

PREFACE

Until we each physically die, we are not going to know personally and for certain what, if anything, occurs following death. And, specifically, if we plan to commit suicide, we are not going to know for certain until we are dead what awaits us following such an act.

Based on faith, our traditional religions provide their various perspectives on this matter of survival of death. For the most part, they concur that something called our soul or spirit transcends death, and that if we take our own or another's life there will be certain negative repercussions for us following death. However, the details and larger context for such religious depictions of personal survival often remain missing or unclear, and are based only on faith and doctrine in the first place. In contrast, the mainstream scientific community is dominated by the view that nothing continues after death except for the now-inanimate molecules comprising our decomposing or cremated bodies and the pictures, words, and memories we leave behind for those still alive. And, finally, the field of survival research, through its various modes of psychical, parapsychological, and consciousness studies, attempts to investigate if—and if so, how and in what form—individual existence and consciousness continue after physical death. Our book lies closest to the last of these three orientations, survival research.

One of the main ways survival research tries to determine whether or not meaningful human existence continues following bodily death is to examine communications purported to be from human spirits said to have survived death and received by people called psychics, mediums, or channels. The goal of this approach is to see if any of the content of such communication can provide conclusive evidence that the sources of this information are who or what they say they are and not just the products of the hoaxing, fraud, or creative or psychic activity of, the channels' or mediums' own unconscious that does not involve, let alone prove, the existence of surviving spirits.

Our book, however, is not the result of this kind of research that seeks evidential information by means of mediums or channels to try and make a case for survival of physical death. Instead, we have chosen to draw on this same body of material simply to develop a wide and deep portrayal of this

so-called afterlife realm based on the perspectives communicated by the myriad spirits said to be inhabiting it. What we do in this book is provide you with a comprehensive, multi-sourced composite picture and an undeniable consensus based on hundreds of purported afterlife spirit communications, and we do this in particular with regard to the nature of suicide, murder, and present-day terrorist suicide bombings and their afterlife repercussions. (We will talk at greater length in our Introduction about why we have chosen to focus on the topic of suicide in particular.) We wish to provide you with this rich description as food for thought for your own eventual decision-making on this matter of suicide and survival. We have chosen not to try to give you evidence or proof regarding the existence of spirits, of an afterlife, of survival of death, or of the authenticity or efficacy of the mediumship or channeling process. We leave this to other researchers and other books and to our own future work.

Given that we have chosen to give you a picture of the supposed afterlife, its spirit inhabitants, and what they convey to us about suicide and its repercussions, how did we go about developing this picture? As we said, we are not attempting to prove anything. What you will be reading is descriptive in nature, intended to identify, bring together, draw from, and describe what was presented to us, usually in published form, as spirit communications from the afterlife that was primarily related to suicide.

Traditional scientific research, that is quantitative, experimental, and empirical in nature, tends to test pre-conceived hypotheses by gathering and analyzing discrete data usually based in the physical world. Certain elements of a situation are identified as variables and are controlled, manipulated, measured, and related to each other in the form of numbers and percentages in an effort to ascertain possible correlations or casual relations. Most scientific investigation operates in this deductive manner. Inductive-type qualitative research, on the other hand, tends to gather data in a more open-ended way in order to see what data may emerge and what it can tell us about itself more than what it can say about our preconceived hypothesis about it. Still, this kind of research is guided by some kind of research question or questions, which might be as large as: What is going on here? How does this process seem to work? What makes this person sad or that family dysfunctional? What can we say about this novel or film? What makes that program effective (or ineffective)? Such research, mostly used in the social sciences and humanities, is exploratory in nature and usually needs to be done before more precise, quantitative, experimental,

correlational, hypothesis-testing type research can be done. The data involved in such exploratory, inductive type research is usually characterized as qualitative, rather than quantitative.¹ What is being studied may not yet be known, identified, clarified, or characterized; it may still be diffuse, unable to be delineated, measured, or counted. Still, it is left for research of this more qualitative kind to constitute the first expeditionary advances into relatively unknown territory.

So, the research we did to create this book was exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative in nature. All it intends to do—and all it can do—is provide you with a verbal depiction derived from our inductive data-gathering efforts, an account of admittedly otherworldly sounding matters with no proof of their objective reality. We went into this project asking the question: What will we find from investigating a survivalist-oriented, spirit-based perspective on the nature and afterlife repercussions of suicide, murder, and today's terrorist suicide bombings?

In order to answer this overarching research question, we needed to identify and locate hundreds of different published books and other material presented as coming from spirit sources and relevant to our topic of suicide. To supplement these sources, we also conducted a series of interview sessions with mediums and channels, asking spirits about suicide and attempting communication with recently deceased suicide bombers.

