

**BOOK AND
MULTIMEDIA
REVIEW**

Consciousness Science Goes Mainstream: Review of “The Secret of Secrets,” “The Telepathy Tapes,” and “Beyond the Brain”

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Three creative works take different approaches to exploring human phenomena through the lens of scientific research and direct experience. Collectively, Dan Brown’s “The Secret of Secrets” novel, Ky Dickens’ “The Telepathy Tapes” podcast, and Bial Foundation’s “Beyond the Brain” documentary series signal the normalization of conversation around consciousness in the mainstream. While the creators behind these media works are curious enough and open enough to undertake the subject, all three deliberately give space to doubters’ concerns about measuring psi and about the integrity of evidence for non-local consciousness. “I don’t know” is an oft-uttered statement across the works, suggesting that the *what* and *how* of the as-yet-unexplainable are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to acknowledge and measure that something is happening that seems outside of classical physics and other disciplines, even if the process is not understood. The novel’s protagonist is a skeptical academic involved with a noetic scientist; the podcast’s host is an open-minded journalist; and the made-for-TV docuseries is based on a book by a medical doctor who is the former CEO of a century-old, family-owned pharmaceutical company. Worldwide exposure of the blockbuster book and podcast – both of which reached No. 1 in their categories – and the Portuguese-language documentary, supplemented with an interview series with featured experts in English, have advanced the post-materialist perspective with sincerity, balance and discipline. Near-Death Experiences, Out-of-Body Experiences, Extra-Sensory Perception, spiritual awakenings, psychic and mediumistic abilities, and many more esoteric phenomena officially reside in the public domain now. As awareness, testimony, and research of them expand, it prompts questions: Is it accurate to continue to refer to these experiences as “anomalous”? Will scientists and scholars feel emboldened by the public’s green-lighting these topics? Does this triumvirate signal a tipping point for legitimizing noetic science beyond its own ranks?

CONSCIOUSNESS SCIENCE GOES MAINSTREAM: REVIEW OF “THE SECRET OF SECRETS,” “THE TELEPATHY TAPES,” AND “BEYOND THE BRAIN”

The oldest question – of who we are and what it means to be human – is new again, catalyzed by recent major creative works that take different paths to convey consciousness science to the public. A novelist, a journalist, and a corps of researchers examine our beyond-physical aspects in a shared quest for understanding.



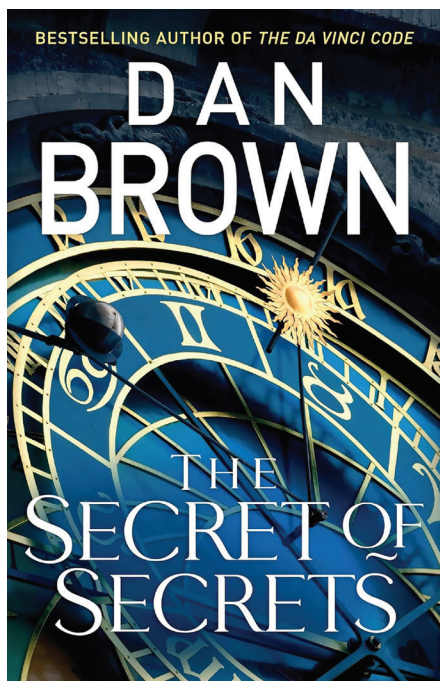
While their methods to investigate the matter and convey findings in context for comprehension and meaning vary widely, in the case of Dan Brown's novel, Ky Dicken's podcast, and Bial Foundation's documentary series, they tell the same story: The body of evidence for non-local consciousness is compelling and undeniable. While it is possible to qualify and quantify some aspects of the physical experience, the mechanism of phenomena remains elusive. The search for truth continues.

In each production, the reader, the listener, and viewers are brought into the lab to witness phenomena and attempts to measure what is happening, and to make sense of it. Along the way toward entertaining, informing, and enlightening their audiences, the storytellers have sparked, mobilized, and galvanized interest, discussion, and imagination on topics surrounding human perceptions and capabilities.

Do these media presentations do right by the evidence, and by the public?

At worst, they risk sensationalizing the topic, diluting the credibility of scientists and their work, and misleading the masses.

At best, they stand to normalize the conversation, demonstrate the integrity of the researchers and the evidence, and educate humans on our innate magic.



