

Encountering the Mystical at EOL

“I see dead people”

North Simcoe
Muskoka Hospice
Palliative Care
Network
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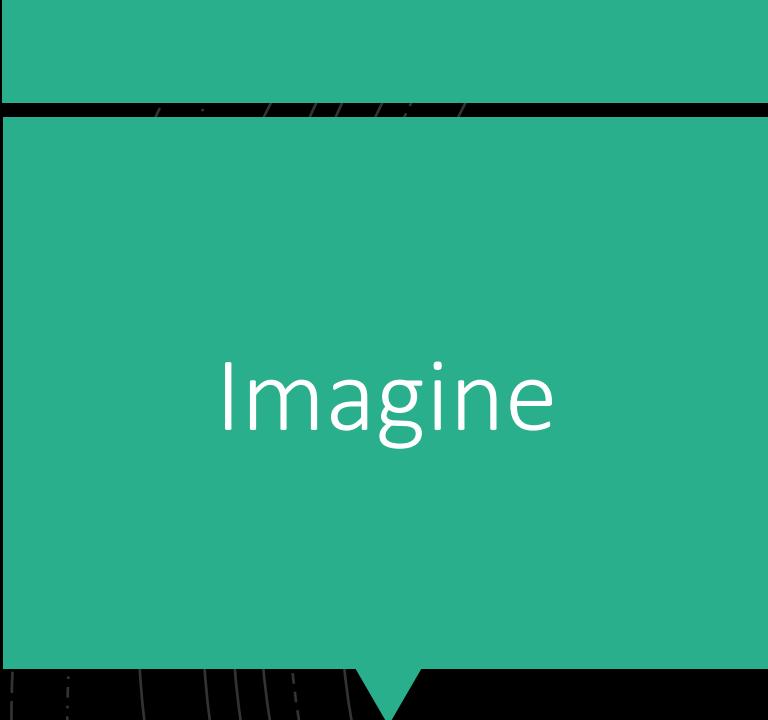
Mystical, Extraordinary,
Unexplained

- Professional ?
- Personal ?

THE CANDLE IN THE DARK

The best way to describe a mystical experience might be with an allegory.

The ancient Hindu tradition of Advaita Vedanta has an interesting one:



Imagine

...that you are in a completely dark room. You've been told that in this room lives a very large snake. As you sit in the room, you can see its silhouette and you feel great fear as you contemplate the potential for it to bite you at any moment. But one day there is a flash of light which illuminates the room and you see that what *looked* like a snake is in reality a rope. Although the flash of light was momentary, it gave you a glimpse of the truth. All of a sudden your long-held fear vanished entirely, and your experience in the room was never the same ever again.

And so

This is what a mystical experience feels like:

it is like a flash of truth that releases you from your limited sense of self and gives you a taste of a reality that somehow feels more real.

A sense of...

- Divine flow
- Peak experiences
- Sense of expansion
- Bliss
- Grace
- Meaning
- Paranormal
- Intense peace
- Union
- Ecstatic or numinosum
- Spirituality
- Religious experience

Angels

numinous

(adj.) describing an experience that make you fearful yet fascinated, awed yet excited—the powerful, personal feeling of being overwhelmed and inspired.



since the beginning of time

- Déjà vu
- Jamais vu (familiar but not remembered)
- Paresthesia
- Vestibular experiences
- Olfactory sensations
- Feelings of meaningfulness
- Prophecy
- Spirit guide voices
- Mediumship
- Seeing spirits
- All 5 senses can be involved



Hearing music, favorite songs

Neuroscience

- Temporal lobe activity
 - Deeper limbic structures
 - Altered states
 - Seen in people with temporal lobe epilepsy
 - On a continuum
- Amygdala
 - Affective structure
 - Joy
 - Bliss
 - Religious ecstasy
 - Emotional spiritual states
 - Sensed presence

