

Chopra then compares these data/experiences with some of the metaphors with which we, in the world of science, amuse ourselves, and impress the masses. Deepak has thrown down the gauntlet demanding the burden of proof from the reductionist materialists. I can confidently predict that the best they will do is to try to ignore it.”

—RUSTUM ROY, professorships at Pennsylvania State University, Arizona State, and University of Arizona; elected to the National Academies of Science or Engineering of The United States, Sweden, Japan, Russia, and India

“As we enter the twenty-first century it is clear that we have crossed into an unprecedented global age in which widely diverse worldviews intersect, meet, and often compete or collide in the marketplace of our cultures. Deepak Chopra has established himself as a unique global voice for our time who lives and speaks from the global perspective and through a global lens that brings our diverse worlds together. In his global story it is clear that the collective wisdom of the ages, including the wisdom of frontier science, concurs that Reality must be an infinite unified field of interconnectivity that calls for a radical revision in how most of us see and understand ourselves and approach our life and death.

In his powerfully accessible narrative Chopra helps all readers cross into this ancient, yet newly revealed, global perspective that clarifies a new common sense that overcomes chronic ignorance, fear and denial of our passage through death. This lucid book shifts the burden of proof about life after death onto the older dysfunctional egocentric cultures and myopic perspectives whose time have now passed. This book is another clear historic marker of our transition into our new global story and self-

image in which humans may flourish together across all our old artificial borders.”

—ASHOK GANGADEAN, Professor and Chair of Philosophy, Haverford College; founder-director of the Global Dialogue Institute; co-convenor of the World Commission on Global Consciousness; host of the TV show Global Lens; author of *The Awakening of the Global Mind* (www.awakeningmind.org)

“*Life After Death: The Book of Answers* opens the doorway to an ever-evolving future Now. With mastery and compassion, Chopra combines the wisdom of the Vedic tradition with quantum physics, and his experience as a doctor, to reveal that we are not and never have been limited creatures trapped in physical bodies, but are already multidimensional beings, creating our future beyond this life through every thought, word and deed. His view of the nature of reality is precious, illuminating, life-giving. I love the book.”

—BARBARA MARX HUBBARD, President, Foundation for Conscious Evolution

“A unique initiative to understand Life After Death and dispel one of our greatest fears of the unknown: death. Weaving between religious scriptures, science, and our common cultural/societal understanding, Deepak has very articulately reasoned the myth of death and simply made it just another aspect of life. Surely this book serves to expand our understanding to go beyond and deeper into the unknown, cherish life, and embrace death with love.”

—BAWA JAIN, Secretary General, World Council of Religious Leaders

“Three cheers for Deepak’s courage to express his beliefs and wisdom about a subject many fear and avoid. This book

will help us to open a door to a subject few seemed prepared to explore because they cannot explain it. I know from personal experience that near-death and past-life experiences are not a matter of the imagination. I can believe because I have had the experience. Consciousness exists when our bodies do not. From my own life and my work with patients I know that we are aware of the future and the past at an unconscious level, which when made conscious helps us to understand and survive. Life is a mystery, so read on and help us to enter the darkness and light a candle.”

—BERNIE SIEGEL, M.D., author of *365 Prescriptions for the Soul* and *101 Exercises for the Soul*

“I, perhaps like many others, most often think of and look to Deepak Chopra as a physician, pioneer, and major influence in the huge positive change in Western attitudes toward holistic medicine. In this book he is much more than that. He addresses the ultimate mystery—death—as a physician, a philosopher, and a teacher. His presentation of concepts such as the ‘journey of the soul,’ or the ‘music of the spheres,’ reminded me of the readings of my grandfather, Edgar Cayce, who many years ago also provided the world with a more hopeful view of the transition we are all destined to make. I recommend this book for all of us who are concerned about our own eventual death, and the death of those closest to us.”

—CHARLES THOMAS CAYCE, Executive Director, Association for Research and Enlightenment, Inc.; President, Edgar Cayce Foundation, Inc.

