

***LIFE AFTER DEATH:
REFLECTIONS ON EXPERIENCES
Don Evans**

I have no doubt whatsoever that there is life after death, for every day I experience the presence of people who have passed on. Usually they have involved themselves in the difficult process of trying to transform me into a better human being, less self-preoccupied, more compassionate, more open to living within Divine love. Most central, most important, is the bodily-resurrected presence of Jesus Christ pervading every cell of my body. But I've also been helped by various Christian saints and by holy men and women from within many other traditions, especially Buddhist, Hindu and aboriginal. Sometimes I'm aware of deceased persons whom I can help in some way, perhaps to "move on" after a traumatic death. Or I've been asked, as a spiritual counsellor and psychotherapist, to persuade or deter a deceased person from intruding on someone in this life.

If you do not believe that there is life after death, I do not expect that you will come to believe there is merely because I say so, appealing to my own experience. Indeed, I think that only your own personal experience can be, for you, conclusive concerning life after death.

Various researchers have gathered evidence pointing towards life after death, but their evidence is at best impressive, and alternative interpretations of the evidence are always possible. For example, I remember being at a spiritualist service where a medium claimed to be bringing a message from a woman's deceased mother. She noted that the mother was holding a red rose, and this touched the woman because her farewell to her mother had involved placing a red rose in the casket. One sceptical objection is that this was a statistically plausible guess, for such farewells are not uncommon. A more sophisticated objection is that the medium was psychic, and tuned into the woman's memory, which was the source of the image of the rose. A this-worldly paranormal explanation is often plausible for ostensibly other-worldly phenomena.

I do not discount empirical research concerning life after death. Indeed, some of it, such as careful studies concerning purported reincarnations, has moved sceptics to concede, "Maybe there's something in it", abandoning their previous certainty that death is the end. They are not convinced, but they move into agnosticism, suspended judgment, which is a position that I deeply respect. What is required to move out of a legitimate agnosticism is personal experience, whether of past lives or of near-death, or of spiritual presences. Past-life experiences and near-death experiences are important for many people, but in this lecture I'm going to focus on spiritual presences.

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How can claims to knowledge concerning life after death be justified by experiences of spiritual presences: experiences which many view as merely subjective? For I don't merely believe that there is life after death, I claim to know this. As a philosopher I have reflected much concerning this question. How can I justify my convictions to myself on the basis of my experience? Such reflections may be of interest to you, so I'm going to share them with you. I'm not hoping thereby to convince you that there is life after death. But I will try to show you, in the third part of this lecture, how you might come to have some of the relevant experiences yourself. The experience is of knowing through "resonating", first with embodied human beings and other physical creatures in nature, and later with disembodied human being

It's not that I have a mission to get more and more people to believe in life after death, for I don't see such a belief, or even experiences of spiritual presences, as essential for people to live a good life or even a spiritual life. The experiences can enrich human lives, sometimes wondrously. That's been the case for me, but it's important at the outset to note, and explain, my own view that such experiences are not necessary for people to be exemplary human beings. So at the beginning of this lecture I am going to outline, briefly, four significant kinds of spirituality, only one of which involves contacting spirits.

1. Four Kinds of Spirituality

The four kinds are the humanistic, the naturalistic, the spiritualistic and the mystical. The distinctions, and the labels, arose a year ago when I prepared the opening address at a conference, at the University of Toronto's Department of Continuing Medical Education on "Spirituality in Health Care". It seemed important to make such distinctions if there were to be clarity concerning what kind of spirituality is proposed for inclusion in health care.

Humanistic Spirituality: Such a spirituality by itself need involve no experiences of spirits or beliefs concerning a Supreme Being. The label is a way of focusing on the metaphorical "spirit" in which a person lives and acts, the combination of mood, motivation, emotion and attitude which he or she brings to each situation. Such inner dispositions as trust, hope, commitment, compassion and courage constitute a person's humanistic spirituality along with their creativity and joie de vivre. Sometimes people say of a work of art that it "celebrates the human spirit". Such an expression implies nothing about the existence of spirits, but expresses a sense of appreciation for a dimension of human beings beyond our being flesh and blood.

Naturalistic Spirituality: This term applies to an active involvement in paranormal but this- worldly activities such as distant healing or healing touch, where these are given a purely naturalistic explanation, though one which does not as yet fit in with current scientific assumptions. Reference is made to "life-energies" or "cosmic energies" which may eventually become part of scientific theorizing, or which are already perhaps hinted at in contemporary physics. But no reference is made to supernatural, other-worldly spiritual entities which imply life after death.

