

Journal
of
Near-Death Studies

Editor's Foreword • *Bruce Greyson, M.D.*

Guest Editorial: A Call to Reconsider the Field of Near-Death Studies •
P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D.

A Philosopher's View of Near-Death Research • *Carl B. Becker, Ph.D., D.Litt.*

Disclosure Habits After Near-Death Experiences: Influences, Obstacles, and Listener Selection • *Regina M. Hoffman, Ph.D.*

Lucid Dreams as One Method of Replicating Components of the Near-Death Experience in a Laboratory Setting • *J. Timothy Green, Ph.D.*

Book Review:

Beyond the Light: What Isn't Being Said About the Near-Death Experience, by
P. M. H. Atwater • *Reviewed by Joseph Chilton Pearce*

Volume 14, Number 1, Fall 1995



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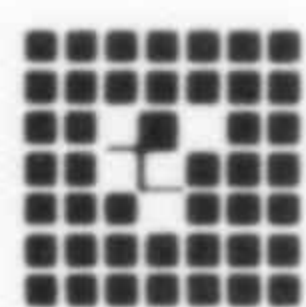
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Journal
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Editor's Foreword	3
<i>Bruce Greyson, M.D.</i>	
GUEST EDITORIAL	5
A Call to Reconsider the Field of Near-Death Studies	
<i>P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D.</i>	
ARTICLES	
A Philosopher's View of Near-Death Research	17
<i>Carl B. Becker, Ph.D., D.Litt.</i>	
Disclosure Habits After Near-Death Experiences: Influences, Obstacles, and Listener Selection	29
<i>Regina M. Hoffman, Ph.D.</i>	
Lucid Dreams as One Method of Replicating Components of the Near-Death Experience in a Laboratory Setting	49
<i>J. Timothy Green, Ph.D.</i>	
BOOK REVIEW	61
Beyond the Light: What Isn't Being Said About the Near-Death Experience, by P. M. H. Atwater	
<i>Reviewed by Joseph Chilton Pearce</i>	
Announcement	71

JOURNAL OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES (formerly ANABIOSIS) is sponsored by the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). The Journal publishes articles on near-death experiences and on the empirical effects and theoretical implications of such events, and on such related phenomena as out-of-body experiences, deathbed visions, the experiences of dying persons, comparable experiences occurring under other circumstances, and the implications of such phenomena for our understanding of human consciousness and its relation to the life and death processes. The Journal is committed to an unbiased exploration of these issues, and specifically welcomes a variety of theoretical perspectives and interpretations that are grounded in empirical observation or research.

The **INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR NEAR-DEATH STUDIES** (IANDS) is a world-wide organization of scientists, scholars, near-death experiencers, and the general public, dedicated to the exploration of near-death experiences (NDEs) and their implications. Incorporated as a nonprofit educational and research organization in 1981, IANDS' objectives are to encourage and support research into NDEs and related phenomena; to disseminate knowledge concerning NDEs and their implications; to further the utilization of near-death research by health care and counseling professionals; to form local chapters of near-death experiencers and interested others; to sponsor symposia and conferences on NDEs and related phenomena; and to maintain a library and archives of near-death-related material. Friends of IANDS chapters are affiliated support groups in many cities for NDErs and their families and for health care and counseling professionals to network locally. Information about membership in IANDS can be obtained by writing to IANDS, P. O. Box 502, East Windsor Hill, CT 06028.

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Editor's Foreword

This issue of the Journal includes two articles inspired by the twentieth anniversary of the publication in 1975 of Raymond Moody's *Life After Life*, the book that coined the term "near-death experience" and its acronym "NDE" and is usually thought to have initiated the modern phase of near-death studies. In a Guest Editorial, author and lecturer P. M. H. Atwater urges a revamping of the field of near-death studies. Based on recent work published in this Journal, she proposes that we have progressed to a point at which researchers now need to collaborate on standardized international study protocols and a shared data base, supported by an independent research fund.

In another contribution stimulated by the twentieth anniversary of modern near-death studies, philosopher Carl Becker presents an overview of theoretical and methodological trends apparent in recent articles from the Journal. Based on critiques of this work by his Japanese university students, he suggests greater clarity of definitions and philosophical assumptions underlying near-death studies, and a sharper focus on researchable issues.

In the second of two articles derived from her doctoral dissertation, communications researcher Regina Hoffman describes NDErs' habits in disclosing their experiences, and the major influences and obstacles to such disclosure. This article follows up on her previous paper describing NDErs' needs to share their experience and their disclosure motives. Next, clinical psychologist Timothy Green, noting the phenomenological overlap between lucid dreams and NDEs, suggests a strategy for replicating components of the NDE through the induction of lucid dreams.

In this issue's book review, author and former humanities teacher Joseph Chilton Pearce reviews P. M. H. Atwater's provocative *Beyond the Light: What Isn't Being Said About the Near-Death Experience*. Finally, we include the IANDS Board of Directors' announcement of the establishment of a research fund, as proposed in Atwater's Guest Editorial, for underwriting investigational activities and educational programs in near-death studies.

Bruce Greyson, M.D.



Guest Editorial

A Call to Reconsider the Field of Near-Death Studies

P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D.
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ABSTRACT: In this commentary I take remarks previously made in this Journal about frightening near-death experiences and the possibility of near-death being a kundalini breakthrough as license for me to ask for a reconsideration of near-death research. Since the International Association for Near-Death Studies has now established a special fund for the purpose of launching the kind of large-scale clinical, multi-disciplinary research so needed in the field, I appeal for contributions to that fund, so near-death research can advance to its next stage, one of international professionalism.

The field of near-death studies marks its twentieth anniversary in 1995. Raymond Moody inadvertently initiated the field when he coined the term "near-death experience" to describe episodes that happened to people who brushed death, nearly died, or revived after the cessation of vital signs. *Life After Life* (Moody, 1975), the book he wrote to explore this phenomenon, became an international best seller. This stroke of fortune paved the way for near-death research to blossom into a legitimate field of inquiry, and for the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) to be established as a non-profit corporation dedicated to advancing the field through public

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education, further research, and varied support services for near-death experiencers.

Today there are over eighty near-death researchers in the United States and dozens more in other countries. And those are just the ones we know about; uncounted others may be legion. Gone are the days when any one person could speak for the field. Findings are now so numerous, no one researcher privy to another's research data base—some even unaware of the existence or purpose of IANDS—that the field of near-death studies has quite literally outgrown its "superstars" and heroes.

The need to move toward increased professionalism in the field and a larger data base became evident to me when I read the recent issues of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies* devoted to speculations about the near-death experience being a kundalini breakthrough (Spring 1994) and to theories about frightening near-death episodes (Fall 1994). I would like to comment briefly on the subject matter of each of these two issues as an avenue whereby I can illustrate that it truly is time that present research methodologies be reconsidered, as provided for in the new NDE Research Fund IANDS has launched.

The Near-Death Experience as a Kundalini Breakthrough

First, let me congratulate those who submitted articles for the issue on NDEs and kundalini; I found the thoughts expressed very stimulating. I am concerned, though, about claims that kundalini is causal to the near-death phenomenon. There is nothing in current findings, mine or anyone else's, to support such a claim. There is, however, ample evidence to suggest that kundalini energies are aroused by a near-death event. Questionnaires are not helpful in exploring possibilities here, no matter how many thousands are collected, for this particular point of inquiry will necessitate follow-up studies including physical exams and measurement of the aftereffects.

My own work in this area, which began in the '60s, has convinced me that the topic of kundalini, both Eastern and Western versions of the subject, is really a discussion of energy levels in the body/mind complex that can be jumpstarted to higher, finer frequencies through the release of pent-up forces resident within the human body. These forces, existent more as a latent process of energy conversion than bizarre bolts of power, are what is commonly referred to as "kundalini."

Certainly descriptions of "kundalini breakthroughs," the activation of this energy conversion system, sound like near-death experiences. Limitations of language and a lack of comparison can alter or distort how these episodes are interpreted; aftereffects are similar. Thus, it is easy to think that kundalini is causal when, to all intents and purposes, kundalini might really be but the first step in a larger process indicative of higher brain development. Actually, research on kundalini, although thousands of years old in India and Mesoamerica, has only recently been subjected to the rigors of modern science. The term itself still exists as little more than a "catch-all" phrase to support differing theories about spiritual growth and/or species evolution.

I had three kundalini breakthroughs nearly a decade *before* my experiences in 1977 with death and near-death. My first happened spontaneously during a special harp concert held in a person's home. I was totally unprepared for the drama that followed: having no weight; being able to float several inches above the floor in front of dozens of witnesses and maintain that "lofty" position for over twenty minutes; possessing "x-ray vision" so that I could see through people, plants, and buildings; suddenly being filled with all knowledge, all power; and having my faculties greatly enhanced.

Afterwards, I was incapable of normal body functioning or even recognizing myself as a wife and mother. A childhood habit of severe nail-biting instantly ceased. Part of the body crisis I faced was the inability to eat. What weight remained on my frame melted away so rapidly that my family became alarmed. I had to relearn the significance of food and reconnect taste to each item I ate. It took 44 days for me to accomplish this. Aftereffects were extensive. Several years later, I took up hatha and raja yoga so I could control the kundalini process and its power surges. Under the tutelage of Rukhmani Devi (Clara Ross) and her mentor, Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda (of South India), I underwent two more breakthroughs.

I used this experience to research spiritual awakenings, a project that eventually involved thousands of people and resulted in the creation of Inner Forum, Idaho's first non-profit educational corporation devoted to the exploration and promotion of spirituality as a positive adjunct to human potential. This activity was every bit as involved as what I later did in the field of near-death studies. These activities were presaged, however, by a steady stream of shamanistic experiences that began when I was four and by an unexpected "Baptism of The Holy Spirit" that occurred during church services when I was 17.

Most people, and particularly most researchers, do not have a basis of personal comparison from which to explore and investigate other-worldly environments. I'm one of those who do. From the broad scope of this background, it has been my observation that the near-death phenomenon is *one of many* potentially transformative episodes that can trigger or activate the arousal of kundalini forces, along with the pattern of physiological and psychological changes that follow, including altered brain structure.

Frightening Near-Death Experiences

In *Beyond the Light: What Isn't Being Said About the Near-Death Experience* (Atwater, 1994), I summarized the results of nearly 16 years as a full-time researcher of the near-death phenomenon. My work began in November of 1978, a year and a half after I had experienced near-death thrice over. Starting in 1981, thanks to Kenneth Ring, articles on my original observations were carried as a regular column in *Vital Signs*, IANDS' newsletter, an endeavor that led me to cross-check my findings and do more research, leading to the publication of *Coming Back to Life: The After-Effects of the Near-Death Experience* (Atwater, 1988).

I published a Guest Editorial, "Is There a Hell?", in this Journal in 1992 as a way of challenging other researchers in the field, and as a vehicle that would enable me to deviate, for what I was discovering during my investigations wasn't matching what others claimed. For example, I met hundreds of near-death survivors in 1989 who spoke of hell rather than heaven when describing their episode. There were so many, in fact, that at one point I considered writing a book about it—until another researcher strenuously objected, warning that my material would just become fodder for religious fanatics. Out of respect for that researcher, I abandoned the project. I now regret having done so. Far from being anomalies, simple fragments, or incomplete or inverted episodes, I have found that unpleasant and/or hell-like near-death experiences are a class unto themselves, as valid as any other type.

When you do more than send out questionnaires or conduct one-time-only interviews, you cannot help but notice a whole array of correlations, parallels, and interconnections between deeper levels of the human psyche and what is experienced during the near-death phenomenon, irrespective of positive or negative aspects. I became

aware of the existence of the following four distinctive types of experience.

Initial Experience

The initial experience is usually a scenario fragment, simple or brief. It can involve elements such as a loving nothingness, the living dark, a friendly voice, or a short out-of-body trip. Experienced most by those who seem to need the least amount of shake-up in their lives at that point in time, this type often becomes a "seed" experience or an introduction to other ways of perceiving and recognizing reality. It is associated more with children than adults, although adults report it, too.

Unpleasant and/or Hell-Like Experience

The unpleasant and/or hell-like experience usually follows a sequential pattern comparable to heavenly versions, involving elements such as an encounter with a threatening void or stark limbo or hellish purgatory, or scenes of a startling and unexpected indifference, even "hauntings" from one's own past. Experienced most often by those who seem to have deeply suppressed or repressed guilts, fears, and angers and/or those who expect some kind of punishment or discomfort after death, this kind of experience is not reported by young children.

Pleasant and/or Heaven-Like Experience

The pleasant and/or heaven-like experience usually follows the same sequential pattern universally reported, involving elements such as loving family reunions with those who have died previously and/or reassuring religious figures or light beings, validation that life counts, and affirmative and inspiring dialogue. Experienced most often by those who seem to need reassurance that they are loved and that life is important and that every effort has a purpose in the overall scheme of things, these are reported by children, too.

Transcendent Experience

A transcendent experience can follow the universal pattern of near-death scenarios or it can deviate significantly. It involves exposure to otherworldly dimensions and scenes beyond the individual's frame of reference, sometimes includes revelations of greater truths and the discovery of alternate realities, and seldom is personal in content. Experienced most often by those who seem ready for a "mind stretching" challenge and/or individuals who are more apt to utilize (to whatever degree) the truths that were revealed to them—to make a difference in society—this kind of experience is not reported by young children.

Keep these experience types in mind as I share with you some of the observations I have made while investigating frightening episodes. First, with children, what type of experience they had depended on their age when the experience occurred. Little ones either had an initial episode, referred to by some researchers as a "fragment" or "partial scenario," or they had a pleasant, heavenly episode. None underwent extremes, either unpleasant/hellish or transcendent, and none had long, complex experiences. I did run across a few children aged 9 and older who detailed lengthy encounters and some who spoke of "dark and fearsome things," but for the most part it was teenagers and adults who reported hellish scenarios.

Second, early on I faced the conundrum of experiencer response: what seemed to me an experience of great beauty could be deemed horrific by the one who had it, yet what appeared scary to me, even violent, was often labeled wonderful by the experiencer, "the best thing that ever happened." Furthermore, the only people who ever described "hell" as hot, fiery, or burning, were those who were deeply influenced by fundamentalist religious doctrines; the larger number said hell was cold, icy, hard, shivery, or devoid of temperature. The assumption that only people from the "Bible Belt" have unpleasant and/or hell-like experiences did not hold up in my research.

Third, imagery most frequently centered around vortices of varied types, such as falling unchecked into a spinning vortex, being trapped in a watery whirlpool, or being caught up in a tornado funnel; great or threatening storms or high winds; total abandonment or eternal silence; attack scenes and what appeared to be torture chambers and fights with those who tempted and taunted; denuded landscapes and nude people, colorless scenes, absence of love and companionship, and frightening degrees of boredom.