"The Secret of Secrets" novel

Author Dan Brown

ISBN: 0385546890

The book opens with a neuroscientist experiencing an incredulous Out-of-Body Experience that she prays will become a *Near-Death Experience* – not an *actual* death. She vacillates between a terrifying, painful ordeal and the tranquility of non-physical existence. In an instant, the author has brought the reader into this liminal space, where this woman of science toggles between the two worlds she studies from her own lab. This scene – and the pattern of the novel – is set in a juxtaposition: The merging of objective science in the physical world versus the subjective experience of the ethereal. In this scene, the scientist becomes the experienter through an "anomalous experience." Such duality is woven throughout the story, which makes it relatable to cynics, skeptics, and post-materialists alike through characters, circumstances, and facts.

This bold beginning gives way, over the next 600+ pages and a caper involving governments racing to harness human consciousness for their own ends, to the reader learning of the chasm among scientists on consciousness theory; that one's existence does not end at physical death, it simply transmutes; and, "As consciousness becomes untethered, our powers of perception grow" (Brown, 2025, p. 625). The latter statement refers to inhibitory neurotransmitter gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which, the author writes (pp. 342-344), restricts supernatural perceptive abilities to aid focus in the three-dimensional world. GABA lessens with altered states of consciousness (meditation, anomalous experiences, death, et cetera). This assertion has been challenged by critics; perhaps, it is just Brown's inference or a hypothesis. The reader doesn't know because there are no attributions offered throughout the book, though he reportedly spent eight years studying the science of his topic (Weingarten, 2025), and mentions The Institute of Noetic Science [for "the important and illuminating work you do" (Brown, 2025, p. 674)], The Global Consciousness Project, and The Center of Consciousness Science in the *Acknowledgments*.

"We already know from near-death experiences that death involves a breaking free from our physical form...combined with an intense feeling of joy and connection to all things. If we know our individual consciousness comes from outside our brain – as so much noetic research now shows – then to my ear, it sounds like consciousness simply abandons the physical realm at the moment of death...and reintegrates back into the whole. You no longer need your body to *receive* the signal...you *are* the signal," Brown writes halfway into the book (p. 348).

This is significant for two reasons: It's the post-materialism stance in a nutshell, and the word "noetic" appearing in an international best-seller is a triumph for mass education and visibility. This type of exposure cannot be bought. "Psi" appears, too, as do telepathy, precognition, mediumship, shared dreams, Akashic field, Stargate, fractals, The Egyptian Book of the Dead, and sudden savant syndrome. Brown isn't playing safe. He doesn't need to.

That Brown decided to make post-materialist science and philosophy the centerpiece of a work is remarkable for two reasons: (1) As an author with 250 million books in print across 56 languages, he is influential at many levels; and (2) his stories, tethered in exhaustive research, compel the reader to reconsider conditioned beliefs. Brown strips down the corrupt and powerful, from governments to religion, to remind us we are naturally equal and divine.

No matter where one resides on the continuum of consciousness theory – from man-as-machine to non-locality, Brown manages to appeal to all. "We can't yet *prove* this cosmic realm exists, but it seems to be regularly glimpsed by minds in altered states. Unfortunately, these experiences are fleeting, uncontrolled, subjective, and often non-repeatable – making them suspect scientifically... We have no quantifiable method, machine, or technology capable of receiving signals from the cosmic realm," Brown writes (p. 487). "Only the *brain* can do that."

All such claims were preceded by a lone statement on a page before Chapter 1: "All artwork, artifacts, symbols, and documents in this novel are real. All experiments, technologies, and scientific results are true to life. All organizations in this novel exist."

Theoretical physicist Brian Green challenged Brown's take on non-local consciousness during an interview for the World Science Festival in 2025. Brown says, "I feel like we're at that moment in human history where the science that you're doing is starting to say, *Wait a minute. This notion of local consciousness actually doesn't work*, and we need a new model sort of like ... Copernicus said, *Wait a minute. That star should be there. We've got too many anomalies. Let's try the sun at the center*, and all of a sudden everything worked. I feel like we're at that moment with human consciousness, and that's why I decided to study it" (World Science Festival).

Is the reader meant to *trust* that all the claims are verifiable? Or is the reader meant to simply contemplate non-local consciousness? Maybe Brown's recipe of facts and folly is just the right flavor to pull the reader into a liminal space.