Tunnels of light

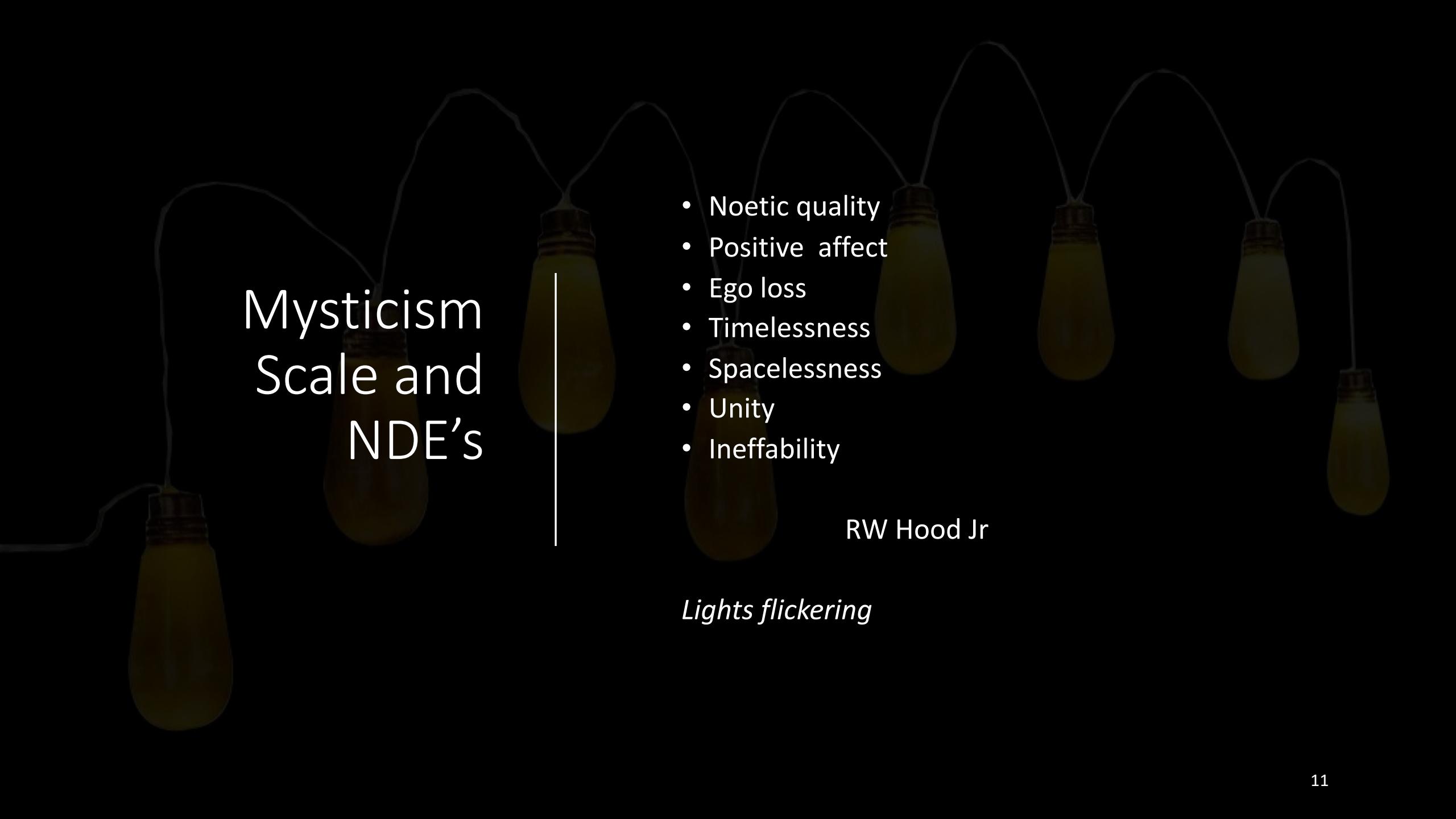
Hippocampus

Cognitive structure

- Dream imagery
- Music
- Trance
- Memory
- Spatial perception

Feathers



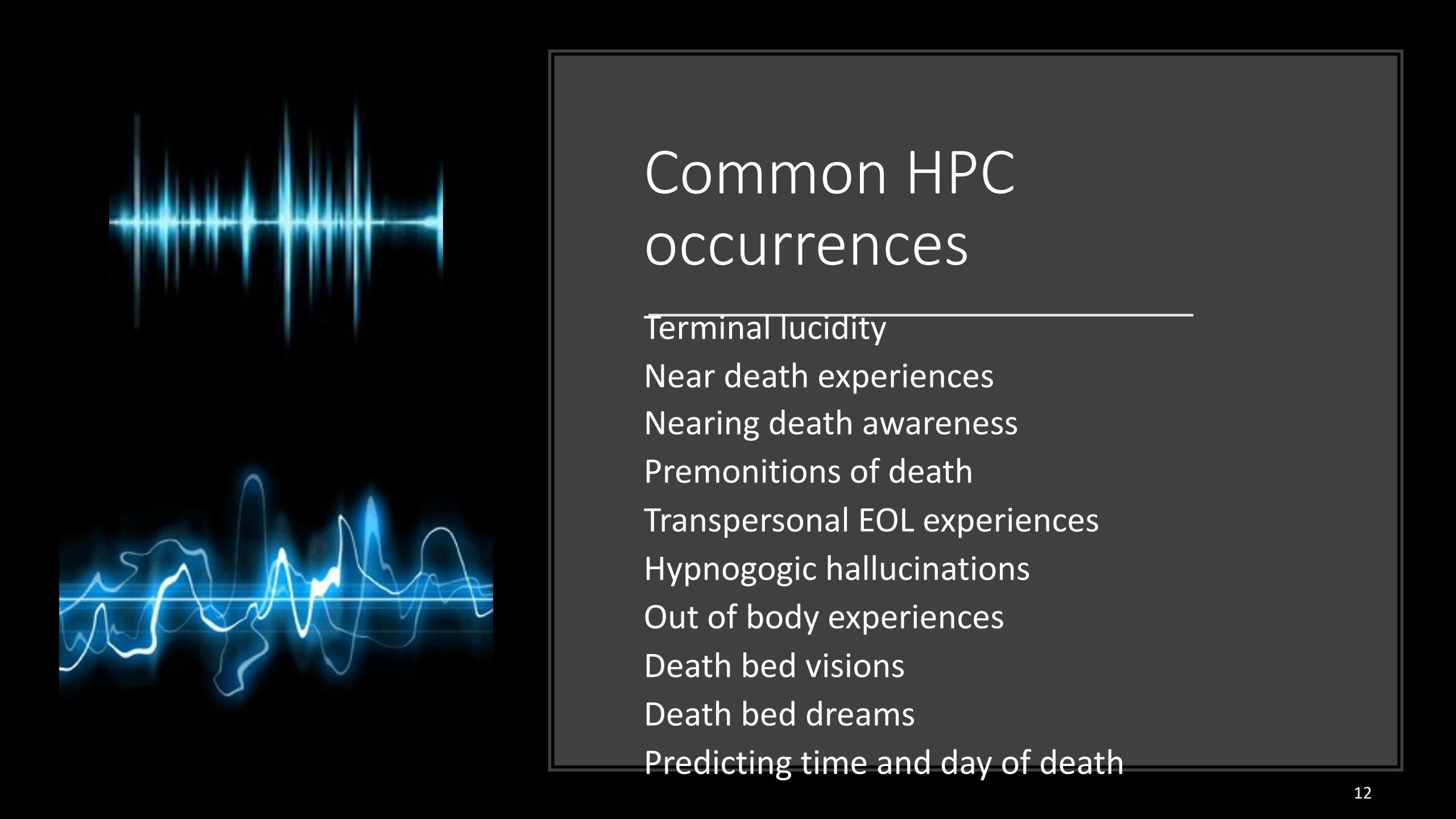


Mysticism Scale and NDE's

- Noetic quality
- Positive affect
- Ego loss
- Timelessness
- Spacelessness
- Unity
- Ineffability

RW Hood Jr

Lights flickering



Common HPC occurrences

- Terminal lucidity
- Near death experiences
- Nearing death awareness
- Premonitions of death
- Transpersonal EOL experiences
- Hypnagogic hallucinations
- Out of body experiences
- Death bed visions
- Death bed dreams
- Predicting time and day of death

