

Encounters With the Deceased

Spontaneous encounters with the deceased in dreams and other states of consciousness have been reported throughout history. An apparently universal folklore belief holds that the dead can influence the lives of the living, not always positively, as seen in the works of Shakespeare and Goethe.¹ However, poets, artists, writers and scientists have also testified about the beneficial effects of such encounters, and recent research suggests that dreams of the deceased are widely perceived as being helpful.² This article describes the various types and characteristics of such encounters, as revealed in research and case examples.

Terms and Key Characteristics

Spontaneous ESP messages often appear to originate directly from the dead or the dying (hence the term 'visitation dreams').³ Encounters with the deceased occur in all states of mind: during dreaming, waking and altered states of consciousness, in various circumstances, and before, at and following death. Dreams of the deceased in particular are experienced not as an ordinary dream but as a real encounter:⁴ the dreamer typically notes a strong sense of reality, often described as 'more real than real, quite unlike ordinary dreams'⁵ (also a common feature of lucid dreams about the deceased).⁶ Also, while an ordinary dream is quickly forgotten, the impression of a real encounter in a dream may have such an impact as to remain in mind throughout life.

The term 'after-death communication' (ADC), coined by Bill & Judy Guggenheim,⁷ covers all types of contacts with the deceased and has been generally adopted.⁸ A recent study based on 1004 case reports in English, French and Spanish⁹ has underlined the frequency of the phenomenon. Over six hundred (62%) occurred during dreams, while falling asleep and awaking,¹⁰ and a similar number were said to convey a message.¹¹ This typically comes in symbolic form that is hard to decipher, but may offer information or advice that is helpful for the dreamer.

'Veridical' occurrences are those that convey information unknown to the percipient that is later discovered to be true (see below). Thirteen percent of all ESP cases reported to the Rhine Research Center included verifiable information.¹² Information that researchers believe cannot be explained either in normal or alternative paranormal terms (super-psi) is often cited as proof of survival of death.

The study of 1004 experiences with deceased persons mentioned above found that 38% occurred during waking hours while the majority, 62%, happened in sleep related states.¹³ The study revealed the frequencies concerning the way in which the ADCs were perceived:

- tactile 47%
- visual 46%
- auditory 43%
- sensing a presence 34%
- olfactory 28%¹⁴

Intent

Patricia Garfield in her book *Dream Messenger* (1997) refers to her collection of approximately 1000 dream accounts.¹⁵ She finds that the purpose of the encounter is commonly to give greetings and expressions of love, to say goodbye, or give assurances that the deceased person has not really died. More rarely, the intent may be to warn or criticize, to ask forgiveness, or even avenge a murder.¹⁶

Another study similarly characterized the essence of messages as

- reassuring: 'I'm fine'
- resolving: settling old conflicts
- reaffirming: 'I love you'
- releasing: 'don't be sad'¹⁷

Similar findings are reported by Sally Rhine Feather¹⁸ and D. Barrett.¹⁹

Dreams of the dead can provide comfort and reassurance.²⁰ In a cross-cultural survey of more than 400 people in Southern California,²¹ over half of the female participants and about a third of the males confirmed they had had such contacts, most occurring in vivid dreams.²²

A classic 1960s study by Dewi Rees of 227 widows and 66 widowers in mid-Wales investigated bereavement experiences.²³ Nearly half reported apparitions (termed 'hallucinations' or 'illusions' by Rees), most commonly occurred in the ten years following the death. The experiences increased with the length of the marriage and were associated with a happy marriage. Rees concluded that such experiences are a normal and beneficial aspect of the grieving process.

A 2005 study by Luann Daggett included interviews with 18 people from middle-class backgrounds who had lost a spouse. Fifteen said they had experienced unusual dreams or occurrences they understood as communications with their dead spouses.²⁴ Daggett concluded 'that the phenomenon of continued encounters or after-death experiences is a common if not well-known aspect of the bereavement experience'.²⁵

Case example:

Six months after Keisha was killed in a car accident, her husband Charley, a 44-year-old African American, had a dream in which he could say goodbye to his wife (names changed).

I was on the college campus and registering for school. She had a long brown coat that she would wear ... especially in Michigan when it was so cold ... it was made out of wool. And I saw her coming in the distance ... she was walking toward me, and I remember turning to her and she was smiling and I was smiling and we embraced, and that was it in the dream. The whole time we were married, I was in school working on my degree, and so many times ... she had to carry the majority of the load, and it was like, that (the school) was a good place for us to say goodbye.²⁶

Death Coincidences

In many cases, the encounter is with a person not known to be dead, but who is discovered later to have died at about the time of the experience.

