

## **Dying To Be Me: My Journey from Cancer, To Near Death, To True Healing**

*Dr. Anupam Vatsyayan*

*Assistant Professor, PG Department of English, Guru Nanak Khalsa College for Women, Gajarkhan Campus, Ludhiana (PB), India.*

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*"Each of us is immortal."*

*Dr. Brian Weiss, Same Soul, Many Bodies*

The biggest fear of all humans is death. Death has been seen as synonymous to "the end," or "closure," which implies the conclusion of a beautiful life and also the corollary sensory perceptions. It is seen as an enemy, an impostor who disrupts the mental peace, destroys the smooth pattern of everyday schedule and jolts us out of a (delusional) existence of being in command of our own course of life. However, when Anita Moorjani declares "dying to be me," we are forced to sit up and take notice of the other side of the coin, in this case, death. Can there be a positive side to death? Can "it" lead to anything even remotely constructive? How can the fear of death be mastered? Is it even possible? Which new house will I live in after I die? What will happen to "me" or my "self?" Moorjani, by sharing her own experience through her book, has made an attempt to dissipate such fears and resolve similar questions. The title of her book propounds the idea that death can result in the discovery of the "self," which otherwise loses its identity during life. It sounds paradoxical but has been proven to be somewhat true in the case study of/by Anita Moorjani.

Professionally speaking, Moorjani is an intercultural consultant for multinational corporations in Hong Kong where her parents moved when she was barely two years old. However, on a personal plane, she feels that she has "*a purpose of some sort,*" a purpose which is thousands miles away and different from the concerns of any corporate house. After struggling with lymphoma (cancer of the lymphatic system) for four years, Moorjani drifted into comatose one morning and was rushed to the hospital by a frantic husband and mother. Her organs had virtually failed and her body had stopped absorbing nutrients long ago. The breathing was laboured and she was excessively malnourished. The oncologist and her team made painstaking efforts to revive Moorjani that historic day in 2006 – a day that spelt horror for her family but opened up unbelievable dimensions of health, liberty and life itself for Moorjani to experience and understand. In her own words, she had an NDE (near death experience) which revealed to her the embryonic secrets of life, death and life-after-death. Consequently, she emerged from coma absolutely healed. All medical tests corroborated the fact that there is no trace of cancer in her body which had engulfed her entire upper body down till her abdomen just two weeks back. A range of tests were conducted and not a single lymph node was found that could be tumorous. This is the story that Moorjani has to share - the story of her miraculous comeback. However, she maintains that her recovery happened because of the NDE and the message which she brought back from it.

Though the Hay House website hails the book as an "inspirational memoir," it comes across as an amalgamation of autobiography, motivational journal, and spiritual discourse. Her NDE enabled her to reassess her childhood, where she unearthed the seeds of her illness. Her healing was the direct consequence of her NDE, and as a by-product, she explored her past as well as her behavioural patterns with a fresh perspective.

The conversational tone of the book makes it a gripping tale and we surf smoothly along the waves of the different phases of her life-story. However, in order to emphasise certain aspects, Moorjani has resorted to the device of repetition. Certain sections are picked up and elaborated in later chapters, and some ideas are replicated twice, or even thrice. This device is effective in places but too much of repetition taints the charm and the power of the work.

Moorjani has divided her book into three distinct and well-balanced parts. Though the first and the second parts appear to be heavier (constituting six and eight chapters respectively), whereas the last part has only four chapters, the length and the weight of the chapters in all the three parts balance the scales.

Part I is entitled "Seeking the Right Way." Moorjani takes the reader into her childhood and vividly describes things which she observed as a child and which also left an indelible mark on her delicate mind.

Part II, "My Journey To Death ... And Back," is the narration of her near death experience and her learning which took place on the other side. Simultaneously, she narrates the process of her recovery in chapters such as "Realizing the Miracle," "Proof of Healing," and "Lady, Whichever Way I Look At It, You Should Be Dead!"

"What I've Come To Understand" is the title of Part III of the book. In this section, Moorjani shares her experiences and insights with the readers. She alleges to know the reasons for the invasion of her body with cancer. Whatever Moorjani brought back from her NDE helped her to gauge her own ways and conduct, and to re-prioritise her life.

The last chapter of Moorjani's narrative comprises questions and answers. The innovative use of Q/A pattern is remarkable. Moorjani has incorporated discourses which she had with different groups of people in the years following her NDE in this chapter. The answers are illuminating and tend to respond to most of the questions which originate in curious minds. Yet she fails to give adequate expression to her thoughts on crime and criminals. Her views are bewildering and illogical in the matter. But, perhaps, she is not even searching for logic. Her quest is of a different type.