Nearing death awareness

And other phenomenon often discounted

- Viewed as part of delirium
- An element of terminal restlessness

Rainbows



Raymond Moody NDEs

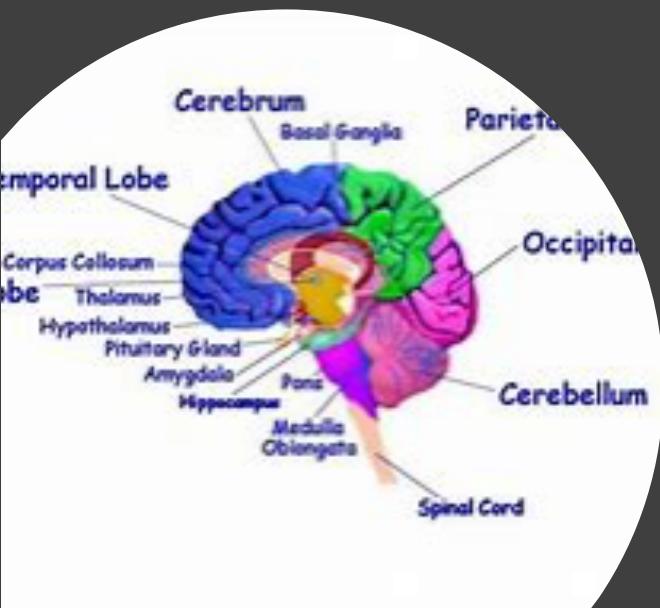
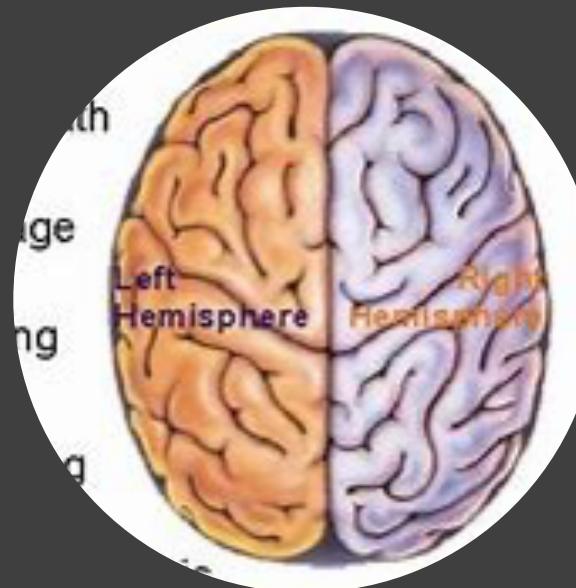
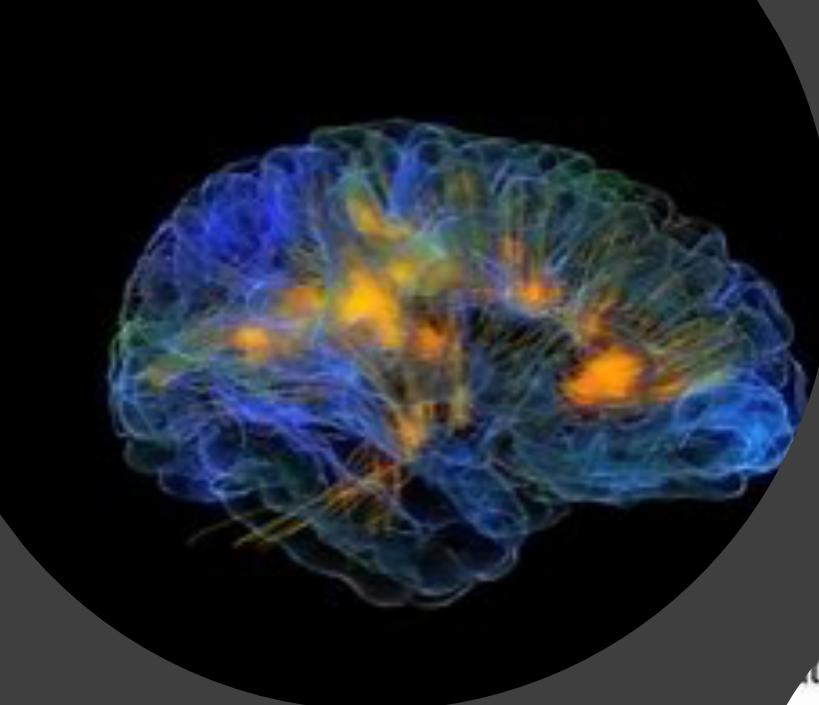
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- ineffability ---beyond language
- hearing self pronounced dead
- feelings of peace and quiet
- hearing unusual noises
- seeing a dark tunnel
- finding yourself outside of your body
- meeting spiritual beings
- a very bright light experienced as a being of light
- panoramic life review
- sensing a border or limit to where you can go
- coming back into your body
- frustrating attempts to tell others what happened to you
- subtle broadening and deepening of life afterward
- elimination of the fear of death
- corroboration of events that were witnessed while outside your body
- a realm where all knowledge exists
- cities of lights
- a realm of bewildered spirits
- supernatural rescues

other views

- oxygen deprivation
- Hypercarbia
- optical illusions
- temporal lobe excitation or seizures
- dissociations
- tumors
- self-fulfilling prophecy
- culturally bound notions
- dying brain's chemistry
- drugs used during resuscitation
- dreams



Changing culture

- James Van Praagh
- Theresa Caputo
- John Edwards
- Paranormal web sites, Facebook pages
- Spiritualism
- Mediums
- Psychics
- Media
- Conferences

Shadow people



Mystical experiences

Nine characteristics

- Conscious unity, boundlessness
- Time and space shift, sense of self shifts
- Objective reality ...all is perfect
- Gratitude, awe
- Sacredness
- Understand paradox I/That
- Indescribable, limited language
- Temporary
- Life changing, death is no longer as scary



Street name serendipity

People who have extraordinary experiences

- Fearful
- Feel like losing mind
- Comforted
- Careful who divulged to
- Need for more
- Upset
- Seeking
- Happy
- Uncertain, not willing to trust the experience