Case example:

In 1874, when reading for college, I frequently visited a man named William Edwards (of Llanrhidian, near Swansea), who was then seriously ill; he often professed pleasure at, and benefit from, my ministrations. He at length recovered so far as to resume work. I left the neighbourhood, and amid new scenes and hard work, I cannot say that I ever thought of him. I had been at college some 12 months, when one night, or rather early morning between 12 at midnight and 3 in the morning, I had a most vivid dream. I seemed to hear the voice of the above-named William Edwards calling me in earnest tones. In my dream I seemed to go to him, and saw him quite distinctly. I prayed with him and saw him die. When I awoke the dream seemed intensely real, so much that I remarked the time, 3 a.m. in the morning. I could not forget it and told some college friends all particulars. The next day I received a letter from my mother, with this P.S.: 'The bell is tolling; I fear poor William Edwards is dead.' On inquiry I found that he did die between 12 and 3; that he frequently expressed the wish that I were with him. I had no idea that he was ill.[27](#)

Case example:

Singapore, March 1985

Some weeks after my mother died in England in January 1985 I had a very powerful dream in which she came to see me, smartly and (uncharacteristically) dressed in a tweed suit, and clearly ready to embark on a journey. I have no recollection of any conversation we held, but I have an abiding memory of actually being with her.

I was awakened from this experience by the alarming sound of our three normally docile dogs howling and barking frenziedly outside the bedroom window. I got out of bed, together with my wife and we went outside to see what the fuss was, and I seemed to hear singing, and also my mother's voice. The house and garden outside were bathed in the light of a brilliant full moon, while the dogs kept up their clamour. I calmed them down and as there seemed to be nothing else the matter, we went back to bed. It was 4 am.

The following evening I telephoned my father to see how he was getting on (this had become a regular thing since our loss). He told me that the previous night he had carried out the melancholy task of scattering my mother's ashes in his garden, carrying out a pact agreed between the two of them and not divulged to anyone else, that this should be done in the light of a full moon. Bearing in mind the 8-hour time difference between England and Singapore I asked him: 'would that have been about 8 pm?' and he said 'Yes, why do you ask?'

I then told him what had been happening in our house and garden 8,000 miles away at that very moment.[28](#)

The timing in such cases is sometimes unclear, giving rise to ambiguity about the degree of concurrence. In rare cases an exact time was observed that matched with the time given on the death-certificate.

Dreams and Sleep-Related States

Encounters with the deceased are reported to occur in a variety of sleep states, including hypnagogic imagery, rapid eye movement (REM) dreams, deep sleep and lucid dreaming. They may also occur as waking visions during the day (research shows that consciousness seems to shift frequently and humans are actually only 'fully awake' about half the time).[29](#) Researchers now also consider encounters reported in altered states of consciousness induced by psychoactive plants and mushrooms.[30](#) Furthermore, it seems well established that persons undergoing extreme stress or life changing situations are especially likely to have exceptional experiences.[31](#)

Hypnagogia and Hypnopompia

Encounters with deceased persons can occur amid the dreamlike impressions that sometimes occur while falling asleep (hypnagogia) or while waking (hypnopompia). Andreas Mavromatis distinguishes four steps of hypnagogic experiences: light and colours; nature scenes; symbolic phenomena; and dreams representing the mind of the deceased person at the time.[32](#) These states can be experienced with all senses, and because of their unstable changing content may be especially receptive to veridical information concerning dying and deceased persons. They are distinct from daydreams in which the dreamer still has some control over the experience.

Hypnopompia occur towards the end of sleep in the process of awakening, bringing the dreamer back to the waking state of mind. As with hypnagogia, this period, perhaps because of its unstable changing content, seems receptive for perceiving veridical information concerning dying and deceased persons.

Lucid Dreams

A lucid dream is one in which the 'I' gains some control over the dream actions. It offers an ideal opportunity to experience events that appear to be beyond the usual limits of time and space, for instance an encounter with a deceased person.[33](#) In a study with lucid dreamers, participants succeeded in producing 80 lucid dreams of the deceased in which the 29 dreamers appeared to interact with the deceased person. Ten percent of the dreams were reported to carry verifiable information.[34](#)

Shared Dreams

There are rare accounts of two people dreaming about the same deceased person, in a few cases even in the same night.[35](#)

Case example:

My father suddenly died in August 1988 ... I found it very hard to come to terms with his death because everything happened so rapidly. I kept dreaming that we buried him alive, and I was very afraid to wake up in the middle of the night after these dreams. This had been going on for a few nights until one night I had a completely different dream. My father appeared, looked alive and well and told me that he was fine and happy and staying with his uncle. Since that night I stopped having bad dreams about him and was able to 'let him go'. But the most surprising experience came after that. I went to see my sister at Christmas whom I had not seen since my father's funeral in August. She started telling me about her bad dreams about our father's death that stopped when one night our father appeared in her dream and said that 'he was fine and happy and staying with his uncle'. She was telling me exactly the same things that happened to me, and possibly it happened with us the same night.[36](#)

Ghosts and Apparitions

In popular discourse, a vision or hallucination of a person who is not present, dying or deceased is referred to as a 'ghost' or 'apparition'. Both may contain a psi component. In psychical research the terms are generally used in slightly different ways.