In order to understand Moorjani's idea of illness and healing, we have to hear her story as both of these are deeply intertwined. Born in an Indian Sindhi family and brought up in Hong Kong, the child Anita was exposed to a number of cultures. Moreover, she went to a British school and was tended by a Chinese nanny, Ah Fong. She states, "... my childhood was a mixture of East and West" (12). But her life was not as idyllic as it may sound. Moorjani suffered racism in school because of her dark skin and felt the pressure of patriarchy at home. Also, the questions of religion, rituals, belongingness, and gender prejudices would constantly trouble her young mind. As she grew, societal pressures also increased and she was forced to enter into an arranged matrimonial alliance. The anxieties which she felt and the compromises she made in order to make herself "fit" were kept to herself, as were the bullying and biases which she encountered in her school,

I didn't even want my parents to know that I was being bullied

because I didn't want them to think of me as a problem ... so I keep  
pretending that I was adjusting well and was really happy. (19)

Later, in the chapter "Matchmaking Missteps," Moorjani points out, "I was so scared - scared to tell anyone, and of the reaction I was going to get if I did" (27). She adds, "I'd kept everything to myself and put on a brave front, appearing to be happy and always smiling ... I didn't want to burden others with my emotional pains and fears." Even though the

marriage was called off, she was unable to free herself from the "regret," and was also apologetic for "being" herself.

In due course, she was allowed to take up a touring job which also made her financially independent, and brought her in contact with her "true love," Danny, whom she married. But the relocation of her mother and brother to India, loss of her job due to recession, and pressure of the community to have a child re-introduced "stress" and "loneliness" in her life. In addition, she was torn apart by the news of the illness of her friend, Soni, and Danny's brother-in-law (both were fighting a lost battle against cancer). She articulates,

This news instilled a deep fear in me because both were close to my age. I began researching everything I could about cancer and its causes, Initially, I started doing this in the hope of helping ... But I found that the more I read about the disease, the more I was afraid of everything that could potentially cause it. I started to believe that everything created cancer – pesticides, microwaves, preservatives ... sunshine ... mobile phones, and so on. This progressed until eventually, I started to fear life itself. (43)

When she was diagnosed with cancer, more than the disease, she became afraid of the line of treatment that is usually followed in such cases – chemotherapy and radiation. She held the opinion that people undergoing this treatment are "wasting away" and are perpetually in "pain." "I'd rather die this very moment than allow that to happen to me," writes Moorjani in "Diagnosis of Fear" (46). She felt "frightened" and "vulnerable," and was struck with "rage" and "panic." To deal with her mind and body ravaged by illness and fear, she practised a number of alternate therapies. In the process, she came across varied methods to attain holistic health and well-being. No stone was left unturned. She tried Chinese herbal remedies, learnt Yoga in India and carried out Buddhist chanting. From pranic healing and Chi Gong to chakra balancing and forgiveness therapy, Moorjani tried every possible method available to combat cancer. Her confusion and desperation was augmented by the fact that most of these therapies contradicted one another. The system followed by Western naturopathy was extremely different from that of Eastern naturopathy. As usual, the West came in conflict with the East which added to her "already overwhelming fears" (51). On February 2, 2006, Moorjani virtually succumbed to the enemy and was on the verge of ending her battle with cancer. She went into coma.

During her NDE, Moorjani picked up her valuable lessons which, through this book, she wishes to share with others. She experienced the "expansion" of her "self" and its eventual merging into the bigger soul. The primary lesson which she brought back is that we are essentially one soul. Though the manifestations are many, there are no restrictions or boundaries or shapes of the soul, which is in essence "pure, unconditional *love*" (66). On the other side of the life, the body is liberated of all anxieties, fears and pain and becomes engulfed in "deepest kind of caring," the glory of pure love for the self (6). In addition, Moorjani claims that she could see and hear everything which was happening or which was being said in front of her, or forty feet down the hallway, or outside the hospital and even across the seas. She could see her brother, Anoop, on the airplane and could read his feelings, too. For her, death did not spell separation for her from her loved ones, and the world in general, but it, in fact, made her one with "everything and everyone" (64). Even when she met her deceased father and her friend, Soni, in the other world, it was not their physical shape which she saw, but their essence which "enveloped" her in a "warm embrace" (66).

Furthermore, their conversation was not real or actual. There was no exchange of words. The words were only thought and the emotions behind the words were felt whereas the meaning was understood.

