**Written by Chriss Pagani on April 2, 2005**

|  |
| --- |
| **http://www.chrisspagani.com/2005/04/death-and-dying-truth-all-of-it/** |

**Death is big. Death, not life, is the centerpiece of civilization and the basis of what we do. Religion exists because of the fear of death. Our lives rotate around avoiding death, cheating death, flirting with death and denying death. And of course, everyone dies. That is why people want to know what death is really like. What is it like to die? I will tell you. I will also attempt to give you some hope - hope based on fact, not fantasy.**

**My personal experiences near death and the experiences of others I have interviewed give a good picture of what death is really like. It isn’t the Hollywood version you are used to, and it isn’t the picture painted by religion. If you really want to know the truth, you might as well know the truth. At the same time, it isn’t a pretty story so if you are looking for a soothing tale to brighten your day, this isn’t it.**

**The first thing I will tell you, from the experiences of all who share a knowledge of the truth is that death is not hard, it is the easiest thing in the world. As my friend who drowned (but was later revived) said, it is like falling asleep. I agree. Yes, you will probably be horribly scared as you realize you are going to die: This is a natural defense designed to save your life whenever saving your life is a possibility. Once you actually begin to die, however, fear and pain cease, as I will explain.**

**Now, most people are very uncomfortable talking about the truth of dying. The vast majority of people want a nice fantasy. So do I, actually, but want and desire still will not make something real. In the real world, you see, truth is often cold and ugly. I am talking about what we know about death, not what we wish. It might not be the whole story but it is all the story I can verify from personal experience and objective analysis. If you can’t handle it, don’t read any further than this. If you are merely afraid you can’t deal with the nature of existence, stop reading now. I will not warn you again.**

**For those who must have the truth, you will now have it, from those who have gone part of the way and come back. Again, it is always possible that this is not the entire picture, but it is certainly the entire picture as we know it. If there is more to the dying experience than this, then it leaves no evidence for us other than our intense desire that there actually be more to it than what we find.**

**One thing everyone agrees upon, as hinted at above, is that dying is very much like falling asleep. In fact, that is exactly how it will feel to you: Sudden tiredness engulfs you, and you begin to feel like the one thing that will make everything better is sleep. The urge to sleep becomes irresistible, and so you drift off to the comfort of sleep….**

**A percentage of people - not the majority as you may have been led to believe -but some, will now begin to have vivid dreams of floating out of body, perhaps meeting relatives or a religious figure. This is the so-called “Near Death Experience” that people make so much of. As the name indicates, it is the experience some have NEAR death, and not the whole experience of dying. The details vary greatly, although those with a certain agenda try to imply that it is all the same. I understand the desperate need people have to assuage the fear of death. But need does not imply reality: The drowning man desperately needs oxygen but does not get it, which is why he drowns.**

**The truth, as clearly as we are able to determine, is that oxygen deprivation causes a release of neurotransmitters so the brain is briefly flooded with electrical activity. People get this same sensation from sniffing glue, which also has an oxygen-depriving effect. At one extreme, this electrical activity is such that it resembles a seizure, without sufficient organization to produce a conscious experience. At the other end, however, the burst of activity is sufficiently subdued that the dying person perceives a light in the room (burst activity in the visual cortex) and a sense of floating (a similar burst in the temporal lobe). The temporal lobes are also involved in the recognition of persons and places, so such activity may cause one to perceive the presence of relatives or even God.**

**After three minutes or so, the electrical bursts in the brain begin to die down; the experiences (if any) become more disorganized, and detached from meaning. This process is also perfectly natural and will not cause fear. Fear is not even possible at this point.**

**After a while the synaptic activity in the brain drops to a point similar to deep anesthesia, so that while some stimulus is possible, there will no longer be conscious reaction. At this point, the connections between neurons are dissolving due to depolarization, so that while senses continue to produce electrical signals, there is nowhere for them to go.**

**After many minutes we are now past deep sleep and into the phase of complete cessation of brain activity. This takes a half-hour or so at room temperature, longer in cold conditions.**

**The good news is that as long as you are able to feel or experience anything, the sensation of dying is no different than going to sleep. You may even have a pleasant religious experience due to hyperactivity in the temporal lobes of your brain. This is what we know beyond any doubt is true. If there is anything more to the dying process, then it is purely a matter of faith not knowledge and certainly not science.**

**There is never any pain or fear once the true dying process begins. This is one sense in which the Bible gets it right - “There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.” (Revelations 21:4). These things are gone. The absence of all fear and pain means peace, and peace is a good thing.**