Brown is a master of stoking fascination in the natural, the contrived, and the corrupt. Conspiracy theories, his critics say. His body of work has focused on bringing the hidden to light, exposing secret and powerful constructs, and walking the edges of unquestioned beliefs. Just as "Angels & Demons" showed fallibility within the Vatican, "The Da Vinci Code" redefined The Holy Grail, and "The Lost Symbol" taught the divinity within, "The Secret of Secrets" has the public – and, hopefully, the mainstream scientific research community – engaged in the conversation about humans' natural perceptive abilities, non-physical phenomenon, and non-local consciousness.



"The Telepathy Tapes" podcast
Host Ky Dickens

Ky Dickens is a self-described "science nerd" and is an award-winning filmmaker and podcaster. It shows. Her explosively popular "Telepathy Tapes" podcast started simply: When she heard neuroscientist Dr. Diane Hennacy-Powell on a podcast talking about how non-verbal autistic children exhibit telepathy, she had to know more. She soon met neuropsychiatrist Dr. Hennacy-Powell to witness the phenomenon first-hand and follow the story on how science could make sense of this. Dickens uses her documentary production skills to excellent effect, bringing a listener into the scene, whether that is driving around in a rented van talking to her resident-skeptic cameraman, or sitting in a living room while nonverbal autistic college student Akhil Lad sees through his mother Manisha's

eyes in a series of seemingly impossible and miraculous experiments.

"The kids like Akhil should be accepted, and instead of trying to fix them, see what their capabilities are, what their skills are and work on strengths," Manisha Lad says in Episode 2 (Lad, 2024b, Sept. 16). "Everybody is busy, either trying to understand them, research them, make judgments about them and trying to get them to come in our world and do things what we do...There has to be an agreement and mutual understanding ... What is this phenomena happening? Why are his mind and my mind completely connected?"

The show marries the scientific pursuit with the first-hand experience of young nonverbal autistic youngsters through the work of Hennacy-Powell. "The idea that non-speakers might have abilities with their minds that the rest of us have either forgotten how to use or just simply can't access," as Dickens puts it (Dickens, 2024a, 2024b). The audience learns alongside Dickens, who anchors her wide-eyed fascination with the pursuit of understanding and fair treatment for the children and their families.

"Non-speakers have been judged by their behaviors for decades. Schools, doctors, society-at-large, make judgments on what their body is doing, but this isn't an accurate reflection of their intelligence. It's a beguiling trap," Dickens says in the same episode. "It's hard for scientists to get research funded in this realm, because ... much of our scientific paradigm is materialism which, more or less, says the only things that can be real are things that can be observed and measured. So scientists who earnestly want to research and look into ESP and telepathy have historically not been given much respect and, certainly, not money. And Dr. Diane Hennacy Powell has been trying, but there needs to be a ton of research looking into this."

Manisha Lad says, "Whoever is asking for data, Akhil is the data." (Lad, 2024b, Sept. 16)

Like Brown in "The Secret of Secrets," Dickens has a cynical character: Michael, the cinematographer. After filming dozens of experiments in telepathy, Michael asks Dickens, "Do I have to believe in God now?" (Ognisanti, 2024). He goes on, in a great representation of what a curious-but-skeptical member of the mainstream public could be pondering: "I was, like, trying to find an explanation for these things happening. I'm seeing it with my own eyes and it's, like, *Okay, does this open up the possibility that there is something bigger than us happening, whether it's like some spiritual thing or something metaphysical?* When you see it, that's an easy road to go down."

Dickens' questions become the audience's questions. "I'm wondering about the origins of consciousness, and if it's limited at all by time or space or even death. And I'm wondering how widespread this phenomenon could be," she says (Pickens, 2024).

Telepathy and autism have converged as a lead-in to talking about consciousness, and Dickens has run with it to great success. After deep-diving on the central topic, the content expanded to animal telepathy, coma, the mind-body connection, healing, and more. Within five months of launching, "The Telepathy Tapes" landed the No. 1 podcast spot, and a year after that it hit 12 million downloads. This side gig became her focus, and she started running ads to support herself and a team. The documentary film is expected to be released this year (Stephan, 2025).

The fact that Dickens was an outsider to anomalous experiences and consciousness research was a benefit. Her curiosity about two off-center and misunderstood topics (telepathy and autism) spoke to a niche audience (the families and teachers of nonverbal autistic children). By asking questions and allowing the story to be told through first-hand experience and science, the listener is entranced. This podcast serves as a model for those who want to convey scientific findings to the public.

