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Something pulled at me. Not like someone grabbing my arm, but something subtler, less physical. It was a little like when the sun dips behind a cloud and you feel your mood change instantly in response.

I was going back, away from the Core. Its inky-bright darkness faded into the green landscape of the Gateway, with all of its dazzling landscape. Looking down, I saw the villagers again, the trees and sparkling streams and the waterfalls, as well as the arcing angel-beings above.

My companion was there, too. She had been there the whole time, of course, all through my journey into the Core, in the form of that orb-like ball of light. But now she was, once again, in human form. She wore the same beautiful dress, and seeing her again made me feel like a child lost in a huge and alien city who suddenly comes upon a familiar face. What a gift she was!

"We will show you many things, but you will be going back."

That message, delivered wordlessly to me at the entrance to the trackless darkness of the Core, came back to me now. I also now understood where "back" was.

The Realm of the Earthworm's-Eye View where I had started this odyssey.

But it was different this time. Moving down into the darkness with the full knowledge of what lay above it, I no longer experienced the trepidation that I had when I was originally there. As the glorious music of the Gateway faded out and the pulse-like [page 69] pounding of the lower realm returned, I heard and saw these things as an adult sees a place where he or she had once been frightened but is no longer afraid. The murk and darkness the faces that bubbled up and faded away, the artery-like roots that came down from above, held no terror for me now, because I understood-in the wordless way I understood everything then-that I was no longer of this place, but only visiting it. But *why* was I visiting it again?

The answer came to me in the same instantaneous, nonverbal way that the answers in the brilliant world above had been delivered. This whole adventure, it began to occur to me, was some kind of tour - some kind of grand overview of the invisible, spiritual side of existence. And like all good tours, it included all floors and all levels.

Once I was back in the lower realm, the vagaries of time in these worlds beyond what I knew of this earth continued to hold. To get a little - if only a very little - idea of what this feels like, ponder how time lays itself out in dreams. In a dream,

"before" and "after" become tricky designations. You can be in one part of the dream and know what's coming, even if you haven't experienced it yet. My "time" out beyond was something like that-though I should also underline that what happened to me had none of the murky confusion of our earthbound dreams' except at the very earliest stages, when I was still in the under-world.

How long was I there this time? Again I have no real idea-no way to gauge it. But I do know that after returning to the lower realm, it took a long time to discover that I actually had some control over my course - that I was no longer trapped in this lower world. With concerted effort, I could move back up to the higher planes. At a certain point in the murky depths, [Page 70] I found myself wishing for the Spinning Melody to return. After an initial struggle to recall the notes, the gorgeous music, and the spinning ball of light emitting it blossomed into my awareness. They cut, once again, through the jellied muck, and I began to rise. In the worlds above, I slowly discovered, to know and be able to think of something is all one needs in order to move toward it. To think of the Spinning Melody was to make it appear, and to long for the higher worlds was to bring myself there. The more familiar I became with the world above, the easier it was to return to it. During my time out of my body, I accomplished this back-and-forth movement from the muddy darkness of the Realm of the Earthworm's - Eye View to the green brilliance of the Gateway and into the black but holy darkness of the Core any number of times. How many I can't say exactly-again because time as it was there just doesn't translate to our conception of time here on earth. But each time I reached the Core, I went deeper than before, and was taught more, in the wordless, more-than-verbal way that all things are communicated in the worlds above this one.

That doesn't mean that I saw anything like the whole universe, either in my original journey from the Earthworm's-Eye View up to the Core, or in the ones that came afterward. In fact, one of the truths driven home to me in the Core each time I returned to it was how impossible it would be to understand all that exists - either its physical/visible side or its (much, much larger) spiritual/invisible side, not to mention the countless other universes that exist or have ever existed.

But none of that mattered, because I had already been taught the one thing - the only thing - that, in the last analysis, truly matters. I had initially received this piece of knowledge from my [page 71] lovely companion on the butterfly wing upon my first entrance into the Gateway. It came in three parts, and to take one more shot at putting it into words (because of course it was initially delivered wordlessly), it would run something like this:

You are loved and cherished

You have nothing to fear.

There is nothing you can do wrong.

If I had to boil this entire message down to one sentence, it would run this way:
You are loved.

And if I had to boil it down further, to just one word, it would (of course) be, simply: Love.

Love is, without a doubt, the basis of everything. Not some abstract, hard-to-fathom kind of love but the day-to-day kind that everyone knows-the kind of love we feel when we look at our spouse and our children, or even our animals. In its purest and most powerful form, this love is not jealous or selfish, but unconditional. This is the reality of realities, the incomprehensibly glorious truth of truths that lives and breathes at the core of everything that exists or that ever will exist, and no remotely accurate understanding of who and what we are can be achieved by anyone who does not know it, and embody it in all of their actions.

Not much of a scientific insight? Well, I beg to differ. I'm back from that place, and nothing could convince me that this is not only the single most important emotional truth in the universe, but also the single most important scientific truth as well.

I've been talking about my experience, as well as meeting other people who study or have undergone near-death experiences, for several years now. I know that the term unconditional [page 72] love gets bandied around a lot in those circles. How many of us can grasp what that truly means?

I know, of course, why the term comes up as much as it does. It's because many, many other people have seen and experienced what I did. But like me, when these people come back to the earthly level, they're stuck with words, and words alone, to convey experiences and insights that lie completely beyond the power of words. It's like trying to write a novel with only half the alphabet.

The primary hurdle that most NDE subjects must jump is not how to re-acclimate to the limitations of the earthly world - though this can certainly be a challenge - but how to convey what the love they experienced out there actually feels like. Deep down, we already know. Just as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* always had the capability to return home, we have the ability to recover our connection with that idyllic realm. We just forget that we do, because during the brain-based, physical portion of our existence, our brain blocks out, or veils, that larger cosmic background, just as the sun's light blocks the stars from view each morning. Imagine how limited our view of the universe would be if we never saw the star-spangled nighttime sky. We can only see what our brain's filter allows through. The brain-in particular its left-side linguistically/logical part, that which generates

our sense of rationality and the feeling of being a sharply defined ego or self-is a barrier to our higher knowledge and experience.

It is my belief that we are now facing a crucial time in our existence. We need to recover more of that larger knowledge while living here on earth, while our brains (including its left- side analytical parts) are fully functioning. Science - the science to which I've devoted so much of my life - doesn't contradict [page 73] what I learned up there. But far, far too many people believe it does, because certain members of the scientific community, who are pledged to the materialist worldview, have insisted again and again that science and spirituality cannot coexist.

They are mistaken. Making this ancient but ultimately basic fact more widely known is why I have written this book, and it renders all the other aspects of my story-the mystery of how I contracted my illness, of how I managed to be conscious in an- other dimension for the week of my coma, and how I somehow recovered so completely-entirely secondary.

The unconditional love and acceptance that I experienced on my journey is the single most important discovery I have ever made, or will ever make, and as hard as I know it's going to be to unpack the other lessons I learned while there, I also know in my heart that sharing this very basic message - one so simple that most children readily accept it - is the most important task I have.