Fourth, medical literature at the turn of the century was filled with reports of people who experienced whirling or spinning vortices or funnels during the onset of anesthesia, especially with ether. Missing from that literature, however, was mention of anything more significant than this peculiar "hallucination." Nothing was said about possible aftereffects beyond chemical changes. In *Beyond the Light* (Atwater, 1994, pp. 30-31), I compared the hellish experience of Gloria Hipple, involving a terrifying fall through a spinning vortex where she fought off attacks from a white skull, with her memory of being inside a similar vortex as a child when she was anesthetized with ether during a tonsillectomy. Hipple was adamant that any comparison between the two vortices ended with the image, as her hell-like near-death experience was totally and intensely felt, completely real, and life-changing. In fact, because of her struggles in the vortex, she was transformed from being a person dependent on outer circumstances and material possessions to an individual directed by the power of Greater Truth, a confidence she still has.

Fifth, most of the unpleasant and/or hell-like experiences I investigated did not resolve into heavenly scenarios or comforting light (as Hipple's did, once she shattered the attacking skull). For example, a woman in her early 30s, once past the proverbial tunnel and light at its end, found herself in a cold, watery whirlpool. Frantically, she fought to reach shore so she could save herself, while storm clouds raged above her. Her battle culminated when she revived after being pronounced dead of accident injuries. There was *no* resolution to that experience, yet she considered it proof that everyone has a second chance at life. She was so charged with energy and enthusiasm afterward that she made significant changes in her life, and had the same far-ranging aftereffects that one finds typical of "pleasant" experiences. Her case is not unique.

Finally, regarding aftereffects, about 50 percent of those I studied who underwent unpleasant and/or hellish types of near-death experiences came to deal with the same aftereffects that we now know are universal to the phenomenon. The other half deviated, sometimes becoming withdrawn and fearful afterward or exhibiting undirected anger. Many complained of bouts with depression and headaches, and problems with low self-esteem. I also observed a tendency among them to become opinionated and cling to one-sided belief systems. Some were virtually impossible to converse with.

So far, I am aware of one person familiar with my work who has conducted a study to test my model of experience types: in her study,

entitled "Phenomenological Case Studies of Four Hispanic and Four Non-Hispanic Near-Death Experiences," Patti White (in press) confirmed my findings. Although her research base was too small for lengthy discussion, it does represent a movement in the field toward different approaches to research and the possible validation of types not previously recognized as standard in the field.

The Field of Near-Death Studies

It is not my intention in this article to summarize all my thoughts and observations about the near-death phenomenon. I selected for discussion the two areas of kundalini awakening and frightening NDEs because each directly relates to previous issues of the Journal and highlights the real subject at hand: reconsidering the field of near-death studies.

Many things have led me to believe that the field itself needs an overhaul, not least of which is the myth of Amazing Grace, as articulated by Ring (1991): that as a compensatory gift, near-death experiencers are privileged to survive the immediacy of death and witness, in so doing, the realms of heaven. They return utterly transformed, eschewing greed and materialism for selfless service and love for all humankind.

This myth is the creation of certain researchers and experiencers, buoyed by a media willing to bend facts to fit *what they think* the public wants to hear. The result is almost "religious" in the way the subject is now regarded. That which exists as *potential* has taken the place of fact, with little attention paid to what experiencers *really go through* after their experience. We need to spend less time dramatizing contrasts and more time taking a critical look at not just the experience but its aftereffects and implications as well. For example, once Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, the son of a Chinese peasant farmer, became convinced that his 1837 near-death experience gave him the right as God's divine representative to overthrow the Manchus and Confucianism, the bloodiest civil uprising in all history resulted, lasting 14 years and costing 20 million lives.

The phenomenon of near-death is far more complicated and involved than previously thought, addressing the incredible aliveness of life quite directly. For example, since preverbal children, even newborns, can remember a near-death experience and tell their par-

ents about it when they later become proficient at language, what else can they remember and how far back does their memory extend? In truth, implications from near-death research affect almost every aspect of society as well as our concept of what it means to be human.

A large-scale, international, multi-disciplinary near-death research campaign administered by a non-profit organization with established credentials in the field and teams of professionals willing to tackle the project is now essential. Yet the funding for such a project is not there, primarily because the near-death experience has been so trivialized on national television talk shows, that it is no longer considered a legitimate field of scientific inquiry. So let's do it ourselves; we can and we will. IANDS has stepped forward and created the NDE Research Fund announced elsewhere in this issue of the Journal. Subject to changes as needed, I envision this Research Fund being used to employ and advance the following:

First, the fund might employ a director, office staff and facilities, and field coordinator, supported by a multidisciplinary committee who will work part or full time, or by consultants when needed. The committee might consist of people such as neurologists, engineers, biomedical engineers, neurobiologists, chemists, surgeons, psychiatrists, nurses, physicists, consciousness researchers, and "leading edge" researchers in subtle energy fields, and would include representatives of other countries and/or cultures.

Second, the fund might advance a reconsideration of present near-death research by identifying and indexing all known work in the field since its inception, including that published in *Anabiosis* and the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. This effort would identify and correlate various research projects and investigative styles with the findings that resulted from each, to determine what methods are the most effective and the most productive. It would also survey needs to set future priorities, at all times addressing the entire phenomenon and its many aftereffects and implications.

Third, the fund might foster a redesign of research methodologies, testing out various techniques in actual field work. This might include laboratory controls for physical measurement of the various aftereffects, such as electrical sensitivity, as well as of the experience itself. Careful attention would be paid to insuring a broader research base by avoiding the exclusive use of any one hospital or any single region of a country or culture.

Fourth, the fund would send all findings back to the central multidisciplinary committee for study, evaluation, reports, and record keeping.

Fifth, the fund might be used to design and implement a suitable computer system, which, in the future, could be accessed for a fee or by membership of those who have applied for the right to use the material contained therein. Reports could be copyrighted in the name of IANDS, and ongoing administration of the computerized database could be controlled and directed by IANDS.

Sixth, the fund might advance the design and implementation of information kits for researchers, experiencers, medical personnel, educators, students, media news sources, investigators, or interested individuals who wish to avail themselves of the service.

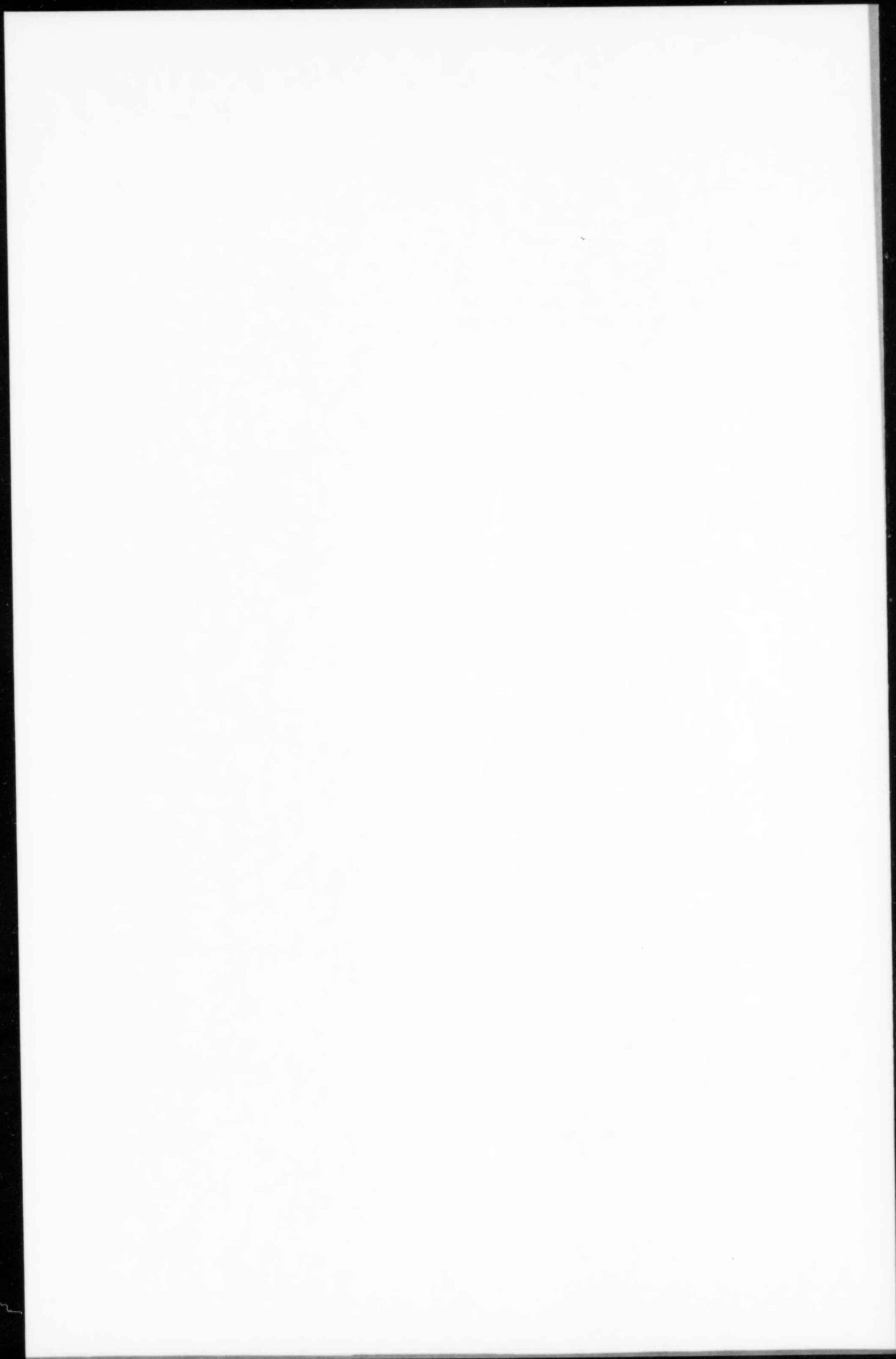
Finally, the fund might be used to design and implement meetings and conferences to address the subject with special emphasis on "second" and "third" tier research, involving fields of inquiry such as sociology, theology, philosophy, and studies in reincarnation, mysticism, human behavior, and child development. Public awareness and public interest could be both respected and promoted through approved avenues, striving for international cooperation and the free flow of information between governments.

What has been shared here is my personal, and perhaps idealistic, "wish list," but I believe this entire proposal is attainable. Although the entire project would take a considerable amount to fund, the prioritizing of sections noted above would permit activation in stages as monies become available. Without research of this caliber, near-death reports will be forever relegated to society's fringe, no matter how famous any experiencer or researcher becomes and regardless of how much money such individuals make. I invite each and every one of you to support this endeavor through personal contributions, public announcements, networking, even fund-raising events of various kinds. If we each participate, the project will happen! For myself, I will donate 10 percent of the proceeds I make giving talks or workshops about the near-death phenomenon, to the fund. This is my commitment. What's yours?

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A Philosopher's View of Near-Death Research

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ABSTRACT: This article summarizes some trends and issues raised by a review of recent articles in the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. It points to a need for clarity on the problems of monism and dualism, on the definitions of near-death experiences (NDEs), on reasoning by analogy, and on hypothesis testing and falsification. While recognizing the superficial similarities between NDEs and a broad range of spiritual experiences, psychotic syndromes, and psychological states, it urges a nonreductionistic focus on those issues amenable to recognized research methodologies.

The International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) is approaching its 15th year, and it has grown from a liberal bunch of long-haired or bearded interns and graduate students of the '70s into a mainstream organization attracting renowned scholars to speak at its conferences and write for its professional quarterly *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. I am extremely gratified by this progress, and depend heavily on the Journal both to keep abreast of the latest thinking in the field, and to publicize the legitimate scholarly nature of near-death research to colleagues and other professionals. Lest any of the following comments be misconstrued, let me first say that I am deeply grateful to the many authors, reviewers, and editors of the Journal for the efforts and energies they pour into this research and its publication.

Kyoto University is known for being Japan's leading university in philosophy, and I am privileged to teach some very gifted graduate

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students there. Recently, we studied the last few years of the Journal, to compare the latest English-language near-death research with that conducted by Tachibana Takashi in the magazine *Bungei Shunju*. This article summarizes some trends and problems our study revealed. This study may enable future writers to avoid certain conceptual and linguistic confusions, and may possibly have policy implications for review standards that our Journal will want to maintain.

Monism and Dualism

From the pre-Socratics to the latest in philosophical encyclopedias, monism has meant the doctrine that everything is ultimately reducible to one underlying substrate. Materialist monists, such as Karl Marx and Mao Tse Tung, reduced everything to matter. Idealist monists, such as George Berkeley and Mary Baker Eddy, reduced everything to ideation. By contrast, dualism holds that two fundamentally disparate kinds of essence make up the universe: physically extended matter, and nonphysical mentation. While monists face philosophical problems in explaining phenomena that do not seem to fit their reductionist modes, dualists also face philosophical problems in explaining the connection and interaction of two fundamentally unrelated kinds of stuff.

This is not the time nor the place to take sides on this millennia-old debate. It is important to note that all of the above theories are inherently problematic, some more than others; that none of the above theories is unequivocally supported or denied by what we know of near-death research to date; that while personal survival of death would stretch the bounds of materialist monism as we know it, still, if the surviving personality were embodied and extended, there need be no fundamental conflict with a monist materialism, extended to allow for other dimensions. The assumptions that monism is necessarily materialism, that materialism is necessarily reductionist monism, and that either is incompatible with near-death experience (NDE) data, are far from demonstrated, although some writers, such as Kenneth Arnette (1992), seem to write from such assumptions.

At the same time, the fact that people see different things in their NDEs no more proves that NDEs are illusory or self-created than the fact that people sailing around the world see different things in their different cruises proves that their journeys are all hallucinations. While the law of parsimony immortalized as Ockham's razor

is indeed to be applied to scientific theories, as John Wren-Lewis (1992) wrote, it simply advises us that "entities are not to be multiplied without necessity; that nothing is to be assumed as necessary, in accounting for any fact, unless it is established by evident experience or evident reasoning, or is required by the articles of faith." So William of Ockham would be the last scholar to reduce NDEs to physicalist or materialist monism, because there are facts of "evident experience" that cannot be accounted for without resorting to entities or aspects not yet understood by physical science (Becker, 1993).

Internal and External Experiences

We must distinguish clearly between experiences as observed from the outside and as personally experienced. This is one difference between Western medicine, based on examining cadavers and brain functions from the outside, and Eastern medicine, based on knowing one's own psychophysiological responses to drugs, acupuncture, and meditation. Each has its place; neither is complete in and of itself. Since the NDE is above all an experience, it is amenable to both kinds of observation. Any overemphasis on either side would be a distortion.

