

I was passing over into a different sphere. My soul was disconnecting from my body with a hum that kept growing louder, rising to a whine as the vibration of death pulled me deeper.

I noticed that there was a large screen before me. I was being drawn into a three-dimensional slide show of my life that played out before my eyes chronologically, while I experienced every part of it from all points of view and all points of understanding. I knew exactly how each person felt who had ever interacted with me.

In particular, however, I was being shown in vivid detail exactly what my childhood was really like. The pictures flew past me, but I easily absorbed every moment, each one triggering an entire memory or a chunk of my life. So this was what people meant when they said, "My life flashed before my eyes."

The closer I came to the end of my life, the faster the pictures flew past me. It was incredible! In an instant I had experienced the entirety of the twenty-seven years from my birth until the moment that I found myself dying on the couch and passing into the warm tunnel. Then the fast motion of my life rushing past and through me stopped abruptly.

Now what?

Where was I? I was immersed in darkness. My eyes seemed to adjust, and I could see clearly even though there was no light. The darkness continued in all directions and seemed to have no end, but it wasn't just blackness, it was an endless void, an absence of light. It was completely enveloping.

I swung my head around to explore the thick blackness and saw, to my right, standing shoulder to shoulder, a handful of others. They were all teenagers.

"Oh, we must be the suicides."

With a laugh, I opened my mouth, but before I could form the words, they came tumbling out. I wasn't sure whether I had thought the words or had attempted to say them, but they were audible without my having to move my lips. Then I wasn't sure if these other people had heard me, until the guy next to me responded.

He didn't say a word to me. He slowly looked down at me and turned forward again. There was absolutely no expression on his face, no warmth or intelligence in his eyes. Suspended in darkness, he and all the others stood fixed in a thoughtless stupor.

Second over from the other end of the line was a girl who looked to be in her late teens. I was coming to see that feeling - what some call intuition or the sixth sense - was the preferred method of transferring information here, where unvoiced ideas grew audible. As I exercised my new power of sensing/feeling, I had an inkling that I was remembering a long-forgotten, natural, familiar skill that had been supplanted or subverted by words, and I quickly grew proficient at this new way of gaining knowledge. But she did not connect with me. Her empty gaze, fixed on nothing, continued uninterrupted by my thoughts about her. She was just like the rest of them, staring blankly forward, with no concern or curiosity about where we were. They were dead, and so was I.

Suddenly, as if we had been waiting for a kind of sorting process to take place, I was sucked further into the darkness by an unseen and undefined power, leaving the teenagers behind. I landed on the edge of a shadowy realm, suspended in the darkness, extending to the limits of my sight.

I knew that I was in a state of hell, but this was not the typical fire and brimstone hell that I had learned about as a young child. The word purgatory rose, whispered, into my mind.

Men and women of all ages, but no children, were standing or squatting or wandering about on the realm. Some were mumbling to themselves. The darkness emanated from deep within and radiated from them in an aura I could feel. They were completely self-absorbed, every one of them too caught up in his or her own misery to engage in any mental or emotional exchange. They had the ability to connect with one another, but they were incapacitated by the darkness.

I gradually became aware of the sounds of a kaleidoscopic flurry of voices, and I realized that in this realm, thoughts were the mode of communication. Around me I could hear the buzz of thoughts, as if I were in a crowded movie theater with lights down low, picking up the sounds of hushed exchanges.

Sitting next to me was a man who appeared to be about sixty years old. This man's eyes were totally without comprehension. Pathetically squatting on the ground, draped in filthy white robes, he wasn't radiating anything, not even self-pity. I felt that he had absorbed everything there was to know here and had chosen to stop thinking. He was completely drained, just waiting. I knew that his soul had been rotting here forever. In this dark prison a day might as well be a thousand days or a thousand years.

I was sure that this man, like the middle-aged woman, had killed himself. His clothing suggested that he might have walked the earth during Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. I wondered if he was Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed the Savior and then hung himself. I felt that I should be embarrassed that I was thinking these things in his presence, where he could hear me.

As my mind reached for more information, I felt tremendous disappointment. I could feel and completely know about everything around me just by posing a question in my mind or by looking in any direction. The possibilities for learning were endless, but I had no books, no television, no love, no privacy, no sleep, no friends, no light, no growth, no happiness, and no relief - no knowledge to gain and no way to use it.

But worse was my growing sense of complete aloneness. Even hearing the brunt of someone's anger, however unpleasant, is a form of tangible connection. But in this empty world, where no connections could be made, the solitude was terrifying.

Then I heard a voice of awesome power, not loud but crashing over me like a booming wave of sound; a voice that encompassed such ferocious anger that with one word it could destroy the universe, and that also encompassed such potent and unwavering love that, like the sun, it could coax life from the earth. I cowered at its force and at its excruciating words:

"Is this what you really want?"

