

THE MAP OF HEAVEN

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(Excerpts From *The Map of Heaven* - if it seems chopping and broken up, that is because it is)

Introduction

“Unlettered peoples are ignorant of many things, but they are seldom stupid because, having to rely on their memories, they are more likely to remember what is important. Literate peoples, by contrast, are apt to get lost in their vast libraries of recorded information.

—HUSTON SMITH, RELIGION SCHOLAR

Human beings have been around in our modern form for about one hundred thousand years. For most of this time, three questions have been intensely important to us:

Who are we?

Where did we come from?

Where are we going?

For the vast majority of our time on this planet, human beings didn’t doubt for a moment that the spiritual world was real. We believed that it was the place each of us came from when we were born, and that it was the place we would return to when we died.

Many scientists today think we are right on the verge of knowing just about everything there is to know about the universe. There is much talk these days, among certain of these scientists, of a “Theory of Everything.” A theory that will account for every last bit of data about the universe that we currently possess: a theory that, as the name suggests, will explain it all. But there’s something rather curious about this theory. It doesn’t include answers to a single one of those three questions listed...

“The word heaven originally meant, simply, “sky.” That is what the word that translates as “heaven” in the New Testament means. The Spanish word for heaven, *cielo*, also means “sky,” and comes from the same root that our word ceiling does as well. Though we now know that heaven isn’t literally up there, many of us continue to sense that there is a dimension or dimensions that are “above” the earthly world in the sense that they are “higher” in a spiritual sense. When I use “heaven” in this book, and talk about it being “above” us, I am doing so with the understanding that no one today thinks heaven is simply up there in the sky, or that it is the simple place of clouds and eternal sunshine that the word has come to conjure up. I am speaking in terms of another kind of geography: one that is very real, but also very different from the earthly one we are familiar with, and in comparison to which the entire observable physical dimension is as a grain of sand on a beach.”

“I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness. We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything that we regard as existing, postulates consciousness.

—MAX PLANCK (1858–1947), QUANTUM PHYSICIST

In the twentieth century, after three fantastically successful centuries, science—in particular, the branch of science known as physics—got a surprise. Deep down, at the very heart of matter, it found something it couldn’t explain. It turned out that “matter,” that stuff that science thought it understood so well, wasn’t what science had thought it was at all. Atoms—those unbreakable, rock-solid little objects that science had thought were the ultimate building blocks of the world—turned out to be not so solid, or so unbreakable, after all. Matter turned out to be a dazzlingly intricate matrix of super-powerful but nonmaterial forces. There was nothing material to it.

It got even weirder. If there was one thing that science thought it knew as well as matter, it was space—the area that matter moved around in, nice and simple. But space wasn't really “there,” either. At least not in the simple, straightforward, easy-to-understand way that scientists had thought it was. It bent. It stretched. It was inextricably linked with time. It was anything but simple...”

“But in the 1920s, quantum mechanical experiments revealed not only that you could detect consciousness, but that, at a subatomic level, there was no way of not doing so, because the consciousness of the observer actually bound the observer to all he or she observed. It was an irremovable part of any scientific experiment...”

“The physics community has yet to interpret what the results of experiments in quantum mechanics reveal about the workings of the universe...” “According to the “measurement problem,” consciousness plays a crucial role in determining the nature of evolving reality. There is no way to separate the observer from the observed. The reality portrayed by experiments in quantum mechanics is completely counterintuitive from what one might expect based on our daily lives in the earthly realm. A deeper understanding and interpretation will require a thorough reworking of our concepts of consciousness, causality, space, and time. In fact, a robust enhancement of physics that fully embraces the reality of consciousness (soul or spirit) as the basis of all that is will be necessary to transcend the profound enigma at the heart of quantum physics.”

“I maintain that the human mystery is incredibly demeaned by scientific reductionism, with its claim in promissory materialism to account eventually for all of the spiritual world in terms of patterns of neuronal activity. This belief must be classed as a superstition. . . . we have to recognize that we are spiritual beings with souls existing in a spiritual world as well as material beings with bodies and brains existing in a material world.