“Deepak Chopra masterfully navigates a bewildering but profoundly important landscape in *Life After Death: The Book of Answers*. Gracefully weaving parables, poignant experiences, religious lore and scientific evidence,

Chopra's survey of the afterlife is at once contemplative, heartening and satisfying."

—DEAN RADIN, Ph.D., senior scientist, Institute of Noetic Sciences.

"This is not an 'easy' but thoroughly fascinating book that could well become one of the important reads of your lifetime."

—DORIS WILSDORF, Professor Emeritus, University of Virginia, and inventor

"A fabulous read! While western science continues to watch the world with its nose pressed to precise lenses with limited focus, Deepak takes you by the hand and leads you on a wonderful journey right through those looking glasses to the very inside of eternally creative consciousness as revealed by the Vedic rishis and reflected in other great world cultures. Then he shows you why this inside view better explains the data of western science than its own worldview! In short, this is a highly effective preview of the integral global science of the future that will dramatically change the way we see and act in our world. As you take this fascinating journey with Deepak, the immortality promise of its title is easily fulfilled along the way."

—ELISABET SAHTOURIS, Ph.D., evolution biologist and futurist; professor; author of *EarthDance: Living Systems in Evolution*

"In his captivating book *Life After Death*, the immensely talented Deepak Chopra invites us to join him in an exhilarating and irresistible eternal dance whereby death equals love and freedom. Chopra, with his distinctive wisdom and ingenuity, takes us deeper into a timeless consciousness that encompasses all of life. *Life After Death* is a scintillating amalgamation of science and spirit as it

lyrically intertwines ancient tales, modern literature, and Chopra's own intriguing encounters. *Life After Death* is a stunning work, a magnificent achievement, and an inspiring antidote to mankind's anxiety and despair!"

—T. BYRAM KARASU, M.D., Silverman Professor and University Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Albert Einstein College of Medicine; author of the best-selling *The Spirit of Happiness*

"Deepak Chopra presents a compelling portrait of the afterlife, one he bases on the wisdom of religious teachings and supports with the findings of scientific research. The result provides readers much food for thought as well as the opportunity to approach death in a new, more hopeful way."

—JIM B. TUCKER, M.D., researcher at the University of Virginia Division of Perceptual Studies, and author of *Life Before Life: A Scientific Investigation of Children's Memories of Previous Lives*

"'The shortest distance between the human heart and truth is a story,' according to one wisdom saying. The story Deepak Chopra tells of Savitri in his insightful and wonderful book *Life After Death: The Book of Answers* not only makes the human heart and truth kiss, but also penetrates to the heart of this extraordinary insight into life after death. Reading this book as a Catholic priest and spiritual teacher, I am amazed at the way Dr. Chopra is able to make sense to a Christian of the profound truth of life and death from his own culture and deep learning. I encourage everyone—be he or she Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, or atheist—to read this extraordinary work. Your mind and your soul will be uplifted and enlightened."

—REV. J. FRANCIS STROUD, S.J. DeMello Spirituality Center,
Fordham University

“East meets West in *Life After Death*. This treasure of a book is graceful and thoughtful, inspiring and enlightening, practical and mystical, an adventure of the mind and heart. If Deepak Chopra is correct—and contemporary afterlife research supports his belief—we should not fear death, but ‘respect it as a miracle’ and celebrate our inherent ability to conceive and experience the eternity of life. Prepare to be awakened.”

—GARY E. SCHWARTZ, PH.D., professor and director,
Laboratory for Advances in Consciousness and Health,
University of Arizona, and author of *The Afterlife Experiments* and *The G.O.D. Experiments*

“Deepak Chopra continues to be a significant figure in the emerging dialogue of world cultures and faiths. Here he deepens the conversation by tackling the ‘Big One,’ the eternal issue of death and the possibility of life on another plane. Instead of focusing on beliefs, he turns to the medium through which most people receive the ancient wisdom of a tradition: stories. Thus he expands the whole idiom in which such questions are understood by recalling the ancient Indian insight that we exist at the intersection of multiple realities and that the line between life and death is not a wall, as we often imagine, but one permeable crossing point among many, many others. Also by drawing on the most recent science, he makes this book thought-provoking for people of any faith or none at all.”