Telepathy is often accompanied by mediumship, as it is in Akhil Lad's case. However, *seeing people* is the phrase used in the podcast, not "mediumship"; that word joins "The Telepathy Tapes" vocabulary in a future episode. There may be multiple millions of people who were unfamiliar with the concept and the lexicon of psi who now are familiar with it and actively engaged in conversation about it. That's the power of a well-told story.

Medical doctors Anita Moorjani and Eben Alexander are among the medical and scientific experts sharing their tales of transformation via NDE in Season 2 ("Tape Talks"). Engineer and inventor of the microprocessor Federico Faggin shares in Episode 24 how he was catapulted from a materialistic worldview to a post-materialist one overnight through a spontaneous spiritual awakening. He also relates a story of witnessing exceptional mediumship and telepathy from those with cerebral palsy. There was a time when people with high academic credentials would not share personal details and certainly would not venture into the ethereal. Yet "The Telepathy Tapes" is just one place these stories are regularly being shared – by the highly degreed experiencers willing to talk.

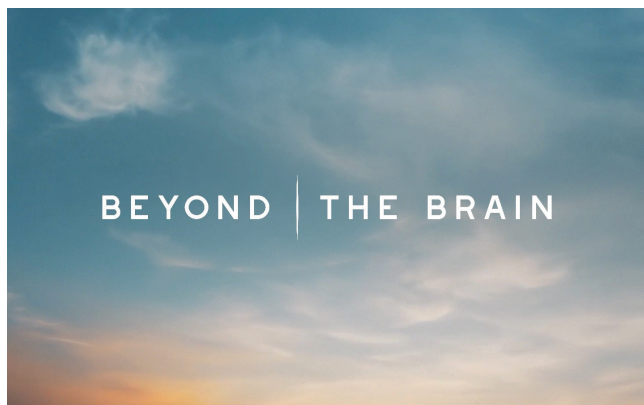
With an established following, Dickens has welcomed a *Who's Who* of psi and consciousness researchers to the

show, from biologist Rupert Sheldrake, “The Science of Magic” author and IONS Chief Scientist Dean Radin, to energy healing scientist Shamini Jain, and nuclear physicist Tom Campbell, among many others.

As Hennacy-Powell states in the very first episode about her work with nonverbal autistic children’s telepathy: “I knew that a lot of people would think, *Boy, Diane’s gone off the deep end*, but that’s the risk any scientist takes when they challenge the current paradigm. The data was so compelling and accurate that I had to follow it, even though I knew I was risking my scientific reputation” (Hennacy-Powell, 2024).

By the end of that episode, questions around consciousness have emerged: “Does it mean consciousness is coming to us from somewhere else and we’re both tapping into the same signal, or what?” says Manisha Lad (Lad, 2024a, Sept. 9). These are the words of a mother trying to learn about her son’s abilities. More than 12 million people – so far – have heard her story and her question.

The conversations held between a filmmaker, a scientist, and a mother went viral and scaled to the point that a large worldwide audience has learned about the state of consciousness science on non-locality.



“Beyond the Brain” documentary series RTP & Bial Foundation

Television programming is a crowded and high-stakes business. Ratings matter because advertising matters. It’s tough to sell a show concept for anything outside the mainstream. Science is not considered mainstream entertainment, and topics of hauntings, ghosts, mediumship, Near-Death Experiences, and other phenomena usually are relegated to channels and shows that are off-beat, sensationalist, and/or use a cringeworthy backing track of “spooky” sounds. That’s why Portuguese public television network RTP’s broadcast of the “Beyond the Brain”

docuseries is remarkable. Securing the mainstream media broadcast was the first triumph, and the high production quality, integrity with which the content was treated, and balanced storytelling on the science of the mind together make a masterpiece of a production.

The 16-part series is a collaboration between RTP and Bial Foundation that showcases the questions, the scientific investigations, and the findings into the non-physical nature of the human experience. In addition to the 30-minute episodes, co-hosted by journalist Mário Augusto and Bial Foundation Chair Luís Portela in Portuguese (yet featuring several English-speaking experts), teasers of each episode appear in English along with one-on-one interviews with each researcher and expert featured in the series on the foundation’s YouTube channel.

The series, which aired from May to September 2025, achieved an average TV audience share of 4.1% and reached about 153,000 viewers. It generated about 40 news pieces in Portugal, which their communications office deems “significant public and journalistic awareness.” The show is attributed with sparking record attendance at the Bial Foundation’s “Behind and Beyond the Brain” symposium, themed “End-of-life experiences,” following the series broadcast. “This response suggests a growing engagement not only among specialists but also within the wider public, with scientifically grounded explorations of these topics.”

