

# The Primacy of Consciousness <sup>1</sup>

## Interview of Dr. Eben Alexander by Dr. Jeffrey Mishlove

**Mishlove:** Hello and welcome. I'm Jeffrey Mishlove. Today we'll be exploring the primacy of consciousness. With me is Dr. Eben Alexander who is a former professor of neurosurgery at the Harvard Medical School. He is the author of several books, including *Proof of Heaven*, *The Map of Heaven*, and *Living in a Mindful Universe*.<sup>2</sup> Welcome.

**Alexander:** Jeff, it's great to be here. Thanks for having me on.

**Mishlove:** It's a pleasure to be with you. In our previous discussion about integrating the near-death experience, you described your journey as a materialistic scientist. And what that means is that matter, inner dead matter is the fundamental bedrock of everything we experience in the universe. But there's another point of view, it's a very ancient point of view, with a noble philosophical tradition, which is the opposite-- that consciousness is primary not matter,

**Alexander:** I would say that, certainly, it was a beautiful kind of gift to me, an implication of my journey. But my scientific mind, you know, in those early months, of trying to make sense of all this, I couldn't see how it could be so. I had to go much more deeply into the modern neuroscience of consciousness and philosophy of mind, to begin to realize how materialist science has never gotten anywhere-- they've never even gotten out of the starting blocks, with any kind of putative explanation of consciousness as originating in the brain. It opens the door to some tremendous understanding.

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<sup>2</sup> The following are Dr. Alexander's books:

Alexander, E. (2012). *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*. Simon & Schuster.

Alexander, E. (2014). *The Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion, and Ordinary People Are Proving the Afterlife*. Simon & Schuster

Alexander, E. and K. Newell. (2017). *Living in a Mindful Universe: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Heart of Consciousness*. Rodale Books.

As I often point out, the hard problem of consciousness, which is the extreme challenge, in the neuroscience of consciousness and philosophy of mind, in trying to come up with any mechanism by which the physical brain might give rise to consciousness, is a very daunting issue. Most of the people I know involved in the scientific study of consciousness are now moving to much more expanded models. It's because they realize that the simplistic notion of the physical world being all that exists and that the brain somehow creates consciousness out of purely physical matter is completely false. It does not explain even the rudiments of conscious awareness in our consensus day-to-day reality.

But much worse, it does not begin to approach any kind of explanation for all the many examples of non-local consciousness. For example, the fact that telepathy is real, that precognition is real, that we can actually know the future before it happens and that we can scientifically demonstrate that kind of effect. There is even something called presentiment, where our autonomic nervous system can respond to immediate future events before they've even been determined, say by a random number generator and a computer.

The whole world of psychology and the examination of mind and consciousness is revealing all kinds of ways that we can be aware of things beyond our physical senses, things such as remote viewing, the psychic spy programs (many government agencies over the last many decades have shown that there are ways that people can train to know things beyond their physical senses) out of body experiences, or something that many people have come to discover on their own and have taken advantage of. Thus, these are all ways of saying that consciousness is not limited to the confines of the physical brain in the body.

The big implication of this is what happens when the brain and body die. It looks very strongly like the reality is not only that our consciousness continues beyond the death of the brain and body, but that it expands tremendously in its kind of scope and understanding. I think all of this is a fascinating world of discovery that is opening up to modern science. And yet it leaves the simplistic view of that the brain creates consciousness, you know, the physical is all that exists, leaves it in the dust, which is a good thing given that that view has never gone anywhere, in terms of explaining the nature of consciousness itself.

**Mishlove:** As a devil's advocate, I'll play that role. I'm very sympathetic to your point of view. But I'm aware of the fact that, let's take remote viewing as one example. I've done many interviews with Ed May, who was one of the directors of the remote viewing research funded by the US government for many years. He's a physicalist. He believes that eventually, we'll explain all of this through normal physical processes. And he would argue that physical science has been so successful, we know so much about the brain and the nervous system, and because of physical science, we eventually will solve this sticky little problem of consciousness,

**Alexander:** What I would say is that we're expanding our kind of notions of what our natural science. For example, I think the word supernatural is very misleading. Of course, it just points out how our linguistics is kind of the first order of discovery and trying to understand the nature of the world. But what we're investigating here is the natural world. Once you realize that consciousness itself cannot be so readily determined by the physical workings of the brain-- and I would say that's especially true in things like remote viewing-- because there you have to postulate that there's an information field that is far grander than say, physical reality, that is necessary for us to explain, explain the effects.

There's, there's a philosophical position, I believe was originally defined by Sir John Eccles, called promissory materialism, which is the notion that if we simply study the physical world more and more, sooner or later, we'll come up with these answers. But what I would say is that near-death experiences, remote viewing, and other things point out that there seems to be a realm of informational organization and causal effect, the kind of cause and effect between certain situations, that transcends the kind of physical notion of causality and the physicalist view. In many ways, you could say it's greatly based in kind of an evolving notion of quantum physics. And that is probably where maybe Ed May and I could have a little bit more of a discussion around at all, and maybe find a little more common ground.

But to me, it's fascinating that both neurosciences of consciousness and philosophy of mind have been working towards this position where mind seems to exist fundamentally, that you cannot simply explain the workings of mind or free will by the workings of the brain just as I pointed out in our previous interview where I discussed Wilder Penfield, the renowned and very respected neurosurgeon in his 1975 book, *The Mystery of the Mind*. But I think one of the problems he had at that time was that people didn't realize how far this whole quantum physics discussion would go.

