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Judgment Day!

Judgment and punishment in near-death-experiences represent warnings, not visions of the future

By Michael Newton, Ph.D.

In my practice as a hypnotherapist I have worked with genuinely good people who feel they are inherently bad. Regardless of how much they give of themselves to others, it is never enough. These individuals think evil exists within them and they are going to pay dearly for all their transgressions at the moment of death. I often find much of this negativity is the result of mental conditioning they received as children—particularly in rigid, fundamentalist households. It is the belief of these people that, eventually, they are going to be taken into an underworld of torment and harshly judged, no matter what they do in life.

Within the structure of the world's major religions there are theological elements of great beauty but also dictums of ugliness. Frequently, one finds segments of strict fundamentalism gravitate to the ugly side with long standing beliefs in a satanic kingdom waiting to punish wrongdoers after death. In my opinion, these dire predictions of "ultimate truth" were originally

founded to establish fear as a means of controlling people. To intimidate impressionable people by scaring them about a hell in the hereafter is cruel. This form of persecution and brainwashing fosters the dread of death which begins in childhood and grows with age. Crossing into the afterlife is something to be feared.

In the six years between the publication of my first book, *Journey of Souls*, documenting case studies of life between lives, and my new book *Destiny of Souls*, I have been traveling around the country talking to audiences about the ordinary people who make up my cases. Since spiritual regression is my area of hypnosis specialization, these clients come in order to mentally be taken back to the time of their soul existence between former lives. I wrote *Destiny of Souls* to provide further detail about what I have learned of the spirit world in response to the many questions I received about life after death on these lecture tours. At the top of the list of public inquiries were concepts of judgment and and punishment

in our afterlife.

When I explain at lectures that, in all my years of research, no case of mine has seen or experienced any sort of hell after death, someone invariably raises their hand to ask about the less than positive NDE (near-death experience) cases reported by the press. People want to know how I reconcile my case reports of light, peace, and love with the sensationalized stories from certain NDEs who say they did not see bright lights but experienced only cold darkness and an atmosphere of hell. There is an account from one NDE who said he was hauled before a tribunal of judges by screaming ghouls to answer for his sins before being "rescued" by returning back to life.

There are a number of responsible writers of the less than positive NDE who consider these occurrences as a self-inflicted wake-up call by people to make better use of the time they have left after returning to life. This does not mean we are going to be punished for disbelieving in God or avoid-



ing participation with institutional religion. My own view is that the few NDEs who report they have seen hell were stuck in the tunnel between life and death for a few brief minutes and never entered the light because their time in a death state was so short. Their experience was so brief they do not even see spiritual guides. Consider too, that the negative frame of mind they might have had just prior to this bad experience and the fact that the coldness of their physical bodies and the noise around them (amplified to screaming) while unconscious are also contributing factors.

I feel there are highly susceptible individuals who were preconditioned by strict religious programming into believing in the existence of a hellish place before their negative NDE. They carried these mental images of horror with them during the actual physical trauma they suffered which involved a loss of consciousness. In the quiet, relaxing state of hypnosis, a physically healthy person describing a former death scene to me does not perceive heat, cold, loud sounds or frightful visions of a court of last resort waiting for them on the other side. We discuss how they entered the spirit world, who meets them, where they go and what they do as a soul. After working with hundreds of cases over many years, I have found a remarkable consistency to their reports about the afterlife. Without devaluing the less than positive near death experience, these individuals make up only a distinct minority. Most NDE people relate the same sort of images of the spiritual gateway as my clients in the early stages of hypnosis. What is seen on the other side is very empowering.

Is there any basis of reality for our mental images of being judged in the afterlife? I have the conviction that certain cultural myths are not simple, made-up stories with no practical foundation in soul memory. All my subjects tell me that after every life they do go before a panel of wise beings. Sometimes they call them judges, but more often I hear such terms as directors, masters and elders. These spiritual beings do not appear to be arbiters who pass sentences and exact punishment for misdeeds. The words courtroom and trial are never used by hypnosis subjects to describe these proceedings. In my view, the superconscious memories of these events between our lives come back to us in flashbacks and dreams. However, these images may be distorted by the conscious mind. In these instances, the spiritual event is equated and subverted by earthly concepts of demons, spiritual courts of law, and retribution.

Based upon my client's statements, I have come to call our spiritual board of review the Council of Elders. Because of so many inquiries from people about a time of judgment, I devote a whole chapter in *Destiny of Souls* to this soul experience in the afterlife. The Elders on our councils vary in number and are typically seen wearing white robes. Frequently, our personal spiritual guides accompany us to these gatherings, not as defense attorneys but rather to assist in the interpretations. Unlike many Hollywood movie scripts which depict adversarial spiritual courts, we are not grilled unmercifully about our mistakes in life. The first question generally put to us is, "Well, do you think you achieved your goals in the last life?"

The following case quote from a subject in hypnosis is an illustration of a spiritual judgment scene: "The faces of the Elders in front of me are kindly and they are here to help me evaluate the life I just lived. My guide is with me. She provides support for me as we review my achievements and shortcomings in the last life. I am expected to express my frustrations in the past life and desire for the type of new life I wish in the future. The Elders are honest and open with me and I am always treated fairly."

Many of my subjects see these wise beings as males and females while others consider them as gender neutral. The settings are always quiet, dignified, and respectful to the soul. A council chamber environment contrasts with the busy social group activity of souls described in my books. Another example of a judgment scene taken from *Destiny of Souls* comes from a subject who, upon leaving the council, said "When the elders are finished with me, I feel they told me much more about what I did right than where I went wrong. The council knows I have had critical meetings with my guide about my performance. They don't patronize me, but I think part of their job is to raise my expectations. The council says they foresee great things from me. The last thing the Elders said was to stop looking to others for self-validation. When I leave them, I feel they have absorbed all my self-doubt and cleansed me."

I find in my travels around the country that many people are more fearful about what happens to them after death than about death itself. My message is that the spirit world is surrounded by forgiveness and high expectation for our growth potential. Certainly, those people who have been involved with evil acts will pay their karmic debts in future lives. However, they will not be sent into a place of eternal damnation and despair with no hope of redemption. ✠

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