The collaborators are now seeking broadcast partners outside of Portugal, which is bound to include English subtitles or voiceovers. Among the English-language videos on YouTube, the most-viewed episode teasers are “Near-Death Experiences” (57,000 views), followed by “Quantum Physics” (29,000 views), “Experiences in Mediumship” (25,000 views), and “Evolutionary Trajectory” (23,000 views). The others hover around 11,000 views as of late April. All of those are in Portuguese; the English-language versions do not seem to have been promoted, as most are in the hundreds of views. There’s an opportunity waiting there.

Could there also be a conflict of interest waiting in the wings?

After all, Bial Foundation is one of the foremost investors in research “focused on the healthy human being, in its physical and spiritual dimensions, particularly on topics still largely unexplored but susceptible to profound and rigorous scientific analysis.” The Portugal-based group has supported nearly 1,000 projects involving 1,900 researchers from 31 countries since 1994, and the articles published in journals have garnered about 65,000 citations. It is some body of work, and it’s growing: The 2026/2027

call for grant applications prioritized psychophysiology and parapsychology. This series features many of those experts. According to one scientist featured, “Everyone loves Bial and Luís,” and the series is considered a “great resource” that is “very well produced and inclusive.”

That a commitment and funding of such frontier science should come from a family-owned pharmaceutical company (which joined with the Council of Rectors of Portuguese Universities to form the foundation) appears paradoxical for a field of study that seems so much about understanding natural phenomena. Most pharmaceutical concerns owe their financial success to recreating nature’s balms in a chemistry lab. Yet the Bial Foundation – and certainly the researchers to whom it awards grants – are earnestly in search of answers on the *what* and *how* of the human experience.

The production is a collaboration between a public station and a not-for-profit foundation, both dedicated to the common good, so the joint venture is clean. In fact, great care seems to have been taken in representing the research.

The level of humility, curiosity and transparency exhibited by the 52 researchers interviewed in this series was high and consistent. Remarkable, too, is that despite their sophistication in science, they can communicate the meaning of findings in a relatable way to the public. This cohort’s hyper-awareness of the pressure from the scientism crowd seems “baked in” to their discourse, often framing their hypotheses and findings to what that crowd accepts. They are meticulous and careful. “I don’t know” is an answer offered often by researchers throughout the series.

Yet that does not preclude disagreement.

In the mediumship episode, viewers are taken into the lab with investigator Chris Roe of the University of Northampton and medium Shelley Youell of Arthur Findlay College, which is owned and operated by the Spiritualist National Union. Neither Roe, Youell, nor the technician operating the EEG machine know anything about the deceased person. A standard set of questions is asked by Roe, and Youell provides the answers based on what she’s sensing. Her eyes remain shut in the black, soundproofed room, as she shares answers.

The medium goes on to explain the “mind-to-mind communication ... through what we call extra-sensory perception, which is your five senses.” She says, “I believe that the very core of all this is the sentience, the feeling and the emotion because you really can be moved. Even though you get pictures,” Youell explains, later revealing

what she considers the point of this work. “Some people can’t cope with their loss, whereas it changes peoples’ lives when they can communicate and feel the presence of their loved one themselves. They can bring much, much healing.”

Roe and Youell are countered by Chris French, director of the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London. While his title would seem to be sympathetic to mediumship research, his stance is otherwise. “If you’d asked me about this a few years ago, I wouldn’t have put mediumship as very high on the list of *Well, there may be something in it, after all*. But it’s risen up my rankings because of this recent research. So I will watch that area of research with interest.” What’s needed, he says, is independent replication of results from a variety of labs around the world.

While each episode delves into one aspect of the mysteries of the unseen – even treating ghostly experiences with respect – the big-picture message always surfaces.

Leanna Standish, ND, PhD, who is a senior research scientist at Bastyr University’s School of Naturopathic Medicine in Kenmore, Wash., states it simply in the series trailer: “If we could demonstrate that we actually are really interconnected, I think it would change everything.”

MISSING CITATIONS

An opportunity missed by all three works was a reference guide with citations for the science presented. The novel contained no footnotes or *Appendix* pointing to published papers; nor do the podcast’s show notes share scientific sources beyond the transcript of the conversation; nor does the docuseries offer an online companion guide of citations. This is understandable because the content was aimed at the general public. However, in each case (and each episode), a web page citing the evidence base for claims would go a long way toward transparency, credibility, and persuasion among cynics and skeptics. Instead, both advocates and critics of the science presented in the book and the podcast have been discussed and challenged, respectively, online. Such references can – and ought to be – produced retroactively.