— SIR JOHN C. ECCLES (1903–1997), NEUROPHYSIOLOGIST”

“The day science begins to study nonphysical phenomena, it will make more progress in one decade than in all the previous centuries of its existence.

—NIKOLA TESLA (1856–1943)”

“The new theory—the new “Map of Everything” that I am so in favor of—will include all the revolutionary discoveries that science has made in the last century, most especially the new discoveries about the nature of matter and space and the revolutionary discoveries of the centrality of consciousness that threw materialistic science into such chaos at the beginning of the twentieth century. It will address discoveries like that of the physicist Werner Heisenberg that subatomic particles are never actually in one place, but occupy a constant state of statistical probability—so that they might be here, or they might be there, but they “can never be totally nailed down to a single, no-doubt-about-it spot. Or that a photon—a unit of light—will appear as a wave if we measure it in one way, and as a particle if we measure it in another way, even while remaining exactly the same photon. Or discoveries like Erwin Schrödinger’s that the outcome of certain subatomic experiments will be determined by the consciousness of the observer recording them in such a way that they can actually “reverse” time, so that an atomic reaction set off inside a box that was sealed three days previously will not actually complete itself until the box is opened and the results of the action are noted by a conscious observer. The atomic reaction stays in a suspended state of both happening and not happening until consciousness enters the picture and cements it into reality.

This new Map of Everything will also include the vast quantities of data that are coming in from a whole other area of research, one that materialist science paid even less attention to in the past than it did to consciousness, and that dogmatic religion resolutely ignored as well: Near-death experience. “Deathbed visions. Moments of apparent contact with departed loved ones. The whole world of strange but totally real encounters with the spiritual world that people

experience all the time, but that neither dogmatic science nor dogmatic religion has allowed us to talk about.”

Dear Dr. Alexander,

“I loved reading about your experience. It reminded me of my father’s near death experience four years before he passed away. My dad had a PhD in astrophysics and was absolutely 100% “scientifically minded” before his near death experience.

He was in a pretty bad way in intensive care. He had trodden an emotionally hard path in life and fallen prey to alcoholism, until many of his body organs packed up and he caught double pneumonia. He was in intensive care for three months. During that time, he spent a while in an induced coma. When he started to recover he began to relay his experience of being with angel-like beings who were communicating to him not to worry and that everything was going to be fine. They said he would get better and continue his life. He said they were helping him and that he was no longer afraid of dying. He used to tell me, after he recovered, not to worry when he did die and to know that he would be fine.

. . . [H]e changed massively after his experience. He didn’t drink anymore...

“It was a real comfort to read your experience and it reaffirmed to me my dad’s experience too.

Many thanks,
Pascale”

“In Proof of Heaven, I described how the sudden onset of a very rare strain of bacterial meningitis put me in a hospital, and a deep coma, for seven days. During that time, I underwent an experience that I am still in the process of absorbing and comprehending. I journeyed through a series of supra-physical realms, each one more extraordinary than the last....”

“During this voyage, I had a guide. She was an extraordinarily beautiful woman who first appeared as I rode, as that speck of awareness, on the wing of that butterfly in the Gateway Realm. I’d never seen this woman before. I didn’t know who she was. Yet her presence was enough to heal my heart, to make me whole in a way I’d never known was possible. Without actually speaking, she let me know that I was loved and cared for beyond measure and that the universe was a vaster, better, and more beautiful place than I could ever have dreamed. I was an irreplaceable part of the whole (like all of us), and all the sadness and fear I had ever known in the past was a result of my somehow having forgotten this most central of facts.