—HARVEY COX, Harvard University, author of *When Jesus Came to Harvard*

“Deepak Chopra, M.D., has become a physician to our time. His latest medicine is *Life After Death: The Book of Answers*. With care and humility he uses story, the

teachings of the masters of wisdom in the East, new science, and cosmology to hospice the fatally constricting reductionism of the materialist worldview and open our minds and souls to a universe permeated with consciousness, spirit and Life. Be prepared for a truly masterful exposition on the nature of karma that brings together Eastern philosophy and modern neuroscience. Chopra reminds us that both ancient wisdom and frontier science point us toward a Reality that will persist long after the sound bites of contemporary culture have bitten the dust. I loved the book.”

—JAMES O’DEA, President, Institute of Noetic Sciences

“Harvesting the wisdom of East and West, of science and spirituality, Deepak Chopra carries the reader on a profound exploration of the greatest of mysteries. It is a revelation to waking consciousness of the source of our existence, the passion of our unending journey, and the Field of Being that calls us into Union.”

—JEAN HOUSTON, PH.D., author of *A Passion for the Possible*

“Mind-expanding! Acting as a trusty guide whose words spring not from this-is-so or believe-this but from what-if? and why-not?, Deepak Chopra takes us on a fascinating exploration of a vast continent of beliefs, stories, myths, testimonies and brain research, demystifying a hitherto foggy domain while facilitating our self-examination. Like the rishis of old, Chopra invites us to participate in an endless experiment. The journey includes surprises (our reality here may determine our afterlife) as well as comforts (death is a creative leap). One cannot read *Life After Death* with any degree of openness without being delighted, empowered, and changed.”

—JIM BALLARD, author of *Mind Like Water*

“Some books are divinely inspired transmissions with the power to change the way we think, act and live. This is one of them, written by a scientist and physician who is also one of the most luminous spiritual teachers of our time. If you’ve ever wondered about the meaning of life and longed to awaken to your full potential, this book is sacred treasure.”

—JOAN BORYSENKO, PH.D., author of *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind* and *Seven Paths to God*

“Belief in life after death is a universal constant. This book will help many find certainty and comfort in this possibility by exploring many lines of evidence pointing to the infinite, eternal nature of human consciousness.”

—LARRY DOSSEY, M.D., author of *The Extraordinary Healing Power of Ordinary Things*

“Deepak Chopra has written what will be considered his most brilliant book yet: *Life After Death: The Book of Answers*. He skillfully draws the reader into his inquiring and limitless mind on a topic relevant and fascinating to all of us, Death itself, and he does that in a way that we are profoundly touched, expanded, and inspired.

In his writings and talks, Deepak always gives us the gift of freeing us from the limitations of our mistaken confining identity. Readers of Deepak’s also know we can always count on him to liberate us from the prison of our greatest and most petty fears. In this breathtaking book, he does all of that again and more. Through exquisite prose, mystical poetry, and riveting storytelling, the reader is given a whole new way of seeing death and therefore life itself.

As a scholar and teacher, physician and healer, master communicator and twenty-first century sage, Deepak Chopra has written a masterpiece that draws on many disciplines, communicates on multiple dimensions, and

delivers a sweeping transformation on every level. I was hooked from the moment I started reading and found myself buzzing with excitement, moved to tears, filled with awe, and profoundly altered by this book. My unexamined and unconscious beliefs and assumptions about death have been unearthed and overturned.

I absolutely loved this book and am transformed by its message in ways I am just beginning to understand. I urge everyone to read it. It will change your life and your death.”

—LYNN TWIST, President, Soul of Money Institute

“In *Life After Death*, Deepak Chopra opens the door to our true potential: the afterlife. He shows us that death can be a profound confrontation with the radiance of our soul. And he guides us in a hundred irresistible ways into this journey which begins now. This book is a must-read for those who want to find out how ‘passing on’ can be the most meaningful adventure of your life.”