I don't want to go into detail about that, because it does get very detailed, but if you do follow it in our book. Living in a Mindful Universe, we follow the various turns in that. But in brief, it's that the founding fathers of quantum physics, individuals like Erwin Schrodinger, Wolfgang Pauli, Eugene Wigner, John von Neumann, and others, realized that you really could not formulate quantum physics, in a materialist physicalist sense, without invoking consciousness in the mind of the observer, at some fundamental level. All of them surmise, from early quantum experiments, that mind must be fundamental. Schrodinger wrote a beautiful essay on the nature of mind ("Mind and Matter") that I would highly recommend to people. But then what happened was in 1935, Einstein expressed his real disdain for quantum physics on the belief that it was an incomplete theory. This paper was published in 1935 and became known as the Einstein Podolsky Rosen, the EPR paradox. It was a philosophical curiosity for a few decades.

But then in the mid-1960s, John Bell, a brilliant Irish physicist, recognized that you could take the EPR argument and turn it into a kind of thinking that would enable empirical evaluation through experimental setups. In the early 1970s, physicists started taking Bell's arguments seriously and started performing a series of experiments to try and better delineate what was going on behind the measurement paradox, what's called contextuality, which is the notion in quantum physics that subatomic particles don't have a given property until they're measured, and the decision, the mental activity of the mind of the investigator in determining, for example, whether you're trying to demonstrate particle or wave properties of a photon, or some other form of matter, actually determines the behavior of that particle back to its origin.

It is kind of striking that the experimental evidence, in more and more refined experiments, even into recent years, shows very profoundly that consciousness seems to be primordial-- there's an organization of information at a very deep level that seems to defy the ability to put all of that determinism within one universe. For example, if you take a poll of quantum physicists or physicists, what do they believe is the best interpretation of the measurement paradox which points to this odd feature of contextuality, and the importance of the mind of the observer, they come up with the "Many Worlds Interpretation, Dr. Hugh Everette's 1957 model.

**Mishlove:** Or as I understand it, most physicists are taught not even to think about it. They are told, "Shut up and calculate".

**Alexander:** Yes. One-third of our economy is based on quantum physics. All of our microelectronics, GPS computers, cell phones, every bit of that depends on quantum equations, the Schrodinger equation. Yet, if you go deeper into the experiments, it's just mind-bending, it seems completely counterintuitive. And I think part of it is, that our very notions of time and space, are built in a kind of on this side of the veil. And that's why quantum physics reveals some very kind of deep, kind of astonishing principles of operation at work in the very fabric of all the reality around us. As Niels Bohr put it, we've got to face the fact that all of the reality around us is made up of things that are not real, they behave in a completely counterintuitive and unreal fashion. And yet, when you assemble it all into this macro world, you have this apparent kind of behavior by conventional classical physics.

I would say that where materialist science went wrong is that they failed to recognize that what a human being perceives, is always the inside of their own consciousness. What modern neuroscientists would agree on, first and foremost, is that every single bit of your thoughts, your perceptions, your awareness, your reflection, every bit of your mental reality you've ever had, has depended on the activity of neurons-- the 100 billion cells in your brain.

The mistake is in not recognizing that a neuron is the working ground for Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. All the stuff we look at out there, all of the macro properties of things, that's what we assumed to be out there. But what we're experiencing is a mental model that's dependent on neuronal activity, and neuronal activity is completely within the world of Heisenberg's uncertainty. If you're confining ions with ion channels, (I know in the "Orchestrated OLR theory" of Stuart Hammeroff and Roger Penrose, they're talking about maintaining quantum systems for long enough in microtubules of the brain because they can maintain the quantum state long enough for information processing). However, you are looking at the activity of neurons, they are working in the realm of the quantum where that tight spatial confinement completely opens up the momentum vector. So then, in fact, it's a perfect staging ground for consciousness to manifest reality beginning with the brain, the body. And from thence outward, all of this world.

**Mishlove:** Well, if consciousness itself is primary, then the neurons, even the brain itself, would be a product of consciousness.

**Alexander:** Yes, it is a product of consciousness. That's the important point. It's because consciousness, the phenomenal experience, is what is happening. And then if we look at this as neuroscientists, what we would be finding, in those superposition states, in those various ion channels, is that which only selects from the conscious phenomenal experiences, which is the result of those superposition states, spread through all of those ion channels and 100 billion neurons of the brain. The truth of the matter is, that the majority of the brain's neurons are not even involved in what we would call a conscious experience. Most of the neurons, for example, something like 60 to 70%, I forgot the exact number of neurons in the brain, are in the cerebellum. I did a lot of work in the cerebellum when I was doing lab work as a resident where we would remove parts of the cerebellum, and you find it does not influence consciousness at all. There's a short adaptive period, where people's motor skills are involved... But in other words, just having the neuronal activity proper is not what leads to consciousness. The thing to remember is that consciousness is the only thing that exists. It generates so much of this other apparent physical reality, and hence, outward to all of causality. But it all begins in that mental model.

**Mishlove:** One of the problems of even talking about consciousness is we don't have a good definition of what consciousness is. For example, we have the unconscious and the subconscious. It seems that the human, not just humans, but other animals, computers... computers are a really good example... computers can be very intelligent, without being conscious at all.