The great voice emanated from a pinpoint of light that swelled with each thunderous word until it hung like a radiant sun just beyond the black wall of mist that formed my prison. Though far more brilliant than the sun, the light soothed my eyes with its deep and pure white luminescence. I sensed that the light could not (or perhaps would not - I wasn't sure) cross the barrier into the darkness. And I knew with complete certainty that I was in the presence of God.

He was a Being of Light, not just radiating light or illuminated from within, but he almost

seemed to be made of the light. It was a light that had substance and dimension, the most beautiful, glorious substance that I have ever beheld. All beauty, all love, all goodness were contained in the light that poured forth from this being. But there is nothing that we are even capable of imagining that comes close to the magnitude of perfect love that this being poured into me.

While I was not remembering details of a life before my mortal birth, I was reacquainting myself with the life that I shared with the Father, a spirit life that seemed to extend to the beginning of the universe.

I could see that none of the others in the realm were aware of God's presence. The man cowering next to me could see that I was focused on something, but it was apparent that he couldn't see anything beyond the barrier. Others continued to babble unaware.

Then God spoke to me. His words were excruciating:

"Is this what you really want? Don't you know that this is the worst thing you could have done?"

I could feel his anger and frustration, both because I'd thrown in the towel and because I had cut myself off from him and from his guidance.

And I'd felt trapped. I had been able to see no other choice but to die before I could do any more damage in life. So I answered:

"But my life is so hard."

My thoughts were communicated so fast that they weren't even completed before I absorbed his response:

"You think that was hard? It is nothing compared to what awaits you if you take your life."

When the Father spoke, each of his words exploded into a complex of meanings, like fireworks, tiny balls of light that erupted into a billion bits of information, filling me with streams of vivid truth and pure understanding.

"Life's supposed to be hard. You can't skip over parts. We have all done it. You must earn what you receive."

Suddenly I felt another presence with us, the same presence that had been with me when I first crossed over into death and who had reviewed my life with me. I recognized that he had been with us the whole time, but that I was only now becoming able to perceive him. Then I'd sensed his powerful, yet gentle personality, but now I could feel him so strongly that I could even ascertain his shape. What I could see were bits of light coming through the darkness, like tiny laser beams pinpricking a black sheet or like stars peeping through the blackness of a cloudless night. This light was unmistakably of the same brilliance as the glorious light that emanated from the Father, but my spiritual eyes were incapable of fully beholding it. My ability to see with my eyes was somehow linked to my willingness to believe.

The rays of light penetrated me with incredible force, with the power of an all-consuming love. This love was as pure and potent as the Father's, but it had an entirely new dimension of pure compassion, of complete and perfect empathy. I felt that he not only understood my life and my pains exactly, as if he had actually lived my life, but that he knew everything about how to guide me through it; how my different choices could produce either more bitterness or new growth. Having thought all my life that no one could possibly understand what I had been through, I was now aware that there was one

other person who truly did.

Through this empathy ran a deep vein of sorrow. He ached, he truly grieved for the pain I had endured, but even more for my failure to seek his comfort. His greatest desire was to help me. He mourned my blindness as a mother would mourn a dead child. Suddenly I knew that I was in the presence of the redeemer of the world.

He spoke to me through the veil of darkness:

"Don't you understand? I have done this for you."

As I was flooded with his love and with the actual pain that he bore for me, my spiritual eyes were opened. In that moment I began to see just exactly what it was that the Savior had done, how he had sacrificed for me. He showed me; He had taken me into himself, subsumed my life in his, embracing my experiences, my sufferings, as his own. And so for a second I was within his body, able to see things from his point of view and to experience his self-awareness. He let me in so I could see for myself how he had taken on my burdens and how much love he bore me.

And I knew where I had gone wrong. I had doubted his existence. I had questioned the authenticity of the scriptures because what they claimed seemed too good to be true. I had hoped that there was truth to the idea of a Savior who had given his life for me, but I had been afraid to really believe. To believe without seeing requires a great deal of trust. My trust had been violated so many times in my life that I had very little to spare. And so I had clung to my pain so tightly that I was willing to end my life rather than unburden myself and act on the chance that a Savior existed. He wanted to comfort me and to hold me, but we were separated by my responses to the lessons of life. He had been there for me all through my life, but I had not trusted him.

As I watched from the Savior's perspective, his unique comprehension of my predicament was transferred to the Father. From my new perspective I saw God in profile as he was looking at my form. The Father and his Son's communication was so rapid, so perfect, that they seemed to think each other's thoughts in unison. Jesus was pleading my case. There was no conflict or argument here; Jesus' understanding was accepted without dispute because he had all the facts. He was the perfect judge. He knew precisely where I stood in relation to my need for mercy and the universe's need for justice. Now I could see that all the suffering in my mortal life would be temporary, and that it was actually for my good. Our sufferings on earth need not be futile. Out of the most tragic of circumstances springs human growth.

As God the Father and Jesus were teaching me, their words picked up speed and power and then merged, so that they were saying the exact same things in the very same moment. They shared one voice, one mind, and the purpose, and I was deluged with pure knowledge.

