

Lessons of the Light

I tried to show in my story some of the things I learned and tried to assimilate from my near-death experience as well as those I have yet to integrate. Which of these lessons might be useful to you will vary a lot depending on who you are and your life experiences. But you do not need to have been where I went to realize some of the same benefits. In this chapter, I would like to share what I took from my experience with the Light in the way of gifts and lessons that I hope might be helpful to others.

The Spirit of Unconditional Love

Even if you have never experienced a vision of your own Light, it can be a tremendous source of hope and comfort to hear from thousands who have shared their near-death experiences that they have experienced being part of a universal spirit beyond what we see in our material world which can help us in our journey through life.

Based on my own NDE, this universal spirit is a life force energy of unconditional love which I believe exists within and around all of us, and it loves each and every one of us unconditionally no matter what mistakes we make. I think it is everywhere, eternally present, connecting all of us as one. It lies within each of us as the essence of our higher, infinite self. And because we are part of it we can turn to it continually for hope, wisdom, comfort and guidance through life's challenges. It wants us to know we are not alone. It is always by our side, rooting for us. We only need to be willing to open to it to reap its benefits. We also need to have trust and faith that it will help us and give us hope through difficult times. When we connect with this spirit within us, we can experience its love, peace and joy. We can reach out to it, any time, any place. It never leaves us; only we leave it or are unable to connect with it. That said, connecting with our own Light isn't always as easy as it sounds. Many of us need to overcome the conditioning we have experienced, the many forces of society, family, friends, enemies, and so on that steered us away from being our true selves.

When I was given the "gift of love," I came to believe this was the Light's most important gift to the world and was meant to be shared. All the

attributes of the Light—peace, joy, compassion, acceptance, nonjudgment, forgiveness and others—stem from love. As expressions of the Light, which manifests through us, we are meant to love ourselves and others as it loves us. We are meant to love life itself and live it to the fullest.

Self-acceptance

Before we can truly accept others, we must first accept ourselves just as we are, with all our human imperfections, with loving kindness, just as the Light accepts us the way we are. One way to look at ourselves is the way we would look at a diamond with inclusions or imperfections. Many diamonds have flaws within them, yet they are still diamonds, and beautiful, even with their inclusions. It is the same with us: we are like diamonds, beautiful with all our imperfections. When we are connected to our “real” selves, the people we were at the moment we were born, the part of ourselves that is love, we are able to fully embrace our humanity, all the parts of ourselves, the flaws along with the strengths. From the perspective of the Light our mistakes and imperfections are simply part of who we are as humans, learning the lessons to be learned along our evolutionary path. Wherever we are on the continuum of that path, we are in our right and perfect place, learning what we need to learn. Everything that comes to us along that path is a gift leading us to greater insight and self-awareness. We do not need to do anything to obtain the Light’s love. And since it loves us unconditionally, we can love ourselves the same way. For example, during my NDE when I had a life review, I was not judged but held in unconditional love while being made aware of my self-recrimination and other negative states. As a result, my self-judgments and all the pain that accompanied them dissolved in the embrace of compassion. In that way, we are gently guided toward new insights to see what does not serve our growth, and reoriented much as a loving parent would guide a wayward child.

When we judge ourselves, our self-judgment comes from not being connected with the Light. Instead of harshly punishing, admonishing, or blaming ourselves when we make mistakes and see our flaws, we can be reminded to treat ourselves with the same acceptance and compassion we would receive from the Light. As we acknowledge and accept our own flaws and weaknesses without judgment, we are better able to accept those of others. The most important thing is to believe in yourself and remember the Light is within you.

Joy and Expansion

Joy is part of the light of our essential self and when we feel and express it, we bring joy to others and the world. We are meant to expand and express our potential and find what makes us happy and fulfilled. Within each of us is a magical, loving and powerful being—our true self—and finding what brings us joy is part of realizing that self. If there is something you really like or love to do, don't hold back; that's what you should be doing. The Light wants us to express the unique gifts we are given. Each of us has a gift, sometimes many gifts, skills or talents that we are meant to realize and that is part of our purpose. When we feel joy, aliveness and love in what we do, we know we are aligned with spirit and connected to our essential selves. Centering in joy also means detaching from power struggles with others by sending out compassion and trying to see experiences from the other person's perspective.