Strictly speaking, during a vision the perceiver is simultaneously aware of ordinary reality, while in a hallucinatory state the perceiver has no contact with reality; however, in the research literature these terms are sometimes used interchangeably.

An 'apparition' is of a person who is known to the percipient and may be either alive or dead. Like some dream encounters, waking apparitions are commonly experienced at a time when the appearing person, unknown to the percipient, is undergoing a trauma that in many cases proves fatal. The term 'crisis apparition' was coined by British psychical researcher George NM Tyrrell for this phenomenon,[37](#) and it remains in use (for instance by the [Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia](#)).

'Ghost' applies where the appearing person is unknown to the percipient, is known by others to be dead, and typically appears in a single location.[38](#) Such a case is also referred to as a 'haunting'.

In some cases, the percipient is in an extreme state from exhaustion, accident, attempted suicide, or imminent death. In such moments, help may appear in the form of a 'sensed presence', a visual appearance or an auditory experience, identified by the percipient variously as a divine being, an angel or a deceased person, or even an ordinary person, whether known or unknown to the experient at the time. (See also '[sensed presence phenomena](#)'.)

Studies show that ghostly and apparitional experiences often occur in sleep-related states, conforming to psi experiences in general.[39](#) However, the nature of the percipient's state of mind at the time of the encounter is often unclear. In apparition dreams the percipient is commonly woken by the event, but may be

uncertain as to whether he or she observed it with eyes open or closed.⁴⁰ In Haraldsson's study of 337 encounters with the dead in Iceland, most experiencers were physically active (40%); others were resting (22%), falling into sleep (7%) or awakening (16%); in 5% of cases it was unclear if they were sleeping or awake. In 28%, the encounter occurred just prior to falling asleep or upon awakening, 'many of them quite impressive'.⁴¹

The encounter often appears intended for a particular purpose, for instance to draw attention to a will, obtain justice for a wrong, identify the whereabouts of missing money or valuables, give warning (for instance against taking a particular action), solve a crime, or recommend a healing cure.⁴²

Case example:

The Swedish academic Mr Gustavsson (name changed) spent the summer 1984 with his family on a skerry at the Swedish west coast, where they had rented a summer cottage. Around midnight, a few days before the 2nd of June, when his second son was born, he was in bed reading while his wife was already sleeping. All of a sudden, he had a strange experience:

There stood a man on the balcony that was connected to his sleeping room. The balcony door was locked but the man seemed to ignore this and came without problems through the door inside the room, more hovering than walking. He looked Mr Gustavsson directly in the eye for a moment, which lasted about eight to ten seconds. Then he was hovering through the room, passing the bed and went out of the room and down the stairs. The man was maybe between 40 and 45, and he did not look transparent, just a little bit grey, not at all colourful. His dress looked somewhat old fashioned, maybe from the late 60s. His face was clearly recognizable, a bit pale and overshadowed with a slight expression of accusation, as if he wanted to say some unfriendly words, like 'What are you doing here?' The whole event lasted for about ten minutes. Mr Gustavsson who had seen it all with open eyes was completely convinced it was only a dream, a kind of hypnagogic imagery before falling asleep. But then he jumped out of bed and ran after the man. There was nothing, no trace of the man. The stranger had little resemblance with his father, but it wasn't his father.

A week later Mr Gustavsson told a colleague about the incident, who earlier was resident on that island, whereupon the colleague said he remembered that during the 70s a suicide had occurred just in that house: a man had poisoned himself in the garage by a running engine. Mr Gustavsson then discovered a box in the summerhouse that contained photographs from the 40s and 60s. On one photograph Mr Gustavsson recognized the man he had seen coming through the locked door. The difference was that the apparition looked quite a bit younger.⁴³

Veridical Dreams

Many after-death contacts and dreams of the deceased convey information not known to the dreamer which is later discovered to be true.