Spiritualistic Spirituality: My label here appropriately reminds us of the particular religious movement called “spiritualism”, but what it includes is much broader, for example Roman Catholicism, Tibetan Buddhism, popular Hinduism, aboriginal shamanism and New Age spirituality. There are immense differences among these, but the one feature distinguishing them from an agnostic humanistic-naturalistic world view is the existence of (unembodied or disembodied) spirits. For some very strict monotheists there exists only one Supreme spirit, God. Within such a religious framework there may be doctrines concerning the existence of disembodied spirits such as deceased saints or unembodied spirits such as angels, but any experiential access to them is severely restricted. On such an approach any belief in life after death typically depends not on personal experience but on trust in religious or scriptural authority.

Mystical Transformative Spirituality: About twenty years ago I was involved as a Christian in Christian-Buddhist dialogue, and offered a Buddhist a definition of the word “God” by a French-Canadian mystic: “*an unlimited space of light and love*”. The Buddhist found this intelligible in terms of his own experience, though he wouldn’t call it “God”. What the phrase implies is both a union with an Ultimate Mystery and a transformation of the mystic, whose consciousness is expanded by light and love, liberating him from the narcissistic constraints of self-preoccupation

Spirituality as mystical transformation has two very different versions. In the world-transcending version, one realizes that one is not one’s body, emotions, mind or spirit and one moves into a pure consciousness of Ultimate Mystery. In the world-affirming version, to which I am committed, one embodies the Mystery, and the focus is on this-worldly existence.

In either version, there is a contrast between two kinds of mystical path, which I call the “stripped-down” version and the “indwelling spirit” version. The “stripped down” approach, exemplified in some forms of Buddhism, virtually excludes all naturalistic or spiritualistic elements, seeing these as distractions from the process of transformation through meditation (and, for world-affirmers, also a distraction from involvement in everyday life.) In contrast with this, an “indwelling spirit” path explicitly includes spiritualistic elements as an intrinsic part of the process, since being indwelt by a radically transformed being such as Jesus Christ or the Buddhist Kwan Yin or the Hindu Ramana Maharshi can eventually enable us to share in their already-realized transformation.

What I’m calling “stripped-down” mystical paths sometimes seem attractive to people who are already on a consciously humanistic path, for the focus on human transformation can seem similar, and one is not being asked to add a paranormal realm or a realm of spirits or a Supreme Spirit to one’s universe. Rather, one is being asked to become open to Mystery.

For me, such a combination of humanistic and mystical spiritualities is ultimately the most important. But my own experience of transformation has included naturalistic and spiritualistic elements, and the latter have been an integral part of the process. So although the rest of this lecture will be focusing on spirits and life after death, I do not hold that everyone needs to believe in spirits and in life after death. What matters most is human transformation during this embodied life. Whether or not people believe in spirits and in life after death is secondary. Human transformation at its most profound always involves humanistic spirituality and mystical spirituality. For most people on humanistic-mystical paths, however, some form of spiritualistic spirituality is an integral part of the process, for being spiritually indwelt by an already-transformed person is central in being transformed oneself.

In popular religion, of course, there have been practices for obtaining help from spirits in relation to hunting, health, warfare, fertility and communal unity. Such practices are increasingly being replaced by a faith in technology, though appeals to a Supreme-Spirit, God do continue. And quite apart from any spiritual paths, human beings are naturally concerned about whether or not they continue to exist after death, and whether or not any contact is possible with deceased loved ones, whether now or after death.

Thus far in this lecture I have provided a sort of “map” of diverse human ways of being concerned, or not concerned, about life after death. I’ve tried to be as clear as I can in distinguishing the four kinds of spirituality, and within the fourth, mystical-transformative kind, the world-transcending version versus the world-affirming version, and also the “stripped-down” version versus the “indwelling-spirit” version. If you would like further clarification, please ask me now, before I go on to the second of the three sections in this lecture. I welcome brief questions for clarification only. At the end of the lecture there will be an opportunity for agreement, disagreement and arguments.

In the second section, I will be arguing that some kinds of knowledge are only accessible to us in so far as we undergo personal transformation. Knowledge of spirits is only one of many such kinds of knowledge. None of these are available through impersonal methods that require no personal change, methods which ignore our human proneness to self-deception.