Let me illustrate this concern with the example of falling in love; feeling at peace, making a discovery, bidding farewell, or any of a number of other examples might do. Let us imagine that at some future point, neuroscience will become so advanced that it can "explain" falling in love physicochemically. It can identify which chemicals the body releases at which moment and are picked up by which sense receptors; which ions must cross which neuronal membranes to produce the required loss of concentration or appetite; which infantile imprints or fantasies are subconsciously superimposed on the other person, and so on. Indeed, if such an analysis were possible, it might then also be possible to influence people to fall in or out of love, which would have important ethical and behavioral ramifications.

Would anyone be so obtuse as to say that that physicochemical explanation is what love *feels like* and *means* to the parties who gaze into each others' eyes? Surely the feeling of love and the meaning of love are extremely significant regardless of whether its biophysical mechanisms are known. For a scientist who had never experienced the emotion to say he now "understood" love because he could explain

it neurologically would be as misguided as those critics of transcendental experiences who try to "explain" them by physicochemical explanations but have never experienced ecstasy, or those who would dismiss out-of-body experiences (OBEs) as mental disturbances, although they themselves have never been out of body.

There is much need for neurophysiological research. It may contribute substantially to our understanding of brain functions, even of when, how, and why people have what kind of NDEs. But let us not mistake the *correlating* of NDEs to neurophysical events with the idea that they can somehow be *reduced* to neurophysical processes. Surely the most important aspects of the NDE, the OBE, religious ecstasy, falling in love, and other subjective phenomena are present in the experience and impact in the life of the experiencer, regardless of whether their neurophysiological correlates can be identified. At the same time, this does not mean that each experiencer is an expert on the subject; on the contrary, one's own experience may color one's perceptions to the extent that one is unable to admit other experiences or interpretations, and we see this trend among many of the near-death experiencers whose papers appear in this Journal.

Definitions of Near-Death Experiences

The problem is confounded by the lack of clarity about what we mean by NDEs. Originally, we used the term NDE to refer to experiences of those near to death. But how near to death does one need to be? a week away in a hospital? psychologically prepared to die, like Golden Gate Bridge suicide attemptors? spiritually ready to be absent from the body, like some meditators? or physically in the throes of death? As recent studies take an ever broader view of what constitutes NDEs, it becomes ever harder to tell what can be excluded as *not* being an NDE.

Classic approaches to this problem use the ideas of "core experiences," a Weighted Core Experience Index (WCEI) (Ring, 1980), or family resemblances between experiences. Philosophically speaking, the WCEI type of approach is problematic if it fails to distinguish essential and nonessential characteristics.

Consider as an analogy the definition of a university. There are surely a great number and variety of universities. Some have gymnasiums and swimming facilities; others do not. Some have their own

bookstores, some their own cafeterias, some their own hospitals or hotels or lakes or desert islands. All of these are what we might call "incidental" features of universities; it is possible to be a university without having your own lake or desert island. On the other hand, there are certain features that are essential to universities, without which we would be hard pressed to call something a university. For example, if the institution had no faculty, or no administration, no post-secondary students, no research programs or facilities, or no degree-granting powers, then we could rightfully say that the institution were not a proper university, the way the term is understood in English.

A similar argument can be made about NDEs. Features like tunnels, noises, out-of-body experiences, and life-reviews, while somewhat common, are hardly unique to NDEs. They are all producible by physicochemical means, can be encountered in meditation, and are philosophically peripheral or incidental to the core experience. There is no question that physical stimulation can produce these parts of the NDE, as researchers like Susan Blackmore and Tom Troscianko (1989) have taken great pains to emphasize. The question becomes rather, are there parts of the NDE that cannot be so mechanically produced?

Deathbed visions of departed friends, religious figures, or of a "next world" are fundamental to the NDE, having direct reference to death and the hereafter, and directly affecting the individual's feeling about death and the afterlife. It would make good philosophical sense to distinguish between NDEs that refer to death or the hereafter, and those incidental to that core experience. I have argued this point in great detail elsewhere (Becker, 1993).

Association Games, or Reasoning by Analogical Implication

A number of articles over the past few years have involved the association game of "that reminds me of" For example, NDEs remind various people of multiple personality disorder and child abuse cases (Serdahely, 1992, 1993); the Garden of Eden, Peggy Sue, and boson condensation (Wile, 1994); wormholes to other dimensions (Arnette, 1992); *The Velveteen Rabbit* (Kellehear, 1993); Moses in the wilderness (Steinmetz, 1993); kundalini (Kieffer, 1994); and the

movie "2001," driving the Pennsylvania Turnpike, or a washing machine commercial (my students).

Of all such analogies, we surely must ask: do they shed light on important features of the NDE that are not already known without the use of such analogies? To what extent are they really analogous? Does the author have a hidden (or not so hidden) agenda? Ill-formulated analogies and hypotheses can hurt, at best, the repute of the writer and, at worst, that of the journal that accepts them for publication. Let me elaborate with a few examples.

Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) and Child Abuse Cases

William Serdehely suggested that "NDEs and MPD may be variants of the very same experience" (1992, p. 37), a "dissociating from a painful body" (1993, p. 93). Several observations need to be made here. First, a great number of NDEs happen to people who have neither been abused as children, nor are in the least need of escaping physical or psychological pain at the time of their near-passing. To generalize that all NDEs are like sexually-abused mental patients because a few of them are commits the same fallacy for which Sigmund Freud became notorious: making pronouncements about the mental health of the populace based on analysis of a few extremely unusual patients.

Second, as a health scientist, Serdahely may be unaware of the analogous debate in anthropological literature concerning the sanity and child abuse of shamans. Since the early part of the 20th century, certain scholars had held that shamans suffered from multiple personality disorder and child abuse, that they had schizophrenic tendencies and were less mentally stable than their peers. However, careful Rorschach testing and other clinical observations have since shown conclusively that shamans not only were not schizoid, but in fact have better mental health than those who lack religious or spiritual grounding (Boyer, Klopfer, Brawer, and Kawai, 1964; Noll, 1985). We could re-run this whole debate through the NDE world if desired. But such a research project is hardly required, because its premises are flawed from the start. The facts that abuse can trigger dissociation and NDEs can trigger dissociation do not mean that all dissociation comes from abuse nor that NDEs all happen to people who have been abused. Most NDEs neither have MPD, have been

abused, nor are mentally unstable, but have a very healthy outlook on life.

Third, we must look at the implication of this charge. If Serdahely is able to tell his patients with MPD that they are not so abnormal after all, because some people have somewhat similar experiences in NDEs, then this ploy may be clinically useful, regardless of its questionable logic. However, if it leads us to conclude that NDErs are schizophrenic, have MPD, or were abused as children, then this is not only a travesty of logic but borders on slander and libel.

Consider a very sane and sober contributor to this Journal, who had once gone on record as reporting her out-of-body experience (OBE). Imagine she were to apply for a job where someone on the hiring committee had read and believed Serdahely's theory that OBErs are like sexually-abused mental patients. This could easily cost her the job, or create for her severe interpersonal relationship problems after being hired, for reasons at first unclear to her. If she discovers the course of this discrimination, Serdahely will need a good lawyer on retainer.

Hypotheses are all fine and good; but when they threaten the reputations of the very people whom we are trying to encourage to "go public" and discuss their experiences, they are more of a disservice than a service to our fledgling field. So on the grounds of (1) logic, (2) limitations of the data, and (3) the implications for the field, such articles ought to be written, edited, and published with extreme caution.

Wormholes, Boson Condensations, and the Meaning of Life

The logical mistakes in Kenneth Arnette's (1992) wormhole theory and Lawrence Wile's (1994) explanation of the meaning of life by application of boson condensation theory to Reissner's fiber are analogous, though they vary in elegance. Both wormholes and Reissner's fiber are aspects of the physical world. One (possibly) connects our dimensions with other physical dimensions; the other (possibly) connects the subcommissural organ and the terminal ventricle, serving for buoyancy regulation, as shown forty years ago by the late Masashi Enami (1954) in Japan.

NDEs, however, are not physical movements from our three dimensions to other dimensions. The body of the NDEr or OBEr remains physically in our dimensions. If anything moves physically out

of the body and through wormholes to other dimensions, it must be some kind of matter of which we have no present knowledge. It does not follow present laws of gravity, friction, inertia, as so on. Proof of its existence would drastically change our understanding not only of wormholes, but of physics altogether. But Arnette presented no evidence of such a new form of matter. He committed the common category mistake of applying a theory to an inappropriate domain, like trying to apply the theory of gravity to trigonometry, or of magnetism to dream interpretation. Even Kenneth Ring sometimes slipped into this trap: holograms (Ring, 1984), like wormholes, are concepts about matter, not about mental experience.

Psychiatrist Wile's confusion is harder to clarify because his claims are fuzzier. The theory that "Reissner's fiber" is the English name for the anatomical structure known as the "sushumna nadi" in Sanskrit is straightforward and readily testable. We simply need to do scans of meditating yogins raising their kundalini energy, and see if Reissner's fiber is involved. However, the notion of boson condensation "creating a deeper relationship between our consciousness and the ultimate frontiers of physics" (Wile, 1994, p. 141) is as vague as it is unfalsifiable. On whose identification of the frontiers of physics shall we rely, and how are we to know that they are the ultimate ones? Do we all share one consciousness, as this sentence implies? Or was Wile using the "imperial we," referring only to his own consciousness? Will this one (collective or imperial) consciousness have one relationship with the plural frontiers of physics, as this sentence implies?

Neither consciousness nor the frontiers of physics are physical things. No one would imagine that either of them is located in, limited to, or researchable by boson condensation, nor by any other biophysical technique, for that matter. We must be careful not to confuse theories that apply to physical objects and processes with those that relate to concepts or categories.

Kundalini

I had always thought and spoken very highly of Gopi Krishna and kundalini research. However, the subtext of Gene Kieffer's (1994) article presented a classic case in the history of new religions: (1) the world's in deep trouble and there's no time to lose (compare the sayings of Jesus or Confucius); (2) we've got the true solution, and it

will fix everything (again, Jesus or Confucius); (3) why doesn't anyone understand me? (4) it must be a conspiracy! "Sound the battle cry ... [K]undalini secrets ... give us the fighting edge in any debate with those manning the reactionary ramparts" (Kieffer, 1994, p. 176).

I believe there is much to be said for and about kundalini meditation. It's just that our Journal is not the place to say so much, unless each idea is clearly connected to NDEs. I am happy to have an issue of the Journal contemplate the relation of NDEs to kundalini, and I have defended its doing so to critics. My disappointment is that some of the articles are less descriptive of research results, theories, or methodology appropriate to an academic journal than polemical cants of people with particular religious axes to grind.

Moses in the Wilderness

The analogies between Moses' experience on Mt. Horeb and NDEs (Steinmetz, 1993) are again indicative of the problem of definition alluded to above. As countless earlier studies of shamans and primal religions have shown, there is an extensive range of visionary, disembodied, and otherworldly experience, in which both Moses and NDEs can find a home. Indeed, because of this very range of experience, it is hard to say that all NDEs are indeed the *same* experience: some may have more of the visionary; some, more of the psychic; and some, more of the ecstatic. English lacks even the vocabulary (more available in Sanskritic languages) to label and distinguish between many levels of consciousness and mental experiences. Rather than reducing Moses' experience to an NDE, or elevating all NDEs to Horeb heights, we should acknowledge Steinmetz' correctness in calling Moses' an NDE-like experience.

This, of course, raises the question of where we are to draw the line between NDEs and NDE-like experiences for the purposes of our Journal. The page between the table of contents and editor's foreword of each issue states that "The Journal publishes articles on near-death experiences and on the empirical effects and theoretical implications of such events, and on such related phenomena as out-of-body experiences, deathbed visions, the experiences of dying persons, *comparable experiences occurring under other circumstances....*" (italics added). The criterion of comparability here becomes problematic, but the Journal could easily open itself to anthropological articles on NDE-like experiences in primal cultures; to psychiatrists'

reflections on the family resemblances of NDEs and patients' cases; to physicists' reflections on how holograms and wormholes in physical space remind them of NDEs in mental space. In fact, isn't that exactly what's happened? I am not proposing censorship of articles reviewed for publication, but that the editorial board, of which I am still a member, ask that all articles be focused, logical, documented, nonpartisan, and paying primary attention to NDEs.

Hypothetical Falsifiability and Meaninglessness

One of Karl Popper's several great contributions to philosophy was the now widely-accepted definition of meaning in terms of propositional falsifiability. In short, it states that if no data could conceivably be adduced, or no method imagined, that might falsify a proposition or theory, then the proposition or theory is not false, but cognitively empty and meaningless (Popper and Eccles, 1977). This principle has wide application from philosophy through the hard sciences; it orients us immediately to ask: on what basis might this theory conceivably be disconfirmed? It is by searching for such disconfirmations that science receives its greatest impetus forward. Conversely, if no possible evidence would dissuade the theory-holder from the theory (such as Aristotle's volitional theory of gravity, or, I maintain, certain of the theories propounded in the articles mentioned above), then such positions are neither true nor false, but simply cognitively meaningless. This rule of thumb, already a guideline for philosophers and scientists in a wide range of fields, ought to be understood and applied to theory-building in near-death and out-of-body research.