Case example:

In August 1912 ... I brought Alexander Scordelli, a nephew of mine in to the Britchany Zmestvo hospital, where his state was acknowledged by the physicians to be hopeless ... Feeling probably that he would not see me again, he thanked me when saying good-bye for all and asked me not to forget his daughter. Two months later ... a physician of the Britchany hospital telephoned to me: 'Poor Scordelli has just died.' The very dense mud and an ailment did not permit me to make twenty versts (13 miles) to attend his funeral.

Two months later ... I left for Kishinev for business, stopping for twenty-four hours at Beltzy, Bessarabia, on the way.

I put up at the same inn as usual, went to bed at the regular time, but having put out the light in my room, could not fall asleep at once on account of the servants noisily running in the passage, the electric bells ringing and an electric arc-light hissing.

As it seemed to me, I was beginning to lose consciousness before falling asleep. I then suddenly commenced perceiving distinctly, among other sound in the passage, a characteristic shuffling of slippers, as if a man with feeble gait were approaching the door of my room. When these footsteps stopped before the door, which I had locked, I felt and understood that the visitor was none other than the late Alexander Scordelli. I was seized with fear and covered myself with the counterpane, head included. I then heard him grasping the door handle, beginning to move it and saying: 'Open, Uncle, open.' As I did not answer his request: 'Do you not think I can pass through the door?' he said. Frightened at such a possibility and making a big effort, I asked him: 'What doest thou want from me? Speak!' And then the answer came: 'Put me in properly; the coffin is narrow, the coffin is short.' After repeating these words twice in a voice already dull and faint he went slowly away, his slippers still shuffling.

In May 1913 (the next year) I happened to go on business to Britchany, the borough where Scordelli had died half a year before. A woman was waiting on me in my room (at the inn) whose face I seemed to know, but without remembering where I had seen her.

As she noticed this: 'Sir, you probably do not recognize me?' she asked. 'I was ward-servant in the hospital when you brought the late Scordelli in.' Feeling that I might learn something of interest from her connection with the Beltzy apparition, I asked her to tell me how he died. 'Well, he died as I was attending him (literally; 'on my arms'). I held the taper for him, I washed his body after his death and attended his funeral. They buried him in his new clothes and with slippers on, for it was difficult already to put boots on his feet. One thing was bad: no special coffin was ordered and he was put into a hospital coffin, such as are kept for emergency purposes. Well, this coffin proved to be so narrow and short, that when he was being laid into it, the bones cracked.'[44](#)

Case example:

Another informational case example is given in Sally Rhine Feather's book *The Gift*. This concerned a woman, Priscilla, who shortly before her death requested that her husband not be allowed to raise her children. Shortly after Priscilla's death, her sister-in law experienced an visual-auditory hallucination of her during the hypnopompic phase of wakening.

One night I was awakened by a soft and light voice, calling out my name. When I opened my eyes, Priscilla was at the foot of my bed. All I could see was her face and the long pink gown she was buried in. She was floating in the air. She had a very worried look on her face.

She told me to go to the house where she had lived, look under her bed in a trunk, and get out the letters that were in the trunk. After she told me this, she disappeared. The next morning I told my husband what had happened. We went in the house and looked in the trunk and sure enough, the letters were there. Apparently Priscilla was the only one who knew about these letters. The letters contained evidence that helped us to win the custody trial.[45](#)

Other examples can be found in a collection of historical ghost cases in the UK and Ireland that offer verifiable information transmitted via dreams of the deceased.[46](#)

Dreams of an Unknown Deceased Person

A rare category, one that has yet to be fully researched, concerns dreams of an unknown person who is only later discovered to be deceased. Such dreams occur at places where the person died prematurely or by violence, including murder, accident and suicide.

Case example:

This happened during the summer of 1966. I was somewhere between sleeping and waking, when I get wide awake. I see a man at a stove of the cabin, a young man who was stooping over it. He was doing something there. I recognized that this man was not a member of the crew. I was going to check this further but then he disappeared. Later I got the information that he had got burnt inside the cabin. He did not get burnt to death, he suffocated in smoke. I remember so clearly that he was wearing a blue sweater and a scarf around his neck. My description fits what I later learnt about him.[47](#)

Encounters Before, Near and At Death

Terminal Lucidity

Terminal lucidity refers to the reported phenomenon of a bedridden person or one suffering long-term dementia experiencing a sudden moment of lucidity in the moments prior to death, able to converse normally and showing normal recall, sometimes for the first time in years. Michael Nahm studied cases that occurred to persons suffering with serious mental illnesses or organic brain damages, identifying three types.[48](#) The first group is characterized by visions of landscapes,

the appearance of beings and entities, or impressions that lead to a very positive mood change accompanied by astonishing mental alertness. The second group concerns deathbed visions (see above). The third group relates to coma patients who experience suddenly become conscious, describe dreams in which they communicated with deceased persons, and shortly afterwards die.[49](#)

Case example:

This case, described to Nahm by Guy Lyon Playfair, concerns a neighbour who suffered from severe memory loss.