I learned that just as there are laws of nature, of physics and probability, there are laws of spirit. One of these spiritual laws is that a price of suffering must be paid for every act of harm. I was painfully aware of the suffering I had caused my family and other people because of my own weaknesses. But now I saw that by ending my life, I was destroying the web of connections of people on earth, possibly drastically altering the lives of millions, for all of us are inseparably linked, and the negative impact of one decision has the capacity to be felt throughout the world.

My children, certainly, would be gravely harmed by my suicide. I was given a glimpse of

their future, not the events of their lives but rather energy, and the character that their lives would have. By abandoning my earthly responsibilities, I would influence my children, my oldest son in particular, to make choices that would lead him away from his divine purpose. Before Alex was born, I was told, he had agreed to perform specific tasks during his life on earth. His duty was not revealed to me, but I felt the energy that his life would have up until his young adult years.

I was told that my children were great and powerful spirits and that up to this point in my life, I had not deserved them. I caught a glimpse of how deeply God loves my boys, and how, with my callous disregard for their welfare, I was tampering with the sacred will of God.

Then I was shown how I would harm other people close to me, such as my husband and my sister, Tony, by taking my life; and by extension, countless others. There were people on the earth whom I would never meet who would be affected by my suicide. Because of the anger and pain I would cause them, my loved ones would be unable to store up the goodness that they were meant to pass on to others. I would be held responsible for the damages - or the lack of good - they would do while immersed in the pain of my selfish death. And I would pay dearly for it, since spiritual laws dictate that all of the harm, including lack of good, stemming from my death be punished by a measure of suffering. Even though I couldn't foresee the ripple effect my death would cause, I would be held accountable. God himself is bound by spiritual law, and so there could be no escape for me.

And I was shown that for me, the realm of darkness was quite literally spiritual time-out, a place where I was supposed to grasp the gravity of my offenses and to pay the price. But I had to ask, why me? Why was it that I could see God while the vacant husk of a man next to me could not? Why was I absorbing light and being taught, while he was hunkering down in misery and darkness?

I was told that the reason is willingness. When I first looked at that man and wondered if he had been alive during the earthly ministry of Jesus, the question showed that I was willing to believe in God, willing to believe that Christ had once walked the earth. And once I was willing to believe, I was able to see. Willingness and ability are the same thing. All around me on the dark realm were people of varying degrees of willingness, of understanding, of ability to see that Jesus Christ was there with us the whole time. I don't know if the others were talking to God as I was or if they were talking to other messengers of light that I was not yet capable of seeing, but I'm sure that not all of them were just mumbling to themselves. And I could see that my spiritual time-out could have lasted a moment, or it could have taken me thousands of years to progress out of that dark prison, depending on when I reached the point of willingness to see the light.

And what about the spiritual law that required me to suffer for the damage I had already done in life, up until and including my suicide? I was told that the debt had already been paid, that the sacrifice had already been made. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus Christ had experienced all the suffering that has or ever will take place in the life of any human born on this earth. He experienced my life, he bore my sins, he accepted my grief. But in order for the agony that Jesus endured on my behalf to count, in order for him to take my place in fulfilling that spiritual law, I had to accept his gift.

My heart broke as I realized that I had been not only hurting my family, who are beloved children of God, but also causing my Savior, who had such all-encompassing love and compassion for me, to suffer - all because I had allowed myself to be molded by other people's weaknesses.

Now my perception was shifting, and the darkness seemed to lift slightly. When I first entered the dark prison, my vision took in only the things and the people in the realm of darkness. But once I had taken enough light in from God and Jesus, my spiritual eyes were opened to another dimension in the darkness. Now I could see that Beings of Light were all around me.

Hell, while also a specific dimension, is primarily a state of mind. When we die, we are bound by what we think. In mortality the more solid our thoughts become, as we act upon them-allowing darkness to develop in others and in ourselves - the more damning they are. I had been in hell long before I died, and I hadn't realized it because I had escaped many of the consequences up until the point that I took my life. But when we die, our state of mind grows far more obvious because we are gathered together with those who think as we do. This ordering is completely natural and is consistent with how we choose to live while we are in this world. Our time is but a heartbeat in the eternal scheme of creation, and yet it is the crucial moment of truth, the turning point. It determines how our spirits will exist forever, into both the future and the past.

I was becoming less and less a part of the place of darkness with each particle of light that I accepted. I hadn't felt myself lift off the surface, but now I was hovering above the field of darkness, into the realm of the scurrying spirits of light.

I could feel the urgency in the spirits who were scurrying about to do the work of God. I was then told that we are in the final moments before the Savior will return to the earth. I was told that the war between darkness and light upon the earth has grown so intense that if we are not continually seeking light, the darkness will consume us and we will be lost. I was not told when it would happen, but I understood that the earth is being prepared for the second coming of Christ. I looked down at the pathetic souls and realized that I no longer felt as they did. I wanted to live.

Then the powerful energy source that had transported me to the dark prison returned to liberate me. For a split second a rushing sensation engulfed me. The darkness sped past, and suddenly I was back in my body, lying on the couch.