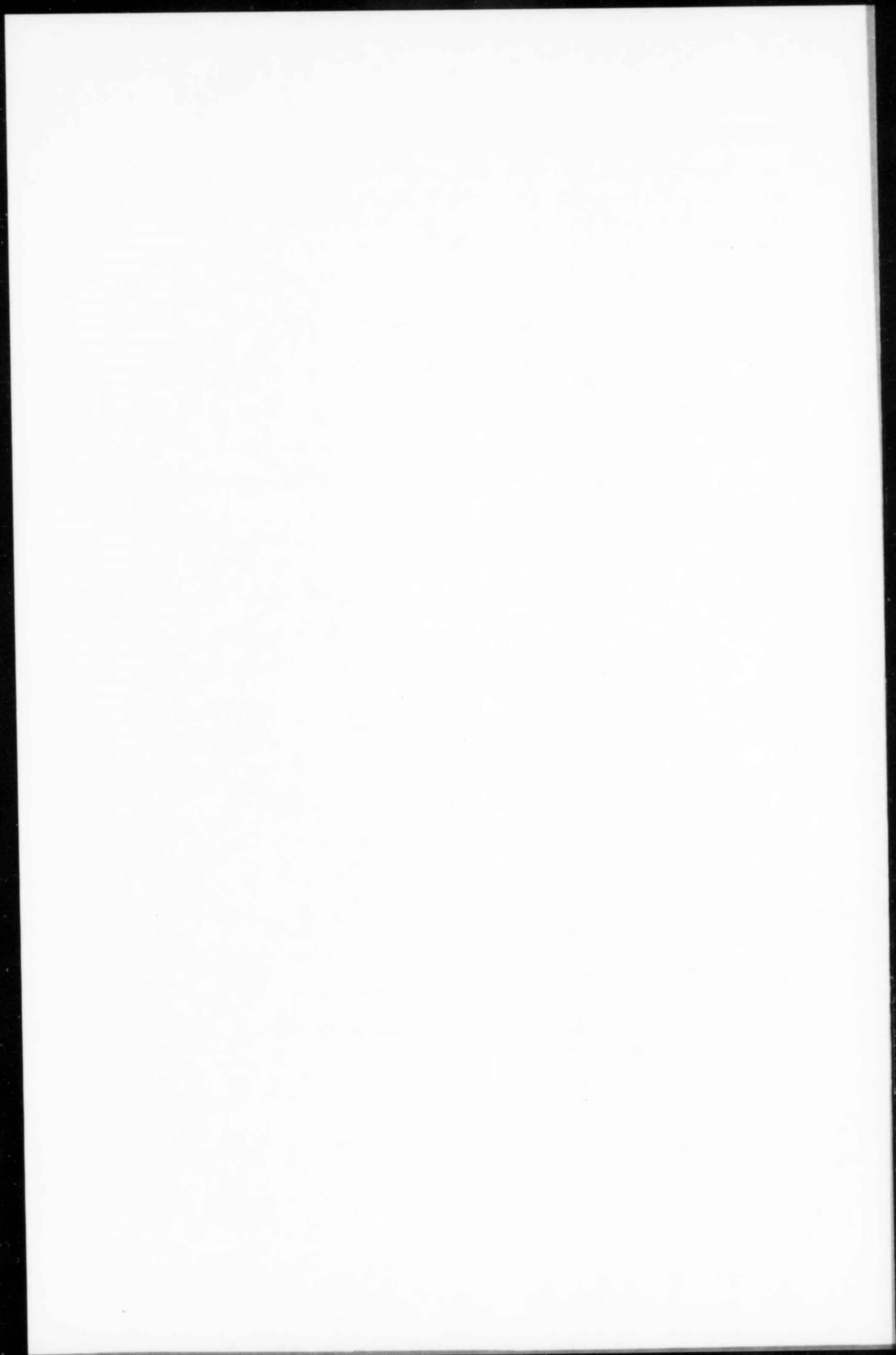
Implications

The field of near-death research is not the place for debates about monism and dualism, which has occupied better philosophers than us for millenia, and whose resolution, even if possible, would have no immediate relevance to the survival question. It is also not the place for psychological autobiographies, polemics advocating particular religions, or articles that effectively discourage further discussion of NDEs and OBEs. Let us set aside our philosophical differences and work (1) to assemble as much information as possible about NDEs and OBEs; (2) not only to make but to test hypotheses about

these experiences using statistically significant numbers and methodologies; and (3) to make discussion of NDEs and OBEs increasingly acceptable to the entire academic community through the high level of our work.

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Disclosure Habits After Near-Death Experiences: Influences, Obstacles, and Listener Selection

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ABSTRACT: Based on research gathered through interviews with 50 near-death experiencers (NDErs), this essay describes habits of disclosure regarding NDEs. Major influences and obstacles to disclosure are discussed, as well as issues involved in listener selection. Finally, some comments about secrecy emphasize the importance of discerning between appropriate, nourishing choices of secrecy and choices of beneficial disclosure.

As powerful and transformative happenings, near-death experiences leave behind a trail of aftereffects. Because of their controversial and intimate nature, however, they also plunge individuals into acute communicative dilemmas as experiencers ponder whether and to whom they may talk about the NDE. These communicative dilemmas, challenges of self-disclosure, were the focus of my dissertation research in the field of communication theory (Hoffman, 1993).

This essay presents research results regarding self-disclosure habits among near-death experiencers about their extraordinary experience. As I detailed in a previous article (Hoffman, 1995), decisions to talk about or conceal significant life experiences have implications for our physical as well as psychological well-being. Recent findings in psychoneuroimmunology support the claim that

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the "act of inhibiting ongoing behavior, emotions, and thoughts requires physiological work" especially when a "person who constantly thinks about something and wants to discuss it with others often actively holds back in talking about it" (Pennebaker and Susman, 1988, p. 331). The work of inhibition appears to act as a cumulative stressor over time, thus increasing the probability of the problems associated with stress, physical as well as psychological (Pennebaker, 1989).

While researchers identify physiological mechanisms that correlate with this work of "inhibition," they also find evidence that "confronting" previously withheld experience produces immunological as well as cognitive benefits (Pennebaker and Susman, 1988). Confrontation "refers to individuals' actively thinking and/or talking about significant experiences as well as relevant emotions. Psychologically confronting traumas negates the effects of inhibition, both physiologically and cognitively" (Pennebaker, 1989, p. 231). Research findings "demonstrated that disclosure of important personal events has physical and psychological benefits" (Pennebaker and Susman, 1983, p. 332). The physiological effects of the disclosure event itself were influenced by such factors as depth of emotion and meaning invested in the recalled event as well as the degree to which individuals "let go" as they talked about it.

Recognizing the significance of these decisions to talk about major life experiences, I began a three-year investigation into the disclosure decisions and patterns that followed near-death experiences (NDEs). In an earlier article, I described the research project and summarized the reports of 50 persons, 26 women and 24 men, regarding their disclosure needs and motives about the NDE (Hoffman, 1995). In this essay I discuss major influences on disclosure habits, several specific obstacles to disclosure, and the process of listener selection, and close with a final word about secrecy.

My research combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Following an extensive interview, each individual completed Kenneth Ring's Weighted Core Experience Index (1980) and Bruce Greyson's Near-Death Experience Scale (1983), as well as demographic and communication questions. Statistical correlations revealed some significant findings about disclosure habits.

Previous Knowledge of NDEs

Among the questions asked on the pen-and-paper follow-up questionnaire was the following: "Indicate the degree to which you *hold back from talking* with others about this experience." The five possible answers were these: I never discuss this, rarely, occasionally, frequently, often. I wanted to test the strength of relationships between this question and other demographic, experience-content, and general questions.

The responses to that question were significantly correlated with responses to the following question: "Were you familiar with the near-death experience in general before your own experience occurred?" A point-biserial correlation found that individuals who were *not* familiar with near-death experiences before the occurrence of their own were significantly less likely to discuss it ($r = .3606$, $df = 48$; p near .01).

I noticed in my interviews that having read about near-death experiences before one has one does not offset the amazing power of this happening. If one knows some facts about these events, however, at least the sense of profound singularity may be attenuated. Without such knowledge, individuals must cope with both the power of this experience *and* a seemingly inexplicable uniqueness in having received such an extraordinary encounter while near death. The NDE itself may be strongly consoling, but the feeling of singularity can be troubling, on the one hand, or lead to attributions of lofty eminence, on the other.

Some persons I interviewed mentioned that before the publication of Raymond Moody's books (1975, 1977) little information existed that offered substantive corroboration of these happenings. Biblical references to visionary experience and parapsychological literature served as the only sources for descriptions remotely similar to theirs. Experiencers often wondered who was likely to believe that such a happening occurred to them. It appears that early years of isolation, with little access to others to whom one could speak about this, may begin a pattern of keeping these NDEs secret.

In the past ten years, publicity about NDEs has increased. Sometimes that coverage trivialized the experience, according to a number of NDErs I interviewed, which complicated their attitudes toward near-death experiences before their own first-hand encounter. This finding, which connects habits of subsequent disclosure with awareness of NDEs *before* the near-death event, underscores the powerful

role that such knowledge plays in releasing individuals from a potentially harmful experience of alienation.

Experience Content and Disclosure Desire

In addition to the question about the degree to which individuals hold back from talking about the NDE, I also asked each person I interviewed to respond to the following question: "If the circumstances were completely comfortable for you, how would you describe your desire to describe this experience?" Possible answers included the following: I have a very strong desire to talk about this, strong desire, moderate desire, slight desire, and no desire. Two scores from Greyson's NDE Scale about experience content correlated at significant levels with this question about desire to talk about the NDE.

Greyson's scale (1983) was designed to gather information about the content of the NDE through 16 questions in four areas: cognitive, affective, paranormal, and transcendental. This scale, then, yields a total score, four subscale scores, and 16 individual item scores. The scores that correlated significantly with one's reported desire to talk about the NDE came from the paranormal section. Four questions comprise this paranormal section: Were your senses more vivid than normal? Did you seem to be aware of things going on elsewhere, as if by ESP? Did scenes from the future come to you? Did you feel separated from your physical body?

Desire to talk about the NDE was positively correlated with the paranormal subscore ($p = .042$) and even more significantly correlated with the first question in that section about senses being more vivid than normal ($p = .003$).

Paranormal happenings seem to be viewed as particular kinds of hard evidence concerning the experience's reality. Experiencers may know facts that can be checked and corroborated, for example. Several medical researchers have published reports substantiating the reliability of such reports (Sabom, 1982; Morse and Perry, 1990). Persons whose NDE had no such element may accept the authority of their experience while recognizing their inability to offer corroborative sense data. But for those NDEs with strong paranormal elements, discussions about the experience's reality may move to levels of documentation and/or verification of such evidence. Talk about evidence and sequence of events witnessed from a place outside the body are controversial topics, to be sure. However, these topics are not as

likely to involve disclosures of profoundly intimate matters as may be required when talking about affective, cognitive, and transcendent elements within NDEs.

In addition, paranormal elements within near-death experiences seem to spark enduring questions about the nature of reality. Such information brings into question the foundation of our human condition as embodied beings. Having gained access to a new dimension of perception, as it were, these experiencers have stepped beyond ordinary limits and returned with the kind of data that might be deemed "persuasive" precisely because it is subject to empirical verification.

Such breakthroughs have immediate and profound implications that extend beyond the individual level. Keeping this information quiet may be profoundly dislocating as well as disingenuous. For this group, there's a conviction that what happened to them at death's door will happen to every human who crosses that threshold of death, and that people deserve to know the truth. One woman recalled that she would sit in the orthopedic clinic during her long recovery at age 16 "and would look at all those people and try to figure out who had done this." She was secretly convinced that everyone who was hurt badly in an accident had been released from the body as she had been, and whenever she heard of someone in an accident "the first thing I thought of was, I wonder if they did that?"

Cascading Disclosures

Previous researchers in the field of self-disclosure have not focused on the ways certain disclosures precipitate other closely linked disclosures (Hoffman, 1993). I have termed such intricately linked disclosures "cascading disclosures" to emphasize the powerful way that discussion of one aspect necessitates a disclosure decision about other aspects.

A near-death experience is a kind of "limit-experience," to use Lane's (1988) phrase, because it is deeply embedded in context. Lane included near-death experiences as well as mystical experience, the experience of falling in love, and other sacred experience as examples of limit-experiences. From the perspective of near-death experiencers, NDEs and the precipitating physical events are integral parts of a whole memory.

Experiencers who met with me pointed out that their NDE is rarely a topic they suddenly bring up in conversation. As researchers in disclosure note, the issue of topic relevancy is one powerful variable in judgments about disclosure appropriateness. Because NDEs occur within physical crises and are woven like whole cloth into close-to-death episodes, this topic may become relevant through discussion of NDE-related topics or through talk about specific physical situations related to the crisis event, such as drowning, car accidents, childbirth, and so on.

Research has documented that NDEs occur within a wide range of physical crises, including acute illness, tragic accidents, surgery, suicide attempts, and violent attacks (Ring, 1980). The NDE topic is controversial in itself, but physical crises also carry connotations of innocence or stigma. When discussion of the triggering physical event is likely to elicit negative attributions, one's desire to talk about the NDE may be thwarted by other disclosure complications. For instance, violence (including a suicide attempt) played a role in six of the 50 cases in my research. Only one of those persons had talked about the NDE to more than 5 people. On the whole, this group was more concerned about my preserving their anonymity than the other experiencers who met with me.

Experiencers report that unwillingness to talk about one aspect of the near-death event increases the difficulty of disclosing the other aspects. Often the affective tone and degree of intimacy dramatically shifts between the crisis-discussion and the NDE revelation, which introduces additional situational and relationship assessment variables into the decision process. One man, for instance, insisted that I ask no questions about the physical violence that precipitated his close brush with death, though that constraint closed several lines of inquiry within the interview. During a conversation much later in time, this man initiated disclosure about that physical violence and appeared to experience relief that he had shared the "whole story" with me. He added that he had originally feared that my acceptance of his NDE's legitimacy would be tarnished if I had known about the exact nature of the violence.

At times the character of the physical crisis makes the topic arise easily in conversation, multiplying the occasions in which talk of the NDE is relevant. One woman noted that her NDE occurred during childbirth, an event that included some humorous anecdotes and arose fairly often when she and her husband gathered with close friends. She recounted the decision process as follows:

I would be real hesitant to tell this story, and I would, most of the time I would tell the funny parts about the doctors coming in . . . and I would be real hesitant, and most of the time I didn't tell the other part . . . I guess it would depend on how the spirit moved me, and what kind of friends we were with and if I thought they would be receptive to hearing this. Most of the time I didn't though.

When the crisis causes lingering physical or functional disabilities, those obvious impediments can trigger queries that suddenly thrust both the physical episode and the NDE into topic relevancy. A barber told me that she found herself speaking about the NDE frequently as she explained her residual memory loss to her regular customers following a near-fatal car accident.

As with all intensely contextual experiences, NDEs are intricately connected with a physical event. Rivers of associations flow through both aspects. Linguistic cross-references abound. Affective intensity may arise in part from dichotomous juxtapositions. While it is possible to talk about the physical crisis or the NDE in isolation, disclosure about either one necessitates a disclosure decision concerning the other. Issues of cascading disclosure help explain the effects of precipitating forces and complicating constraints within talk about the near-death episode.

Disclosure Following a Distressing NDE

NDE research depends on disclosure decisions. This dependence means, in part, that we cannot know for sure what proportion of near-death experiences are of a distressing nature. Are distressing NDEs rare, or are they rarely reported? Understanding and resolving disclosure difficulties following distressing NDEs is one small step toward removing impediments that may forestall such disclosures. Among the 50 individuals who met with me and spoke of their NDEs, one person recalled the out-of-body experience as an acutely distressing event. While one case does not justify broad conclusions, I present it as a vehicle for disclosure insights from that person's point of view.

I was contacted by a man in his 70s who had read a description of my research in a church bulletin. Our interview was comfortable and open, he was a gracious host to me in his home, and he seemed eager to make some headway about this important unresolved event in his life. His distressing NDE had occurred 40 years earlier during emergency surgery. Just prior to that surgery he was advised by his

physician to prepare for death and had called a priest. The on-duty priest did speak with him, but refused to administer the "last rites" sacrament after the man admitted that he had once encouraged a woman to have an abortion. After this refusal the man requested that the priest simply join him in prayer, a request also refused.

