

ESSAY

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The Afterlife as an Extension of Lifespan Development

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Lifespan development is traditionally divided into a series of chronological stages, beginning in the womb and ending in late adulthood, with dying and death. Each period involves the mastery of certain cognitive-behavioral skills and/or virtues. However, what about after death, if it occurs as many of us believe it does? Do we remain unchanged? Or do we continue to grow and develop as disembodied spirits?

When Jon Klimo and I were gathering material for our book, *Suicide: What Really Happens in the Afterlife?* (2006), we read a tremendous number of channeled messages, near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, electronic voice phenomena (EVP) transmissions, reincarnation research facts, past life hypnotherapy regressions, mystic visions, deathbed apparitions, and accounts of hauntings. It became clear to both of us that the afterlife can be thought of not merely as a place (or series of them) where souls reside, but as a continuation of lifespan development involving acceptance, adjustment, and spiritual growth. As with its counterpart before physical death, this involves various stages through which souls must progress, each with its own required tasks and purpose. In *Handbook to the Afterlife* (2010), Jon and I discuss these steps, what they are, possible adjustment problems, and how souls can be helped.

Much of what we found will be no surprise to those familiar with the channeled literature. Death *per se* is responsible for very few (if any)

changes in an individual's basic personality, beliefs, attitudes, and moods. Nor do the newly dead find themselves instantly in the light. Before they can even begin their transitions, they must first recognize that they are, in fact, dead. This may not be as easy as one might expect. Many souls report feeling as if they have a body in spirit and are more alive than ever. If their deaths were sudden or unexpected or they were convinced nothing exists after death, this can be particularly difficult. In addition, the newly dead must learn how to perceive the world around them without the use of the sense organs.

Once the newly dead understand what has happened to them, they must separate from what remains of their physical bodies. Many times this is effortless. However, sometimes—possibly because of belief systems or emotional attachment to their bodies, or other people, places, or things in the physical world—this can take time. For example, some spirits speak of being tethered until their bodies have rotted away, while others state that if people die “before their time” (as planned in their “life blueprint” before incarnating), souls may have to wait near the earth plane until their “allotted hour” is up. It is unclear how much these problems are the result of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Spirit helpers usually, if not always, show up to orient newcomers and help them move forward through “vibrational levels” to a higher plane of existence, often described as rapidly traveling past a variety of levels or dimensions via a tunnel of light. Problems can arise if the newly dead reject this aid and remain in what is known as the “lower astral” near the earth plane. This can be more likely in cases where the recently crossed over have false expectations, psychological baggage, or addictions. In some cases, these lost souls can trouble the living. Fortunately, both psychic rescue circles (made up of the living) and spirit guides may be able to eventually help these lost souls.

The number of levels said to exist vary, but are often mentioned as being around seven or nine, with the “lowest” level of vibration being close to the earth plane and the highest level closest to the Source or the Light. Most souls appear to go to a middle level. Here, there can be a second wave of spirit greeters, and a joyous reunion of friends and family members. This is especially useful in helping the newly dead shift their focus from what they have lost—their bodies, jobs, lifestyles, and physical friends and families—to what they have gained.

The reunion phase and adjustment to the afterlife can be emotionally draining. Most spirits spend time in peaceful places of reflection or healing

centers. The recovery stage may be repeated and combined with the others that follow it. Sleep appears to be a major component of this stage early on. However, if (as is common) souls return to this phase later in combination with their life reviews and spiritual work, then it may take on more of a social quality, and relaxing in managed communities of like-minded beings.

Visits to the living may occur, for the dead to reassure themselves that loved ones are okay and provide a kind of closure. Although some spirits speak of being afraid of becoming sucked back into the lower vibrations of the Earth plane, many contemporary mediums feel that souls attend their own funerals.

Once souls are mentally and emotionally strong enough, they enter the life-review and judgment phase. This is where the most learning and change takes place. Spirits sometimes speak of re-experiencing (from both their own viewpoints and those of others) the choices they made in life and their impact on others. While older channeled material speaks of this judgment as being done by God, angels, or other spiritual beings, most newer material emphasizes self-judgment under the direction of guides. This life-review is not limited to a single time, but repeated until souls have wrung every bit of learning they can from this experience. Needless to say, this can take a long time to finish.

Once the life review process is over (and sometimes before then), many souls choose to take on a kind of spiritual work. For some, this may mean working as spirit guides to the living or the dead, acting as spirit greeters, transmitting messages to the living, or spending time in quiet contemplation. However, in all cases, this work appears to be freely chosen by the souls themselves.

From the perspective of the spirit realm, soul growth is everything. The cleansing and self-refinement which are an intrinsic part of this process may continue indefinitely or end with a return to the physical realm for a new set of lessons and challenges. Although reincarnation remains controversial in the channeled literature, many sources suggest it occurs, and that souls spend time planning in advance where they want to be born and what they want to accomplish. In some cases, lives are chosen so as to let them “work off” karma, which can exist on an individual, group, or regional level. Once souls reincarnate, they return to the traditional developmental stages to begin the process again. Thus, we come full circle, with a never-ending cycle allowing each of us to eventually unfold to our greatest potential.

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