Being True to Yourself

The Light always wants us to live from a place of love. Being true to yourself means allowing your spiritual essence to have a greater role in governing what you say and do. It means aligning yourself with what your inner guide or greater consciousness would want as opposed to what society might think or expect, such as trying to be a person you have been forced or persuaded to be by fear, by the need to be liked by pleasing others, or by trying to gain approval or meet others' expectations. This does not mean we don't honor and respect the opinions, feelings, and expectations of others, appreciate their needs and desires, try to be helpful, considerate, sensitive and kind to others, and so on. It just means believing in ourselves, honoring our own feelings, caring for ourselves, and knowing ourselves and what is best for us from the higher perspective of love. When we recognize our own uniqueness, and follow our own inner guidance, it is easier to detach from the views of others and act in a way that is true to ourselves. And that means being motivated by love, not by fear.

Another way to be our authentic self is to allow ourselves and our feelings to be as they are. When we have negative feelings, instead of denying, suppressing or blocking them to maintain a positive front, we can allow them to be honored and expressed as our truth of the moment. During my NDE, the negative feelings I experienced while in the presence of the

loving being were simply allowed to be, to exist, without an opinion, preference, judgment or condition being placed on them. They were simply accepted as they were. Instead of expecting ourselves to be positive embodiments of the Light and then judging ourselves if we fail, we can allow ourselves to be wherever we are on our learning path. Being able to say “Who I am is okay now, even with all these negative feelings” is a kinder way of treating ourselves than judging, “I shouldn’t feel this way and have failed to live up to who and what I should be.”

Beauty

The Light is an energy source of radiant beauty and when we see beauty in this world, I believe it is a sign of the presence of the divine. One of the ways we can reconnect with the Light is by searching for beauty in all things around us. When we allow ourselves to be touched by it and rejoice in it, we see the miracle in every being, tree, leaf, flower or other part of life. Sustaining the beauty of our planet, environment and nature allows us to experience our source in the visible universe of which we are all part. We see that we are inseparable from this interconnected web of life that is our home and are inspired to protect its sanctity.

Non-judgment and Forgiveness

Non-judgment and forgiveness go hand in hand with love and acceptance because when we love, we let go of judging ourselves and others, and this is forgiveness, which sets us free. Letting go of self-judgment and judgment of others frees us to love ourselves and others as the Light loves us. Forgiveness does not mean we condone or justify harmful acts, or fail to stop them when we can. It does not mean we don’t hold ourselves or others accountable for acts that are harmful to ourselves or others. Since not everyone is enlightened on this earthly plane, it is normal to have to deal appropriately with harmful actions. Forgiveness is largely for our own sakes, for as we forgive ourselves and others, we are able to let go of the burdens of the pain, hatred, resentment, anger, and other emotions we carry, thus cleansing us and setting us free to experience unconditional love and peace of mind.

Practicing discernment instead of judgment helps us to accept rather than reject our differences and see them from a higher perspective as parts of the whole. Discernment allows us to accept our preferences and differing points of view without attaching negative opinions and labels to them. While non-judgment is a key lesson of the Light, I think it is one of the hardest to learn and practice as we live in a world dominated by judgments. One way to deal with judgment is to bring compassion and forgiveness to it. When we find ourselves judging something, we can let go of judging ourselves for being judgmental. We can also try to open our heart to what lies behind or beyond what we are judging, such as looking at the pain, suffering, lack of love or other condition that is causing another person to act as they do. And we can notice how someone else's flaws exist within us too, thereby connecting us in our humaneness. Also, surrendering the judgment to spirit and letting the latter guide you to see from a greater perspective love can also help release it.

Death and the Afterlife

My NDE and that of many others has led to our belief that life does not cease to exist when the body dies and we are more than our physical bodies. It showed me that when we die, our souls continue to live on and unite with a greater consciousness of unconditional love that is the source of our creation. There is nothing to fear at death. Rather, it is a beautiful experience that envelops us in love, peace, joy and radiant bliss. When we die we all return to the true home from which we came where we become part of an all-knowing universal intelligence. We return to our True Self. Knowing our souls live on after death can help many of us let go of the fear of death.

Service to Others

As interconnected beings and expressions of love, our lives are enhanced through giving and service to others using our unique gifts. Extending our love and what we have to teach or share with others brings us fulfillment and re-energizes us. Things as simple as a smile or helping someone during a difficult time allow us to be spiritually replenished and renewed. As we give, we change the lives of others and impact the human race on a global level.