During the NDE this man described movement at high speeds through a dark and narrow tube, which he described as "like I was going to hell." In addition, a "deep, melancholy sound" was part of the NDE, a sound that he described as haunting to him in the years since. He had never disclosed this NDE to anyone, citing as reasons "I felt like they'd think I was nuts," "I was ashamed to say that I had a sensation I was going to Hell," and "I never felt like anybody would understand." Though his relationships with family members were described as close, he reported that he didn't want to "burden" or "upset" them. He added that this particular concern involved a degree of intimacy that he was not prepared to share even with those closest to him.

This man's spiritual distress moved me deeply. As an older man, he seemed desperate for "peace of mind, peace of soul." Recent controversy over abortion accentuated his preoccupation, including his horror upon reading a religious pamphlet describing unavoidable spiritual peril for those involved with abortion. He mentioned that this haunting near-death experience may have prompted a lifelong tempo of intense busyness as an effort to "get it out of my mind." This man obviously longed to resolve this lingering haunting from an experience that he interpreted as an indication of spiritual culpability. Yet he resisted my suggestions about professional resources with explanations that such persons wouldn't understand, did not have proper authority, or were much too busy. My follow-up calls always found an answering machine, but none of my calls were returned.

Greyson and Bush (1992) reported their findings after searching out 50 accounts of distressing NDEs. As they noted, "It is difficult to imagine that an experiencer could be indifferent to the cultural assumption that personal merit determines type of experience" (p. 96). Within my interviews, I found evidence that such a cultural assumption exists from both ends. Not only did the man with the distressing NDE memory interpret it as sign of spiritual culpability, many persons with uplifting NDEs commented that this happy event sealed their spiritual destiny after death. When one woman confided her blissful experience to a nun in the hospital, the nun replied that

she had heard both hellish and uplifting reports. "Well, I guess I won't go to hell!" was her response and conclusion. Several people expressed the belief that their blissful experience had already validated the merit of their behavior and thus no change was warranted (Hoffman, 1993).

The most noteworthy piece of misinformation I encounter when I speak to groups about near-death research involves this point. A number of audience members have mentioned their understanding that following suicide attempts, NDEs are all of distressing nature. Research findings do not support that (Ring, 1980). This belief seems to reflect the cultural assumption that merit and near-death experience milieu are linked causally. Ironically, recent NDE publicity, amplifying the dominantly uplifting motif, may be making it even more difficult for persons with distressing NDEs to self-disclose about the event.

Listener Selection

Interpersonal self-disclosure necessarily involves issues of listener selection. A decision to talk about one's NDE is a decision to disclose to a particular person or persons. When I asked about this aspect of listener selection within my 50 interviews, I found that these experiencers were amazingly specific when describing that process of assessing listener responsiveness and readiness. It appears that close observation and vigilance accompany this process. This refined level of process awareness reflects, I believe, the value of near-death experiences as well as the power of listener response. As Pennebaker and Susman (1988) and Pennebaker (1990) emphasized, when one experiences rejection during disclosures about significant events the negative effects can be personally devastating. This risk underscores the right and responsibility for near-death experiencers to exercise care in choosing persons with whom to discuss their NDE.

Disconfirming Responses

I found that experiencers are especially vulnerable to disconfirming responses during *early* disclosures. These communication events mark initial attempts to bring this experience out of the intrapersonal realm and into the interpersonal one. It is deeply ironic that when a powerful rejection stymies further disclosure initiatives, the

same happening that frees individuals from fear of physical death is itself buried within a communicative casket. One woman summarized this state of communicative isolation as distancing "you from the person you told" and creating a "loss of community with the living."

Several persons described to me these early rejections and trailing nondisclosure legacies. I will describe two of these to show their influence on subsequent listener selection processes. One woman's NDE occurred within a suicide attempt. When she told the psychiatrist what she witnessed from a point outside her body, she recalled the psychiatrist's response: "You're just hallucinating.... If I hear stuff like that from you again, then I'm going to have to put you in [the mental ward of local hospital] and lock you up.'" Despite her continued insistence of the experience's reality coupled with detailed descriptions of resuscitation efforts, the woman found that the psychiatrist "just wouldn't listen." Referred to a social worker shortly afterwards, she decided to try once again to describe the NDE. The social worker called the experience a hallucination and added, "You should not uh, tell people this, because, a, it's not going to help you because that just really did not happen.'" Soon afterwards she broke off her association with the psychologist because "nobody would listen to me." When I asked why it was so important to have that part of the ordeal discussed, this woman asserted that the NDE "changed me so much" and she wanted that wonderful part of a difficult ordeal to be acknowledged. She interpreted the negative responses to mean that there was something "to be ashamed of" but she wanted people to know that "something good came out of it." More than ten years passed before this person shared descriptions of her NDE openly with a trusted friend who was herself struggling with her child's death. Even then, she proceeded slowly and cautiously, alluding to her NDE on a number of occasions while refusing to elaborate how she knew so much about what awaits after death. Strongly motivated to comfort her friend, she described her extreme caution with these words:

I had to make sure that I wasn't going to be rejected. I had to make sure that she was going to listen to me. And I had to make sure how I was going to deal with it, from telling somebody because I hadn't told anybody in so many years.

Another person had three NDEs at ages 4, 16, and 39. When she began to describe what she observed and overheard during her original NDE her grandfather told her "you know the fever has affected your mind, and you must never talk about this; they'll lock you

away.' " The grandfather's words "scared me so badly." Even after her second NDE at age 16, which involved days of out-of-body autoscopic observation, she "never got up my nerve [to talk about it]. It was just too scary." She brought up the subject obliquely with her doctor by asking "when people get hurt real bad, and they're unconscious but they're not dead, where does their mind go?" But she was so terrified she'd be locked up that when the doctor said " 'Well, why are you asking me that?' " she decided not to tell him. After her third NDE she began an intensive search for written information. The librarian recognized her and asked why she was researching the topic. "I still wasn't telling anybody. [Laughter] So it's amazing, I'm a thinking, reasoning adult, but I still was afraid. My grandfather had so frightened me." About 10 years after her third NDE, a very close friend was depressed and grieving. In her desire to comfort him, she decided to disclose her NDEs in part to reveal how she knew what happens at death. She prefaced her narratives with these words:

I'd like to share something with you...that is totally off the wall, and you might call the people with the white jacket and the nice little ribbons on the ends of their sleeves, but I'm gonna tell you.

The power of early rejections, in cases like these, began a pattern of nondisclosure that persisted more than a decade despite sustained interest in the experience. They seem to heighten a posture of vigilance in listener selection afterwards.

Catharsis

Some persons respond to the awesome power of this happening with an irrepressible desire to talk about it with others. Almost explosive in its urgency, this strong desire immediately upon return to consciousness may usher in a period of nearly indiscriminate disclosure. Listener selection is nearly absent as a constraining variable in such disclosure interactions. This period tends to be shortlived and seems to be related to a residual sense of invincibility or euphoria.

Some persons described this period as a time when they were relatively unaware of signals corresponding to listener readiness. Proximity played a big role in determining who they spoke with; thus persons in emergency or hospital settings who maintain close contact with patients may be selected to hear such reports. Typically, NDErs

who commented about such early cathartic periods characterized them retrospectively as a joyful antecedent to more protracted stages during which both listener selection and awareness of their own needs, expectations, and vulnerabilities were refined.

Listener Criteria for Considered Interactions

As the early days and weeks following the NDE pass, experiencers become more aware of their own disclosure hopes and expectations. Dissatisfying listener responses, which may range from outright rejections to indifference to superficial curiosity, hone the experiencer's awareness of his or her own disclosure needs and motives. An intrapersonal development parallels this interactive one as well. The surprise and awesome power associated with the NDE yields to more measured thoughts about the experience's meaning and legacy. Experiencers are moved then to make more deliberate disclosure decisions.

I noted a surprising degree of willingness among the NDErs I interviewed to talk about this experience with others. In addition, these experiencers expressed remarkable agreement when they described the qualities they looked for in listeners as signals to guide their disclosure decisions. These qualities are expressed through the four queries that follow.

(1) *Is this person willing to think seriously about death and beyond?* Perhaps this willingness is a critical element in part because reciprocity operates as a fundamental guide in human interaction. We mirror one another in a thousand creative ways as a means of maintaining social harmony. A favor begets a favor; a gift is met with expressions of gratitude. Similarly, we usually move slowly in our disclosures with others. The degree of risk is usually increased in incremental stages between the persons involved, with an eye toward maintaining a relatively equal level of risk incurred. Except in formal relationships like therapeutic encounters, we look for matched levels of disclosure risk. We know, for example, that when disclosure is imbalanced that mismatch of vulnerability strains relationships (Adler and Towne, 1993).

One's NDE is typically viewed as an intimate and treasured happening. In addition, the topic is noted for its controversy. NDErs recognize that their own confrontation with death and beyond means that they have left behind cursory interest in such matters. NDErs

look for listeners willing to enter that place of vulnerability where we stand face-to-face with the great mysteries of life and death. It is not necessary that listeners present unquestioned belief about the NDE's reality, experiencers report, but the listener's willingness to ponder these issues seriously is critically important. Such a willingness may signal reciprocal involvement and interest as well as honor the topic's significance and power.

Judging from the comments made during our interviews, such willingness to think deeply about these issues is relatively uncommon. If potential listeners manifest an attitude of superficial curiosity or voyeuristic thrill-seeking, or in any way seem to be evading requisite soul-searching, the door to disclosure may shut quickly. Experiencers noted that a listener's recent brush with serious illness or a loved one's death typically engendered genuine interest in these issues.

Listeners may unwittingly confound these disclosure interactions by misunderstanding the reciprocity impulse. This impulse, for example, may partially account for the tendency that some listeners demonstrate to summon up examples of "strange" experiences to offer in return. A number of NDErs mentioned that listeners sometimes interrupt their account and begin offering reports of "strange" or "weird" happenings. As one man reported:

[The listeners] started to ask questions before I was halfway through the story, about did I see any auras around people, asking these kind of kooky questions people ask, and I thought, well I'm not interested in going anywhere, so I kinda didn't finish the story.

This kind of response seldom meets reciprocity needs, in part because an NDEr does not view the experience as "strange" or "weird" but rather as significant, intimate, transforming, and profound. NDErs reported their dismay when listeners respond to this topic in a competitive spirit, trying to "outdo" the account with other accounts of sensational or strange happenings.

(2) *Does this person have a closed mind on these matters?* When experiencers look for someone with an "open mind" to talk with, they have two characteristics in mind. First, they look for someone who will consider new ideas in these matters. Experiencers know that they themselves may have scoffed about these matters were it not for their first-hand encounter. They are well aware that these experiences may conflict seriously with materialistic scientific perspectives as well as certain religious dogmas. If someone has closed his

or her mind about these matters, NDErs may choose not to speak about their experience. After all, death will come . . . in its own time.

Because beliefs about death and beyond form bedrock layers of our personal schema, compelling new information about these matters can be disorienting. Near-death experiences are not uniform in content, yet following uplifting experiences NDErs can tolerate uncertainty about specific issues because overwhelming assurance was given by the NDE. Experiencers intuitively know, then, that their transformation has been eased because of that first-hand certainty and they have no way to bestow that assurance upon their listeners. As one man put it:

Why I don't speak of it a lot, is that it disturbs people My perception is that people tend to define themselves within the structure of religion somewhere, so that they have some reason, some semblance of their existence.

Closely aligned to an "open mind" is this second aspect: is this person's cosmology flexible enough that they are not unduly fragile when presented with this account? Often near-death experiences contain content that challenges traditional religious dogma. In words that echoed that sentiment, an experiencer explained that if he spoke about his NDE, "all I could do would be to break their faiths" because he could not take away anxiety about death and about making mistakes. It seems that uplifting NDEs provide noetic and emotional legacies. While talking about one's NDE may effectively share new knowledge, experiencers are not as confident that such dialogues can transmit the powerful assurance they've come to know.

(3) *Will my sincerity be respected?* If a listener carefully attends to the NDE account and chooses an alternate explanation, experiencers are not necessarily disturbed by that choice. What is disturbing is a response that calls into question the experiencer's sincerity and judicious attitude toward the NDE.

There is no question that from the experiencer's point of view, the NDE description is as truthful and accurate as possible. I would describe the experiencers who met with me as generally reluctant to make claims not specifically supported by their NDE content, differentiating in their comments between empirical evidence and belief or speculation. When experiencers cannot find words, they say so. When they need a metaphor, they introduce figurative language with disclaimers like "it's as if . . ." or "this is as close as I can come." Such metacommunicative comments, discourse about the words

themselves, reflect special care and integrity. When looking for potential listeners, experiencers hope to find persons who will accept this presumption of sound judgment and complete sincerity.

(4) *Will the value of this gift be appreciated?* With some exceptions, experiencers regard this event as precious and offer their account with that attitude. They hope that at the very least the listener will appreciate the value of both the NDE and the offer to share this account. Two NDErs said to me, "Don't cast pearls before swine." Experiencers look for persons who recognize this value.

Individuals vary in their capacity to deal with jocular responses. Several pointed out the difficulty of having others refer lightly to something they cherish. For instance, a woman decided to be more selective in sharing her account after she overheard some remarks made by church friends after her NDE description. When she heard the words "she had one of those experiences," she felt that a pivotal and profound happening had been reduced to a category. Said another, "I regret sharing something with them that I cherish so much and they look at it the way they look at it, with no respect and no belief." Several NDErs reported that when their spouses speak more glibly about it to others than the experiencer does, spouses may unwittingly encroach upon that hallowed space.

Finding Listeners

Experiencers draw on a combination of observational and intuitive means to detect a listener's attitudes in these four areas. Hoping to gather this information before actually revealing their own NDE, they may creatively test the waters by bringing up similar topics and watching responses. Said one woman who occasionally discusses her NDE in her work with seriously ill patients, "I do it in steps I don't suddenly drop this on someone." Said another, "I take a little time to figure out where the person's coming from philosophically and religiously, and then I gear the way I talk about it to that." Another NDEr who talks openly about his happening said that if someone brings it up at an inappropriate circumstance he responds, "I'd be glad to talk to you about it, but not here." He explained, "It seems to me if a person is truly interested in hearing about it, if it's not coming out of social nervousness or wanting somewhere to be at a party, then I'll hear back from them."

In addition to "trial balloons" and close listening, experiencers report that nonverbal clues are relied upon to assess attitudes. One man mentioned he looked closely into the eyes of the prospective listener for signs of disbelief and hesitation. I pressed another experiencer to describe behavior she classified as "resistance." Her description was amazingly specific:

There is a physical thing that happens when a person is—I can see it happen. Their back gets a little bit straighter, [getting ready to] defend them. There's a look that comes across their eyes. You can see them observing you and watching you and making judgments It's an observing look. It's not a being-with look. It's an observing look, and a judgment. You can see their mind going a mile a minute in the background.