Dear Dr. Alexander,

“Thirty-four years ago I had a NDE—but it wasn’t me who was dying. My mother was. She was being treated for cancer at the hospital and the doctors there told us she had at most six months to live. It was Saturday, and I was set to fly from Ohio to New Jersey on Monday. I was out in my garden, when suddenly this feeling went through me. It was overwhelming. It was a feeling of an unbelievable amount of love. It was the best “high” you could possibly imagine. I stood up, wondering: What on earth was that? Then it went through me again. It happened three times in all. I knew my mother had passed. The feeling was like she was hugging me but going right through me. And every time she did, I felt this supernatural, unbelievable, immeasurable amount of love.”

“The Gift of Knowledge” Chapter I

“Every man is born an Aristotelian or a Platonist.”

— SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772–1834)

“Plato and Aristotle are the two fathers of the Western world. Plato (c. 428–c. 348 BCE) is the father of religion and philosophy, and Aristotle (384–322 BCE) is the father of science. Plato

was Aristotle's teacher, but Aristotle ended up disagreeing with much of what Plato had to say. Specifically, Aristotle questioned Plato's assertion that there is a spiritual world beyond the earthly one: a world infinitely more real, upon which all that we experience in this world is based.

Plato did more than just believe in that larger world. He went within, and he could feel it there inside him. Plato was a mystic, and like countless mystics before and after him, he realized that his consciousness, his inner self, was intimately connected to this larger world of spirit. He was, to use a "modern analogy, hooked up to it. The juice of heaven flowed inside him."

"Aristotle was built differently. He did not feel that direct connection to the living spiritual world that Plato did. To Aristotle, Plato's world of Forms—the trans-earthly, superphysical structures that Plato felt all the objects in our world were mere dim reflections of—was a fantasy..."

"Aristotle was the first great mapper of earthly order. His political writings celebrate the idea that human beings do not need trans-earthly inspiration to discover the best way to live and govern. We can do it ourselves. The answers to the big questions, and the smaller ones, too, are right here on earth, waiting to be uncovered.

Plato felt differently. Among his other distinctions, Plato is the father of the Western near-death narrative. In *The Republic*, Plato tells the story of an Armenian soldier named Er. Wounded in battle and mistaken for dead, Er was placed on a funeral pyre. He revived just before the flames were lit, and told a story of going to a realm beyond the earth—a beautiful place where souls were judged for the good or bad they'd done while here.

It was a story Plato found deeply significant. He believed we come to earth from this place above, the place that Er visited in his NDE, and that if we look deep within, we can recover memories of our existence there. These memories, if we trust and build on them, can create an unshakable orientation. They can keep us anchored, while we are here on earth, to the celestial earth above from which we came. To use a wonderful Greek word, we have to perform an act of anamnesis—a word that translates as "remembrance." The key to understanding this world and living well while here "on earth is to remember the place above and beyond, where we really came from..."

"One of Plato's most famous stories concerns a group of people in a dark cave. The people are chained in such a way that they can see only the wall in front of them. There is a fire behind them, and they can see shadows playing on the wall: shadows cast by the light of the fire on shapes that their captors, standing behind them, hold up and move about.

These flickering shadows constitute this people's entire world. Even if these people were unchained and let out into the real light of day, the light would so blind them, Plato suggests, that they would not know what to make of what they saw. "It's plain enough whom Plato is really talking about in this elaborate but striking story. Us..."

"In the mystery religions, as in most ancient initiations, the person being initiated died as the earthly person he or she had been, and was reborn as a new, spiritual one. Not in some vague, theoretical way, but for real. The central concept of the mysteries, as of most ancient initiatory practices, was that as humans we have a dual heritage: an earthly one and a heavenly one. To know only one's earthly heritage is to know only half of oneself. The mystery initiations allowed people to recover a direct knowledge of what we could call their "heavenly" lineage. In a sense, the initiate wasn't turned into anything new so much as he or she was reminded, in a powerful and immediate way, of who and what he or she had started out as before coming to earth, of what he or she really had been all along.