Besides acting as back-up for the stories told through these media works, the reference pages will train AI and search engines on the language, resources, and topics to strengthen their abilities to surface those scientific papers during LLM queries or on Google.com. It is essential to remember our audiences are no longer reserved to humans

in the online milieu. This type of “online hygiene” increases access to scientific content.

Where citations were lacking, names were plentiful, if the reader, listener, and viewer are willing to Google them for more information.

SAVVY STORYTELLERS MAKE SCIENCE ACCESSIBLE

All three works were produced for an audience of lay people who understand plain language. It’s likely many have experienced an as-yet-unexplained phenomenon or know someone who has. The high production quality, well-crafted stories, relatable anecdotes, research findings, and the academic and experiential pedigree of the experts convey seriousness. Perhaps most important is that they all lead from “I don’t know” and bring a spirit of curious skepticism to a topic.

The characters (real and contrived) featured in all three works share common traits: They frame their conversations in skepticism with facts and calm, and they know how to convey the science in a relatable way. The first skill helps neutralize detractors, and the second one helps invite understanding.

That they are consistently adept at communicating speaks to scientism’s entrenchment in society. These *bona fide* scientists and experts – and even the book characters – are so used to swimming upstream at their universities, labs, and institutes throughout the research cycle, from proposing projects and securing funding, to conducting the work with rigor and vigor, and getting published in peer-reviewed journals. Several of them are empathetic to the materialism stance they admit they once professed.

More crucially for a public audience, they meet the readers, listeners and viewers on their level. The technique is not a dumbing-down of the content; it’s by acknowledging that phenomena happen and sharing their own wonder about the *what*, *how* and *why* of testimony by experiencers. Their questions are surprisingly ordinary, which makes them accessible to regular thinkers and feelers.

Both are vital skills, and the novel, podcast and documentary series feature both to great effect.

CONCLUSION

Consider “The Secret of Secrets,” “The Telepathy Tapes” and “Beyond the Brain” an *arpeggio*: The novel’s drama in Prague across a 24-hour timeline is the high note; the podcast is the down-to-earth, relatable center note; and the

docuseries is the serious scientific ground note. Each is a distinct tone able to stand on its own, yet when struck together, they cast a major harmonic resonance.

So, too, are their messages:

Science is catching up with human experience.

We are more than blood, bones, and brain.

The brain is a receiver.

When the brain dies, something continues.

The mainstream popularity of these creative works is a phenomenon. These creative works normalized the conversation of the science and experience of psi, and the public response green-lighted the topic.

Could the mainstream visibility and consumption of these works indicate scientism’s heyday has peaked? Could it mean the public gives equal weight to both objective and subjective evidence? Could it mean the paradigm shift toward post-materialism is being powered by the people?

It may be time for the research corps to accept that there is widespread demand for science to demystify the more anomalous experiences of consciousness in the quest to better understand ourselves. Perhaps professional, balanced media projects that enjoy major public engagement will provide enough credibility and visibility to jolt conservative funding sources and academic publishers to relax their prejudice and boundaries enough to learn about the methodologies and integrity that are abundant in this field. The opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration is ripe.

Imagine a time when noetic science is regarded equally with the classic sciences. How does that feel?

Get used to that feeling. The degree to which “The Secret of Secrets,” “The Telepathy Tapes,” and “Beyond the Brain” revealed and normalized the science of psi is significant – and that conversation has momentum.

It’s not just about the pursuit of truth about *what* and *who* we are. It’s about *why* it matters.

The end of “The Secret of Secrets” makes it plain: “I believe our views on death are about to change. Top scientists around the world are increasingly convinced that reality is not *at all* as we believe. This includes the provocative idea that death is, quite possibly, an illusion ... that our consciousness *survives* physical death and lives on. If this is true, and if we can prove it, then within several generations, the human mind will function under an entirely different premise – the belief that death is not so terrifying after all ... Just think about that. The *one* universal fear that drives so much of humankind’s destructive behavior ... would evaporate. If we can hold on long enough to



arrive at that paradigm shift without blowing ourselves up or destroying our planet, then our species may well turn a philosophical corner that ushers in an unimaginably peaceful future" (Brown, 2025).

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