

## Transpersonal experiences during catastrophic events

During World War I, Will Bird's brother, Steve, had been killed. After his death, Steve visited Will, also a soldier, on numerous occasions looking out for him, warning him of dangers. In today's research environment, this type of event is referred to as an after-death communication.

After-death communications and a host of transpersonal experiences occur not only to hospitalized patients, but also to victims, survivors, and first responders of catastrophic events.



We have heard the stories of near-death experiences occurring to hospitalized patients. They also appear to individuals during disasters, including wars. Corporal William Vandebush was a soldier during the Vietnam War. A bomb exploded near him, injuring him. He thought death was near. He made himself as comfortable as possible and then was overtaken by a feeling of peace and tranquility. He went out of his body, through a corridor, until he reached a white light. He saw his grandfather and another spirit figure. They told him to return and fulfill his purpose.

Besides near-death experiences and after-death communications, individuals near death can

experience out-of-body experiences, near-death visits and death bed visions or communications. Bob Woodruff, a former ABC news anchor, was in Iraq war reporting on the war, when a bomb exploded near him. He was injured and found himself floating above his body. He was pain free, typical of hospitalized patients who have out-of-body experiences.

Also the deceased can visit those in need. A young, pregnant Jewish woman from Hungary was interned at Auschwitz-Birkenau. She was warned if she had the baby, both she and the baby would be killed. A doctor offered to perform an abortion to save her life. During the night her deceased mother came to her in a dream and told her not to have the abortion. She declined the abortion and delivered the baby in December, 1944, four weeks before the Soviet army troops liberated the camp. Both she and her daughter survived.

Individuals who are imminently dying frequently report seeing deceased friends and relatives. They are totally aware of their surroundings but see these visitors, whom others cannot see. These visits result in those who are dying feeling less anxious about death.

Why is it important to know about these experiences during disasters?

Disasters are devastating, be they floods, fires, bombs, shootings, or hurricanes. Victims, survivors, and even first responders, suffer greatly from these experiences. If they talk about being out of their bodies, seeing deceased friends and relatives, they suffer even more. They may well be referred for psychiatric help and labeled with a psychiatric illness. We know this because that is what occurred to the individuals in hospitals who early on reported near-death experiences and related phenomena.

Disaster victims have limited support services. They are usually not in their communities when these disasters strike. When they go home, no preparations are there to help them cope with the experiences they have had. Little support is available for these disaster victims who not only experienced something devastating, they could also have had a transpersonal experience for which they have no understanding.

First responders are most often members of police and fire departments. They have limited knowledge of these transpersonal experiences. They also can be victims themselves helping both strangers and colleagues who are seriously injured or dying. They need education about these experiences to respond appropriately.

Catastrophic events bring with them fear, anxiety, pain, psychological damage, and loss.

Experiencing transpersonal events that bring them comfort and hope should be validated. Research has shown these experiences are not due to questionable mental health. Educating victims, survivors, and emergency personnel about these transpersonal experiences can add elements of hope, comfort, and understanding during a tragic experience.

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## **Publication**

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