**Alexander:** I would say it is an important point to differentiate between what's known as artificial intelligence and conscious awareness. There's something called the Turing test, that Alan Turing came up with, to assess how good an artificial intelligence system is. It's pretty straightforward stuff. If you can duplicate the linguistic responses of a human being satisfactorily so that the person who's doing the interview can't tell if they're interviewing a true human being, or a computer, then you pass the Turing test. But that doesn't take you anywhere, towards identifying self-awareness of that system. Now, from my point of view, as I point out in Proof of Heaven, I believe that one of the greatest indicators is that we are not philosophical zombies... In consciousness discussions, for example, if you talk to Daniel Dennett, at Tufts, he might bring up the notion of a philosophical zombie. Now a philosophical zombie would be someone who looks, acts and quacks just like a human being. For example, an Eben Alexander zombie, would sit here and do all the things I do and make all the points I am making. Yet, that philosophical zombie would have no inner conscious awareness. (next minute of discussion deleted).

But the important distinction remains... do not confuse inner awareness of existence with Artificial Intelligence and passing the Turing test. It's the same problem that we get into when people discuss Near-Death Experiences (NDEs), and also discussion of the psychedelic drug experience. A lot of the language can sound similar. We also make the mistake of assuming that because the words to describe it have some similarities, maybe the phenomenal experience is the same. I know of many cases of people with experiences with NDEs and with psychedelic drugs... certain scientific papers that have directly compared the two experiences, where you can show that there are very major differences in the quality of an NDE, especially some of the transcendental elements that seem to leapfrog way above and beyond what the psychedelic drug experience sprang. So, in other words, just having that linguistic overlap does not necessarily take you there either.

But getting back to discussions on Ed May and our discussion on quantum physics... especially a series of arguments I've seen right lately... Bernardo Kastrup has been a good friend and colleague in our defense of idealistic philosophy, especially, ontological or metaphysical idealism. And that's what we argue in the book, *Living and Mindful Universe*, this is really where we are all headed-- that Consciousness is fundamental.

**Mishlove:** It is useful to point out that there is now a community of scholars who are pushing this point of view-- that if we look very carefully, at all of the data, we need to revise our metaphysics,

**Alexander:** Yes. I think that's true. And, you know, it should come as no surprise that the scientific revolution of over 400 years was based on studying the material world. If you study the material world, you're going to learn a lot about the material world. But again, the step that they miss is the realization that what humans experience is all engineered in mind, in this layer of mind, with this ordering of causality, that is kind of much closer to the origin than the stage setting... all that material world out there is just the stage setting on which that drama unfolds.

**Mishlove:** You are an expert on the brain. Let's assume, from your point of view, that consciousness is primary, which means that everything we experience is composed somehow of consciousness—it originates in consciousness. What then is the role of the brain,

**Alexander:** The brain is a filter. It's a reducing valve. That's the language that comes from the late 1800s. The notion of the brain as a filter was very popular among great students of the human psyche, like William James ("The Principles of Psychology"), the great Harvard professor, who was mainly active around the turn of the 19th to the early 20th century. This theory was also very popular with Henri Bergson ("Time and Free Will"), in France, F.C.S Schiller "On Pragmatism and Humanism"), and a little bit later, Aldous Huxley ("The Perennial Philosophy"), these were all very astute kind of philosophers, investigators of the human psyche and of the workings of the brain in mind. They came to realize that the best way to explain a lot of the phenomena that they discussed, was to see "consciousness as fundamental".

Certainly, that had to do with their knowledge of the spirit, after-death communications from the spirit world to loved ones left here in the physical plane, as well as what would be broadly labeled mediumistic psychic readings. Although many people out there tend to say that psychics are all fakes, that's not true. For example, if you look at the work of Julie Beischel ("Investigating Mediums") done at the Windbridge Institute, she has done quintuple blind studies to identify psychics with very profound psychic abilities. Psychic mediumship is in many scientists' minds, a very proven modality, just as remote viewing is. I don't think many scientists study consciousness, who would doubt the reality of remote viewing... the ability to see inside targets halfway around the world.

**Mishlove:** And certainly not Ed May who is a specialist in precognition. He would argue, as a physicalist, that there's an information channel that we don't yet understand, but eventually, we'll figure it out. So information can come from the future or it can come from a different, distant place and in space. But eventually, we'll be able to interpret all of that from the perspective of physical science.

**Alexander:** I would say we'll be able to interpret it all on the workings of the natural world. A deeper understanding of consciousness, especially one that honors that consciousness is fundamental and creative in all of emergent reality. Yes, that's the natural world and our study of the physical world can be very helpful. For example, in my book, *Living in a Mindful Universe*, we discuss several recent studies, scientific studies, that have looked at the effect of what are known as serotonin 2A psychedelic-type drugs... I do not call them hallucinogens, because I believe that they open a doorway to a very real world, just like dreams are also in a sense, a doorway to the same realms, and we go into an NDE. But we get into different levels of them... with a different kind of levels... kind of an informational fidelity and all that kind of thing.

**Mishlove:** People sometimes call these drugs entheogens



**Alexander:** Entheogens, right... that they bring the God force within. But I would say, more to the truth, that they simply reveal to us that we have that godlike oneness of consciousness within us all. An example is the 2012 paper from Robin Carhart-Harris, from Imperial College in London, (a paper that I cited in the bibliography of my book Proof of Heaven, even though I don't discuss it in detail in the text of my book). But in Living in a Mindful Universe, we discussed several of these papers. That paper looked at psilocybin and used functional MRI, which is a way of looking at activity levels and regions of the brain, while a patient is having a certain kind of phenomenal experience. These patients were under the influence of either a placebo or psilocybin. The shocking finding, they are certainly shocking to material scientists, was that the more profound the experience and they measure that with a visual analog scale, for various types of qualities (for example, the oneness and a sense of connection, sense of love, encountering souls of departed loved ones, having visions of the future, visions of purpose in one's life), all these various phenomenal qualities of mental experience, especially in extraordinary states... what they found is that the more profound the psychedelic state, the more detailed and complex the journey, the more the physical brain shuts down and gets out of the way. In other words, the main junctional regions of the brain on functional MRI, go dark.