Songs on the radio

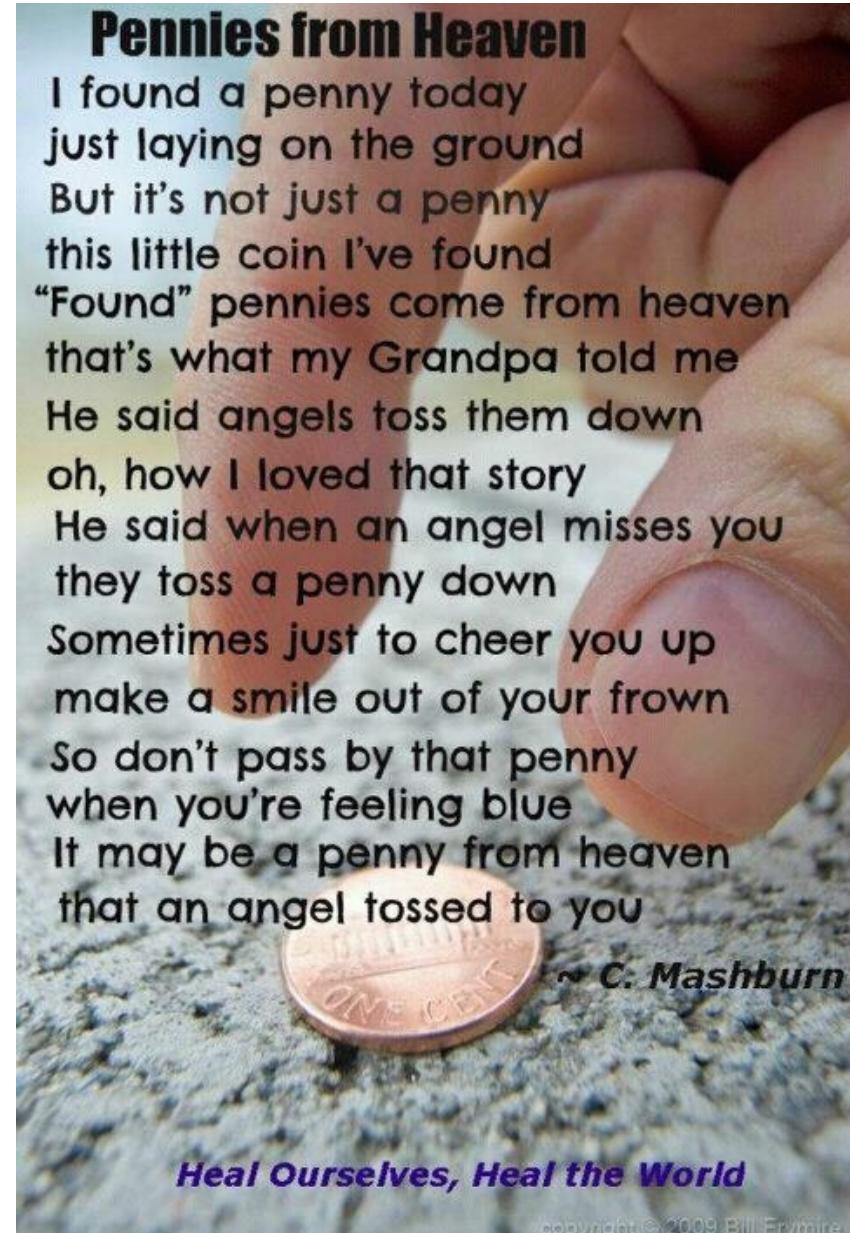


Pennies from Heaven

Pennies from Heaven

I found a penny today
just laying on the ground
But it's not just a penny
this little coin I've found
“Found” pennies come from heaven
that's what my Grandpa told me
He said angels toss them down
oh, how I loved that story
He said when an angel misses you
they toss a penny down
Sometimes just to cheer you up
make a smile out of your frown
So don't pass by that penny
when you're feeling blue
It may be a penny from heaven
that an angel tossed to you

~ C. Mashburn



Heal Ourselves, Heal the World

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People who do not have such experiences

- Sadness
- Jealousy
- Confusion
- Questioning the relationship
- Hard to hear stories of people who have had experiences
- Feel judged
- Wonder what is wrong with them
- Feel their belief is not great enough
- Fine because they did not believe there was anything beyond this life



Phones ringing

Visitation dreams

- Detailed technicolour dreams that seem like a movie unfolding (even for people who usually dream in black and white)
- Messages conveyed
- Detailed vision of what their life is like now