Another experiencer emphasized that one cannot feign genuine interest: "either you are or you're not." A decision to disclose, then, is more accurately a decision to begin by closely watching the listener for attitude and reaction. That checking continues after the disclosure has begun as the persons participate together in exchange of messages, both content and attitudinal. At various junctures, the account can be stopped short, sidetracked, or made more shallow if the NDEr chooses to do so. For listeners who are genuinely interested, experiencers recommend the following:

- (1) Don't interrupt during the NDE account.
- (2) Take the experience on its own terms. Take time to imagine what this would mean if it happened to you.
- (3) Don't judge quickly; keep your mind open.
- (4) Listen with patience. The events may not fall into a tight sequence.
- (5) Stay silent when the speaker is silent. Resist the urge to hurry the story. The silence is not emptiness, but belongs to an experience of ineffability.

Mismatch of Disclosure Desire and Disclosure Frequency

During my research project, I wanted to gauge the degree to which persons adequately fulfilled their desire to talk about the NDE. Wanting to discuss this pivotal event and not doing so constitutes a disclosure dilemma. As Pennebaker argued forcefully in his book

Opening Up: The Healing Power of Confiding in Others (1990), not talking about significant life events appears to act as a cumulative stressor affecting our psychological and physical well-being.

In the pen-and-paper follow-up questions after our interviews, experiencers indicated their desire to talk about the NDE. I used responses to these questions as one means of assessing mismatch between desire to disclose and actual disclosure frequency.

Forty-six persons provided answers to both these questions. Of those 46, 10 persons indicated a desire one degree higher than frequency (for example, strong desire but occasional frequency), while 15 persons indicated a desire more than one degree higher than frequency (for example, strong desire but rarely discuss this). Using this comparison, 54 percent of the persons I met with reported mild to severe mismatch between disclosure desire and disclosure frequency through the follow-up questionnaire. Judging from remarks made during our interviews, I believe this to be a conservative estimate.

Pennebaker (1990) reported research findings that associated disclosure with reducing one's preoccupation with traumatic events, speeding up adjustment processes, and promoting resolution (see also Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, and Glaser, 1988; Pennebaker and Susman, 1988; Pennebaker, 1989). The applicability of these findings regarding disclosure of traumatic life events to near-death experiences is unknown. Like the events noted in disclosure research, near-death experiences are significant events that disrupt some basic beliefs about reality and one's place in reality. On the other hand, most examples in the research of Pennebaker and colleagues were comprised of distressing life events.

A conservative reading of this psychoneuroimmunological research regarding disclosure and health supports the contention that disclosure dilemmas following near-death experiences are matters of significance. I recall, for instance, meeting with one man many years after his autoscopic NDE. He told me he had been preoccupied with it every day for five years before he came across a newspaper article that prompted his initial disclosure. Though he still recalls his NDE clearly, he reported that after that disclosure to his spouse the NDE was no longer a subject of daily preoccupation. Resolving disclosure dilemmas is particularly critical, I believe, for those experiencers who delay initial disclosures after a NDE and who feel isolated, troubled, or unproductively preoccupied with thoughts about it.

Conclusions

In a previous article, I discussed disclosure needs and motives as articulated by 50 near-death experiencers who met with me (Hoffman, 1995). In this article, disclosure habits were examined with particular attention to major influences and obstacles for disclosure as well as the process of listener selection.

Decisions to talk about one's near-death experience mark a symbolic shift in an individual's relationship to that valued happening. Disclosure moves the NDE from a private, inner sanctum to an interactional world where controversy abounds. These communicative decisions are matters of significance from many points of view: symbolic, psychological, and physiological.

A decision to talk about one's NDE is a decision to begin dialogic overtures. Experiencers may modify that decision at various conversational junctures through topic shifts, expanding or abbreviating specific elements, and modulating disclosure depth. Far from being a binary decision—to disclose or not disclose—talk about near-death experiences represents entry into a multifaceted and deeply contextual experiential world. As Lane remarked, these kinds of "limit-experiences cause us to gather up every thread of meaning from the context in which they occur. In our memories, therefore, we return first of all to the place 'where it happened'" (1988, p. 5).

Though near-death experiences share imprints of well-documented patterns, each is unique and uniquely bound within the historical and symbolic context of individual life. Pennachio (1986) concluded that most NDEs can be characterized as mystical experience. As encounters with vibrant mystery and numinous energy, such NDEs are beyond linguistic description. Tournier (1965/1963) wrote:

Great mystics, those who penetrate most deeply into the secrets of God, speak of them prudently, reservedly, difficultly. The greatest secrets are inexpressible. At times, in the encounter with God, we have the impression of discovering life's secret, but we also sense it is incommunicable. It is a secret between God and us which must be respected reverently. (p. 62)

Communication researchers have expounded the benefits arising from self-disclosure, but have been slower to address the potential benefits of secrecy (Hoffman, 1993). Tournier (1965/1963) noted the pivotal role that both keeping secrets *and* revealing secrets plays in healthy personal development. Researchers have begun to unravel the physiological mechanisms that comprise the "work" of keeping

important matters within the bounds of secrecy. Perhaps the energy dedicated to protecting personal secrets is one means of offering sustenance to nascent aspects of our private selves (Hoffman, 1993). NDErs have the labor and responsibility to discern between those times when talking about the NDE is a self-nourishing act and when a decision of secrecy nurtures or protects something valuable.

I found that most experiencers do not view the NDE as a past, static event. Rather, it marks the moment when a living relationship first entered their awareness. Experiencers speak of "missing" that vibrant presence, referred to by many appellations. Deeply cherishing that encounter, selective disclosure is one manifestation of its value. It seems reasonable, for example, to avoid interactions that would devalue the experience, at least until one's relationship with it is well established in the rhythms of memory and meaning.

Based on my discussions with 50 NDErs, I am convinced that "perceived singularity in an extramundane happening of this magnitude is experienced as stressful" (Hoffman, 1993, p. 234). Researchers and medical professionals have the power and responsibility to relieve such misperceptions of singularity by making near-death research accessible through respectful and creative avenues. At the same time, I do not press experiencers to reveal the details of their NDE. I am alert for signs that experiencers are ready to disclose, and I nurture my own relationship with that still, silent place that makes wholehearted listening possible. When disclosure invitations come my way, I regard them as the sacred privileges they are.

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Lucid Dreams as One Method of Replicating Components of the Near-Death Experience in a Laboratory Setting

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ABSTRACT: A large phenomenological overlap among lucid dreams, out-of-body experiences, and near-death experiences suggests the possibility of developing a methodology of replicating components of the near-death experience using newly developed methods of inducing lucid dreams. Reports in the literature of both spontaneous and induced near-death-experience-like episodes during lucid dreams suggest a possible protocol. Raymond Moody's (1993) use of mirror gazing is seen as a major advancement in the field of near-death studies, not only from a methodological standpoint, but also because it represents the first attempt to develop therapeutic interventions based on these experiences.

In his most recent article, Raymond Moody (1993, p. 84) stated that "I had long been intrigued with the prospect of replicating near-death experiences." He cited the movie *Flatliners* (Schumacher, 1990) as evidence of the popular fascination with this possibility. The plot of the movie develops around four medical students who induce cardiac arrest in each other in an attempt to replicate a near-death experience (NDE). While illustrating the fascination with this subject, the movie also highlighted a major ethical problem in actually doing this type of research. It would clearly be unethical to induce cardiac arrest in an attempt to replicate this experience, or for any other reason.

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However, we may be able to devise alternative methods for studying various aspects of this phenomenon that do not put subjects at any risk. Kenneth Ring (Atwater, 1988, p. viii) has pointed out that the near-death experience has nothing inherently to do with death. Although being close to death is one reliable trigger for an NDE, the experience has also been reported during such nonlethal activities as deep meditation (Grosso, 1985), ancient initiation rituals (Grosso, 1985), consciously induced out-of-body experiences (Monroe, 1971), psychedelic psychotherapy (Grof and Halifax, 1977), hypnosis (Babb, 1989) and shamanistic rituals (Eliade, 1964; Kalweit, 1988), as well as during periods of stress, during dreams (Gillespie, 1985), or even spontaneously (Bucke, 1901).

Moody has borrowed from the area of ancient initiation rituals to devise one method of replicating aspects of the near-death experience. He has also made the task less demanding by taking one component of a more complex phenomenon—in this case, seeing apparitions—and studying it in isolation.

A Modern Day Psychomanteum

Moody's article discussed his research into "one form of facilitated visionary experience, specifically crystal or mirror visions" (Moody, 1993, pp. 84). He became convinced that the ancient Greeks had developed a method by which the living could come into contact with apparitions of the dead:

Incredible as it may seem, for many centuries in ancient Greece there were institutions known as psychomanteums, or oracles of the dead, where people journeyed to consult with the spirits of the deceased. Accounts from those times make it quite clear that persons actually seemed to see and to be in direct communication with the departed during these visits. (Moody, 1993, p. 85).

Based on accounts from those times, Moody developed his own modern psychomanteum. This "theater of the mind" is located on the second floor of an abandoned mill on his property in rural Alabama. At one end of a room is a mirror 48 inches high by 42 inches wide mounted on a wall so that the lower edge is 32 inches above the floor. A comfortable chair is placed in front of the mirror with the top of the headrest 34 inches above the floor. A small lamp is placed behind the chair and the entire area is surrounded by a curtain of black velvet reaching from the ceiling to the floor. The result is that

persons looking into the mirror cannot see their own reflection, or anything else for that matter. They are looking into an empty mirror, and it is by gazing into this empty mirror that apparitions are said to appear.

Moody reported that, using this method, 12 of 25 persons, or 48 percent of those who underwent the entire procedure, and four persons who underwent a shorter version of the same procedure, experienced apparitions of dead relatives and friends. Nine of the persons who experienced these visions were male and seven female. They ranged in age from 22 to 74 and all were either students or professionals. A number of people reported not only visual contact, but also communication with the apparitions.

A few of the volunteers experienced apparitions of people other than the person they had intended to see. Moody, for instance, reported that he had intended to visit with his maternal grandmother but instead was contacted by his paternal grandmother. In three cases apparitions were seen after the person had left the psychomanteum. All of the encounters were reported to seem quite natural while they were occurring and there was no element of fear reported by any of the volunteers. The subjects unanimously reported that they felt that what they had experienced was real. Many volunteers who experienced apparitions stated that there was a definite healing or therapeutic aspect to the experience.

Moody's work represents the first time that this component of the near-death experience has been successfully isolated and studied in a laboratory setting. The question arises: Are there other components of the near-death experience that can be extracted for analysis in a laboratory setting? And are there other methods that can be used to induce the near-death experience? I would like to borrow from another area that has been documented to have produced near-death-like experiences in the past: dreams. More specifically, I would like to discuss the application of a specific type of dream, the lucid dream, as another method of inducing components of the near-death experience in a laboratory setting.

Lucid Dreams

Lucid dreams are defined quite simply as dreams in which the dreamer becomes conscious while dreaming that he or she is, in fact, dreaming. Many people who report this experience of "dream con-

sciousness" state that, once lucid, the quality of the dream changes in a manner that is difficult to describe. Often people feel an incredible sense of freedom and exhilaration at the moment they achieve lucidity.

One of my own early lucid dreams illustrates this sense of excitement and joy:

I dreamt that I had gotten off of an old whaling vessel that had just come into port after a long voyage. In my dream, I jump down off of the ship and start walking down a dirt road towards a town. As I walk, I hold both hands over my chest, one hand over the other. Suddenly, I start flying and as I do I realize for the first time that I am dreaming. I become very excited and I keep repeating, "I'm doing it, I'm doing it," meaning I am having a lucid dream. I wake up feeling incredible excitement and enjoyment.

Since the dream is a creation of the dreamer's own psyche, it stands to reason that once conscious, the dreamer can alter the dream in any way that he or she chooses. This is illustrated in the following anecdote:

I decide to practice directing the actual content of the dream. I focus on a tree in the dream scene, and I mentally command it to turn into a house. Slowly, the house appears in its place. I feel pleased with my power and progress. (Kelzer, 1987, p. 17)

There is also an incredible clarity of perception that is often reported during lucid dreams:

I am standing in a field in an open area when my wife pointed in the direction of the sunset. I looked at it and thought, "How odd; I've never seen colors like that before." Then it dawned on me: "I must be dreaming!" *Never had I experienced such clarity and perception* [italics added]—the colors were so beautiful and the sense of freedom so exhilarating that I started racing through this beautiful golden wheat field waving my hands in the air and yelling at the top of my voice, "I'm dreaming! I'm dreaming!" (LaBerge and Rheingold, 1990, p. 3).

Nor are lucid dreams simply beautiful nighttime experiences. They often can be useful in overcoming personal problems or barriers experienced in daily life. Stephen LaBerge and Howard Rheingold (1990) cited as one example of this the account of a musician who used lucid dreaming to overcome anxiety in his playing, which led directly to better performances.

But the most interesting aspect of lucid dreams is that many have an unmistakable spiritual or transcendent quality. During these

dreams the individual seems to go beyond his or her normal sense of self and experience an expanded level of consciousness not often realized during normal, waking consciousness:

I realized I was dreaming. I raised my arms and began to rise (actually I was being lifted). I rose through black sky that blended to indigo, to deep purple, to lavender, to white, then to very bright light. All the time I was being lifted there was the most beautiful music I have ever heard. It seemed like voices rather than instruments. There were no words to describe the JOY I felt. I was very gently lowered back to earth. I had the feeling that I had come to a turning point in my life and I had chosen the right path. The dream, the joy I experienced, was kind of a reward, or so I felt. It was a long, slow slide back to wakefulness with the music echoing in my ears. The euphoria lasted several days, the memory, forever. (LaBerge and Rheingold, 1990, p. 3)

The Overlap Among Lucid Dreams, Out-of-Body Experiences, and Near-Death Experiences

Celia Green, in her classic study of lucid dreams, stated:

It is not possible to discuss lucid dreams without considering their relationship to another type of experience known as an "out-of-the-body experience." Experiences of this kind occur in a wide variety of settings, the majority of these being associated with *conditions of stress, accident or illness* [italics added]. (Green, 1968, p. 17)

Green went on to illustrate this by describing the account of a person who was in a traffic accident and had an out-of-body experience. Since Green was writing before Moody's (1975) work had been published in which he coined the term "near-death experience," she did not distinguish between out-of-body experiences that occur spontaneously and those that we would now regard as one component of a near-death experience. Thus authorities in this field had made the connection not just between lucid dreams and out-of-body experiences but also between these experiences and near-death experiences.