2. Self-Deception, Personal Change, and Knowing

The dominant dogma in our society is an epistemological dogma. It has to do with how we can establish knowledge. I call it the dogma of Impersonalism. It is a dogma in the sense that it involves holding an unquestioned assumption which one does not allow to be undermined by any contrary evidence. It is a plausible dogma in that it arises from an important insight: that much of our knowledge is accessible impersonally, regardless of personal differences, for example our knowledge of scientific truths and of a minimal moral code applicable to everyone. Such

impersonal knowledge is crucial for our ability to live together with some degree of agreement and co-operation in spite of our profound differences in perspective. Impersonalism becomes a dogma when someone insists that only impersonal methods can establish truth. Such methods in science and philosophy can be replicated by any intelligent person trained to use the method, regardless of personal differences in values, attitude, life-orientation, basic motivations, self-understanding or fundamental way of being in the world. Knowledge-claims that can not be thus replicated by anyone using an impersonal method are dismissed as merely “subjective”, or “anecdotal”.

But reliance solely on impersonal testing eliminates human access to much that is significant in human beings. Personal transformation, including an uncovering of personal self-deception, is a pre-requisite for adequate experiential understanding and testing of each of the following statements:

(1) Radical Freedom (Sartre): “Each of us is radically free to choose the basic attitudes with which we respond to whatever happens in us or to us.”

(2) Unconscious Motivation (Freud): “Repressed memories of traumatic events continue to unconsciously influence our current behaviour, emotions and choices.”

(3) Distortion by Ideology (Marx): “Ideologies are created unknowingly by dominant groups to legitimize and disguise their oppression of others. The ideology seems self-evident to the dominators and even to some of the dominated.”

(4) Repression of Mortality: “Human beings tend to avoid any existential, personal awareness of their own mortality, while acknowledging it intellectually. This repression influences us pervasively. ”

(5) Spiritual Presences: “Human beings tend to block out awareness of the multitude of spiritual presences which are actually close to them at all times.”

Each of these five diverse claims is linked with an ongoing self-deception at work in us. We are not simply ignorant, we to some extent actively ignore these realities, refusing to allow ourselves access to them, obscuring them, refusing them the energy of our clear attention. People vary considerably in the intensity of the self-deception. Indeed there are individuals who need minimal change in order to gain access experientially – for example some young children are very aware of spiritual presences and a few of these continue to do so as they grow up.

Each of the five claims about human beings may receive some support from objective, impersonally-accessible evidence, but typically such evidence, at best, is indirect and inferential. For example, concerning the workings of the unconscious there is publicly observable supportive evidence concerning some animals and humans that traumas in infancy affect subsequent adult behaviour. What this impersonal approach to psychoanalysis lacks is the direct, personal experience of the reality that has been repressed, and the direct, personal experience of uncovering a self-deception and thereby changing. When we uncover a self-deception we realize that we were not previously totally ignorant of what we now discern. We realize that previously we were resisting awareness. And we realize that only if we go on changing in this regard will our awareness expand and deepen.

When a person uncovers a self-deception concerning one dimension of human nature, he or she often tends to exaggerate the scope of what has been discovered. For example, when someone such as Sartre uncovers our tendency to deny our radical freedom and responsibility for how we respond to crises, he tends to be blind to the constricting influences on our choices that arise because of the workings of the unconscious. But on the other hand, Freudian determinism can blind us to the extent of our freedom in responding to de-repressed insights.

I mentioned five dimensions of human nature concerning which we humans tend to deceive ourselves by repressing their reality. There are many factors at work in this, but the core of it is fear. And the fear is understandable, for, as T.S.Eliot memorably said, “Human kind cannot bear much reality”. It is very difficult to take in more than a small segment of who we really are. And we are much in debt to the courage of individuals who have ventured beyond previous boundaries in exploring inner space. Their courage enables us, later, to come to realize human dimensions which we have been repressing.

I realize that what I have been presenting concerning radical freedom, unconscious motivation, ideological distortion and repression of mortality is all controversial. You don’t need to agree with me concerning all or any of these if you are to be open to the possibility of life after death. But I present them as examples, alongside spiritual presences, where people have proposed truths that can only be adequately understood and tested if one undergoes the relevant process of personal transformation. All five are examples of truth-claims that are not undermined by the lack of conclusive impersonal evidence in support of them. Insistence on impersonal evidence misses the point entirely. Only if one is committed at all costs to the dogma of Impersonalism does it make sense to dismiss immediately any claim to come to know something through personal transformation.