The Eleusinian mysteries, named after the Greek city of Eleusis where they took place, were the most renowned of these rites. They were based on the myth of Persephone, a girl who was abducted by Hades, the god of the underworld, and taken down into his kingdom... "

"Though built in part around these ancient myths, the mysteries tell a story with a different ending. Rather incredibly, given the fact that they lasted more than a thousand years, we still

don't know exactly what happened in the mysteries. We do know they could be intensely dramatic, and sometimes climaxed with the initiate being shown an object: sometimes something as mundane as a spear of wheat. The initiate was prepared for this moment through a slow and steady dramatic buildup that might have included rhythmic music, dancing, and, in the last sections of the rite, being led blindfolded into an inner sanctum where the ultimate secrets were revealed. Thanks to this carefully orchestrated preparation, this climactic vision had not only a profound symbolic significance for the initiate but a very real psychic and emotional one as well. The initiate saw the symbolic object revealed to him or her as more than an ordinary, worldly object but as an actual living window into the world beyond. If a spear of wheat was held up to the initiate, for example, it was not just a symbol of the fact that the crops die and return each year, but an actual demonstration of the core truth that the mysteries were all about: death is followed by rebirth. Gazing on it in his or her heightened state of anticipation, the initiate saw it as a dazzling, confirmatory emblem of the fact that he or she too had now been initiated into eternal life. We do not die at death.

A person who had been initiated into the mysteries was, it was said, like a newborn child, which is why initiates were often called "twice born." They had seen a reality that was more real than the reality of earth, and that created in them an unshakable certainty that human life continued beyond death. This certainty went so deep that from then on, whatever happiness or sadness life brought with it, there was a part of the initiate that was simply never sad. It couldn't be, because the initiate had recovered through direct experience the knowledge of who we are, where we came from, and where we're going. From then on, the initiate was a dual citizen: one who even while still in this world already had one foot in a glorious, light-filled beyond..."

"I believe that heaven makes us human, that without a knowledge that it is where we come from and where we're going—that it is our true country—life makes no sense. And I believe that the experiences so many people have shared with me are reminders that we need to know these truths every bit as much today as we ever did in the past."

"The Gift of Vision" Chapter 3

"Where there is no vision the people perish.
—PROVERBS 29:18"

"Two hundred years ago, when the modern scientific worldview was still in its youth, the poet William Blake came up with a name for the refusal on the part of the scientific community to see and acknowledge the spiritual side of the world. He called that refusal, and the philosophy that arose with it, Single Vision.

Now I a two-fold vision see . . .
May God us keep
From single vision, and Newton's sleep."

"Our world is still built on that old distinction between matter (the world "out there") and mind (the world "in here") that Descartes established. "For better or worse," writes the psychologist Lawrence LeShan in his 2013 book, *A New Science of the Paranormal*, "this is a scientific culture. We listen to religious leaders, gurus, and politicians, but the people we believe speak real truth are the scientists...."

"Dear Dr. Alexander,
On August 19, 1999, my dad had been in our local hospital's hospice unit for 13 days. He had had a series of strokes that left him in an unresponsive state. After much discussion with his doctors, it was the family's decision to "let him go."

My three siblings and I were at his bedside 24/7 those last few days. Someone was always in the room with him. At around 4:00 AM, he started that particular breathing pattern that lets you know the end is coming. We had been expecting it sooner, but dad was tough and in no rush to go.

The room was pitch dark except for a single night-light that was built into the wall and lighted a small floor area. We were on the 6th or 7th floor so no streetlights were shining in the room's windows.

Dad took his last breath. His feet and hands were already cool. I was sitting about a foot away from the bed, my head resting in the palm of my hands, my elbow on my knee. He was turned towards me, his head not more than a foot away from mine. As I was about to get up and stretch and talk to my brother and sisters, something caught my eye. It looked like a piece of dust had settled on dad's temple. Then I thought, how can I see this "dust"? The room is almost black yet I can see this! How is it illuminated? I looked around for some source of light that could be shining on dad's head—but there was none.

I closed my eyes to rest them for a moment, rubbed them with my fingers, and opened them—and the dust was still there, still somehow visible. I inched closer, thinking it would have to float away. But it didn't. Then, as I watched, something started to extricate itself from the side of my dad's head! My eyes were wide open and I was breathing very slowly, trying to understand what I was seeing. . . .

