

Appendix (Huber, 2026)

We conducted 365 narrative interviews in a four-year research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).¹ These interviews began with a standardized narrative prompt, which was communicated to the participants in advance:

We are researching religious and spiritual turning points. We are particularly interested in how these turning points were connected to certain religious or spiritual attitudes, experiences and practices, what thoughts and considerations accompanied them, and how they affected your everyday life. The more detail you provide in your narrative, the better. Illustrative examples are particularly welcome. Please tell me about your religious or spiritual turning point. What was it like for you?

Of the 365 people interviewed, 95 belonged to a Reformed church in Switzerland in 2021 or earlier (i.e., they left before 2021). Only seven of them did not report any experiences of transcendence. Below, I document three examples of experiences of transcendence from this sample. The examples are designated by nouns («Beer«, »Basket«, »Customer«). These nouns were randomly assigned to the 365 interview transcripts. There is therefore no connection to the content of the interview. We decided on this procedure because nouns are easier to remember than three-digit numbers.

»Beer's« experiences of transcendence

The first example comes from an interview with a man who was between 60 and 70 years old at the time of the interview. In terms of the centrality of religiosity scale², he can be characterized as »non-religious« from a psychological perspective. »Beer« does not believe in God or anything divine, he does not practice prayer or meditation, nor does he attend church services. In terms of these dimensions, it can be said that religion does not feature in his life. However, he often thinks about religious questions. These reflections, however, are very critical of the church and religion and lead to a negative attitude towards them. Nevertheless, he recounts a »peak experience« that can be interpreted as an experience of transcendence.

Then, when I was about 40, I had an experience. And this is the important point for you. I probably dream just as much as everyone else, but I don't consciously remember these dreams. ... In the morning, I never really know what I dreamt about. And then it was like a dream. When I was about 40. ... I wasn't asleep, I was awake. I woke up. And then it came. But not in images, but in feelings. And I could describe these feelings as: love. Trust. Connection. And gratitude. I don't remember how long it lasted. In any case, it was extremely intense. I had never experienced such strong feelings before. It was so intense that I cried. And I didn't know what to do with it. The next day, I thought they might take me to a psychiatric clinic. I felt weird. ... A month or two later, I was out with a friend. We talked and asked each other lots of questions. She said I had great personal awareness. ... And that night, I had the

¹ See <https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/205047>

² See HUBER, STEFAN / HUBER, ODILO (2012), The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS), *Religions* 3(3), 710–724. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel3030710>

experience for the second time. (3) And/ The situation got even worse. I thought to myself, my God, I'm crazy. Because I felt like Jesus. (5)

And I realized/ And I could have founded a religion at that time or appeared like Jesus. That lasted perhaps, I don't remember exactly. One or two weeks, because that's how I felt. And then I left/ it was like a peak experience. And then I left, because I was there on the summit of the mountain and I didn't climb any higher into the pipedream, but climbed back down the mountain. But then I realized that I'm not weird. I felt very normal. ...

And that has become even more pronounced over the last 20 years.

»Basket's« experiences of transcendence

The second example comes from an interview with a man who was over 70 years old at the time of the interview. In terms of the centrality scale of religiosity, he can be characterized as »religious« from a psychological perspective. »Basket« believes very strongly in God or something divine, and he often prays and meditates. These dimensions of religiosity play a major role in his life. Two dimensions (religious experiences and church attendance) occur »occasionally«. They tend to take a back seat in his life. This also applies to reflection on religious questions, which occurs only »rarely«. Religiousness is certainly an important area in »Basket's« life. However, due to the varying degrees of intensity of the five dimensions, it is rather unlikely that religious content shapes his life. In the interview, he describes – among other things – a near-death experience, which he characterizes as a life-changing and defining transcendental experience:

It wasn't primarily a spiritual or religious turning point. ... It was a major turning point in my life. And that's how it turned out or happened. That was in November of that year. At that time, there were these so-called workshops that came over from California, which was the New Age movement. I took part in various workshops there, and you were usually put under psychological and physical pressure and, in group experiences, expected to experience something, yes. For me, it got completely out of hand, I have to say. We had worked through the night, more or less, because it was a group of between 80 and 100 people. ...

And somehow, around... I can't say exactly, around two or half past two in the morning, we... So, we had a break and I went outside. That was at the <NAME> hotel in <A>, I went to the seaside promenade at night and... I was half crazy because of the whole workshop and then I raced along this promenade. I felt like I could beat any 100-metre runner. Then I came back into the hotel hall and had massive breathing problems. And finally, I hyperventilated, lay on the floor and then it went... Well, I didn't know what was going on, right? There were three doctors at the workshop, and they immediately put a plastic bag over my head and closed it.