Now, this made perfect sense to me. Because in my experience, the point I made in Proof of Heaven was that I knew the journey I had been through. I knew and had witnessed this extraordinary more “way to be real” essence, just as so many other near-death experiences have described of those spiritual realms. Yet I knew that happened at a time when my doctors had perfect documentation of the damage to my neocortex, that, according to modern neuroscience, I should have experienced only the dimmest, I think maybe my earthworms eye view, that would be the kind of consciousness you'd expect that brain to muster. And yet I had a reality that was far more profound, complex, vivid, alive, interrelated, meaningful, and memorable than anything I've ever experienced in my life.

**Mishlove:** Because the brain wasn't filtered

**Alexander:** Exactly, it was out of the way. So in these Psychedelic Studies, you find exactly the same thing. In fact, there is no area of the brain where you have increased activity, every bit of it is shutting down. That was not an isolated paper. I'll point out that when that paper came out, Cristof Koch (“Consciousness: Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist”), who was the head of Paul Allen's Neuroscience Research Center in Seattle, wrote an article in Scientific American about your brain on drugs. Surprise, surprise, guess what? It goes dark, just like any materialist, physicalist neuroscientist who believes that the brain would create consciousness, these studies completely defy that interpretation.

And they have been duplicated. For example, a group in South America looked at DMT, Dimethyltryptamine, the active principle in Ayahuasca, which is often used for profound spiritual experiences, because it seems to open a door to an alternate realm, and when you talk to people who've done Ayahuasca, I have interviewed many, and I have read these books, they seem to be talking about a common reality, a shared route that's very real. It's as real as this one. Often I have to remind my audiences that say if we took a group of 20 people in this audience, and liberally sprinkled them around Greater Paris for 12 hours into random situations, and they brought it all back here, they all have very different stories to tell. It would depend on where they were in their life journey at that point, who they ran into what their interests were, what their discussions were all about what they saw. And then they come back here now, there's only one Paris, but they all have different stories.

I promise you, the spiritual realms are far vaster. But still, the consistency of their stories, the kind of meaning and power of their stories, and how they change people's lives, that is very much uniform across the board. It doesn't depend on your prior religious beliefs or your scientific knowledge. Often the lessons gleaned in these kinds of journeys, especially in NDEs and shared death experiences and other spiritual epiphanies of spiritually transformative experiences are very revelatory-- they take us to whole new levels of understanding. So to pretend that they're just some little chaotic mechanistic trick of the dying brain, and nothing more, is a very misleading kind of mode of thought and interpretation.

**Mishlove:** Well, in your experience, in your near-death experience, it was a very real place.

**Alexander:** Yes, it was much more real than anything else, this (our physical reality) is more dreamlike. That's the part that's kind of hard for people to understand. They think, well, you know, an NDE, your dying, so it must be very murky. Well, initially it was murky but I went beyond and like so many millions of NDE Experiences have done over millennia... yes, beyond the gateway, the core realm, every bit of that was just rich with Ultra reality with meaning. As I said earlier, those memories do not fade. You compare them with real-life memories in scientific studies or even things like car wrecks, and life-threatening material events, and NDEs stand out as even more remarkable, as being more real, more connecting more meaningful. And then the memories are resilient over time.

**Mishlove:** Well, there are some physicalists, who would say, and it's a compelling argument, that, yes, what you experienced was very, very real but physical science will eventually explain it in terms of hyperspace, higher dimensions of space that we can now map out mathematically with great precision.

**Alexander:** We might but at the same time, I think we will easily discover that consciousness is far more than anything that could be derivative from the workings of the physical brain. At this stage in the game, it's very largely a kind of a matter of semantics and definitions. When you're talking about God, and you're talking about consciousness in mind. But then as you point out, we also have subconscious and unconscious, and then there's even a superconscious where all of this comes together. I would say that in many ways, those are kind of semantic issues. But consciousness remains, that of which an individual sentient being can become aware. In that setting, especially, for example, with the experiments of Daryl Bem, in his studies on precognition, there are some stunning examples in this work. They go far beyond statistical, any question of the probability of their truthfulness ... that we can know the future. We can even know before what the random number generator has even determined what future to present to us on the computer screen.

**Mishlove:** Well, it presents a paradox at that point, because if the future is knowable, it calls into question our free will.

**Alexander:** Well, that is where I think it gets especially exciting. And in many ways, I would say that this discussion is all about free will whether we have it or not, and what is its true nature. And that has many kinds of different levels. I can tell you from my psychic journey of my NDE, from the 10 years since then, from all my meditative experiences, more and more, I am committed to an understanding that free will is alive and well, and that our existence as sentient beings, in many ways, is this beautiful tango.

It's a dance between the kind of the mission that our soul group, and our higher souls, determined before we came into this lifetime, of what would be the stepping stones, what would be the hardships we wanted to face, to try and bring all of our prior lifetimes into focus to grow. Because it's when I talk about reincarnation in that setting, it's not some blind mechanistic wheel of suffering where the only goal is to get off.

