

WDDTY /magazine / What happens when we die?

What happens to us when we die? It's the ultimate question, but to the materialistic—he believes everything can be explained by physical matter—it's a non-question, because nothing happens when we die. Once the brain stops, everything stops, and all your dreams, hopes, creations and thoughts, they were all nothing more than neural firings in the brain.

Eminent neurosurgeon Michael Egnor believed that, too. The brain controlled everything about us; he was taught that at medical school, and these teachings reinforced his belief that science could explain everything, if not now, then one day.

It follows that if the brain gets damaged, we—our personality and everything that makes me 'me'—so changes.

But it wasn't that simple, as he realised after he performed radical surgery on a man who was suffering around 90 epileptic fits every day. The only way to stop the fits was to perform a corpus callosotomy, where the surgeon severs the corpus callosum, the meeting place of the two hemispheres of the brain.

The fits would stop, but what would become of the patient? Would his personality change? Would he remember anything about his former self? In a series of post-surgery conversations, Egnor discovered that the man hadn't changed in the slightest. He was his 'old self' and had the same sensibilities he always had. His two hemispheres weren't 'talking' to each other anymore, but it made no difference to him.

This suggests the mind is not the same thing as the brain. The mind can exist independently of a damaged brain, as Egnor noted down the years when he worked with patients with traumatic brain injuries or underwent radical surgery that took away parts of the brain.

It goes deeper still. The mind isn't the brain—and, in fact, our essential self is an eternal soul. Egnor, who is the professor of neurosurgery at Stony Brook University in New York, has come to this view after studying and observing his patients who have recounted near-death experiences (NDEs) while they were 'dead' on the operating table.

One famous case he cites is of Pam Reynolds, who had a life-threatening blockage in the basilar artery, the main artery that feeds blood to the brain. It was so severe that she could have suffered a traumatic stroke at any moment.

The solution was a radical procedure which involved draining all the blood from her brain while freezing her body. Her heart stopped, her brain was clinically dead—and remained so for 30 minutes while the procedure was carried out—and yet, when she was revived, Pam was able to recount in exact details what the surgeons were saying to each other, and even the music they were playing—The Eagles' Hotel California, which

she thought was wholly inappropriate as it contained the lines: 'You can check out, but you can never leave'.

She also experienced the light and tunnel related in many NDE accounts.

Egnor recounts his journey from being a materialistic atheist to a deeply religious man in his new book, '*The Immortal Soul*' (Worth Publishing, New York, 2025), and it's well worth a read.

Bryan Hubbard & Lynne McTaggart (Editors)