But I was already high. I can still see it today. There was a huge chandelier in this five-star hotel, and for me, it was the view from up there looking down. I saw my body and how the doctors were trying to help me. And for me, everything was okay, so I felt comfortable and wanted to make myself known. Hey, everything's fine. No problem.

And then... I can't give any time details because I had no sense of time. Anyway, at some point they gave up on me and said they couldn't bring me back, it was over.

And it is... As I later realized, it was a classic near-death experience.

And then I went through / from this chandelier I was suddenly in a tube and that was / at the very back of the tube there was a very bright light, and I went through it at

tremendous speed and was suddenly slowed down. And the feeling I had... no, I forgot... still in the chandelier, there's something else important... When I looked down from up there, there were the three doctors. And of course, that caused a huge commotion among all the course participants. They were there too, and they were of various nationalities. And as I said, I speak English, I understand English, but not perfectly. And at that moment, when I was up there, I noticed all the people at once. So, I don't know what they were thinking or saying. I just understood all the people at once.

And I couldn't see or hear anything, but I still saw and understood. And that was really special for me. And as I said, it went through this tube and suddenly slowed down and there was no figure. But there was a voice and it said to me: Stop! It's too early for you. You have your wife and children. You have to go back (3). And then it went backwards in this tube of light. I can still see it, first slowly and then faster and faster. And then I was back at the chandelier above, so I saw my body again, lifeless. And then there was a jump, actually, and then I entered my body. And it sounds again... I can't say it any other way... I felt every cell, every fibre, every cell of my body, I perceived everything. And I was in infinite pain.

»Customer's« experiences of transcendence

The third example comes from an interview with a man who was between 60 and 70 years old at the time of the interview. In terms of the centrality scale of religiosity, he can be characterized as »highly religious« from a psychological perspective. »Customer« believes strongly in God or something divine, prays daily, attends church services weekly, often has religious experiences and thinks about religious questions very often. Due to the strong presence of all five dimensions in »Customer's« life, it is highly likely that religious content shapes his life. In the interview, he describes – among other things – the following experiences of transcendence:

I actually had my eureka moment in December of that year, when I was attending a very important business conference. At the time, I was the managing director of a company that was going through a difficult business process. It was a turnaround process where I had the task of either getting the company back on track or, ultimately, possibly having to close it down. That was my job. The corporation at the time put me in touch with a very important sparring partner, so to speak, who offered to accompany me through this difficult process, this undertaking, and perhaps discuss certain issues together. And I knew that this was one of the most important meetings I had ever had. This person was also very, very difficult to get hold of and flew specially from the United States to Switzerland.

And on the evening before this meeting was to take place, I went to bed and had an insane... I had already had a disc herniation, i.e. a slipped disc, and had only seen stars. The pain was unbearable. And I knew that if I had symptoms of paralysis, the surgeon had told me to go to the hospital immediately, because then it would be serious. I got up at half past four in the morning and tried to get up, but I couldn't move my right leg. It was really, really bad. I dragged myself into the bathroom in tears, looked in the mirror and said: Okay, at least you have to shave. You can forget about meeting with this partner. That's not going to work. It's going to be very difficult. Now you go back, get the woman out of bed, and then we'll drive to the emergency room at the hospital, and then I will need surgery. Period. That's not going to work. I

went back to bed and sent up a quick prayer to heaven and said: Man, God, you see the situation. You see that this is absolutely inappropriate right now. I'm just going to put this in your hands.

And it's no joke. Five minutes later, I got up, took a shower, drove to <city> for the meeting, and since then I've had wood / I always say wood / no more complaints.

They're gone. That was kind of my first really, really important eureka moment. ...

And the second experience, which was also very significant, was in <year>, when I had to make certain decisions during a very difficult conference that would have been negative for the other party. Was that the way to go? I was able to simply hand over the whole thing. I said: I'll give it to you; I'll give it to you now. I can't change it. I can't find a way to do it. My hands are really tied there, and I know that however I do it, it will really end up in a conflict situation. There's no way. And the conversation then went in such a way that the other person recognized the situation and actually the whole problem was resolved within a few minutes. (IP³: Wow) Without any conflict. And those were the limiting experiences I had.

³ IP = Interviewer.