

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Did Edgar Cayce Have a Near-Death Experience?

To the Editor:

Edgar Cayce (1877–1945) is often called America’s greatest psychic, the Sleeping Prophet, a Seer. He also is often credited with being the father of holistic medicine for the many successful health remedies he prescribed while in a hypnotic trance (Bro, 1989; Kirkpatrick, 2000; Sugrue, 1945).

I began a formal study of near-death experiences (NDEs) in 2009. I chose this research subject to better understand my own NDE that I experienced in 1944 at age five. I didn’t tell anyone about my NDE until I was 31 years old, as I then discovered in 1975 that psychiatrist Raymond Moody had just published a book about NDEs entitled, *Life After Life*. After reading the book and finding people who were interested in NDEs, I began to do more investigating of NDEs and people who have had extraordinary spiritual experiences. Cayce’s name quickly appeared, and I read Thomas Sugrue’s (1945) book, *There is a River*, and other books on this incredible man, originally from Kentucky but having spent most of his adult life in Virginia Beach, VA. In reading about Cayce’s gifts, I found many similarities to myself and to other people who have had NDEs. These similar stories tell of the experiencer’s consciousness traveling to “the other side” and communicating with family members, spirit guides, and divinities. They also report experiencing NDE aftereffects like becoming more spiritual and developing paranormal abilities, such as being able to open the Book of all Knowledge, also known as the Akashic Record.

I started in early 2013 to investigate whether any evidence existed indicating Cayce had had an NDE. While reading the book, *A Seer Out of Season* (Bro, 1989), I found something! Harmon Bro, a graduate student, was working for Cayce in 1944. Cayce, who was in ill health, knew Bro was planning to write his Ph.D. dissertation on Cayce’s life and was providing Bro with some highlights from his earlier years to ensure they would be included in the work. Bro wrote of Cayce: “He told of how he had drowned and been pronounced dead in his youth and how the invisible playmates of his childhood had returned to him once as an adult” (1989, p. 426). Bro wrote down these discus-

sions, and it is important to follow the flow of Cayce's narrative—he drowned, and his invisible playmates came to him—implying the now well-known NDE aftereffect of seeing spiritual entities. I believe that Edgar drowned, had an NDE, and probably had his first out-of-body experience, an experience that he subsequently had more than 14,000 additional times. His apparently post-NDE invisible playmates, a visit from an angel, and the multitude of gifts that Cayce received from God, such as the ability to put himself in a trance and receive information from the Book of Knowledge, were, I believe, the results of his spiritual development provoked into accelerated advancement by his NDE.

Why did Edgar not speak more of this profound event in his life? First, the term “near-death experience” was not coined until Moody's seminal 1975 book—published some 30 years after Cayce's death. Second, although Cayce believed in past lives, traveling to the other side, and meeting Jesus, these subjects were not popular with many people in Christian circles during the first half of the 20th century. Even now, with nearly 40 years of research into NDEs, experiencers are sometimes reluctant to disclose their NDEs for fear of being dismissed, diagnosed, or demonized; this likely was even more the case at the time of Cayce's life.

My continuing research into Cayce's drowning led me to the big vault at the Edgar Cayce Association for Research and Enlightenment (ARE) in Virginia Beach where 14,306 of Cayce's readings, along with some memorabilia and artifacts, are carefully stored. In the vault, I found some original notes by Cayce's father, Leslie Cayce—often called the Squire.

Leslie Cayce related in his handwritten notes that his son Edgar was an outdoor boy who liked to hunt and fish. “On one occasion after some very heavy rain had filled the ponds, lakes and lowlands to overflowing, Edgar decided to go fishing. He got his little fishing pole, hook, and line and started out perfectly alone” (L. Cayce, n.d.). Although Leslie Cayce did not date these loosely written notes, he implied that little Edgar was quite young, I suspect around age five—similar to my age at the time of my own NDE. The heavy rain had caused Edgar's favorite pond to overflow onto a generally shallow area where some small fish had become stranded. Edgar put down his pole and happily waded out into the shallow water in order to pick up the small fish with his hands and throw them onto the bank. However, in his enthusiasm, Edgar unintentionally ventured towards a sinkhole

some 10–12 feet deep. He slipped down the steep sides of the hole. Edgar had to stick his hands and feet in the muddy side of the hole to try to pull himself out. Luckily, a hired man on the farm came along with horses and a wagon of logs or rails. He saw the fishing pole, fish along of the road bank, and Edgar's hat floating in the water above the sink hole, and he knew "that he [Edgar] was about to be drowned—or had been" (L. Cayce, n.d.)—and rescued Edgar.

Some 30 years after the drowning, Leslie Cayce, writing for newspaper writers about this event, was trying to portray little Edgar as strong and resourceful, so he wrote that Edgar was coughing water and climbing out of the hole when the hired man grabbed his hand and pulled him out. I suspect that Edgar had, in fact, drowned; that the hired man pulled him out and applied simple resuscitation skills that were generally known at the time; and that he thus brought the boy back to life. In Cayce's own words, he had told Harmon Bro that "he had drowned and been pronounced dead in his youth" (1989, p. 426). The hired man loaded Edgar on the wagon and took him back to his mother. Leslie then wrote that Edgar's mother was frightened by hearing what had happened and "what he had seen." I suggest that Edgar was telling his mother about his drowning and what he had seen during his NDE—contents of which, research has now revealed, sometimes upset those in whom NDEers confide.

After reading hundreds of NDE accounts, I am comfortable with the idea that Cayce's remarkable life is the result of his meeting God, perhaps in the form of Jesus, during his NDE. After his experience, Edgar asked for his own Bible and opened himself to God. All of Cayce's gifts and abilities followed. Apparently soon after his experience, Edgar was visited by his invisible friends. Later, an angel came to him in the garden. He could sleep on a book and acquire the knowledge within. Similar experiences have been related by children who have had NDEs. Cayce's more dynamic gifts, such as putting himself in a hypnotic trance where he could acquire universal knowledge to look into past lives and future events (post- and precognition), are spectacular in their scope but, nonetheless, similar to psychic gifts other NDEers have received. Cayce understood this point and told Bro: "I don't do anything you can't do" (1989, p. 178).

Having an NDE seems to be a rapid way of traveling to the other side, meeting God, and acquiring special gifts. I believe Edgar Cayce's life and work reflect this divine journey.

References

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