—MARGOT ANAND, author of *The Art of Everyday Ecstasy*

“In an age of materialism, Deepak Chopra’s *Life After Death: The Book of Answers* lifts one’s spirit with new hope. Full of spiritual wisdom, this book opens new vistas on the afterlife and points to new worlds of freedom, love and joy.”

—MICHAEL MURPHY, author, chair, and cofounder of Esalen Institute

“Once again Deepak Chopra lights the way through the darkness of confusion, illuminating the glory of our true selves. Now he takes us to the edge of our own deepest inner truth about life after death by sharing with us his vision and his wisdom, which, as always, is breathtaking, healing and soul-opening. This book, and Deepak Chopra himself, are enormous gifts to humanity.”

—NEALE DONALD WALSCH, author of *Home with God in a Life That Never Ends*

“Dr. Chopra here takes on the answering of major questions to which Western religions often give little help. Death is a New Beginning. Consciousness holds the personality together through death into the Interlife before another incarnation.”

—JOHN O’M. BOCKRIS, Professor, University of Pennsylvania (1953-1972); Distinguished Professor, Texas A&M University (1978-1997); author of *The New Paradigm*

“Birth is a miracle ... so is death. With his customary wit and intelligence, Deepak offers us teaching stories, childhood memories, quantum puzzles, neuroscience, religion, and common sense in a rich and very satisfying exploration of what we really are, what the hell we’re doing here, and where we’re going. It’s all a journey towards liberation and bliss.”

—RICHARD GERE, actor and humanitarian

“In *Life After Death* Dr. Chopra offers us the benefit of his own unique life experience from emergency room medicine to his adventures into Eastern metaphysics. This book is inspiring, comforting and authoritative. It presents convincing data for the survival of bodily death, while instructing us on a path toward joy, spaciousness, and the discovery of who we truly are, which is much more than just a physical body.”

—RUSSELL TARG, physicist and author of *The End of Suffering*.

“With profound wisdom and clarity, Deepak Chopra reveals an awesome kaleidoscopic view of infinite possibilities in the akashic field. Crystallized in story form, one can easily

identify with personal experience in the cycle of everyday life. Every culture, religion and individual can access the spiritual path of their choice in this remarkable work where 'love, truth, compassion, birth and death are equal' and eternity is NOW."

—SISTER JUDIAN BREITENBACH, R.N., Catholic Order of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, Namaste Center for Holistic Education, La Porte, Indianapolis

"In *Life After Death*, Deepak Chopra takes his readers to the gateway that is death and encourages them to keep their eyes open for what lies beyond. Exploring different traditions, he shows death not as a threat, but an opportunity. Chopra deftly combines ancient mythology with cutting-edge science and psychology. He is a master storyteller who makes Eastern wisdom accessible for the Western reader."

—VICTOR CHAN, Founding Director, Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education; coauthor, with HH the Dalai Lama of *Wisdom of Forgiveness: Intimate Conversations and Journeys*

"In *Life After Death*, Deepak Chopra proves himself to be a spiritual alchemist. Using the power of language, he takes diverse elements such as Vedic philosophy, particle physics, psychology, and neuroscience and transforms them into literary gold. His insights into what happens after we die will transform the way you see what lies ahead. An inspiring and profoundly reassuring book."

—ARIANNA HUFFINGTON, editor, huffingtonpost

DEEPAK CHOPRA

LIFE AFTER
DEATH



THE
BOOK
OF
ANSWERS



RIDER

LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND • JOHANNESBURG

To my beloved parents



MEMOIR: THE LIFE BEYOND

WHILE WRITING THIS book on the afterlife, I kept being drawn back to stories that I'd heard in India as a child. Parables are a powerful way to teach children, and many of the ones told to me have lasted all my life. So I decided to weave the book around tales of the kind I heard at home, around the temples, and at school, hoping that the reader would be enticed by a world where heroes battle darkness in order to emerge into the light.

In this case the hero is a woman, Savitri, and the enemy she must defeat is Yama, the Lord of Death. Yama shows up in her front yard one day, waiting to take away her husband the moment he returns from his work as a woodcutter. Savitri is terrified. What strategy could possibly turn Death away from his inexorable mission?