It's a mission of growth, and you realize that your journey as a soul cannot happen in one lifetime. So it demands multiple lifetimes for that growth to occur. But with this strange kind of paradox, that we also come in, and have that program forgetting, that comes into play... as an infant, as a toddler and a child... and we're going through all this learning, we have those memories of all that past stuff. And we kind of integrate that as we're shaping it, and we know where things are headed. But then we start to forget it all. And that gives us skin in the game. So that by age six or seven, we pretty much have forgotten most of that. And that way we buy into this existence and jump in full force. And then when we hit those hardships, that I believe we put into play before we were born, it's how we deal with them. So we then have the free will, in the setting of program forgetting, to make choices. And then we have to deal with certain lessons that are residual that have been allowed in.

I think all of it is this beautiful dance between that free will and how we respond to those hardships and difficulties, illness, injury, suicide, loss of a child, loss of a loved one, one terminal diagnosis, I'm talking about the tough stuff. How do we, in a sense, recover our sense of self, of divinity, of trust in the universe, in a loving, powerful force at the core of it all? How do we kind of adapt in our lives, and grow in our knowledge of that relationship, and that, I believe is the purpose of life.

You know, the entrance to the temple at the Oracle of Delphi are the words “Know thyself”. I believe that ultimately, that's what we're all here to do. But realizing also that thyself, when you realize that you're that very spark of conscious awareness, is one with that God force, the creative, loving force at the core of the universe, we realize thyself is something really big. When I've come to realize that, in one sense, the best way to look at it is that each one of us has a one-to-one connection with the wisdom, love, and creative power of the entire universe. We are here to manifest that to our best abilities. In that sense, I would say free will is alive and well, because that kind of free will, of the higher soul, in steering this world, and realizing that every one of us plays a tremendous role in this evolution of consciousness itself. As Teilhard de Chardin, in his book “The Phenomenon of Man”, in the mid-20th century, where all evolution is seen as kind of an evolution of consciousness towards what he called an Omega Point, a kind of the Christ energy, but not in kind of a traditional Christian sense of Christ, but more as kind of a God force of the pure loving origin of the universe, also being kind of that distant horizon point to which all of consciousness evolves. I would say, just like that old, saying, “all politics is local”, in a similar way, all of the evolution of consciousness in the grand scale of the universe, is nothing more than the individual sentient being, trying to answer these deep questions in knowing thyself, knowing that connection with the universe and the great depths of consciousness and of the possibilities for the expression of that free will.

**Mishlove:** Well, we started this conversation talking about the primacy of consciousness, but as I listened to you, what I think I'm hearing is something a little different. I would call it the primacy of love.

**Alexander:** Yes, very much the case. As I stated in my book, *Proof of Heaven*”, the deepest scientific truth of my journey, was coming to know that fundamental function of love. It’s when near-death experiencers by the millions come back to this world. That’s the part that allows them to have no fear of death. It is having touched that indescribable, absolutely ineffable, the oneness of love and comfort of being home. That is our truest home. And that's what NDEers, by the millions, tell you when they come back to this world. Of course, there are those out there who haven't read the full memo yet and say, wait a minute, if I want to buy into my Christian orthodoxy of one incarnation, that eternal heaven or hell, if all that realm is so beautiful, why don't I just go there now? Again, I have to emphasize suicide is not the answer, because people who hear that part of the story are tempted, especially if they're not willing to go through the toughness and hardship that they dealt with for themselves to serve as stepping stones to learn the deep lessons and to grow the most in this incarnation... If they short circuit and tempt themselves into suicide, all they're doing is postponing dealing with those very same issues. So don't go that shortcut, we have to deal with it.

But I came back realizing from my journey, when I was sitting on that ICU bed, saying all is well don't worry all is well, is realizing now in my meditation, I simply need to gain the perspective, where I realized no matter how big the challenge or interrelationship problem that I might be facing, in an issue today... in deep meditation, higher soul to higher soul, I can always gain the perspective that allows me to see that higher soul freewill. The win-win situation for all involved, way above the petty little view of my ego, the petty little view of the human in the sense of self. That's why I think meditation is so crucial because all of us can develop that profound sense of oneness with our higher soul interconnected with the one mind and the higher souls of all sentient beings throughout the cosmos, in trying to identify our free will pathway and the choices that we should make in any of the interactions or kind of life events that we're trying to deal with day to day here. And that's where I believe that a rethinking and reworking, maybe the semantics of how we frame the higher soul and free will, and of even God, and that oneness with God, can have tremendous power, but so much of it goes beyond the words we speak.

I know often when I'm speaking with audiences, especially filled with NDEers, and other spiritually transformed higher sentient beings, that the words are just, they're like the ice floating at the very top of them, the Arctic Ocean, but they don't cover the depths of so much more, of what it's a heart and love bound, conscious kind of communication that I see going on beneath the surface. And that's where I think the real power is, and the true manifestation of our higher will is dependent on the acknowledgment of that force of love. As I often say, the golden rule in so many ways is written into the very fabric of the universe. It's not simply the most prominent message that comes out of the deep mystical traditions of all the great faiths, to treat others as you would like to be treated. All they're trying to say is, we're sharing the one mind... to hurt another is to hurt myself. We see that purely in a life review. It's a perfect example of that. But I would say, especially when you start realizing the scientific basis behind, for example, reincarnation, for example, the cataclysmic change in the climate, then our ongoing decisions in the now to burn fossil fuels, as if we don't recognize that our mouth is on the tailpipe. CO2 is not going somewhere else, it's going into the air we breathe, and our buffering systems have been rapidly overwhelmed. Even if we start stop burning fossil fuels today, global warming and the buildup of CO2 will continue for a century.