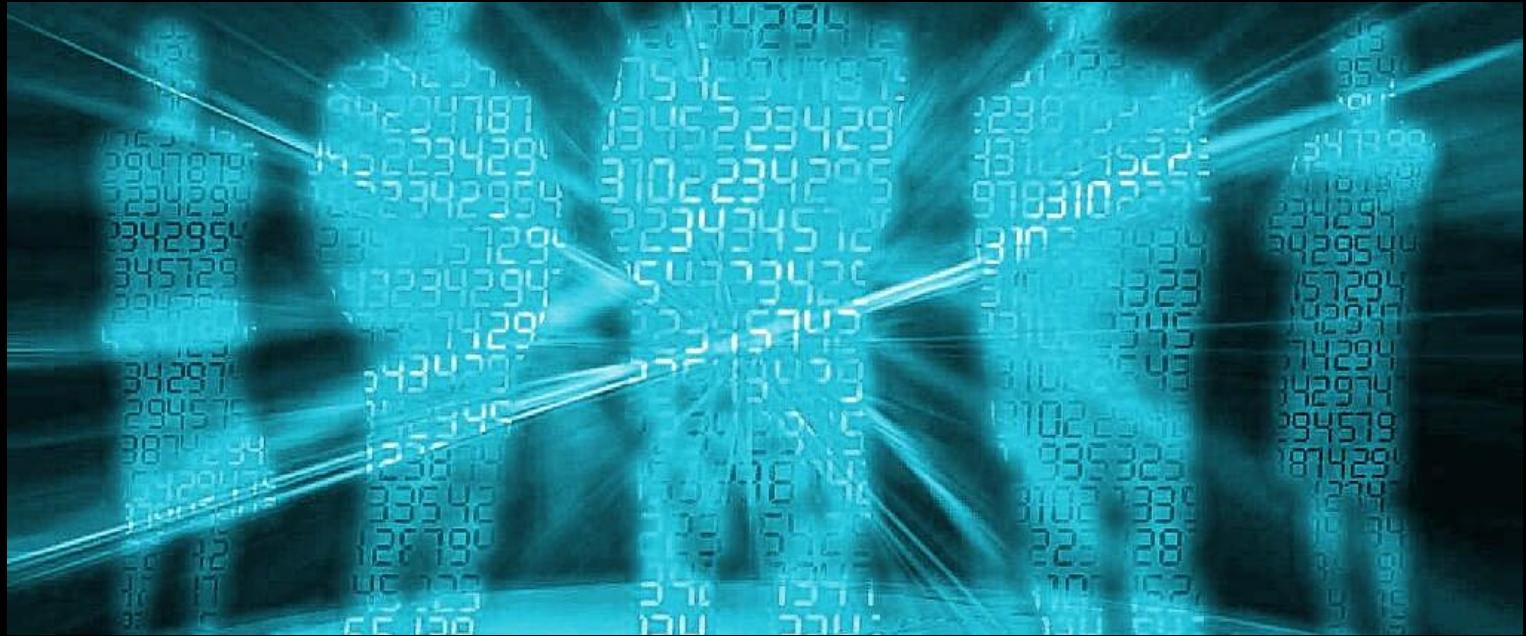


Detailed dreams

- Messages
- Panoramic
- Narratives
- Where it feels like you were in the dream having an adventure with your loved one

Dreamscapes





Searching and yearning

Religion and what comes next

Hinduism: reincarnation

Islam: resurrection

Judaism : afterlife

Christianity: eternal life

Buddhism: reincarnation

Sikhs: reincarnation





Loud voice telling you to stop, pay attention, alter course

Warnings

- Noises
- Appliances small and large turning on or off
- Furnace or air conditioner on or off
- Stairs creaking
- Things that go bump in the night



