

Near Death Experiences: Proof of Consciousness Outside of the Brain ... Or Byproduct of a Dying Mind?

By [Washington's Blog](#)

Theme: [Science and Medicine](#)

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Does a Harvard Neuroscientist's Experience Prove that the Soul Is Real? Or that Even a Scientist Can Fool Himself?

Preface: Around [two-thirds](#) of American scientists believe in God if you count the social sciences. About [40%](#) of physical scientists believe in God, and that number has stayed constant for almost 100 years.

Does that mean that atheists shouldn't assume that all people of faith are idiots? Or that religion can cloud the thinking ability even of trained scientists?

The University of Virginia School of Medicine has [published numerous studies](#) by medical doctors on near death experiences which argue that consciousness survives death of the brain.

Dutch cardiologist Pim van Lommel systematically studied near-death experiences for over 20 years in a wide variety of hospital patients who survived cardiac arrest, and [published his research](#) on near death experiences in *Lancet*, the prestigious medical journal. He also wrote [a book](#) on the subject. Van Lommel argues that consciousness survives the death of the brain.

An academic neurosurgeon at Harvard Medical School – Dr. Eben Alexander – believed that consciousness was just generated by the brain ... and turned off when the brain dies.

Then Alexander contacted severe bacterial meningitis. His doctors expected him to die quickly or – if he didn't die – to be a vegetable for the rest of his life.

The disease not only put him into a coma, but it destroyed all of his higher thinking centers.

Alexander had a very vivid near death experience involving things spiritual.

As an academic neurosurgeon, he set out to explain his own experience using potential explanations from neuroscience, medicine, physiology and chemistry. Specifically, Dr. Alexander considered [9 potential medical explanations](#):

1. Primitive brainstem program
2. Distorted recall of memories from the limbic system

3. Endogenous glutamate blockade with excitotoxicity
4. DMT dump (a hypothetical phenomenon which has not been proven to occur)
5. Isolated preservation of cortical regions of the brain
6. Loss of inhibitory neurons leading to highly levels of activity among excitatory neuronal networks to generate an apparent "ultra-reality"
7. Activation of thalamus, basal ganglia and brainstem to create a hyper-reality experience
8. Reboot phenomenon
9. Unusual memory generation through archaic visual pathways

He concluded that *none* of these potential scientific theories could explain his near death experiences.

Does this prove that consciousness exists outside of the brain? Or is there a scientific explanation?

Judge for yourself:

Note: I studied science as an undergrad at a good university. But I have myself had a near-death type experience. As such, I emotionally believe that consciousness exists outside of the brain, but I am open to scientific explanations.

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