I have noted a variety of truth-claims concerning dimensions of human beings that require personal change if we are to gain access to them. Noting this variety helps us to see that claims concerning spiritual presences are not alone in resisting attempts by science and rationalism to silence them. But I hope we will not get sidetracked in the discussion period by questioning the various self-deceptions alleged by Freud, Sartre or Marx. This evening we are focusing on my claims concerning spiritual presences.

These claims are rendered more plausible by the existence of others where personal change is allegedly a requirement for discernment, but the absence of any others would not destroy the credibility of spiritualistic claims. Indeed, we should note the concurrence of great religions and wisdom-traditions in insisting that profound personal change is required to gain access to the meaning and truth of their teachings. People who presume to gain access without such change are typically rebuked by the teacher. For example, when Jesus proclaimed God’s Reign at work in the world, he told Nicodemus (John 3.3) that he could only “see” it, that

is, experientially discern it, if he were “born again”. Whatever this means, it clearly implies a profound personal change.

I now move on to the third and final section of this lecture, in which we shall consider very specifically how a person can know that a spirit is present. One knows through “resonating” with the spirit’s vibrations. And typically one learns first how to resonate with the vibrations, not of spirits, but of other embodied human beings and fellow creatures within this ordinary, everyday world.

3. Knowing by Resonating

First I invite you to consider an example of resonating in a musical context. If you press the damper pedal on a piano and sing a note, the corresponding string on the piano will vibrate to produce a sound at the same pitch. Another example: I remember at an evening of drumming and movement I was resting and holding a glass of water. The water began moving in internal waves in response to the beats of the many drums. I reflected that all the liquids within my body were probably being affected too in a similar way. Many people who enjoy the final movement of Beethoven’s Choral Symphony report feeling enlivened throughout their bodies. Some also report a thrilling vibration in their spine. Like a piano string, our bodies can be stimulated by strong sound to resonate with the sound. What corresponds metaphorically to the damper pedal in our bodies is a variety of bodily tensions linked with emotional and spiritual resistances. Some people are almost totally “dampened”, whereas others are hyper-sensitive. In between these extremes are those who have learned somehow to be selective concerning when to resonate and what to resonate with.

If someone sings to me I can resonate with the sound of their voice. Indeed, I do to some extent, whether or not I feel my body vibrating. But what if he or she is silent? Many people report that, at least occasionally, they experience strong vibrations come from the person. Or they may express what they are aware of, not in terms of “vibrations” but in terms of a strong “presence”, which might be inspiring or intimidating, peaceful or nasty. No sound, but nevertheless a sense of receiving into one’s body some distinctive energies; or of receiving, in a bodily way, some distinctive impressions of the person. Such experiences from other human beings may be paralleled by similar experiences from other creatures, whether this be a full moon or a sunset, a tree or an eagle. This gives rise to a conviction that things in nature have an energy which each radiates and with which we can resonate. The French philosopher called it an “*élan vital*” and others call it “*life-energy*”, though it’s not restricted to what we usually think of as living creatures, for one can resonate with a particular crystal or a group of stars.

Thus far what I’ve presented concerning resonating does not imply a metaphysics that goes beyond the inclusion of a life-energy dimension within nature, a dimension which some human beings can allegedly experience directly, rather than inferring it as a theoretical entity. Perhaps what is experienced is one of the theoretical entities of modern physics, or several. When one rubs one’s hands

together vigorously for several minutes one can then directly experience, in and between the separated hands, what is probably static electricity. Perhaps what people experience when resonating with the earth is electro-magnetic. Perhaps when I'm with a friend and resonate with his energy-field what I am aware of will eventually be open to scientific explanation.

I say "perhaps" because – and here is the immense metaphysical leap – I am convinced that I can identify the friend's presence even when he is not before me, but thousands of miles away, or even dead. How can this be? Such reports imply a metaphysics in which what have been called "life-energies" are, in some cases, spiritual energies, lacking any sensory access to my body from their physical body. Indeed, if my friend has died, there is no physical body from which the vibrations can emanate. So here there is a movement beyond what I called "Naturalistic Spirituality" to "Spiritualistic Spirituality", from embodied people and things to spirits.

The shift into experiencing disembodied spirits is gigantic metaphysically, but not experientially. Consider the following example, which is similar to what many of you can recall: I'm standing in a cue or sitting in a bus and I suddenly feel uncomfortable and I'm moved to look back. I have a sense that someone is staring at me in a hostile way. When I look, my hunch is confirmed. There is little experiential difference for me between becoming aware of such an embodied persons' hostile stare and becoming aware of a negative intrusion by a spirit who seems to be behind me. Similarly there is little experiential difference for me between becoming aware of a friend's compassionate presence in front of me, or a thousand miles away, or after he has died. Of course the experience when he is in front of me is different in being having a much richer bodily-sensory content. But in all three cases his compassion is experienced as vibrations with which I resonate in my body.

