

afterwords

*75 Everyday People Answer
15 Common Questions About the Afterlife*

by Dave Morgan

*An invitation to join the most
important conversation on Earth*



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dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife, Pam,
who saw value in this project from the start.

She's been forgiving when I didn't deserve it, firm
when my resolve to see it through was wavering, and
remarkably patient with her unsolicited status
of "book widow."

I also thank her for a warm and wonderful interview.
It's one of my favorites and I'm glad it's part of the book.



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introduction

The Conversation Begins

There is another life in your future, and it begins when this one ends. What we experience after death goes by a lot of names, and what happens there is seen through many earthly points of view. So, to avoid playing favorites, let's call it by its generic name, the *afterlife*. From whatever perspective you view the afterlife, *afterwords* has the potential to broaden your thinking, contribute details, and bring new color to the picture.

What makes *afterwords* unique from other books about spirituality is that the words you read could easily be yours. Any of the seventy-five people you'll hear from could also be like someone you know: your neighbor, the receptionist at your dentist's office, your son's math teacher, or anyone else who is part of your life. The only difference between you and them is that I happened to ask them to put their thoughts about the afterlife into words, and they did.

What's your opinion? Is it even possible to talk about the afterlife with insight and perhaps even enlightenment? After the formal interviews for this book, and many more informal conversations on the subject, my answer is an enthusiastic YES! It's a valuable discussion, even priceless, and there are two ways in which this book will make having such a conversation a relaxed and enjoyable experience:

- Reading what others believe happens when we die will make it easier to have your own conversations.
- Hundreds of stories and comments will give you some ideas to think and talk about.

Before hearing from the people who let me inside their hearts, minds, and spiritual lives, I'd like you to know what led me to this project and why I am delighted to make their words public. A few years ago, after many years of reading, reflection, conversation, and many experiences that fell somewhere between "Wow!" and "Huh?" I became convinced that we survive physical death. I also realized that leaving our physical bodies, and what happens next, is both personal and universal. It's as unique as our earthly experiences and personalities, but

seems to take place within a universal framework full of intelligence and love available to everyone.

As my own understanding matured, I realized I had a hunger to find out what other people thought about the afterlife. Since I couldn't find a book that recorded ordinary people talking about it, I decided to write one. With a set of fifteen thought-provoking questions in hand I went looking for people willing to answer them and at that early stage, I was confident that whole neighborhoods would be fired up by my enthusiasm and line up to talk with me. I was badly mistaken. Even though most people believe in an afterlife, it wasn't easy to find the ones willing to offer their insights and opinions about the topic. Sadly, a lot of people just didn't think they knew enough to talk about such an important, profound, but elusive topic. Ultimately, those who did agree to an interview, perhaps after being bribed with coffee or ice cream, found they had a lot to say. By the end of our 1-1/2 hour conversation (several were much longer), nearly everyone said that talking about the afterlife was not only enjoyable and stimulating, but also important.

A few of my interviews were with relatives, many were with friends or casual acquaintances, and many more were with strangers who seemed like friends by the end of our conversation. I spoke with singles, couples, believers from a variety of religions and denominations, and others who believed in an afterlife but were not affiliated with a particular religion. I even spoke with two non-believers about their reservations, and encouraged them to speculate on what the afterlife might be like if it turns out they're wrong in their disbelief. For all seventy-five of them, talking to me was an act of spiritual generosity. I am humbled by the trust they placed in me and I am honored to be able to share their words with you.

Talking to people about the afterlife was a lot of fun, but the value in the conversations went far beyond entertainment. Many led me to look into unfamiliar spiritual concepts. Many others shed new light on things I thought I knew well. In the end, the insight I gained was far beyond anything I expected and heightens my pleasure in bringing their words to you. *Afterwords* is full of light, laughter, sincerity, shared longing, a few tears, and much more of the stuff that makes human relationships unique and precious. The richness of the process made me as eager for the next interview as a child opening a brightly wrapped present. I encourage you to read with the same sense of anticipation and discovery. I am sure

that if you do, you will recognize the very real value in discovering what others have to say about the tantalizing, mysterious, and oddly intimate subject of the afterlife.