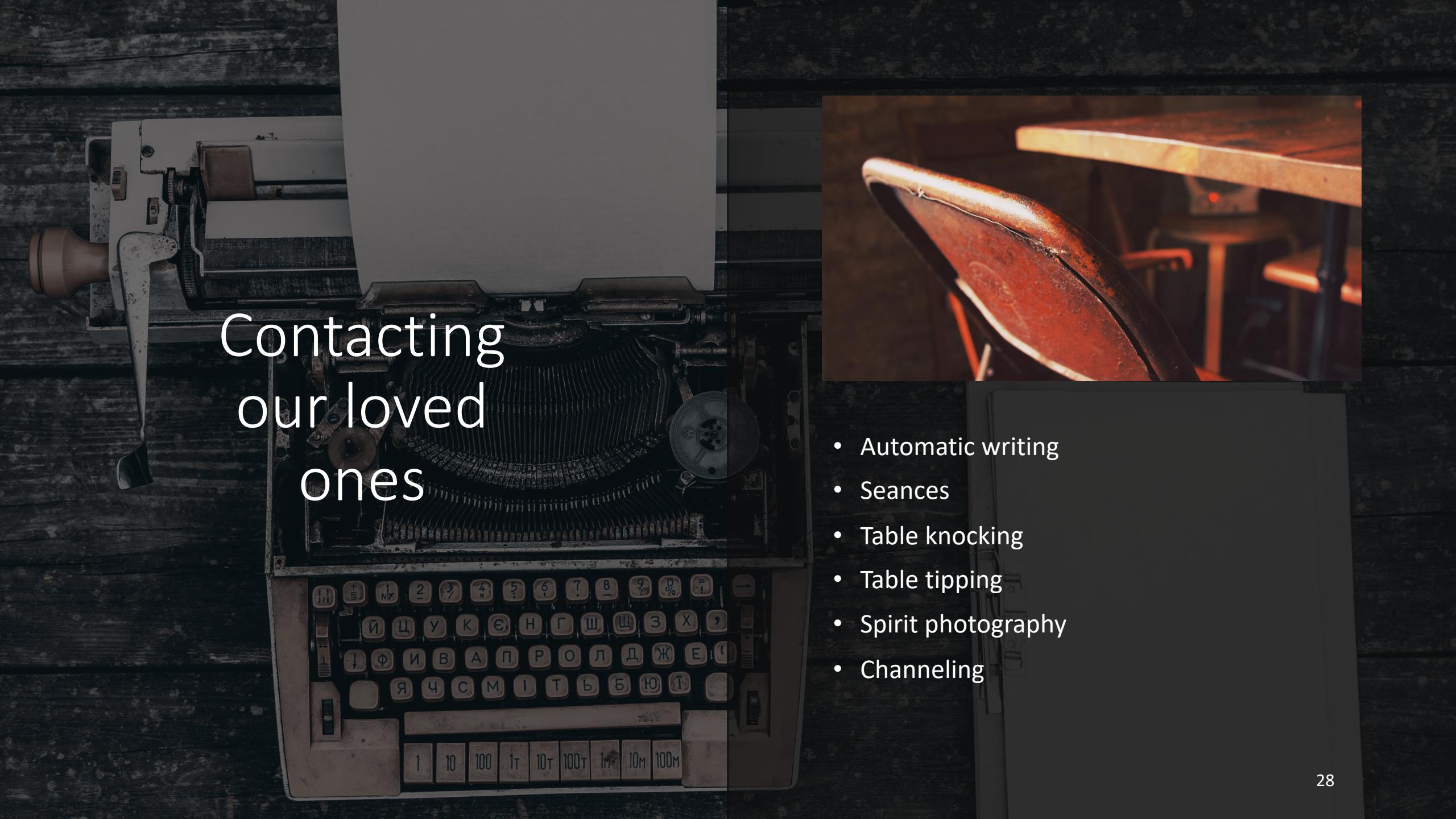
Electrical interference

Coincidences

- Meaning to the person
- Responses of others
- Support people who are willing and able to listen
- Fear of disclosure

"The universe is always speaking to us... sending us little messages, causing coincidences and serendipities, reminding us to stop, to look around, to believe in something else, something more."

-Nancy Thayer



Contacting our loved ones

- Automatic writing
- Seances
- Table knocking
- Table tipping
- Spirit photography
- Channeling



Pets transfixed

- sense a presence
- pick up on smells, movement , energy
- Pets also are quite married to our schedules and may respond at times when they normally would have been walked, petted, fed or greeted the deceased person at the door at the end of their day



I don't know what I'm
looking at but I never
want to see it again.



Hearing voices

- Inside your head giving direction, encouragement
- Discussing decision making or other events with your loved one
- Having discussions with the deceased
- Visiting their grave and having a chat, asking for advice

You are gone
but thank you
for all these soft, sweet things
you have left behind
in my home,
in my head,
in my heart..

Nikita Gill



Scents, colognes

- Cigars, cigarettes
- Apple pie, other favorite foods
- Perfume
- In places most unexpected

And of course smelling those things can bring back a rush of memories either painful or comforting



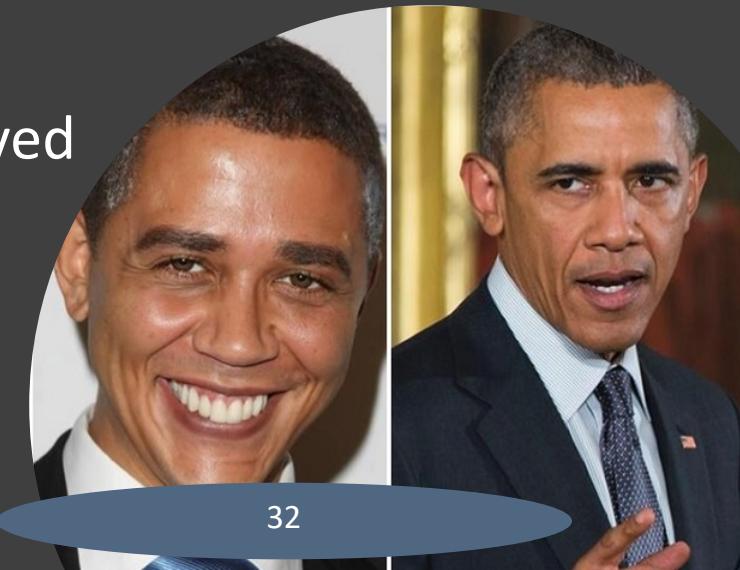
“I am okay messages”