The claim to experience the presence of disembodied human beings and of angels seems strange and weird to many moderns. Yet some versions of this have been central not only in aboriginal religions but also in Christianity. Some forms of Christianity focus not only on the continued spiritual existence and presence of Jesus Christ, but also Mother Mary and many saints – and, for St. Francis, Brother Wind and Sister Water, Brother Fire and Mother Earth as in aboriginal religion. And in aboriginal religion itself there is not only a felt connection with particular embodied animals, but also with the enabling spiritual energy of wolf or eagle or buffalo, entering into one's body to strengthen or heal. And of course the vibrational nature of spirit is for aboriginals recognized in the centrality of drum, rattle, sounding and movement when people join in rituals through which the Four Elements, the power-animals, the grandfathers and grandmothers and the Great Spirit resonate within us.

The Sufis, Muslim mystics, are a very special resource concerning spirituality as, at core, a resonating with vibrations, whether audible or inaudible, I am going to

quote from a book simply entitled “Music” by an eminent 20th century Sufi teacher, Inayat Khan:

“What makes us feel drawn to music is that our whole being is music; our mind and our body, the nature in which we live, the nature which has made us, all that is beneath and around us, it is all music; and we are close to all this music and live and move and have our being in music”

“We say that we enjoy nature. But what is it in nature that we enjoy? It is music. Something in us has been touched by the rhythmic movement, by the perfect harmony which is so seldom found in this artificial life of ours; it lifts one and makes one feel that nature is the real temple, the true religion. One moment standing in the midst of nature with open heart is a whole life-time, if one is in tune with nature.”

“Every person who comes to us, every object we see, is revealing. In what form? It tells us its character, nature and secrets. Every person tells us his past, present and future. In what way? Every person explains to us all that they contain. In what manner? In the form of music, if we can only hear it.....In every being you can see this, and if one looks with deep insight into the nature of things one will read it even in a tree.”

Inayat Khan speaks with the confidence of a man who is in tune with nature, whether people or trees. What is it about musical vibrations, whether heard or unheard but felt, that makes one so confident that one is in tune with a real energetic or spiritual dimension of people or things that is really out there? I’ve pondered this question in relation to my own confidence. This has led me to consider first the basis for my own confidence in the reality of the external material world before moving on to the spiritual world

First the material world of things and people. When I explored this for my book, *Spirituality and Human Nature*, I found that I had to challenge a dominant dogma in our culture, which rejects any direct experiential knowing of reality. This dogma, which I call “Perspectivalism”, arises from an important insight (like its rival, “Impersonalism”). The insight is that we impose various perspectives on our experiences and thus know people and things through our imposed conceptual, linguistic and symbolic frameworks. Immanuel Kant pioneered in this approach, by noting the abstract categories that we impose, and since Kant the frameworks noted have expanded so as to include everything in language. For fifty years the dominant approach in the humanities has been post-modernism, and the insight has become a dogma, which rejects any truth-claim based on an alleged direct experience. All that we can know, according to the post-modernist or Perspectivalist dogma, are the various human perspectives that human beings bring to reality, not the reality itself.

The dogma goes beyond the important recognition that we should try to become aware of our perspectives, and that much of our advance in knowledge comes from dialogue between perspectives in which mutual revisions can occur. Such a recognition can be acknowledged, however, while holding that we do have some direct experiential access to reality, so that perspectives are not only revised by

reference to other perspectives, but by reference to such experience. Indeed, in *Spirituality and Human Nature* I presented some abstract philosophical arguments which show that some such reference must be possible if we are to make any knowledge-claims concerning anything, including perspectives. But in my book I did not rely mainly on such arguments. Instead, I appealed to one direct experience in particular: sitting on a chair.

Although as a philosopher I realize that the concept of “chair” brings a perspectival structure into my knowing, I am nevertheless directly aware that what I’m sitting on exists independently of my experiencing it and corresponds in a rough but basic way to what I feel. If I am outside in the dark I might, later on, discover that what I was sitting on was a flat tree stump, not a backless chair or stool. . Concerning the substantial material reality under my buttocks, however, I have direct experience. Its reality is tangible to my buttocks, and also to my hands. Similarly if I bump into something with my elbow in the dark, I don’t doubt its reality. And even if I’m sometimes not sure what I’m standing on, I directly feel it supporting me. Of course, errors in identification of the reality do occur, and perhaps because of some disorder we may sometimes even mistakenly sense a reality when there is nothing there – as in the “phantom limb” phenomenon. But this does not appropriately undermine our basic confidence that through touch (buttocks, hands, elbows, feet) we are contacting substantial material realities.