Six Occasions for Understanding and Forgiveness

Any book that speaks for others, in this case seventy-five others, runs the risk of misinterpretation and confusion. *Afterwords* is no exception. Since it contains many religious and spiritual themes, it has the added potential of scraping painfully on very deep emotions. For both reasons, I ask for your understanding and forgiveness on the six issues that follow:

1. The rich stew of words, emotion, and body language that make up human conversation made it impossible to transcribe interviews word for word. For instance, when I was taking notes during the interviews I often had to summarize lengthy comments or paraphrase complex ideas. At those moments, particularly if the subject was religious doctrine, I asked the speaker if I was getting it right. But when I was alone at my desk, away from the interviewees, I didn't have that luxury and I'm sure I made some mistakes. To them, and to you, I apologize.
2. Writing about a spiritual topic added to the difficulty of putting conversations onto paper. There is a word that sums up the problem nicely. The word is *ineffable*, and it means that a quality or experience is impossible to put into words, that it can only be experienced. One person described "Aha!" moments as fitting this definition, and said it's like having a momentary glimpse of exhilarating completeness. So, with the understanding that spirituality can't be put fully into words, let *afterwords* be a trail of tasty breadcrumbs leading to your own ineffable "Ahas."
3. When I chose people to interview, I made a special effort to include a variety of viewpoints. That makes the book more interesting, but it does mean that at least a few ideas will be unfamiliar to many readers. With that in mind, I added clarifying remarks when I thought they were needed. I hope I did so often enough, but not too often, and that what I said makes sense.

4. There are more than 1,100 individual comments in *afterwords*. That's a lot, and I considered including only those that added a new idea to the book. Ultimately, I decided that leaving anything out, even repetitive or simple yes/no answers, diminished the conversation. I encourage you to see every comment in the same light I did during the interviews: that is, as heartfelt expressions of personal truth.
5. I tried to group comments into themes to make reading easier and more interesting, but some didn't fit neatly into any category. In those cases, I tried to come as close as I could to an appropriate placement. There were also times when an answer was put with others to offer an alternative, but related, point of view.
6. I can't stress this last point strongly enough. In fact it's at the heart of the book's purpose. *This is not intended to be a scholarly work, and it's not intended to persuade anyone about the reality of an afterlife.* It's definitely not intended to say any one idea is right or wrong. (My own biases are evident at times, but I try not to take them too seriously. I encourage you to treat them the same way.) It's simply seventy-five people talking about an intriguing subject. Seventy-six if you include me. I did not include references for my own observations and conclusions because this could have given them weight they don't necessarily deserve. I've done a lot of reading, thinking, and talking about religion and the afterlife, probably more than most people. But at the very least, for the purposes of this book, I'm just one more person stating his opinion.

Following the Conversation

There are about 1,100 quotes in *afterwords*, so putting quotation marks around every participant's comments seemed a messy way to put the book together. To make it easier to tell my words from the quotes, all chapter and section introductions have been set apart in the typeface you are reading right now. Also, throughout the book I explain and clarify what could be unfamiliar ideas that appear in the quotes. These comments are inserted wherever in the quote I thought they would do the most good. To make it clear they are my words, and not the person speaking, they are in italics within parenthesis.

Everyday People, Extraordinary Conversations: The Voices in afterwords

I changed the initials of the people I interviewed to protect their privacy. I thought this would be particularly important if I misinterpreted their answers. The same initials are assigned to the same interviewee throughout the book so you can follow that individual's train of thought from question to question.

To personalize the conversation, a few real life details are added to each of the initials listed below. This information comes from either my personal relationship with the speaker, or facts learned during the interview. For easy reference, this same list has been placed on a page in the back of the book to refer to, photocopy, or remove from the book as a bookmark. (Please note that personal details may have changed since the date I spoke with these individuals.)