Other people who have near death experiences have felt the similar expansion of the soul, which, in almost all the cases, rises to a certain height, and is able to make a study of life *passing below*. Dr. Brian Weiss terms it “a life review” (a review of the life just departed) in his phenomenal work, *Same Soul, Many Bodies* (12). His study reveals the idea that when soul leaves the body, it goes to a “higher level of consciousness” (11). He firmly believes that the “soul is timeless,” and when the physical body perishes, the soul “makes connections not only to the other lifetimes of the person it just departed but to all the other souls.” The members of the Freudian school choose to call the soul ‘Freud’s unconscious.’ It may be called whatever, but the idea remains that there is “just one soul, one energy,” as also espoused by Weiss. Some call it God, and some, like Moorjani, prefer to call it pure love. Weiss elaborates, “I see the soul as a body of energy that blends with universal energy, then splits off again, intact, when it returns to a new life” (11). Moorjani’s experience of floating in the air can be explained in the words of Weiss:

Just before we die, our soul ... pauses for a moment, floating. In that state it can differentiate color, hear voices, identify objects, and review the life it has just departed. This phenomenon is called an out-of-body experience, and it has been documented thousands of times ... (9)

He continues,

Before it [the soul] merges with the One, it looks down on the body it has left and conducts what I call a life review ... The review is undertaken in a spirit of loving kindness and caring. It is not for punishment, it is for learning.

Your soul registers its experience. It feels the appreciation and gratitude of

everyone you have helped and everyone you have loved in a heightened way ... it feels the pain, anger, and despair of everyone you have hurt or betrayed, again magnified. (12)

The mode of gaining knowledge may differ in both the cases (Moorjani had an NDE and Dr. Brian Weiss gathered the information from the regression and progression conducted on his clients), but the similarities are very prominent. As Moorjani learnt her “lesson” and decided to come back in this world to share it with others, Weiss also promotes the idea that the journey of our soul from one life to another basically depends on how well and how quickly we learn our “lessons.” Through the case studies of his numerous clients, Weiss has formulated the theory that when the soul conducts a life review, it is trying to locate the substitutes of hatred, jealousy, anger and fear. With every lesson learnt, it becomes easier for the soul to, gradually, merge with the “universal energy,” and the body moves towards healing. It is a process of evolution, not of the body, but of the soul,

... the soul always, at all times, evolves toward health ... Our past and

future lives converge in the present, and if they can induce us toward healing now so that our current lives are healthier and more spiritually fulfilled... (Weiss 13)

...

Our lives are a series of steps up the evolutionary scale. Where are we, then, when we are completely healed ... Probably at the highest spiritual level, which some call heaven, others nirvana" (16).

If the lesson is not well taken, then we come back in another form, again and again, to complete the task. In line with this system, Moorjani's healing was the result of the lesson which she learnt during NDE.

She learnt the importance of "being" rather than "doing." She realised that throughout her life she treated herself harshly and her ailment was the result of her judging herself continually, "I understood that the cancer wasn't a punishment or anything like that. It was just my own energy, manifesting as cancer because my fears weren't allowing me to express myself as the magnificent force I was meant to be" (135). Her out-of-body experience brought her face-to-face with the inherent "magnificence" that all humans are. When we neglect or suppress our individuality, we punish ourselves, and it culminates in all sorts of physical ailments. She apprehended that the "entire universe is composed of unconditional love" and we are simply an expression, an external manifestation of that love (139). Therefore, if there is no love in whatever we "do," we kill our inner magnificence. If we "do" things out of fear, or compulsion, or to gain approval, it takes away a piece of that magnificence, leaving the self unguarded to be assaulted by disease. Her message to the readers is to feel love for everyone around. Love should be the driving force behind all our actions, and not fear or pressure. Love comprises our "being," which must not be sacrificed at the altar of "doing."

Her second message is to be true to one's own feelings. She says we must, "*honour our own individual path*" (155). We must acknowledge every positive and negative feeling that crosses the panorama of our mind. Controlling emotions and thoughts is not the right method. All sorts of feelings must be given due importance and space. She strongly disagrees with the idea of "positive thinking." This calls attention to the theory of "law of attraction" propounded by Rhonda Byrne and many others. Byrne's in her seminal work, *The Secret*, announces, "The Great Secret of Life is the law of attraction" (25). It is believed that mind is a very potent weapon, and if you think positive, you attract positive from the universe. Therefore, one must try to "master" the "mind" and "attract" good instead of bad (23). Now, Moorjani voices her disagreement with this theory and rejects positive thinking as a blanket prescription. She, instead, advocates that we must allow our negative thoughts to pass through us without judgment. Acceptance of all things positive and negative should be practised, whether in people, or in the self, "... I prefer to think in terms of *allowing*, rather than *attracting*" (Moorjani 159). Her NDE told her that the ultimate reality is not death. The reality is, in fact, the consciousness of our "true perfection and magnificence" which death permits and enables (149). If everyone on the planet becomes aware of this magnificence then,