Embracing the Darkness

Our progress toward the Light is increased through self-examination to identify and release those blockages of human nature that prevent the Light from flowing in. Our challenges and mistakes are opportunities for learning and transformation. Learning to accept the darker aspects of our nature to achieve greater self-understanding is key to our spiritual awakening. When we can invite these darker aspects into our awareness with compassion instead of running from them in fear, we hasten our ability to transform them. Such practices as contemplation, prayer, meditation, mindfulness, writing and others enhance this process. Going through the darkness of faltering in our own experiences helps us to increase our empathy and compassion for our fellow beings and to comfort others going through difficulties. When we learn from our own flaws and realize they can bring us closer to others through our shared humanity, they become assets rather than liabilities. It is up to each individual to embrace rather than shun the darkness within us, for only by going through it can we find our way to the other side.

Peace

All discord arises from a sense of separation from the Light, and as we align our minds and hearts with it, we can experience its qualities in the forms of peace, love, harmony and serenity. Peace of mind begins with each individual and comes from doing the emotional healing work of letting go of resentments, hatreds, anger and other negative emotions that keep us shackled in distress and discontent. Peace can only come through transformation of the things that block it and we must each make the change within in order to effect any change without. If each individual in the world gave priority to achieving peace of mind within themselves, the world would be a more peaceful, harmonious place. As a song goes, “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.”

The Healer Within

The Light is a healing power and when we align with it, we can find the capacity to heal ourselves. This does not always mean we necessarily “cure” ourselves from a condition or illness through the external interventions of medicine, but rather that we restore balance and harmony to our body, mind

and spirit, bringing us a sense of peace and acceptance with a condition. Whether we are trying to heal from an emotional, mental or physical condition, we can find release from inner conflicts and disharmony that perpetuate our condition when we access the healing power of divine love that exists within us. For those of us who are carrying the baggage of a difficult past, this can be a challenging goal. There are numerous ways to get help along the way and many practices that help us discover the light within ourselves. Different things work for different people, of course. There is nothing magical that works for everyone.

The Value of Being in the Present Moment

The balance of opposites is necessary to our well being. However, in our world, I think we have become more and more bound by doing and excessive busyness than being, and this creates an imbalance that increases stress. The Light is a state of being which allows us also to be, just as we are, in the here and now. It is connected with feelings and our intuition. It cannot be accessed when our attention is distracted in many directions but requires that our awareness be present to it or that we go into the stillness to hear its voice and messages. When we get out of our heads and allow ourselves to be in the present moment rather than the past or future, we can connect with the greater, spacious awareness of this being, which is always with us. Finding more time for being helps us reconnect to our spirit, balance our lives, reduce our stress levels, and find greater peace. The more we bring our attention to our surroundings in the present moment, engaging all our five senses, the closer we become to being in touch with spirit, and experience the richness of our lives and our connection to all living things.

Gratitude and Appreciation

The practice of gratitude connects us to our spirit and allows us to experience more love in our life. It connects us to our heart and through that, to our soul. It is a wonderful way to uplift and elevate our energy to a higher level where we can experience more of the love, joy, abundance and peace of the Light. It helps us to focus on what we have, to see all that we are and are becoming, to be thankful for all we have taken for granted, to see hardships as opportunities to become stronger, to recognize the abilities we were given to express our creativity, and to release fear by looking for the blessing in a situation. It helps us to see that whatever happens in life, we

can embrace it to learn the lessons that will alleviate our suffering. When we accept whatever state we're in and ask what is right with it, instead of what is wrong, we take the meaning from the suffering so the lesson won't have to be learned again. In connecting us to the Light, gratitude also helps us see that whatever difficulty we are undergoing, our spirit is greater than the adversity.

As extensions of the Light, we are meant to appreciate the divinity that lies within ourselves and to recognize and honor that divine essence in others. The more we appreciate ourselves and think about what we appreciate in others, noticing something good that is heartfelt, looking for the best in them, the more we connect with others and our spiritual self.

I am eternally grateful that I was given a glimpse of the Light and its reminder to me that I had been given the gift of love. I hope that for you, no matter what happens, you will find your own light within to help guide you through life's challenges and realize your essential self.