She soon recognized neither friends nor relatives and needed a full-time care. One day when the woman for more than a year had not recognized any of her family members who lived in the same house, she rang for her caretaker and ordered in a surprisingly clear manner three cups of tea. Being puzzled her caretaker dug deeper and asked if she was serious about it. But indeed, the lady asserted her brother and sister had come to her 'from the underground' and would like to have a cup of tea with her. Both had been dead since a long time and were not visible to the caretaker. The next day the woman died.[50](#)

Near-Death Experiences

Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) are different from ordinary dreams, but also occur in an altered state of consciousness and typically include encounters with deceased persons.[51](#) Meetings with living persons are rarely reported: in Bruce Greyson's collection of 665 NDEs, 138 (21%) included a claimed encounter with a deceased person but only 25 (4%) with a living person.[52](#)

In Emily Williams Kelly's case collection of 553 NDEs, 74 (13%) involved encounters with deceased people,[53](#) a figure that lies between the 8% reported by Ring[54](#) and the 39% reported by Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick.[55](#) Of these, most were identified as relatives and only 6 (5%) as friends or acquaintances. Fewer than half were close relationships; ten cases involved relatives who died before the experiencer was born. In one case, the experiencer encountered the deceased father of his future wife, whom he had not yet met, recognizing him later in a photograph.[56](#)

Dreams of the deceased share core aspects and commonalities with NDEs, notably that they have a strong impact, leave the dreamer with the sense of having had a real encounter, and also convince of the continuation of consciousness after death.[57](#) A study by Krippner, Bogzaran and Carvalho confirmed that dreams of the dead can be impactful and transforming, 'motivating some people to change their religion, adopt a new faith, or lead them to a different world view'.[58](#) Callum Cooper states that such dream experiences 'provide a virtual interaction with the dead, and appear to provide equally therapeutic values to the bereaved as spontaneous experiences reported in the conscious waking state'.[59](#)

NDEs are furthermore known for the feeling of awe and full acceptance in the face of the unearthly and unusually bright light. They often describe how it is 'on their way to the light' that they meet their loved ones who had passed on, looking now happy and alive.

Between 1988 and 1992 Pim van Lommel in the Netherlands carried out a prospective study⁶⁰ of 344 cardiac arrest patients who were temporarily clinically dead and received successful reanimation. The study showed that 62 persons (18 %) had memories of a NDE. Of these, 20 (32 %) experienced encounters with dead family member or friends.⁶¹

Case example:

Penny Sartori reports an account sent to her by a 90-year-old person who as a teenager during an acute appendicitis went through a typical NDE. The percipient said, 'Although I tried to think it was a dream it has remained very vivid in my memory.' The person experienced passing a tunnel, nearing a growing light and coming to a gleaming golden gate:

A man wearing a long white robe stood there ... I looked through the gate and saw my grandparents and others who had passed on. They seemed to be behind a cloud. I could only see them from the waist upwards. They had such a look of peace and happiness on their faces and there was an indescribable peace around me ...⁶²

Case example:

Pim van Lommel gives an example of a NDE in which a deceased person appeared who was unknown to the experient at the time but was recognized years later.

During my cardiac arrest I had an extensive experience ... and later I saw, apart from my deceased grandmother, a man who had looked at me lovingly, but whom I did not know. More than 10 years later, at my mother's deathbed, she confessed to me that I had been born out of an extramarital relationship, my father being a Jewish man who had been deported and killed during the second World War, and my mother showed me his picture. The unknown man that I had seen more than 10 years before during my NDE turned out to be my biological father.⁶³

As with dream encounters, shared NDE's have been reported. (See [Nigel Buckmaster](#))

Temporary Death Experiences (TDEs)

The Fenwicks distinguish between deathbed visions and a particular type of NDE they call *temporary death experiences* (TDEs),⁶⁴ where the patient recovers sufficiently to describe the experience and then shortly afterwards dies.

Such cases typically occur during cardiac arrest, when the patient is unconscious and undergoing resuscitation, as distinct from NDEs in which it is not certain that the patient was unconscious.⁶⁵ The indications of cardiac arrest are the same as those of clinical death, showing no cardiac output, no respiratory effort, and no brain-stem reflexes.⁶⁶

Unlike episodic deathbed visions, TDEs accounts are narratives told by the patient, a more complete story with a beginning, a middle and an end. In all three

experiences, patients typically encounter one or several deceased persons, either at the bedside or on their journey.