- A.L.** Metaphysical orientation, clairvoyant, educator, and Reiki practitioner
- A.O.** Administrative assistant at dental office, marathon runner
- A.R.** Letter carrier, songwriter, and musician
- B.D.** Engineer, devoted grandfather
- B.N.** Retired language arts teacher, substitute teacher
- B.P.** Registrar for public school, many lessons from divorce

- B.Y.** Near death experience, administrator at an internationally oriented charter school
- C.F.** Entrepreneur and educator
- C.H.** Retired banker, recent deep interest in spiritual issues
- C.R.** 91 years old at time of interview, still curious and searching
- C.T.** Retired federal employee, minister's daughter
- D.C.** Retired from information technology industry, ordained as a minister
- D.G.** Administrative assistant, poet
- D.J.** Came somewhat late to calling as a minister
- D.L.** Interest in Jewish Renewal, special education teacher, grandchild of Russian immigrants at time of Czar Nicholas
- D.R.** Clothing designer, businesswoman
- E.A.** Homemaker and mom
- E.M.** Years of meditation, poet, technology specialist
- E.T.** Public schools media specialist
- E.W.** Science teacher, suffers chronic disease
- F.B.** Minister
- F.D.** Interpreter for the deaf, animal lover
- F.K.** Public school administrator, officiates NCAA women's softball
- G.A.** Public school media specialist
- G.C.** Retired secretary, wide-ranging spiritual interests
- G.H.** Retired science teacher, minister
- G.N.** Runs press at print shop, minister's son
- H.E.** Retired insurance agent
- H.J.** Caregiver, practices meditation regularly
- H.S.** Did energy-based healing work prior to becoming hearing aid specialist
- H.W.** Music teacher, pianist, and composer, loves the outdoors
- I.C.** Small businessman, including mortgage broker and home improvement business
- I.W.** Technology consultant and senior manager at IT firm
- J.D.** Engineer, Civil War buff

Introduction

- J.K.** Mother, wife, lover of life
- J.T.** Pharmaceutical sales, missionary as young man
- J.V.** First female deacon at her old church, math educator
- K.B.** Singer, band and choir teacher
- K.N.** Spiritual teacher, Eastern orientation, retired businessman
- K.V.** Very informed on Islamic point of view
- L.B.** Math teacher, active in church
- L.J.** Influenced by Native American perspective, community college geology professor
- L.R.** Retired language arts and social studies teacher, enthusiastic grandfather
- L.W.** Writer, orphan
- M.C.** Montessori private school educator
- M.H.** Retired social studies teacher, wide-ranging interests
- M.J.** Near death experience, special education teacher
- M.U.** Graphic designer, experience in theater
- N.H.** Retired, early stage Alzheimer's diagnosis
- N.P.** Metaphysical/spiritualist orientation, strong interest in Earth sciences
- N.Q.** Dental assistant
- N.T.** Homemaker and mom
- O.P.** Businessman, previous career in psychology, loves science fiction
- P.E.** Retired office manager, Eastern spiritual orientation
- P.O.** Retired nurse
- P.R.** Entrepreneur, musician and songwriter, assistant dean of a business school
- P.W.** Hospice administrator
- R.F.** Special education paraeducator, previously owned and managed small business
- R.H.** Hospice and hospital chaplain
- R.L.** Minister of metaphysically-oriented church
- S.A.** Studies variety of Scripture and spiritual testimony, drama and language arts teacher

- S.K.** Activity director at residential facility for seniors
- S.M.** Business background, chronic illness
- S.Y.** Retired science teacher, devoted grandmother
- T.E.** Language arts teacher, poet
- T.R.** Near death experience, owns commercial and residential design business
- T.W.** Near death experience as young man, art teacher
- V.K.** Retired elementary school teacher
- V.R.** Preschool group leader, recovering from miraculous survival of a terrible accident
- V.S.** Public school administrator, E.M.T. certified
- W.J.** Retired, minister's daughter
- W.S.** Language arts teacher, poet, swimming coach
- W.W.** Musician and songwriter, custodian, music ministry to prisoners
- Y.F.** Radiographer (works with x-rays), addiction recovery led to new spiritual outlook
- Y.H.** Promoter of people and life, eclectic spiritual interests

A final thought about reflecting on the conversation in *afterwords*. This is not a book about religion, although religion plays a large part in the outlook of many people I talked with. It's simply a book about how people think about the afterlife. For those reasons, I left out religious affiliation, or lack of it, in the information above. At times, religious beliefs will be obvious, other times not so much. At all times, I encourage you to listen to everyone as if they are cherished new acquaintances, deserving of your respect and interest. Whatever your differences, you may even find that their light, shining from a different angle, can illuminate your own path in refreshing and welcome ways.

question one

Why do you believe in an afterlife?