Celia Green was not alone in making this observation. Psychologist, author, and veteran lucid dreamer Patricia Garfield made a similar observation, and also seemed to imply a developmental trend that begins with dreaming, continues with lucid dreaming, and ends in out-of-body experiences:

[While personally experimenting with dreams] . . . I had been experiencing yet another level of dream consciousness. More and more

I found myself having lucid dreams—dreams in which you become aware that you are dreaming *during* the dream. In this incredible state, anything becomes possible: flying at will, orgasm with partners of choice, calling forth creative ideas, projecting oneself into distant lands, visiting with long-dead people, and so on. *Then after months of lucid dreaming, I found myself automatically on occasion experiencing what people call out-of-body experiences* [italics added]. (Garfield, 1979, p. 13)

The association between lucid dreams, out-of-body experiences, and near-death experiences is so close, so well developed, that the question often arises as to *which* of the three experiences a particular anecdote should be classified under. For example, consider the following:

I was floating in darkness wondering what was happening to me Though I was not particularly aware . . . I felt myself drift up. Suddenly I entered the light which I happily recognized. I knew then that I was again in the presence of God, and that this time I had died. The light was brilliant and filled my vision

I did not remember . . . my life, nor did I know the circumstances of my death. I had some regrets at first, but my joy was greater than any regrets. I was spontaneously prayerful, calm and extremely happy. As I floated for some time in the light I repeated over and over with great feeling, "Thank you, Father." I was not thankful for dying, but for being in the presence of God and the light. (Gillespie, 1985, p. 80)

Many people would be quick to identify this as an example of a near-death experience. Floating in darkness, entering into a light, being in the presence of God, a sense of having died, being calm and extremely happy all are components commonly associated with a near-death experience. However, the above anecdote does not meet criteria for a near-death experience for one, and probably only one, important reason. The man who reported it was not near death; he was asleep and in the midst of a lucid dream.

This brings us back to the question central to my thesis: whether it is possible to have a near-death-like experience during a dream. Earlier in this paper I mentioned Ring's contention that the near-death experience has no inherent connection with death. LaBerge (1985) has also raised the question of whether it is theoretically possible to have the equivalent of a near-death experience under non-lethal circumstances. His answer was that this is indeed possible by experiencing it during a lucid dream.

Why Choose Lucid Dreams?

Lucid dreams lend themselves to the type of application I am suggesting for a number of reasons. As we have just seen, there is a clear, strong phenomenological overlap among lucid dreams, out-of-body experiences, and near-death experiences. Another consideration is that there are no foreseeable negative consequences to participation in research involving lucid dreaming; indeed, there are some very favorable consequences to learning this technique. Dreams are, after all, a naturally occurring event, which happens many times each night. The only people who should be excluded from participation in lucid dream research are those who have difficulty with reality testing.

Another consideration is that lucid dreaming has been shown to be a teachable skill. The work of LaBerge and his colleagues (e.g., LaBerge and Rheingold, 1990) has demonstrated that anyone who is able to recall dreams, and who has sufficient motivation, is capable of learning the skill of lucid dreaming. LaBerge and Rheingold (1990) also have developed methods and technology that facilitate lucid dreaming.

A Possible Protocol

The most obvious protocol would be to have a number of veteran lucid dreamers become lucid and then will themselves to have a near-death experience. Although this has not to my knowledge been attempted in a group of people, the literature includes one account of a person who attempted this with some success.

Scott Rogo wrote a number of books in the field of parapsychology (Rogo, 1989; Rogo, 1974). He stated that, "In the past, I have succeeded in experimentally inducing out-of-body experiences (OBEs) from the hypnagogic state" (1990, p. 257). His description of the induction process clearly indicated that he used what LaBerge called the WILD method. During a nap, he reported, he had the following experience:

I tried to relax into the experience instead of "fighting" to get out of the body. That's when I suddenly found myself standing in some sort of parasomatic body on the opposite side of the room, staring back at my body. I walked or floated up to the inert figure and examined it dispassionately before thinking: "Well this is a bore. What else should I do?"

At this point in the experience, I decided to see if I could induce a classic NDE. I considered the notion practical since I can control my lucid dream environment, even though such dreams are rare in my life. I was also interested in replicating Marcel Louis Forhan's observation that he could control his out-of-body environment by pure thought (Yram, n.d.). I mention these factors to show that, while out-of body, my thought processes were not dreamlike, but perfectly rational.... Then I commanded myself to undergo an NDE.

The scene instantly changed. The neighborhood didn't change in its appearance, but became drab and rather oppressive, as if I were looking at a sepia-tinted photograph of it. The sky and stars seemed to disappear and a large tunnel opened in the sky, taking up roughly 30 degrees of my visual field. I soon found myself flying down the tunnel, which seemed to be sepia colored like the rest of the environment, toward a glowing light. I could see and sense the intensity and warmth of the light, and I marveled at the experience. I knew that I shouldn't be capable of staring into something so bright nor tolerate the intense heat I felt, but I could, which encouraged me to try merging with the light. I continued my way through the tunnel.

I was nearing the light when I lost control of the experience, or control was taken from me. My OBE/NDE environment began to fade and I had the sensation of being sucked back through the tunnel. Everything went black as I felt myself swirling down a maelstrom. I realized that I was returning to my body. (Rogo, 1990, p. 258)

The out-of-body experience, dispassionately looking at his body, moving rapidly down a tunnel, seeing a bright light, trying to merge with the light and being sucked back through a dark area are all familiar components of the NDE.

It is important to note that Rogo indicated this experience was unlike a typical NDE in one important aspect: the sense of peace, calm and painlessness, which Ring (1980) called the core affective cluster, was clearly absent.

Conclusion

The possibility of developing a methodology that would allow us to induce a near-death like experience in a laboratory or naturalistic setting is indeed fascinating. Moody's replication of a modern psychomanteum to induce apparitions has already produced intriguing results and promises to continue do so in the future. I have presented another method that I believe also holds promise of replicating com-

ponents of the near-death experience. Lucid dreams have long been known to produce transcendental, near-death-like experiences.

We also have the opinions of leading experts in the fields of both near-death studies and lucid dreaming who feel that this is theoretically possible. Although this has yet to be demonstrated in a laboratory setting, there is at least one report in the literature suggesting that this is not only possible, but has actually occurred with some success, in a naturalistic setting. I see no major obstacles, either methodological or ethical, to developing a protocol to carry out this research in a laboratory setting in the near future.

Moody, who ushered in the present day field of near-death studies, has again blazed a trail for the rest of us to follow. The method of isolating one component of the near-death experience for laboratory study marks a major advancement in the field of near-death studies. We have now reached the point where we can go beyond simply documenting this phenomenon, which has now been done exhaustively, to being able to replicate the experience in a controlled environment, thereby allowing for a more scientific examination of the experience.

But this is also seen as a major advancement in a more important sense. We are now in a position to begin to develop actual therapeutic interventions based on this research, which promise to be of direct and profound benefit to mankind.

This brings us to the prospect articulated by Melvin Morse (Morse and Perry, 1990, p. 174): "Imagine if the transformative reaction to NDEs could be available to anyone who wants the power to change his life for the better." Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1978) noted that children dying of cancer often spontaneously have these experiences and that the experiences seem to ease their transition into death. Could people who were terminally ill be taught to have this experience, thereby easing their transition into death, while at the same time enhancing the quality of the time they have left? What about the parents of a child who has died suddenly? Could we use Moody's method of mirror gazing to grant them one last visit with their child, thereby alleviating some of their otherwise unbearable grief?

What if we were able to provide criminals with a life review during which they were given the opportunity to evaluate their lives? Would seeing how their actions affected others have an impact on their subsequent behavior? If we were able to develop a methodology that allowed people to enter into and communicate with the light, would it be important for our religious leaders to undergo the experience? Could our scientists be exposed to the sense of all knowledge that

some near-death experiencers encounter? These are just a few of the possible applications that come to mind.

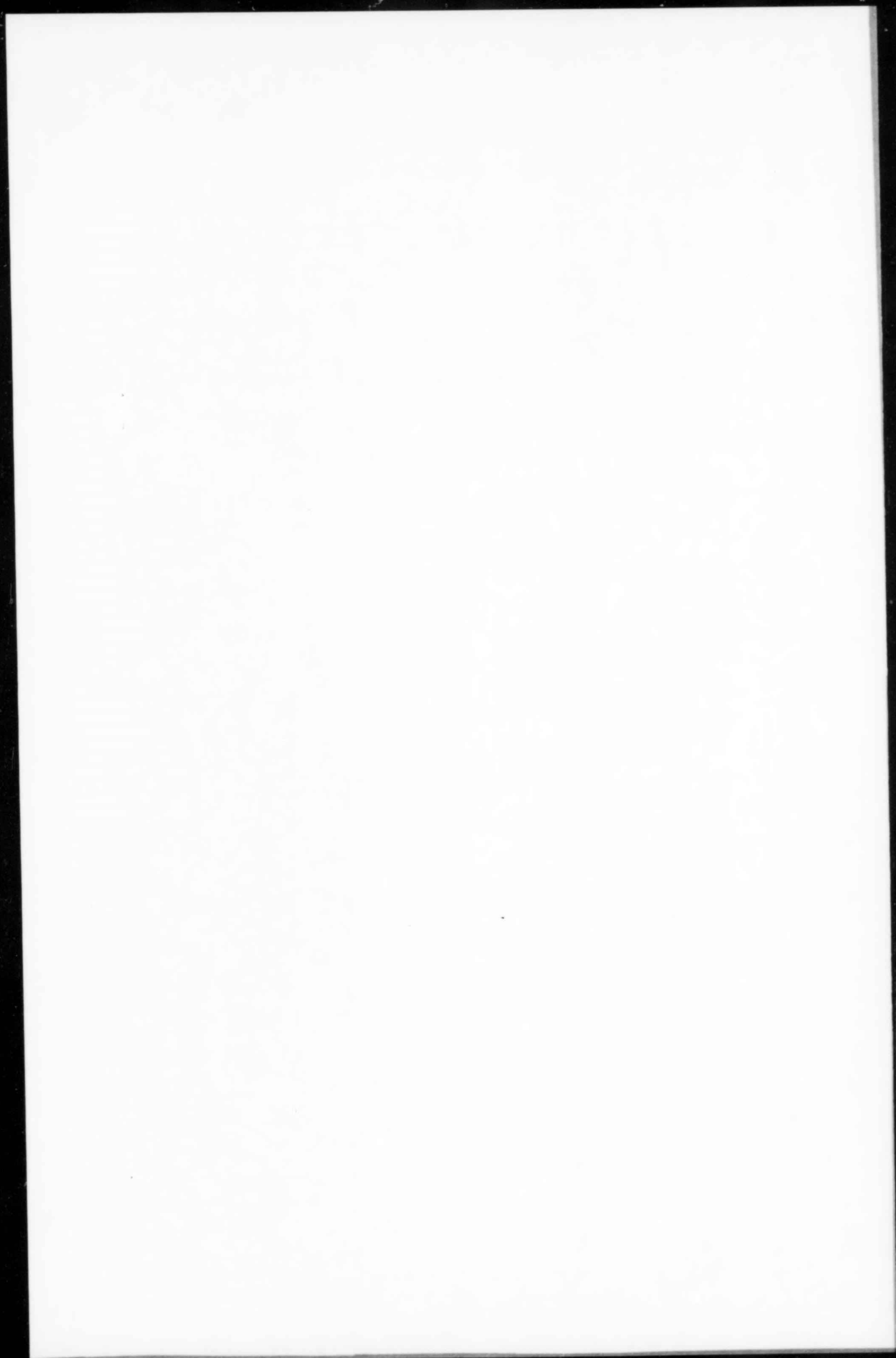
In all cultures throughout history there have been those who knew about these experiences and sought them out. This is, of course, what many of the ancient initiation and shamanistic rituals did, using not only mirror gazing, but also hypnotic techniques, mood-altering drugs, sensory and social isolation, dreams, and a number of other techniques, in order to facilitate this experience (Eliade, 1964; Grosso, 1985). And although these were often closely guarded secret rites in the past, we may have arrived at the point in history where these experiences can be made available to anyone who is in need of them.

In a similar vein, although it once took a lifetime of dedication to achieve these experiences, it may be that by combining the wisdom of the ancients with advances in modern technology we may be able to induce this experience more rapidly and effectively. And while we are now at the point where we need to isolate individual components for research purposes, the day may come in the not too distant future, when we are able to recombine these components into one overall modern-day method of transcendence.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Beyond the Light: What Isn't Being Said About the Near-Death Experience, by P. M. H. Atwater. New York, NY: Birch Lane Press, 1994, 296 + xv pp, \$16.95.

This delightfully readable work is brilliant, provocative, challenging, informative, timely, and, for me, at times exasperating: among the many underlinings of enthusiastic Yeses in my marginal notations lie a sprinkling of frustrated No!s. In light of the importance and overall excellence of this seminal work, however, my grumbles are petty and incidental.

Atwater's primary interest, the near-death experience (NDE), is a subject I avoided early on since the issue ballooned into a cultic-religious circus, with objectivity thrown to the winds. Capitalizing on our species' history of angst, NDEs became a hot commodity. Publishers, writers, speakers, healers, channelers, preachers, crystal-gazers—anyone could cash in on this growing "field," which translated as field of financial opportunity. Radio and television vied with each other as to who could present the most improbable, outlandish, and sensational near-death performers until the whole issue was suspect. Atwater has, at least for me, not only redeemed the subject and made it possible to discuss without intellectual embarrassment, but charted new terrain.

Much of the near-death literature seems to have as its primary basis and intent the proving of various religious sentiments, while Atwater's inquiry, though spiritually based, moves us over a broad range, involving many disciplines, studies, observations, and anomalies. She not only gives the near-death phenomenon a deeper per-

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spective and more universal scope, through her synthesizing and comparative studies, she contributes to the paradigm shift taking place on many levels today, the new definition of humanity emerging worldwide.

That people experiencing a near-death phenomenon claim they "needed" the experience, indeed, that it was even "ordered," gave direction and impetus to Atwater's investigations. She finds implications of a higher order of things seeking to "re-vamp" our self-awareness and worldview, an observation as old and pervasive as is our armored defense to stay as we are. Atwater suggests this transformative thrust awaits its chance to break through to us, catch us unawares or off guard. A close brush with death can provide the very access needed, a "stopping of our world" that temporarily shatters our selective screening and allows something else to form conceptually.

Surely we have a homeostatic "maintenance office" in our neural structure, an ancient survival mechanism that operates defensively and unbeknownst within us, in effect a tight selective screen through which we view our world and keep our cosmic egg intact at all costs. Susanne Langer wrote that our greatest fear was of a "collapse into chaos if ideation fails" (1962/1956, p. 150); she referred to the idea systems we inherited and on which we built our world-perceptions from birth.

Atwater goes deeper into the heart of the matter when, in one of her many powerful observations, she writes, "The greatest fear we have in living out our earth life is not what might happen to us, but what might be expected from us if we recognized who we are" (p. 188).

So any "higher address" generally falls on carefully deafened ears, the light of creation on eyes trained not to see. Even as transcendence tries to open within us we draw back, one level of mind longing to embrace a greater life, a far older and stronger level resisting.