We cannot stress enough that our purpose was not to use the content of mediumistic/channeled communications to try to provide incontrovertible proof that at least some of us do survive physical death and are able to communicate back to the physically living. Nor was it our purpose to try to make a case that mediumship/channeling actually involves mediating spirit communication from beings residing in an afterlife/afterdeath domain, rather than simply involving some kind of self-generated, dissociated brain-mind activity of the medium or channel, or, worse, being a function of intentional fraud or hoaxing. Instead, we chose to allow the published and séance-interview-derived material purported to derive from informants on the other side of physical death speak for itself, and let its inherent themes and patterns emerge.

In doing this, we used a mixture of scholarly, qualitative, textual analysis research methods. We followed the time-honored tradition of hermeneutics, which is the practice of finding and interpreting the meaning of as-yet-

enigmatic textual material. We also followed the theme of heuristic research, which involves becoming deeply involved with a topic and staying open to all possible ways that might prove useful whereby we could learn about it through exposure to data relevant to it, which in our case was primarily from selected channeled and mediumistic communications.

In addition, we practiced content analysis, which is the study of the psychological meaning of documents and records, seeking to discover the incidences and patterns of their content, themes, and categories. And, because of the nature of most of the published and séance-interview mediumship and channeled material involved, we employed research techniques drawn from what is called conversation and narrative analysis, from discourse analysis methods, and from systematic evaluative techniques used in document analysis. We further adopted methods from ethnographic research, which attempts to understand the context of the tacit knowledge brought to an experience and displayed in the communications stemming from the way of life of a culture or group of people. In our case, the way of life of a culture or group of people was that of afterlife-based human spirits reporting back to us about suicide through mediums and channels. For example, the 19th century French researcher Allan Kardec, one of the many sources for our book, was such an ethnographic researcher of the otherworldly, and spent numerous years dialoguing across the veil of death with what he believed were discarnate spirits, trying to learn the nature of their afterlife reality. Once removed from Kardec and others like him, we in turn extracted in a scholarly manner from their published work rich with verbatim spirit messages in order to understand the afterlife experience of spirits as it relates to suicide.

We also drew from what is called grounded theory type research methodology, immersing ourselves in the data from our spirit interviews and from published spirit communication, following an inductive-type systematic analysis process to generate findings as theories that came into focus based on emergent sets of categories and their properties built from data that we coded as we went along.

Finally, we used aspects of phenomenological research methodology, which targets a particular kind of human experience by examining descriptions of the experience provided by those who have lived it. In the case of our data sources, it was, reportedly, their experience of having physically died, of surviving death, and then of experiencing existence in some kind of after-

death afterlife domain. For many of them, it involved having and conveying these experiences as someone who had taken his or her own life. And in the case of suicide bombers in particular, it involved the experiences of those who had purposefully taken others' lives in the process of taking their own.

Where possible, we have supplemented and corroborated such channeled and mediumistic information with other forms of survival-related data, such as near-death experiences (NDEs) and past-life and reincarnation reports.

Although it must be pointed out that one cannot rule out the possibility that people are influencing and copying each other (whether consciously or unconsciously) the resulting consensus within the channeled material and across different eras and modalities suggests an impressive degree of commonality of characteristics, especially regarding suicide.

We recognize (as should the reader) that such research is not without pitfalls. Perhaps the biggest problem is that of bias or distortion. Both the spirit and the medium/channel may wittingly or unwittingly color the information they transmit, and (as we all know from playing the game of telephone) the process of communication itself may be ripe for creating distortion. Such misrepresentations may be deliberate, if the communicating spirit feels an idea is too radical to be accepted by the medium, or inadvertent, if the medium's issues or beliefs get in the way. This is because the unconscious mind of the medium is said to act as a filter for the material that is being received. Thus, unless the mediums have done a lot of work on themselves, they are likely to be coloring to varying degrees the material received. Furthermore, what souls they connect with and are able to channel, may be a function of not only their own ability, but of their personality, since there can be a matter of sympathy or like calling to like. In light of these concerns, it is better to get information from more than one source, and preferably even from different eras and, if possible, different cultures. The greater the variety of sources the material is drawn from, the better the chance that the resulting common ground in the findings will be meaningful, and we have borne this in mind in preparing this book.

ⁱ The following are some of the sources drawn from in presenting information in this preface about the kinds of inductive, qualitative research methods used in preparing this book: *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice*, Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia

Leavy, Oxford University Press, 2003; *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences, Fifth Edition*, Bruce Berg, Allyn & Bacon, 2003; *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, John Creswell, Sage Publications, 1997; *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Annotated Sourcebook*, Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman, Sage Publications, 1994; *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory, Second Edition*, Anselm Strauss and Janet Corbin, Sage Publications, 1998; and *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, Harry Wolcott, Sage Publications, 1990.