Case example:

This account was given by a 60-year old hospital patient following a probable cardiac arrest. In an out-of-body state, the patient met his deceased father, also his deceased mother-in-law, whom he had never met in life and only recognized later in photographs his wife possessed.

All I can remember is looking up in the air and I was floating in a bright pink room. I couldn't see anything; I was just going up and there was no pain at all. I looked up the second time and I could see my father and my mother-in-law standing alongside a gentleman with long, black hair, which needed to be combed. I saw my father – definitely – and I saw this chap. I don't know who he was, maybe Jesus, but this chap had long, black, scruffy hair that needed combing. The only thing nice about him was his eyes were drawing you to him; the eyes were piercing; it was his eyes. When I went to look at my father, it was drawing with his eyes as well, as if I could see them both [at] the same time. And I had no pain at all. There was talking between me and my father; not words but communicating other ways – don't ask me what, but we were actually talking. I was talking to my father...not through words through my mouth, but through my mind.

It seemed to be four to five seconds! It was unusual; I went up ... It was so painless; there was no pain ... I was so happy ... I was enjoying myself ... I was still going up, and eventually the gentleman said to my father and my mother-in-law, 'He's got to go back; he's not ready yet.' I was peaceful, no pain, still looking up, and I felt this...could hear this chap telling my father, 'Sorry, he isn't ready yet; he's got to go back.' I looked up and Mam [his mother-in-law] said a few words and Dad.[67](#)

Deathbed Visions

Similar to NDEs, deathbed visions of the deceased are experienced as real encounters, typically in the moments before the person's death, although they can also occur months earlier.[68](#) Observers (family, hospital staff, carers) may see the person gesticulating and looking intently at a particular spot in the room, stretching their arms as if hugging, or calling out greetings.

A shared deathbed vision is one in which the patient's encounter with a deceased person is shared by one or more bystanders: family members, friends or acquaintances, medical staff or carers. Here, they may see what the dying person sees, or at least something that seems to relate to the dying person's vision.

Case example:

My aunt who helped raise me was dying of cerebral hemorrhage. We had all been up for five days and nights with her. The candles were flickering and she was in a coma. I went to get a cup of tea and my husband remained in the room with her, saying the rosary at her bedside.

All of a sudden he ran down the stairs passed us appearing pale and visibly shaken. When we could finally get him to talk, he said that while he was praying, my aunt seemed to come out of the coma and started flailing her arms around in the air holding them wide open as if she were trying to reach someone, and crying ‘Mom! Oh, Mom.’

My husband felt a breeze, and suddenly a little woman stood next to him, less than five feet tall with a plaid shawl over her head, wringing her hands, and my husband saw tears running down her face. Although he heard nothing from the woman, he did hear the rustle of her dress. She was in black. He said that he prayed hard that he could muster the strength to get out of the room. When able he rushed out and down the stairs.

He described the experience to relatives at our house, and another aunt said, ‘Well, that was her mother. She has been dead since 1910.’ When we went back upstairs, Mom was dead with a peaceful smile at her face.[69](#)

In rare cases, a deceased person seen in a deathbed vision is not known to have died, which offers potential evidence against explanations in terms of hallucination.[70](#) Greyson writes: ‘Some experiencers on their deathbeds see, and often express surprise at seeing, a recently deceased person of whose death neither they nor anyone around them had any knowledge, thereby excluding the possibility that the vision was a hallucination related to the experiencer’s expectations.’[71](#) Greyson considers that cases of this kind ‘provide some of the most persuasive evidence for the survival of consciousness after bodily death’.[72](#)

Case example:

A dying lady, exhibiting the aspect of joyful surprise, spoke of seeing, one after another, three of her brothers who had been long dead, and then apparently recognized last of all a fourth brother, who was believed by the bystanders to be still living in India. The coupling of his name with that of his dead brothers excited such awe and horror in the mind of one of the persons present that she rushed from the room. In due course of time letters were received announcing the death of the brother in India, which had occurred some time before his dying sister seemed to recognize him.[73](#)

Reincarnation

In cases of the reincarnation type, memories of a previous life sometimes emerge in dreams. In children they tend to occur as nightmares and night terrors, usually representing only one aspect of a set of memories. Night terrors among children don't usually include REM dream memories, but they might be combined with other traumatic signs of reincarnation memories. In adults, dream memories can occur alone as the dominating feature of cases.[74](#) In a collection of 127 adult cases reported by Frederick Lenz,[75](#) nineteen (15%) involved dreams.[76](#)