**The bottom line here is that everyone knows what death is like if they can admit it to themselves. If you’ve ever slept deeply and dreamlessly, or if you have ever been under deep anesthesia, then you have had the same experience you will have when you die. The only difference is that sleep ends in wakefulness, while death -as far as anyone can determine- does not. Again, faith tells us much more - but faith in Jesus or Santa Claus is all a matter of personal preference.**

**Fear causes irrational reactions: Rational people who know about dreamless sleep and anesthesia and understand that conscious existence can cease even when you have a living and fully functional brain, still want to believe that consciousness somehow comes back to a person once the brain stops working. That is in the nature of fear: People want an escape, and they will cling to anything that appears to offer hope, even when they know deep down in their hearts that it isn’t really true.**

**I understand that people are made uncomfortable by the thought that our being - our consciousness - fades to nothing. That is the big fear that drives people to irrational beliefs. I can’t help that and I share the same panic at the thought. One consolation I can offer - to you AND to myself - is to remember that this is a fear you can only experience before death. During the dying process, you will no longer be afraid.**

**Is there any hope?**

**The short answer is YES…**

**Yes - although hope may not take the form of a continued conscious existence that most of us would prefer to have, as far as anyone has ever been able to determine. I wish I could offer that hope to you, just as I did to thousands of others when I was a pastor, but I can’t lie anymore. Yet there is another kind of hope: There is a continuation that exists in reality - a continuation that is not built on fantasy, but fact.**

**Although as far as anyone can tell consciousness ceases at death, the elements that made you continue on forever. Energy can neither be created nor destroyed, so all of the real essence of you will continue on and on, changing form but always existing.**

**This does not imply conscious existence, but neither does it totally rule out something that approaches such existence. Since consciousness was once a property of the elements that made up your brain, it is always possible that those same elements will again find their way into an organized, conscious being. Perhaps it won’t be “you” in a way we would relate to, but it will be part of who you once were, back again in a new form. The potential of consciousness must be there - inside of the elements that made you… forever.**

**Think of it as reincarnation without the imaginary soul or spirit elements: The chemicals and substances that once made you who you were find their way into new forms, animate and inanimate.**

**That is eternal life, the real kind… not eternal consciousness or sense of self, but the real eternal existence that comes from being part of an eternal, ever-changing and ever-unfolding universe. Because that is what you really are.**

**QUOTES FROM FAMOUS AUTHORS REGARDING DEATH**

**(not related to the author above)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **albert einstein** | **"A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on** |
|  | **sympathy, education, and social ties and needs;** |
|  | **no religious basis is necessary.** |
|  | **Man would indeed be in a poor way** |
|  | **if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death."** |
|  |  |
| **albert einstein** | **"Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death."** |
|  |  |
| **bart kosko** | **“Death is an engineering problem.”** |
|  |  |
| **carl sagan** | **"Further, fear of death,** |
|  | **which in some respects is adaptive in the evolutionary struggle for existence,** |
|  | **is maladaptive in warfare.** |
|  | **Those cultures that teach an afterlife of bliss for heroes -** |
|  | **or even for those who just did what those in authority told them -** |
|  | **might gain a competitive advantage."** |
|  |  |
| **gloria steinem** | **"Spirituality celebrates life, religion celebrates life after death."** |
|  |  |
| **mark twain** | **"I was dead for billions of years before I was born and never suffered the slightest** |
|  | **inconvenience from it."** |
|  |  |
| **michel onfray** | **"Only mortals have to worry about death's inevitability.** |
|  | **The naive and foolish believer KNOWS that he is immortal,** |
|  | **that he will survive the carnage of Judgment Day."** |
|  |  |
| **polybius** | **"Since the masses of the people** |
|  | **are inconstant, full of unruly desires, passionate, and reckless of consequences,** |
|  | **they must be filled with fears to keep them in order.** |
|  | **The ancients did well, therefore, to invent gods, and the belief in punishment after death."** |
|  |  |
| **thomas edison** | **"I have never seen the slightest scientific proof of** |
|  | **the religious ideas of heaven and hell,** |
|  | **of future life of individuals,** |
|  | **or of a personal god."** |
|  |  |
| **michel onfray** | **"They establish death on earth for the sake of eternity in heaven.** |
|  | **In so doing, they spoil the only gift we possess:** |
|  | **the living matter of a potential existence killed in the egg just because its life is finite!** |
|  | **Fleeing life in order not to have to die is not a good bargain.** |
|  | **It pays death twice, when once is enough."** |

**Top of Form**

**Bottom of Form**