**Mishlove:** So it is pretty clear the planet is entering into a crisis.

**Alexander:** And we will be the ones reincarnated to experience that-- We are the cause of it and we need to treat others as we would like to be treated because that's exactly the deal we've entered in.

**Mishlove:** But it raises a big question for me, which is why what's the purpose of this?

**Alexander:** Well, what I would say, from my journey, it was quite clear what our purpose was. The reason I did I didn't stress this, even though I mentioned it in Proof of Heaven is, of course, it's a bit more controversial. I knew that book had to be an attractor, it had to be a bridge, I had to meet people where they were. So I couldn't go so far with it. But it was very clear to me on my journey, that this is the evolution of at least 5000 years of human thought about the brain, mind, consciousness, and the nature of reality.

In many ways, it's because we are, we are potentially members of a much bigger club. And you could say that kind of in broad strokes and simple language. It's the community of conscious sentient beings throughout the cosmos, many of whom are far beyond our concepts of space and time, but certainly, they are well versed in knowing the loving nature of the core of the creative source of the universe. So in other words, my view of joining these civilizations, the cosmic civilization around us, which I think has been part of the interaction for thousands of years. But at this stage in the game, we remain a very course, primitive, barbaric, a very embarrassingly primitive society... I mean, look at warfare, it's just astonishing to me to look at humanity. We are still running around killing each other. In the last century, 100 million humans have been murdered. To think of how could this possibly be. You'd like to think that with the great advances in humanity, what we should have seen in the 20th century, of growth in the human spirit... our kind of notion of togetherness and of oneness, should have paralleled our ability to... in the First World War, the chemists-built machine guns with high explosives and chemical weapons. In the Second World War, the physicists committed their sins.

Once again, science, divorced from human spirit, gave us nuclear weapons. If we're ever stupid enough to have a World War three, World War four will be fought with sticks and stones. To me, there's this gigantic mismatch. And part of it has to do with a smoke and mirrors trick of people thinking that that same science that has given them all those weapons in the mid-20th century, was hot on the trail of discovering the means and mode of consciousness through studying the material realm. Whereas in fact, quantum physics has spent 80 years trying to steer us in the right direction. That's what's happening now! That is the awakening that is coming to this world! We were dead wrong. In fact, in all that discussion of "The Ghost in the Machine", many scientists in the late 20th century started laughing at the fact that we were ever fooled into thinking that there was a ghost in the machine. They were wrong because there was no machine, only the ghost, that consciousness is what exists. I think what we're seeing now is re-blending, a synthesis, where the human spirit, and this awakening of our understanding of consciousness, of its primary role in the evolution of the universe, and in every one of our lives... but also for society at large, it's unfolding. In essence, the reason we are now faced with this awakening is because we face a choice... are we able, and capable, of surviving?... joining this greater community of sentient awareness that is so far more advanced than we are... we need to, once and for all, need to forgo, the incredibly inane, materialistic separatist stupidity, of killing each other off, as if we're separate from each other, which I would say is fundamentally an errand thinking introduced by materialist science.

**Mishlove:** Earlier you talked about looking at the natural world. From the perspective of the natural world, I guess it's fair to say we are primates and other primates are known to murder each other. We are not the only primate species that does it. We've probably perfected it.

**Alexander:** We have certainly made it a lot easier. I would say, that in those occasional episodes where you could see primates murdering each other over territory and things like that, over sexual favors, you could almost claim that they had some justification. Unfortunately, so much of what I have seen, and from what humans have done, to mistreat, torture and kill others, it's not that you could look at it as any kind of rational justification. It certainly is absolute madness, what we have allowed. The very fact that, in the United States, we spend somewhere around 1.6 billion dollars every day, seven days a week on our military, which is more than the six next countries combined, I think is a big indicator of something inherently very, very wrong with our kind of our modern civilization and where it's headed and what it's doing

**Mishlove:** You started by saying that we're the product of a loving creator that you know that love is primary. How is it that we evolved to this point?

**Alexander:** Well, I would say in many ways it parallels what in the addiction or alcoholism world is known as a gift of desperation. Now in that world of addiction and alcoholism, it's well recognized that if we try and satisfy all the wants of the ego, it often leads to our demise. We die, we hit a bottom that is too low. It does not allow us to live. That is why, for example, in the year 2017, we had 72,000 people die of opioid overdoses. The world of addiction and alcoholism is a painful reminder of the kind of sickness of our modern society. But the way I like to look at it, I'm very optimistic about where this world is headed. So when I see these kinds of... the rise of the fundamentalism, and that includes religious fundamentalists like jihadists, and, some Christian fundamentalists, who insist on, on open carry on the Christian campuses, and things like that, so everybody's got their weapon on board.