... our manifest world would change to reflect that new state ... Priorities would change ... we'd no longer be driven by greed ... Children would

grow up being love – being stronger, healthier, and more trusting. (149)

Coleridge, through his poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” also proclaims that only love and respect for all creations of God can lead us to redemption. When the ancient mariner looks on the water snakes and appreciates the beauty of their colours and movements, the curse is immediately lifted and the ship is steered back to the safety of the native harbour. Unconditional love for the self and for others restores health and happiness. Weiss’s study of the “review of life” also asserts the idea that death leads to better comprehension of life. He regresses and/ or progresses his clients so that they become aware of the reviews done in their past lives and learn lessons from them. They realise that prejudice and hatred must be substituted by empathy and love. This heals them and cures their present state of existence from any kind of physical or mental disorder. Similarly, Moorjani also got a second chance. She learnt the lesson, came back and decided to share it with the rest of the world. She could redefine the pattern of her life and could justly proclaim “dying to be me.” Her closeness to death led to the discovery of the self. Weiss and Moorjani affirm that their purpose is to make the world a better and a healthier place to live. Likewise, Rabindranath Tagore, the bard of Indian literature, also experienced the expansion of consciousness. For him, all individuals are guided by their personal religion and Tagore’s religion orchestrated “his intimate engagement with nature, love, humanity” (Kundu). In his childhood, he read “Jal pare patta nare” (It rains, leaves tremble) which helped him to discover the interconnectedness of the universe and the inherent rhythm in creation. He expresses his feeling of oneness with the people on the street, with sunshine and all the vibrant life around him in his poem, “The Awakening of the Waterfall.”

In fact, what Weiss and Moorjani are doing, like millions others, is a reiteration of the belief of transmigration of soul in Hindu philosophy. In Chapter 4, Verse 5 of Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna,

bahuni me vyatitani  
janmani tava carjuna  
na tvam vettha parantapa  
tany aham veda sarvani"

(You and I had many, many previous births / I can remember all of them, but you cannot / Many times you and I came. You have forgotten).

Lord Krishna, here, becomes the “Jatismara” (who remembers the past birth or births). To some, the study by Weiss appears path breaking but the truth is that these ideas have already been expounded and developed for many thousand years in the Hindu belief system. The Bhagavad-Gita being the very root of the Vaisnava philosophy is thoroughly free from all misconceptions regarding the reality of reincarnation and transmigration. It analyses the mutual difference of the soul as the sub-atomic sentience, the mind as being atomic sentience and the physical body (an aggregate of atoms composed of the five basic elements of earth, air, water, fire and ether) as being gross matter. The soul is the owner of the mind and the body. The mind and body are properties of the soul whereas the soul is the sole property of *paramatma*, the “Suprasoul” or the Godhead. The “Suprasoul” is the casual sentience and the *jivatma* (the individual soul) is the effectual sentience. The “suprasoul” can be Moorjani’s “pure love,” and Weiss’ “universal energy.” Our souls are dormant and inattentive to the Suprasoul. Seeing that the master (the soul) is asleep, the subordinate workers (the mind and the physical body) get preoccupied with their own self-interests. The

mind wants to be the pseudo-controller and the physical body is actively seeking the gratification of the senses. This is called the conditioned state of bondage. The need is to reawaken the consciousness.

The famous Vedic saying “yatha pinde tatha brahmande” (As is the individual, so is the universe. As is the universe, so is the individual) is another evidence of the connection between the human soul and the cosmic energy. It substantiates the idea stated by Moorjani that the physical is a reflection of what is happening within the soul, and the soul, in turn, is guided by the universe. Our energy is inseparable from the universal life. It may also be translated as “As above, so below. As within, so without.” It must be noted that Moorjani is well versed in Eastern scriptures, beliefs and philosophy. The influence is conspicuous and not surprising. Moreover, her NDE validates many of the concepts which have been vehemently questioned and rebuffed by the Western world. Moorjani, though an Indian, always aspired for acceptance in the other cultural orders. Ideas which have been rejected by the pseudo-moderns under the influence of West are now boomeranging. The same ideas are now being acclaimed and accepted because they are packed in envelopes with stamps of America or Hong Kong or any other foreign land.

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