Ouija board not necessary



Doppelgangers

- Yearning becomes manifest
- Following people in the street or in a store who look like your loved one
- Searching takes on new meaning



Street lights going out

- Signs
- Unique to the person and to the relationship
- Often not well understood by people who did not know the deceased or the relationship shared



Orbs in photographs
Recurring numbers
Synchronicity



Sensing a presence

- Often at the end of the bed at night as sleep approaches
- Hypnagogic experiences
- Being held
- Other physical sensations



Words

- Leaping off the page
- Found meanings
- Seem to be speaking to you



The was talking quickly and always
ood, on the other hand,
r's case this was a good thi
an with wood in his perso
t, my father was more at ea
and never left it far behind
after he had bathed. Whe
oor in our dark front room
ing net had been a sleepi
walk...

Impact on grief

- Continuing bonds
- Assisting with ongoing relationship
- Internalizing the other
- Way to carry the person with us going forward

*Vapours leaving the body
Soul, spirit leaving the body
Coloured mist leaving the body*





Context matters

- Individual counselling
- Group setting
- Clinical setting
- Bereavement group
- Bedside of the dying person

Risk of

- financial abuse
- Taking advantage
- Manipulation
- Vulnerability
- Fragility

Clinically

- Our own beliefs
- Openness
- Assessment of problematic attachment
- Acceptance of what is presented
- Understanding motivation
- Knowledge of mystical and extraordinary experiences
- Starting where the client is

Social Work Practice in Pediatric
Palliative and End-of-Life Care
Challenges and Opportunities

Edited by
Barbara L. Jones

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*Oxford Textbook of
Palliative Social Work*

EDITED BY Terry Altilio and Shirley Otis-Green

Objective 2
Standards of Social Work Practice
in Pediatric
Palliative and End of Life Care—
Values and values
Knowledge
Assessment
Intervention/treatment planning
Attitude/self-awareness
Empowerment and advocacy

- ◆ Documentation
- ◆ Interdisciplinary teamwork
- ◆ Cultural competence
- ◆ Continuing education
- ◆ Supervision, leadership, training

Awareness of risk

- Prolonged
- Traumatic
- Secondary
- Inhibited
- Delayed
- Absent
- Collective
- Anticipatory
- Masked
- Disenfranchised
- Ambiguous
- Abbreviated
- Cumulative
- Exaggerated
- Chronic
- Complicated
- And



Interventions

- Meaning to person
- Rituals
- A confidante
- Supportive counselling
- Explore the grief
- Consider the relationship
- Death expected, unexpected, violent, off time, traumatic
- Multiple losses, cumulative impact of loss



Miracles

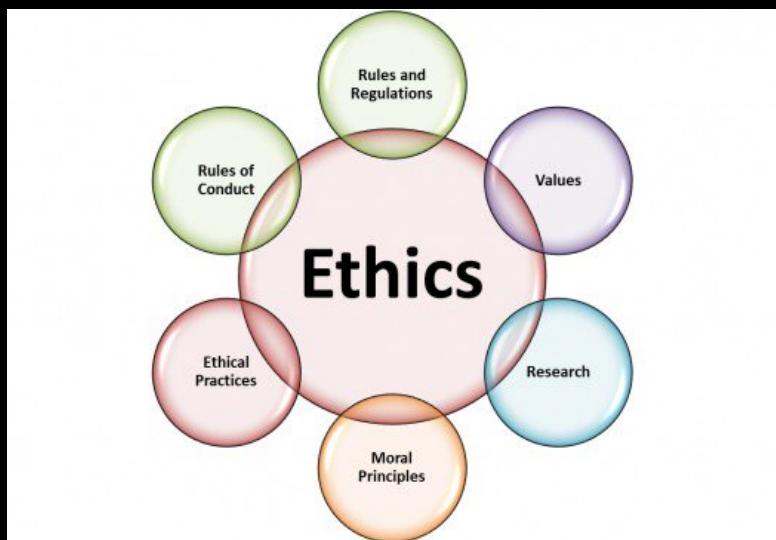
Plummeting room temperature



What if ?

- They do NOT want to see people on the “other side”
- The idea of contact is deeply disturbing
- What if they are frightened?
- Or this type of phenomenon makes dying even scarier
- The relationship was less than ideal

11:11



consider

- Boundaries
- Culture
- Ethical guidelines ...
- Self Disclosureor other people have told me that they have experienced something similar
- Length of time and intensity of experiences- fading, staying the same, growing in regularity
- Refer on

resources

- <https://www.adcrf.org>(after death communication research foundation)
- <https://thesearchforlifeafterdeath.com>
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