I see that this kind of madness, about kind of killing each other, and our focus on weaponry and on that side of technology, and science, is part of that gift of desperation. It's to show us that that is a kind of madness, akin to the ego, demanding all the crazy things the ego will demand. And that's one of the most important steps will you take as an individual in meditation is recognizing the ego is not who we are, the voice in the head, those little thoughts running through our mind is not who we are. I referred to it as the linguistic brain, that's the linguistic brain, which is also heavily the voice of the ego. But one thing we can develop very readily in meditation is kind of growing that relationship with our higher soul with that, the same kind of awareness perspective that I can take to such an altitude that I can see the win-win situation for all involved, and see that binding power of love that connects us all, and still allows for every one of us to move forward in our agenda as souls, embracing that loving oneness, that is all something we can come to do in meditation and developing that is a very rich pathway, out of the myth of kind of the ego is who we are and trying to satisfy those demands. And likewise, I would say that so much of the travesty of our modern civilization, and that divorce of the human spirit, and of that notion of love and oneness from that same science and technology that's given us all those weapons to make killing and murder so easy. That's part of that gift of desperation. And so it's now time for us to collectively kind of reconnect with our higher soul and start to manifest that kind of notion of oneness and the inner observer and the higher free will that can take us to that higher pathway where we don't continue in this death spiral of what materialist science and its false sense of separation has given us so far.

**Mishlove:** Some would argue that it's because of war and conflict, that we've had progress in society that if it wasn't for all this conflict, we'd be living like the ancients did we would never develop science or technology.

**Alexander:** Well, I would rather replace that kind of race with something like the space race. You know, many people would point out that a tremendous amount of that quantum revolution in terms of technology, not only came from trying to build better weapons, but it came from trying to get to the moon and then from trying to send robotic vehicles out to the planets and now entertaining the notion of sending humans to other planets and that kind of thing. I would argue that you can have other kinds of motivators for growth. There's no question that war has been sold, as a tremendous boost to a consumer economy. Yes, it is. But there is a dirty, horrible underbelly. To that warfare in the form of human misery on vast scales. That I think is inexcusable, no sentient sane human being fully knowledgeable of the mayhem and, and horrors that we bring on our fellow human beings and animals living in war zones should ever be allowed. It's one of the benefits of the internet and our modern media, although the problem is the modern media... It's always a two-edged sword and the internet, even though it's brought, you know, the power of the individual through their cell phone video, to the world at large. It also has allowed for a lot of kind of nonsensical thinking, and polarizing thinking.

I mean, so much of this false notion of separation that comes from the material a scientific approach, also filters into social media. And the notion, especially likes in Facebook to kind of use smart advertising smart marketing, so they want you to click clicking can lead to bias and commerce, but clicking can also lead when it leads you along a pathway of your and strengthens your beliefs, as they get more and more polarized into something that's Complete nonsense that system support it. So I mean, so many of the answers can come to us when we realize that of course, you're not going to find all the answers in red or blue, black, white, male, female, what have you, but moving toward a middle ground. That's where the oneness is. That's where duality kind of comes into the oneness of consciousness. So it's always seeing all sides of it and realizing that you're never going to find the big answer at the polls. And yet our modern internet, social media, a lot of that stuff tends to steer us in that direction. But again, to support that kind of clickbait consumerism, we need to move beyond that

**Mishlove:** Earlier we were talking about the great neuroscientists Wilder Penfield and Sir John Eccles, both of whom became dualists, they realized that consciousness operated independently of the brain, but I don't think they went so far as to say that consciousness is primary, dualism is I mean, you were referring to dualism a little earlier in terms of black and white, right and wrong, right. And dualism is in some ways, I should think, from the perspective of one mind dualism is an illusion.

**Alexander:** That's a point that we make in *Living in a Mindful Universe*. I think all the dualisms are convenient stepping stones. Because all of that discussion is looking at the brain-mind connection. So at one end of the linear spectrum, you can have the brain creates consciousness, a physicalist argument, the kind of conventional neuroscientific view that I grew up with, before my coma. And then you've got all of the dualisms, where you recognize that you cannot reduce mind to brain. It's impossible. I would say that most scientists who study consciousness have gotten to some form of dualism. Cristof Koch, for example, admits in his book, titled “*Consciousness: Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist*”, makes it clear that he realized that you cannot just default completely to materialism, it doesn't work. Wilder Penfield was definitely on that page. Many others realize that mind has to have some kind of existence. But the problem is in trying to wed Mind and Brain together. You run into all kinds of arguments where you have trouble connecting those two dualistic positions.

I firmly believe that all of the dualistic positions are simply stepping stones in our thinking, but none of them are ultimately the answer. We describe the various reasons in *Living in a Mindful Universe*. We had to go all the way to the opposite pole-- that is the pole of pure metaphysical idealism, or ontological idealism, the notion that the entire universe is mental. That mental universe projects a physical universe as a stage setting. Now, believe it or not, that kind of thinking is of comfort to quantum physicists. For example, I'll Richard Kahn Henry, wrote a beautiful essay, a one-page essay in *Nature*, in 2005, called "The Mental Universe". Dr. Kahn Henry is a head of the department of Astrophysics at Johns Hopkins-- no slouch in the world of physics and astronomy. In this article, he states that it's obvious that the next step forward in our understanding of quantum physics is acknowledging that fundamentally, the universe is based on a causal structure of information that is mental and that the physical universe only emerges as a stage setting on which that can unfold. I would say that all of the development of modern neuroscience of consciousness, philosophy of mind, refinement of our understanding of the measurement, paradox, and quantum physics, every bit of it, lines up to support this awakening of the fundamental nature of consciousness, which is good news for human beings.