"A small orb, no larger than a quarter inch, very slowly surfaced from under my dad's temple. It was the color of that beautiful intense blue you find at the base of a candle flame. It was radiating white rays. They reminded me of 4th of July sparklers, but the sparks were radiating in slow motion. After maybe a minute, the entire orb had emerged and appeared to be resting on dad's temple. A tiny blue globe radiating white sparking rays.

After a few seconds, the orb slowly levitated to maybe two feet above dad's body and hovered there for a few seconds. Then it slowly drifted higher and toward the west side of the room (actually, more than drifted—it seemed to want to go in a particular direction), and then rose and went into the ceiling and was gone.

I was still sitting in my chair, turned to be looking to where the orb departed. I turned around, expecting someone to say something—but nobody did. I didn't want to ask any questions that would have me putting words in my siblings' mouths, so I simply asked, "Did something just happen?"

My sister said: "You mean that "light that just came out of the side of dad's head?"

I think Shakespeare was right when he said, "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

David Palmer, Higganum, CT"

"Getting back that multidimensional view—that ability to see foxes, ourselves, and everything else on earth within the context of the spiritual universe—is the essence of the new vision, that marriage of science and spirit that is on its way at last. It's a view of the world that isn't "religious" in the old, ponderous, dogmatic sense of the word, or "scientific" in the reductive, materialistic, objectifying sense of the word, either. It's a way of seeing the world that is capable of taking its measure, of studying it scientifically, but without getting lost in the terrible one-dimensionality of the purely materialist view..."

"Even before our current moment there were scientists who understood that rationalism needed to be reborn if it was to be truly useful. The eighteenth-century writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a great poet and also one of the fathers of modern science, probably had the ancient mystery religions in mind when he wrote these famous lines:

. . . so long as you haven't experienced this: to die and so to grow, you are only a troubled guest on the dark earth"

"Heaven, wrote the Persian mystic Najmuddin Kobra, using language that is wonderful in its fearless directness, is not the "visible outer sky." There are, he said, "other skies, more

profound, more subtle, bluer, purer, brighter, “nnumerable and limitless.” Really other skies? Yes. Kobra means this. He is not speaking metaphorically. But these regions can only be entered by people who are spiritually attuned to them. In the universes beyond the physical, you cannot just march into new territories and conquer them. You have, instead, to tune yourself to them, to harmonize with them, or they will remain closed off. “The purer you become within,” Kobra wrote, “the purer and more beautiful is the Sky that appears to you, until finally you are walking in divine purity. But divine purity is also limitless. So never believe that beyond what you have reached there is nothing more, nothing higher still.”

“Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.

—WILLIAM JAMES, THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE”

“The inner world has its clouds and rains, but of a different kind. Its skies and suns are of a different kind. This is made apparent only to the refined ones: those who are not deceived by the seeming completeness of the ordinary world.

—JALAL AL-DIN RUMI, TWELFTH-CENTURY PERSIAN MYSTIC”

“When the mystics say that earthly objects are not “real,” that they do not possess any underlying substantiality, they are not denigrating those objects at all, but in a way are actually venerating those objects by showing where they actually come from. Physical matter is the child of the spiritual realms; all reality that this world has, it owes to the worlds above. But because all the worlds do symbolize and connect with each other, the objects around us—even the most passing and ephemeral—do have a claim to reality, because this world, low as it is, is nonetheless connected to those higher worlds... ”

“Aldous Huxley, a writer who died in 1963 after a long and painful struggle with cancer, dictated his final essay (a piece about Shakespeare commissioned by a magazine) to his wife just a few days before he passed on...” “The world is an illusion,” Huxley said. “But it is an illusion which we must take seriously, because it is real as far as it goes.” We must, Huxley argued, “find a way of being in this world while not being in it.” Because in truth, we are never fully, completely here to begin with. ”