Announcing Dreams

The rebirth of an individual is sometimes announced before or during pregnancy in a so-called 'announcing dream', usually experienced by the future mother, but occasionally by the father and other close relatives. Ian Stevenson recorded announcing dreams from all countries he investigated,[77](#) and they are frequently reported amongst Burmese, the Alevi, and the Tlingit and other tribal peoples.[78](#) Stevenson also worked with cases from Europe; his study of 41 European cases of the reincarnation type gives numerous examples of announcements of a rebirth in dreams.[79](#)

Case example:

A Finnish case reported by Ian Stevenson concerns a boy named Kalevi who witnessed his abusive father Risto beating his mother Sylvi. The couple separated, and on a later visit to his father Kalevi was killed by him.[80](#)

A few months after Kalevi's death, but before she became pregnant with Paavo, Sylvi had a vivid dream about Risto and Kalevi. In the dream she heard the doorbell ring. She went to the door, opened it, and found Risto and Kalevi there. Risto disappeared, but Kalevi came in and sat on a window sill. Sylvi tried to touch him and found that her hand went through him. This dream was so vivid and realistic that Sylvi was unsure whether she was dreaming or seeing discarnate persons while awake. She had never had a similar experience before.

At this time Sylvi had a new partner, Veikko, but she was not pregnant then. Her next child Paavo was born about 13 months after Kalevi's death. At the age of three years, Paavo made statements to the effect that the house they lived in was not his home. Seeing a photograph of his mother with an injured face he burst into tears saying: 'Nobody will be allowed to beat you.' Sylvi had never talked to Paavo about Risto beating her. Moreover, when Paavo saw photographs of Kalevi he insisted that they were photographs of him. Paavo also referred to the life of Kalevi. In addition, there were physical similarities between Paavo and Kalevi.

Evidentially, this is not the strongest of Stevenson's cases, but it demonstrates some typical aspects of announcing dreams: They are very vivid and strikingly real, they refer to a previous personality familiar to the dreamer, and they show their new arrival in the life of the dreaming person.[81](#)

Dream Incubation

Dream incubation techniques have been practised for thousands of years, involving visits to sacred places or temples erected for the purpose. The original intent was to obtain direct contact with a specific god or divine being for healing, prophecy or advice. Several renowned healers, for instance Asclepius, were described both as gods and humans. The image of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius was often appealed to for healing in dreams.[82](#)

Today the method has become a popular aspect of transpersonal psychology, applied where an unresolved issue in a former relationship can be helped by making contact with the deceased person.

Theodor Fechner, a nineteenth century German physiologist, believed that 'whatever awakes the memories of the dead, is a means of calling them'.⁸³ However, our lucid dream study showed that wishing for an encounter with a certain person succeeded only in 11% of cases reviewed, compared with 71% who reported the dream person appearing spontaneously.⁸⁴

Mediated Dreams

A mediated dream refers to one in which a message is intended for someone else. The practice of people who fail to achieve the desired contact in incubation dreams soliciting third party help goes back at least to Greco-Roman antiquity, where a temple priest passed on relevant information.⁸⁵ Today, the role of stand-in dreamer is filled by the psychotherapist or dream group members, with the appearance of a deceased person playing a crucial role.⁸⁶

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Puhle (2019); Puhle & Parker-Reed (2017).
- [2](#). Puhle & Parker (2017). See the video by Jeffrey Mishlove (2021).
- [3](#). Rhine Feather (2005), 252. See also Puhle (2018), chapter 4 'Traeumen ohne Grenzen' (dreaming without limits).
- [4](#). Elsaesser et al. (2020a); Puhle & Parker (2017); Fenwick & Fenwick (1999).
- [5](#). Elsaesser et al. (2020a), 20-21.
- [6](#). Puhle & Parker (2017).
- [7](#). Guggenheim & Guggenheim (1996).
- [8](#). Devers (1997); LaGrand (1997); Houck (2005).
- [9](#). Elsaesser et al. (2020a, 2020b).
- [10](#). Elsaesser et al. (2020a), 21.
- [11](#). Elsaesser et al. (2020 a), 20.