What it means is all of your choices do matter. You will reap what you sow. Thus, it's of great value to learn. It's of great value to contribute to love, compassion, kindness, mercy, acceptance, and forgiveness. That is such a fundamental lesson from near-death experiences and other primary empirical data that support the reality of the mental universe. Once this revolution goes through, you won't have

humans murdering humans, you won't have warfare, and you won't have consumerism based on destruction, violence, and hurting others. Why? Because people realize it always comes back to bite them. Of course, this has been a fundamental lesson of religions for a very long time. One can go no further than the headlines and see Islamic fundamentalist bombing and killing innocents or seeing, this litany of decades of abuse by the Catholic Church in Pennsylvania, all covered by the institution, to see that religions in many ways have dramatically failed us in any kind of mission and conveying a message from the prophets of the oneness of love, mercy, and compassion. And yet modern science is taking us absolutely in that direction. That's why I think it's such a crucial revolution for all of humanity to get. And I believe that if we look at the empirical data if we go within as individuals to tap into that oneness, and that sense of love, and power of our higher freewill, we can manifest that in our relationships with others. And from my point of view, there's nothing we need more in this world than simple acts of kindness and compassion between individual human beings to completely shift the tide of this madness that we find ourselves in.

**Mishlove:** Well, that is a very hopeful message and I have to say, listening to you, Eben, I have been on the fence about this issue. I've thought to myself, it's metaphysics, we can never really, ultimately resolve this question, materialism, idealism, and at the end of the day, who cares? But I think you've convinced me.

**Alexander:** Well, I'm glad to hear that. And I must say, I get to speak to a lot of people about this, many of whom have never given any of this a thought. And that's very helpful, to get that kind of tabula rasa view, that empty slate view, and feedback, it helps me to kind of refine and understand the message. I do a lot of meditation and that helps me to see this very clearly. I have a hopeful view for the future of humanity. It involves a complete reversal from a lot of what I define as a kind of madness in our modern society. And yet, I think all of it is very defensible on empirical principles on the leading edges of our modern science, and understanding of brain, mind, and consciousness. All the scientists that I know in this world are already a certain distance along this pathway, we're describing some more than others. But the reality is, that materialism is not on any of their windshields. Materialism is always in the rearview mirror.

I would say, and I often do in my talks, that the truly open-minded skeptic, if you're truly open-minded about this, and if you know enough about mind, body, and the dualities, idealism, and materialism, the one position you reject that is ridiculous, and that is materialism. How could anybody possibly conjure up the contents of conscious awareness and especially of non-local consciousness, just through three and a half pounds of gelatinous material, with 100 billion neurons floating in a warm, dark bath? How does it happen, that's where it's all happening. But the important message from modern science is that it is not being created in that environment alone. In other words, consciousness is much bigger than that. The brain is simply a filter that allows conscious experience and even allows memory in.

Now, if you interfere with the filter, you will interfere with the consciousness and with the memories. That's why disease can have such a stunning effect on the workings of the brain. But again, what I often have to point out to people in my talks, is that the evidence that consciousness is not created by the brain is all around us in the neuroscientific world. For example, terminal lucidity, where elderly demented patients who might not have said a meaningful phrase for weeks or months, come back to life, often in the last week of their life on Earth with great reflection memory, interaction, communication with loved ones at the bedside, often at a time when they're seeing the souls of departed loved ones coming to escort them over. Terminal lucidity is commonly observed, probably 5 to 10% of Alzheimer's cases, demonstrate some profound return of conscious awareness. Then there's that whole category of what are called acquired savant syndromes, where some form of brain damage, whether it's a head injury, stroke, autism, what have you. can unmask a superhuman mental capacity that far exceeds what a normal human being with a normal human brain can do. These are examples of how consciousness and mental experience are not created within the brain but are filtered into existence from primordial consciousness that has tremendously more power.

**Mishlove:** What an inspirational message and well documented. Thank you so much, Evan. It's been a great pleasure.

**Alexander:** Well, thanks for having me, Jeff. It's great to see you again and always love talking with you.

**Mishlove:** And thank you for being with us.

## ENDNOTES

1. This was an interview of Dr. Eben Alexander by Dr. Jeffrey Mishlove on Dr. Mishlove's YouTube channel titled "New Thinking Allowed".

This interview was transcribed and edited and is published via the express written authorization of both Dr. Alexander and Dr. Mishlove. The following is the link to the interview on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJ5I8sFOJEw&t=1483s>

2. The following are Dr. Alexander's books:

Alexander, E. (2012). Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife. Simon & Schuster.

Alexander, E. (2014). The Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion, and Ordinary People Are Proving the Afterlife. Simon & Schuster

Alexander, E. and K. Newell. (2017). Living in a Mindful Universe: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Heart of Consciousness. Rodale Books.

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**Bio:** Dr. Eben Alexander graduated from the Duke University School of Medicine and spent over 25 years as an academic neurosurgeon, including 15 years at the Brigham & Women's Hospital, the Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston. Over those years he personally dealt with hundreds of patients suffering from severe alterations in their level of consciousness. In November of 2008, he had a profound Near-Death Experience and lived to tell of his experience. His first book, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (2012) debuted at #1 on the New York Times Bestseller list and remained in the top ten for over a year. His second book, *the Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion and Ordinary People are Proving the Afterlife* (2014), explores humankind's spiritual history and the progression of modern science from its birth in the seventeenth century, showing how we forgot, and are now at last remembering, who we really are and what our destiny truly is. His latest book on the subject of consciousness and reality, *Living in a Mindful Universe: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Heart of Consciousness*, co-authored with Karen Newell and released in 2017, is one of the most important books on human Consciousness.