Let us now turn to knowing energetic or spiritual realities through resonating with them. The closest analogy to touching an object here is what happens when we rub our hands together for a minute or more. There is a tingling, vibrating sensation in fingers and when we place the hands almost together there is a sensation of something vibrating between them. In some meditation-states, without any friction, similar sensations occur not only in and between the hands but also throughout the body. And soon vibrations in other people can be experienced in one’s own hands and after a while in various parts of one’s body. More subtly, one can eventually become aware of the distinctive vibratory pattern of a particular person, first when face to face, but later at a distance, and even after they have passed on. It is the sense of vibrationally “contacting” people through and in one’s body that gives rise to the metaphysical confidence in the reality of the spiritual realm.

I’m not claiming that this is true for everyone. Indeed, some people’s spirituality is primarily visual rather than tactual in nature. But that’s a different story, where the dominant theme is “seeing is believing”. For me, visual images are only important spiritually in two ways: first, because of the vibrations that I experience through them, for example, when contemplating an icon and second, because an image is handy reminder of the vibrational presence, for example Jesus.

Knowing through resonating is a central theme in the spirituality of aboriginals and of Sufis, and also of Taoist practitioners of advanced Tai Chi as well as Hindu and Buddhist practitioners of tantra. This is less obvious in Christianity, though Eastern Orthodox talk about being divinized by “participating in the uncreated energies of God” seems to imply some such process.

But as I near the end of this lecture I’m going to refer briefly to a leading Protestant spiritual teacher, John Wesley. It is clear that he felt a need to develop a spiritual epistemology, or theory of knowledge, which could show how religious experience could provide an assurance concerning the reality of God at work in one’s heart. He described faith as involving a “spiritual sensation” analogous to the sense of touch and creating an assurance “more certain than so-called rational or empirical evidences”. Wesley said that the spiritual sensation can be called a “feeling”, if we set aside any suggestion of emotional responses that are evoked by the sensation. Such emotional responses vary considerably from person to person.

For Wesley a specifically Christian experience of God, while including this quasi-tactual awareness of God, also involved interpretations and authenticity-tests drawn from Christian scripture and tradition. Some of the tests are at least analogous to those applied in other religious faith-traditions. But what I am emphasizing is the quasi-tactual component in his heart- awareness of God.

Wesley, of course, was far more interested in the reality of God at work in his heart than in the presence of spirits which indicates there is life after death. But the epistemological bases are similar in being quasi-tactual. Wesley does not explicitly speak of resonating with vibrations, though the distinctive prominence of hymn-singing in Wesleyan spirituality could perhaps imply such a view. The most explicitly vibrational spirituality that I’ve discovered is Sufism. Here is a beautiful Sufi legend cited by Inayat Khan.

“God made a statue of clay in His own image, and asked the soul to enter into it; but the soul refused to be imprisoned, for its nature is to fly about freely and not to be limited. . . . Then God asked the angels to play their music, and as the angels played the soul was moved to ecstasy, and through that ecstasy, in order to make the music clear to itself, it entered this body. . . People say that the soul, on hearing that song, entered the body; but in reality the soul itself was song!”

In another Sufi legend, God fashioned humans as a craftsman fashions a reed flute, and our job as humans is to let God sound through each of us in our own distinctive ways.

It is typical of this lecture that although the topic is life after death, I am concluding with ultimate matters of spirituality. I see spirituality as best focused on human transformation out of self-preoccupation, including the preoccupation with whether or not I will continue to exist after I die. The transformation is into participation within an expansive, graced compassion. For some people this

transformative process involves no contact with spiritual presences. For me it has involved being open to the indwelling of exemplary mentors, centrally Jesus Christ, so as to gradually share in their openness to Divine Love during this embodied life.

Am I confident that many other people continue after death? Yes, because I've experienced their presence. Am I similarly confident that I will continue after death? No. As in this life, what matters from moment to moment has to do with continued surrender into loving Divine Mystery and continued trust that whatever surprises are in store for me arise within that Mystery, even if this be my non-existence as "me".

My hope is that I will continue to exist in some mode, and I don't know of anything about me that distinguishes me from others who do survive, but my future, whether tonight or after death, is in the hands of God.