Most people believe we keep living after our bodies die, but our science hasn't yet provided us with proof. So why do we hang on to this idea as if our lives depended on it? Do we fear death so much that to have everything end when our body quits functioning is unthinkable? Maybe we're so self-centered that an end to "us" is something we can't even imagine. It could be part of the religion we believe in, or a teaching from childhood that's an unquestioned reality. For others, an unusual experience can't be explained without believing in something beyond physical life. So with no proof other than our faith and personal experiences, why do so many feel certain there is an afterlife? And if it's for real, why are there people who don't? It wasn't a surprise that the answers to this question were as individual as the people I talked with.

The openness and honesty of people as they answered this first question helped me realize how intimate these conversations were going to be. Touching and often tearful memories of family and friends, unusual experiences beyond normal understanding, and an amazing richness and depth of insight were part of every conversation. Asking this first question, "Why do you believe in an afterlife?" showed me something else. Despite a common culture, and in some cases a common religion, our personal expressions of spiritual truth are as individual as we are. I'm sure you will appreciate the diversity of the answers that follow as much as I did.

"I've always believed there was more to life than life."

N.P.

Finding Common Ground

The main thing these beginning comments have in common is that they're so different from each other. I expected this, but what caught me completely by surprise was the powerful "personality" of many answers. This was true for each interview, regardless of what the question was. Whether I agreed or disagreed with the person talking, I felt their devotion, awe, and joy of discovery as they talked about their personal history with this thing we call spirit. On that common ground, I felt at home with all of them. I hope you do as well.



Why I believe in an afterlife is hard to put into words, maybe because I've never talked about it out loud. There are a lot of parts to it, but I guess it starts with how you grow up. Judaism is in my background. I remember that my parents wouldn't let us go to funerals, but when my Grandma died I felt her presence. My parents felt it too.

I was in high school when my parents left Judaism and became metaphysically oriented. When my father started doing past-life regressions he did several on me. In one I was looking out the window watching kids playing, but I wasn't hearing anything. It was very suggestive of being deaf, and it happened that my first job as a special educator was with the hearing-impaired. At some point, I began to ask questions like, "Why is this person in my life?" and wondering and believing that God is directing things. Another interesting idea from Judaism is that the original vessel shattered and sent multitudes of sparks out. The sparks are our soul, and good deeds affect the sparks in some good ways. I believe we have to go through many lives and lifetimes.

D.L.

During my near death experience I knew where I was going was where I needed to be, and I was sure there would be warmth and love there. I think that as we develop, all places become Heaven; everything becomes richer as we move on. Love is the greatest goal.

B.Y.

My belief comes primarily out of thanksgiving and curiosity. The next breath of fresh air, fresh powder (*snow*) on my face with my hair on fire skiing down a hill, I'm overcome with gratitude. My curiosity is forever fed with never-ending opportunities for engagement and expansiveness.

It's a constant cycle of mystery, wonder, and worship that goes on and on. I think I was somewhere around three when I first felt this. My father was getting his PhD. at Stanford and we were in the campus community church. The experience of being in trusting arms, surrounded by hymns and community lifted me in a way I've never forgotten. Then I regressed until I was around thirty...Hah!

D.J.

It's a tough question because I don't believe in organized religion or the Heaven and Hell in the Christian view. My Presbyterian heritage goes way back, and as a young man I was on my way to church membership. Then, when I was in my twenties, the questioning atmosphere of the 1960s derailed me. But I never lost God, at least not for long. When I was in my thirties I met a yoga teacher whose way of asking questions as he taught the physical side of yoga brought me to the spiritual path I'm on today. A sense of expansion and touching divinity while I'm meditating, and "Ahhhh" moments in nature add up to thinking that something big is going on. I've also had a couple of visitations from my mother while I was feverish that I'd like to be skeptical about, but my heart says they're real.

E.M.

It begins with how I was raised. Beyond that, there has to be something more than being on Earth. It can't end when we die, but it's hard to explain why. It's just something I know, a fact without a question.

E.T.

I didn't really have a church upbringing, although a Lutheran cultural background was in there somewhere. I had some metaphysical training in the 1980s and just became convinced we are eternal spirit in a body.

H.S.