I had no trouble imagining these characters. I was frightened for Savitri and anxious to find out how her battle of wits with Death turned out. Their world flowed easily into my own, because the India of my childhood was not that far removed from ancient India. I want to take a moment to convey what death and the world beyond meant back then. It may seem like a very esoteric place. If so, you can come back to it after reading the main body of the book. However mysterious and exotic, here is where I began.

What was most magical in my childhood was transformation. Death itself was seen as a brief stopping point on an endless soul journey that could turn a peasant into a king and vice versa. With the possibility of infinite

lifetimes extending forward and backward, a soul could experience hundreds of heavens and hells. Death ended nothing; it opened up limitless adventures. But at a deeper level, it's typically Indian not to crave permanence. A drop of water becomes vapor, which is invisible, yet vapor materializes into billowing clouds, and from clouds rain falls back to earth, forming river torrents and eventually merging into the sea. Has the drop of water died along the way? No, it undergoes a new expression at each stage. Likewise, the idea that I have a fixed body locked in space and time is a mirage. Any drop of water inside my body could have been ocean, cloud, river, or spring the day before. I remind myself of this fact when the bonds of daily life squeeze too tight.

In the West the hereafter has been viewed as a place akin to the material world. Heaven, hell, and purgatory lie in some distant region beyond the sky or under the earth. In the India of my childhood the hereafter wasn't a place at all, but a state of awareness.

The cosmos that you and I are experiencing right now, with trees, plants, people, houses, cars, stars, and galaxies, is just consciousness expressing itself at one particular frequency. Elsewhere in spacetime, different planes exist simultaneously. If I had asked my grandmother where heaven was, she would have pointed to the house we lived in, not only because it was full of love, but because it made sense to her that many worlds could comfortably inhabit the same place. By analogy, if you are listening to a concert orchestra, there are a hundred instruments playing, each occupying the same place in space and time. You can listen to the symphony as a whole or, if you wish, put your attention on a specific instrument. You can even separate out the individual notes played by that instrument. The presence of one frequency does not displace any of the others.

I didn't know it as a child, but when I walked around the crowded Delhi market where more humanity was packed into one bazaar than was possible to imagine, the world I couldn't see was even more crowded. The air that I breathed contained voices, car noises, bird songs, radio waves, X-rays, cosmic rays, and an almost infinite array of subatomic particles. Endless realities lay all around me.

Every frequency in nature exists simultaneously, and yet we experience only what we see. It's natural to fear what we can't see, and since death snatches a person out of sight, we react to it with fear. I certainly wasn't immune to this. The death of a pet made me anxious and sad; the death of my grandfather, which happened suddenly in the middle of the night, was devastating. My younger brother kept running around the house crying, "Where is he? Where is he?" It would be years before I realized that the correct answer was "Here and everywhere."

Different planes of existence represent different frequencies of consciousness. The world of physical matter is just one expression of a particular frequency. (Decades later, I was fascinated to read that according to physicists, there is a background hum to the universe that is so specific as to sound like the note B-flat, although it vibrates millions of times lower than human hearing.) In India a child would never hear such a complicated quasi-scientific idea, but I did hear about the five elements, or *Mahabhutas*: earth, water, fire, air, and space. These elements combined to form everything in existence, which sounds crude to someone versed in Western science, but it contained a valuable truth: All transformations come down to a few simple elements.

In the twentieth century Western science came to understand that all solid objects are actually made of invisible vibrations. In my childhood, solid things were seen to have a large portion of the earth element. To put it another way, solid things had dense vibrations, or

vibrations on a lower plane. Vaporous things had a fine vibration, on a higher plane.

Just as there are different planes of material things, there are also different spiritual planes, a shocking notion to the pious Catholic brothers, mostly Irish, who were my teachers at school. To them the only spirit was the Holy Ghost that lived in heaven. We children were politic enough not to disagree, yet in our cosmos it only made sense that if the Earth was a dense spiritual world, there must be higher spiritual planes, known to us as *Lokas*, which in Western mystical circles became known as “astral planes.” There are an almost infinite number of astral planes, divided into a higher and lower astral world, and even the lowest ones vibrate at a higher frequency than the material world.