- [12.](#) Feather (2005), 37.
- [13.](#) Elsaesser et al. (2020 a), 22.
- [14.](#) Elsaesser et al. (2020 a), 22.
- [15.](#) Garfield (1997), 23-40.
- [16.](#) Garfield (1997), 42-225, ca. 150-200 case examples given.
- [17.](#) Elsaesser et al. (2020a), 23.
- [18.](#) Feather (2005), 252-3.
- [19.](#) Barrett (1991-1992), 100-105.
- [20.](#) Fenwick & Fenwick (2008), 125.
- [21.](#) Kalish & Reynolds (1979).
- [22.](#) Rogo (1986), 82.
- [23.](#) Rees (1971).
- [24.](#) Daggett (2005).
- [25.](#) Daggett (2005), 206.
- [26.](#) Daggett (2005), 199.
- [27.](#) Gurney, Myers, & Podmore (1886), vol. 1, 346.
- [28.](#) Rankin (2009), 166.
- [29.](#) Killingsworth & Gilbert (2010).
- [30.](#) Puhle (2021), chapters 22 and 23.
- [31.](#) De Boismont (1860); Cooper (2017).
- [32.](#) Mavromatis (1987).
- [33.](#) Gillis & Waggoner (2001) is mainly focused on this topic.
- [34.](#) Puhle & Parker (2017).
- [35.](#) Magallón (1997), 309.
- [36.](#) Fenwick & Fenwick (2008), 124-25.
- [37.](#) Tyrrell (1953).
- [38.](#) Finucane (1982).
- [39.](#) Puhle (2004); Puhle (2009); Puhle & Parker-Reed (2017).
- [40.](#) Tanous & Gray (1990).
- [41.](#) Haraldsson (2009), 101.
- [42.](#) Puhle (2009), 85-185; Puhle & Parker-Reed (2017), 88-169.
- [43.](#) Personal interview originally published in German in Puhle (2019), vol. 3, ch. 8.
- [44.](#) Extracts from a letter by M. Platon Biberi on February 10 1930, *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 26, 96; quoted in Richmond (1938), 32-34.
- [45.](#) Feather (2005), 259-60.
- [46.](#) Puhle & Parker-Reed (2017), 88-208: The Ghost of Mr R-d Senior or The Portuguese Coin Test (19th century; category I: The Last Will and Testament Cases; case 3, 98-100); The Ghost of Sergeant Davis or An English Ghost Who spoke Gaelic (18th century; category V: Solving Crime Cases; case 17, 130-36). The Ghost of Mr Watkinson or 'A Ghost With Music' (17th century; category X: Promise Cases; case 28, 158-59); Finding the Body of Police-Constable Eggleton (20th century, 188-92).
- [47.](#) Haraldsson (2009), 102.
- [48.](#) Nahm (2012), 12.
- [49.](#) Nahm (2012), 67.
- [50.](#) Nahm (2012), 70; transl. from German by Puhle.
- [51.](#) Van Lommel (2021), 6; Kelly (2001), 232.

- [52.](#) Greyson (2010), 161.
- [53.](#) Kelly (2001), 233.
- [54.](#) Ring (1980), 67.
- [55.](#) Fenwick & Fenwick (1995), 16.
- [56.](#) Kelly (2001), 239.
- [57.](#) Van Lommel (2009), 140.
- [58.](#) Bogzaran & Carvalho (2002), 151; quoted in Cooper (2017), 33.
- [59.](#) Cooper (2017), 33. See also Wright (2002).
- [60.](#) Published in December 2001 in *The Lancet*.
- [61.](#) Van Lommel (2009), 150-53.
- [62.](#) Sartori (2014), 37.
- [63.](#) Van Lommel (2021), 31.
- [64.](#) Fenwick & Fenwick (2008), 44.
- [65.](#) Fenwick & Fenwick (2008), 204.
- [66.](#) Fenwick & Fenwick (2008), 206.
- [67.](#) Sartori, Badham & Fenwick (2006), 73-74.
- [68.](#) Barrett (1926); Osis & Haraldsson (1977/1997); Kelly (2001).
- [69.](#) Feather (2005), 266-67.
- [70.](#) For this reason, these experiences are sometimes referred to as 'Peak in Darien' cases, from a book of that title published in 1882 by Frances Power Cobbe. The reference is to the topic of a Keats poem, the surprise of invading Spaniards who climbed a mountain in Panama and saw before them, not the continent they expected, but another ocean.
- [71.](#) Greyson (2010), 161.
- [72.](#) Greyson (2010), 161.
- [73.](#) Barrett (1926), 25; original in Cobbe.
- [74.](#) Matlock (2019 b).
- [75.](#) Lenz (1979).
- [76.](#) Matlock (2019 a), 206.
- [77.](#) Stevenson (1987), 99.
- [78.](#) Matlock (2019 a), 165.
- [79.](#) Stevenson (2003).
- [80.](#) Stevenson (2003), 149-52.
- [81.](#) Stevenson (2003), 150.
- [82.](#) Puhle (2020).
- [83.](#) Fechner (1866), 31.
- [84.](#) Puhle & Parker (2017), 151.
- [85.](#) Puhle (2020).
- [86.](#) See Henry Reed's approach in Puhle (2020).