Long ago the West gave up trying to hear the music of the spheres, but in India it is believed that a person with finely tuned consciousness can go inward and actually hear the vibration of various higher planes. In the astral plane you can see your own body, for instance, yet it might change in age from moment to moment.

In the lower astral planes we find clairvoyance, telepathy, and other refinements of the five senses, as well as ghosts, disembodied souls, and spirits that for one reason or another are “stuck.” As a child I was certain that when a cat or dog paused to assess the air, it saw something I couldn’t. So it came as no surprise to later read, in various texts both Eastern and Western, that lower astral planes sometimes sensed by humans in higher states of awareness are often sensed by animals. Nor was I surprised to meet a psychiatry resident who told me that if the hospital room was dimly lit enough, he could see—on the very edge of visibility—when the soul left a dying person. Every Indian child devours comic books about the exploits of various heroes who fought their battles in faraway Lokas. Slipping in and out of material existence was our version of traveling to outer space. Our comic book

heroes would come across thought forms and thought clouds, astral bodies traveling during sleep, astral colors and auras. All these are vibrations in the lower astral plane.

In the Indian tradition every physical body is assigned an accompanying astral body. Your astral body is a complete mirror of your physical body; it has a heart, liver, arms, legs, a face, etc., but since it operates at a higher frequency, most people are unaware of it. During life, the physical body provides a garment for the soul; it gives it the appearance of being localized in the material world. In death, as the physical body begins to disintegrate, the departing soul enters an astral plane that corresponds to its existence on the material plane, the frequency that corresponds most closely to its former life.

The general notion that you go where you belong rested easily in my mind back then. I imagined dogs going to dog heaven, and people who loved dogs joining them. I imagined bad people no longer hurting anyone except themselves because they were isolated in a kind of karmic jail. This was consoling, an assurance that the good people who loved me but were now gone lived in a place of goodness. But my view had limitations. I was never sure whether my wise grandfather met his wise grandfather in the hereafter, who showed him how to proceed, or if that job was carried out by angels, or enlightened spirits. Much later when I began to research karma I found that after we die, we remain self-motivated. A soul moves according to its desire from one astral plane to another, projecting as in a dream whatever sights and people, guides and astral entities it needs for its own advancement.

All these planes ultimately were imagined by Spirit, just as it imagined the material world. The Indian word for Spirit is *Brahman*, which is Everything, the one consciousness that fills every plane of existence. But Indians are relaxed about terminology, as befits a very old culture. We said God. Rama. Shiva. Maheshwara. The

important thing wasn't the name but the concept of a single consciousness that creates everything and continues to do so in infinite dimensions at infinite speed. On the astral planes Spirit continues to play roles.

There, one can actually see images of gods and goddesses, angels and demons. These are ultimately illusions, however, for each astral plane provides the experience of Spirit. Here, on our plane, we experience Spirit as matter, solidity. On the astral planes we experience subtle beings and the landscapes they inhabit—what we might call dreams.

The cosmos is nonlocal; that is, it can't be mapped as a location. After death we gradually stop being local. We see ourselves as we really are from the soul's perspective: everywhere at once. This adjustment is probably the biggest obstacle any of us will encounter in the astral planes. Right now you are at the center of the universe because infinity extends in all directions, yet someone on the other side of the world is also at the center of the universe, because infinity extends on all sides of him, too. If both of you are centers of the universe, you must both be at the same location. The fact that you appear to be in different places is a sensory artifact. It's based on sights and sounds, which are local events. You are not a local event.

Similarly, each moment is the center of time, because eternity stretches around each moment in all directions. Therefore every moment is the same as every other. The cosmos, being nonlocal, has no up or down, north or south, east or west. These are only points of reference for our convenience at our particular frequency (i.e., inside a body). The transformational process after death is not a movement to some other place or time; it is just a change in the quality of our attention. You can only see what you vibrate to.