This transformative spirit is hardly limited in its modes of access to us, however, and Atwater explores ways or means other than near death through which such grace can move. She draws splendid parallels between the classical near-death experience and a whole raft of nonordinary, transformative, healing, "death-like" or magnificent psychic upheavals, shifts of viewpoint and awareness that break the shackles of our sociocultural imprinting. Such nonordinary breakthroughs range from the ecstatic to the psychologically devastating. I found parallels here with episodes of the "experience of no-self"

described by Bernadette Roberts (1989, 1991, 1993), one of the more remarkable, if unsung, people of our time.

In this comparative analysis of near-death phenomena and the large body of "anomalies" human experience offers, Atwater's strength of mind flowers and the vitality and value of her book takes shape. She lifts the near-death phenomenon out of its defined borders and uses it as a lens to give us a new slant on human experience, creativity, brain/mind/body, the universal fields of potential on which all brain/minds draw and to which they contribute. Then she issues a call that the opening offered in this book be followed through with serious, in-depth research—not a bad suggestion.

Atwater emphasizes that not only psychological but physiological changes are often involved in the transformations following a near death, that the phenomenon may, in fact, be a way for accelerated spiritual/emotional/intellectual growth. She speaks of these as "mutations," the equal of species evolution. I reacted to this extravagance, until I remembered research showing that prolonged anxiety alone can bring mutations in our genetic system previously thought immutable. Thus so violent a disruption of our norm as an NDE could surely offer a broader and more creative opening.

Atwater's research revealed a large segment of negative ("hellish") near-death experiences, which provided a springboard into some of her most telling observations: that an individual's pattern of living enters as a determinant in his or her pattern of dying; that how one has lived influences how the phenomenon of passage "arranges itself." Such an issue may prove contentious to the true believer, rather as the academic scientific community resists evidence that the scientist's own subjective state enters into his or her findings, that the observer is also an active participant, even co-creator.

There is no solipsism intended; a basic, shared matrix underlies all experience, be it scientific, or, as Atwater clearly shows, the near-death phenomenon. But over that fundamental given, individual differences weave wondrously varied patterns.

In setting up an experiment *for* observation, we determine to an indeterminable extent that which is then seen. We then take to be purely objective a discovery or observance that is at least our quasi-creative act, wherein lie the horns of a universal dilemma, one Atwater faces in her sincere attempt toward objectivity, and one that keeps us *Homo sapiens* on the edge of ambiguity. To claim that a scientist's attitude and intent prompting his research—much less the disruptive interventions in the natural order necessary to carry out

that research—colors or even gives shape to that which is then discovered, is rightfully resisted.

Science as known would perforce be changed should such be accepted. This "subjective imperative" paradoxically threatens the very "true believing" attitude or faith currently necessary to *do* such research in the first place. Our defensive selectivity of brain/mind operates on both ancient survival levels and learned intellectual ones. We defend our educated mindset as consciously and vigorously as our nature defends our biological "homeostatic" one beneath the surface. I made this claim some twenty five years ago in my first book, *The Crack in the Cosmic Egg* (Pearce, 1988/1970), and have watched that fact slowly dawn in the general academic mind-at-large.

In this respect Atwater's research is as objective as is possible, but, as is true for all of us, what she observes is nevertheless colored by her personal history—a shadowing from which there is no escape, and which she recognizes. Even as she points out a commonality among NDEs that shows a truly universal foundation, as with any and all experience, she notes that: "The issue of ego domination or ego desire directly impinges upon how a near-death survivor interprets his or her experience" (p. 72). Even though our higher function succeeds in breaking through to us, using whatever metaphoric-symbolic imagery is both apropos and available, we must still carry the ball, an issue expressed in the Biblical parable of the sower's seed falling on rocky, brier-filled, or fertile soil (Matthew 13:3).

Ego, Atwater notes, in common with spiritual disciplines in general, "can waylay even the most sincere" (p. 72)—though this leaves in abeyance the thorny issue of what *is* ego. "Heavenly' guidance," Atwater notes, "leads to self-deception if one's ego is not redirected from self-satisfaction to service, from self-righteousness to renewal" (p. 72). This is hardly a new concept, but Atwater uses such observations to throw new light on our assumptions about the NDE and life itself.

The chapters on transcendent experience, enlightenment, and the aftereffects of the near-death phenomenon are rich, rewarding, and revealing; but I have difficulty accepting that the brief encounter of an NDE can equate, point by point, and give an equivalent result of, the attainment of years of soul-wrestling struggles undergone by the saint, realized yogi or Sufi, or master of aikido or Zen. Exemplars of these two categories—saint and NDE recipient—show dramatic differences. Some truly "great beings," who, though rare, are always among us, seem lifted above the ordinary human state into some-

thing akin to "divine," certainly above the affective/emotional reward systems that drive our species.

The emotional states of ecstasy, joy, luminous radiance, infectious warmth, and so on that Atwater attests as a hallmark among near-death experiencers are still aspects of that very affective system we hold in common with all mammals, if in superior form. And every aspect of our affective system, even its highest expressions of joy, love, or ecstasy, is subject to the polar negatives contained within the same system and indeed displayed all too often by NDE recipients themselves: ecstasy today, despair tomorrow. Being happy carries its shadow side of possible unhappiness. There just may be, as great beings demonstrate, a state beyond the polarities of love/hate, joy/sorrow, ecstasy/despair, and so on, a state beyond emotions as we know them.

Decades ago James Olds and Peter Milner (1954) discovered a reward or "pleasure center" deep in the ancient limbic structure of our brain that could be activated by an electrode. They reported that rats with an electrode buried in this center will cross an electric grid, something rats will not do for survival itself, to activate the electrode by pressing a bar. Rats will not only forego mating, but refuse food and water to the point of death in favor of pressing that bar and getting that psychic fix. Other researchers have found a comparable "pleasure center" in the limbic region of the human brain. And so Atwater is on strong grounds in placing a "superconscious" or higher state within the realm of the limbic system, the second of our triadic neural structures. But the edge of ambiguity appears as we note those rare but highly evolved people who are not functioning from any such emotional reward system at all, who speak of a state at a radical discontinuity from the polar contrasts by which we gauge events.

Atwater's claim that the NDE has as its impetus, and actually brings, transformation is questionable in the broad generic way she implies; but she rightly uses the term, since she means literally a sudden change of major proportion. "Transcendence" indicates a rising above or going beyond, which involves growth and development; "transformation," as she uses it, implies a radical, even sudden, change of one's nature itself, or mutation. Atwater points out, however, that seven-some years are generally needed to "integrate" the transformative near-death experience into daily life, a point which, if true, clarifies the issue, has great significance, and needs to be understood by all concerned. Thus, if she is correct, the saint spends

decades of discipline preparing for entry into a new life, while the NDE throws one willy-nilly into a new state to which one then must, as best he or she can, sink or swim—learn to adapt to as well as adopt this new awareness to life in the world at large. (Perhaps our spirit simply gets impatient.)

The adult stages of human development, seriously truncated in nearly all of us, should lead to states that transcend the lower animal structures of our brain/mind and the behaviors carried within them. Though we thwart adult development at every hand, our spirit bides her time and moves on behalf of her agenda, given the opportunity.

I am delighted that Atwater embraces research into our “triune nature of brain and behavior” as delineated through the lifetime work of Paul McLean (1990), a leading brain researcher at the National Institute of Mental Health. Anything growing out of our ancient “mammalian-based” affective system proves dual, and indeed this realm of the “lower heart” is considered a stumbling block to the highest states by all spiritual systems. The transcendence toward which evolution has groped goes beyond and so achieves *freedom from* the very affective system generating our emotional/relational life in this all too mammalian body, a modality both sparking and plaguing our species.

That the near-death experiencer’s ego-interpretation can distort and even thwart the grace given, brings into question whether transcendence of human to divine is the same as that considered “transformative” in popular usage. “Transformation,” as it is used in most popular literature, generally refers to that which make us whole persons, that which heals or brings to unity our seriously split three-fold brain/mind structure and its respective “selves” or behavioral systems.

But the sort of wholeness of self in current usage should be but our first stage of maturation, designed by nature to be complete by late adolescence. Since our development is seldom complete, we are left fragmented and spend a lifetime longing to be “healed,” made into one centered, intact person. A veritable army of therapists cashes in on that need, which virtually none can fill since therapy can at best only make us whole in a social sense, that is, whole enough to be functional according to society’s criteria, which means able to support and maintain that society and our place in it. In this pursuit our deep intuitive desire for real healing is untouched.

We long for wholeness because only a whole human can be transformed into the divine. And a whole person in *this* sense might be

seriously *dysfunctional* in a social-supportive sense. Wise men have noted that it is better to be blind or crippled and *in* that kingdom than whole (physically/mentally functional) and outside it. We transcend our triune nature not only to go beyond all biological constraints, but to be moved into a different modality altogether—the real goal and purpose of our adult development and of life itself.

Atwater's cognizance of the role our triune brain structure plays is significant, as well as her inclusions of field theories. Time and again her creative inquiry encompasses issues that might well escape, or be dismissed by, more conventional thinkers. She recognizes the similarity between the rising incidence of near-death experiences and the periodic epidemics of collective imaginative creations that plague us: beliefs, manias, captivations of mind that, right or wrong, seize public attention. A surge of such attention dramatically increases the phenomenon so attended, which illusion may thereby be catapulted into a universal field of influence impinging on all of us. It may be that flying saucers, alien abductions, the current surge of suddenly remembered child abuse, and like phenomena may be shared field effects.

By pointing out a resemblance between shared public fantasies and the near-death movement itself, Atwater shows that through such psychic mechanisms we can color and lose the true significance of what is given. Her examples of shared or almost identical near-death experiences brought about by close proximity of the individuals involved fits Charles Tart's (1972) early studies in mutual-hypnotic states, the phenomenon of shared lucid dreaming, shared altered states through drugs, and so on. Such striking research may not enamor Atwater to the more strident religious voices within the near-death movement, but only as we face this shadow-side of ourselves and go beyond it, as Atwater invites, will we discover an even more awesome level of our being toward which the near-death phenomenon points.

In this way Atwater rightfully opens near-death study to Rupert Sheldrake's (1981) "morphogenetic field theory," Howard Gardner's (1993) theory of independent "multiple intelligences," and related issues to which I devoted the first section of my recent book, *Evolution's End* (Pearce, 1992). She points toward a primary fact of our life, that the notions we entertain in our brain/minds determine, to an indeterminable extent, the reality we experience. I would add that those notions are seldom matters of choice, but the fate and destiny of the society in which we are born, to which "body of universals"

we must respond from birth, unbeknownst. The stakes in Atwater's observation are high. Evolution itself, the thrust of eternal being in its becoming, is involved. Our survival as a species—currently rather in doubt—is at stake as well.

In regard to God, that unknowable and unknown that lies at the horizon never reached, Atwater falters in her objectivity. As with so many undergoing a transformative experience, she tends to concretize God, and makes of that unknown an object among objects. Even a sphere of blinding light is an objectification. I challenge equating God with light or anything else. As John Donne said of God: "He brought light out of darknesse, not out of a lesser light" (1963/1624, p. 182). He, It, or whatever, is not that which is made. As endemic with the West, Atwater unwittingly falls into idolatry with such extravagant exclamations as: "The near-death phenomenon frees an individual to walk and talk with God without reservation or restriction" (p. 144), a statement fraught with problems, and indicating the common fallacy of projection onto a mythical or mental image that which cannot be imaged, for which there is no target of projection, and which always lies beyond our knowing. As Roberts (1989, 1991, 1993) pointed out, no one ever sees or "knows" God, we but journey *into* God. Likewise we do not become God; at best we are to become Christs, the manifestation, expression, or objectification if you like, of God.

In spite of implying that the near-death experience gives what rare members of our species, our saints, have struggled mightily to attain over millenia, Atwater realizes that many near-death experiencers have serious difficulty coping with their experience. Even the seven-some years needed to fully integrate the brain-shift is adequate only if the recipient devotes those years *to* such an integrative discipline. For discipline it would take, and indeed, seven years would be cheap. The spiritual seeking that leads to the great saint is invariably long and difficult, not because a price is extracted by some heavenly bargaining agent, nor that the seeking eventually "finds" or even creates that which is sought—as it does in the Eureka! phenomenon of science and art.

Rather, through that intensity of discipline and training the brain/mind/body is prepared to handle, process, and respond to a radically discontinuous perceptual/conceptual system having nothing in common with what came before, and which opens one to the unknown, or God beyond God. Roberts wrote of our journey *into* God as an eternal process, since God is and always will be the unknown.

God the known, the created, is our matrix, our foundation, our given; and to stop at that is—as in nature-worship or projections onto historical figures—idolatry, making of God an object among objects. This fixes or freezes into that previously created the fluid creation of being, which seeks itself through becoming—a turning backward, a de-evolutionary move leading to stasis and death.

Unresolved, perhaps unrecognized, in Atwater's book, is the difference between "immortality" and eternal life, an issue cropping up in the above paragraphs. Immortality would lock our current mortal condition into an endless timeline, a projection of a fixed past onto an indefinite future, rather as the pharaoh taking his slaves with him into the next life. Eternal life, on the other hand, is a state that one enters only now, instant by instant, or not at all. Eternity has no content or definition of itself, but is the position from which one views content, time, and events. "Eternity is in love with the productions of time," William Blake wrote (1966/1790-93, p. 151).

On the other hand there is that enigmatic realm toward which Johannes Eckhart pointed saying, "nothing known or named can be carried into that cloud of unknowing"—God beyond God. Personhood, ego, self, structures of knowledge, language, identifications—all must be left outside. Notions of reincarnations, happy hunting grounds, realms of light, sweetness and divine joy, and so on, arise from, and may be but, intensifications of our physical, named experience on this good earth, and the realm of concepts in which we have been born, our cosmic egg that constrains us even as it entertains us. Perhaps the gateway to the journey into God is a flood of this intensified human experience, but the journey into God itself has no points of correspondence with anything that comes before. A radical discontinuity separates the two states: God as that created and God as creation, or the uncreated—a void if you like, which our brilliant brain/mind with all its untapped potentials will never, of its own making, bridge. Only grace—again an abused and ruined term couching a vast unknown—can construct that bridge.

Atwater's book draws a thoughtful reader into many related issues extending to the whole web of life itself. In writing this review, I've had to throw away page after page of my own extravaganzas triggered by key issues she brings into the picture. And time and again I've had to call to question smug academic assumptions of mine exposed by Atwater's insights. This is the mark of a worthwhile book: that I put it down not pleased that my prejudices had been confirmed, but disturbed that they had been upturned, leaving me open

in areas of mind previously closed. I trust readers in general will read *Beyond the Light* and like myself be stretched, refreshed, even renewed.

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Announcement

IANDS Research Fund Established

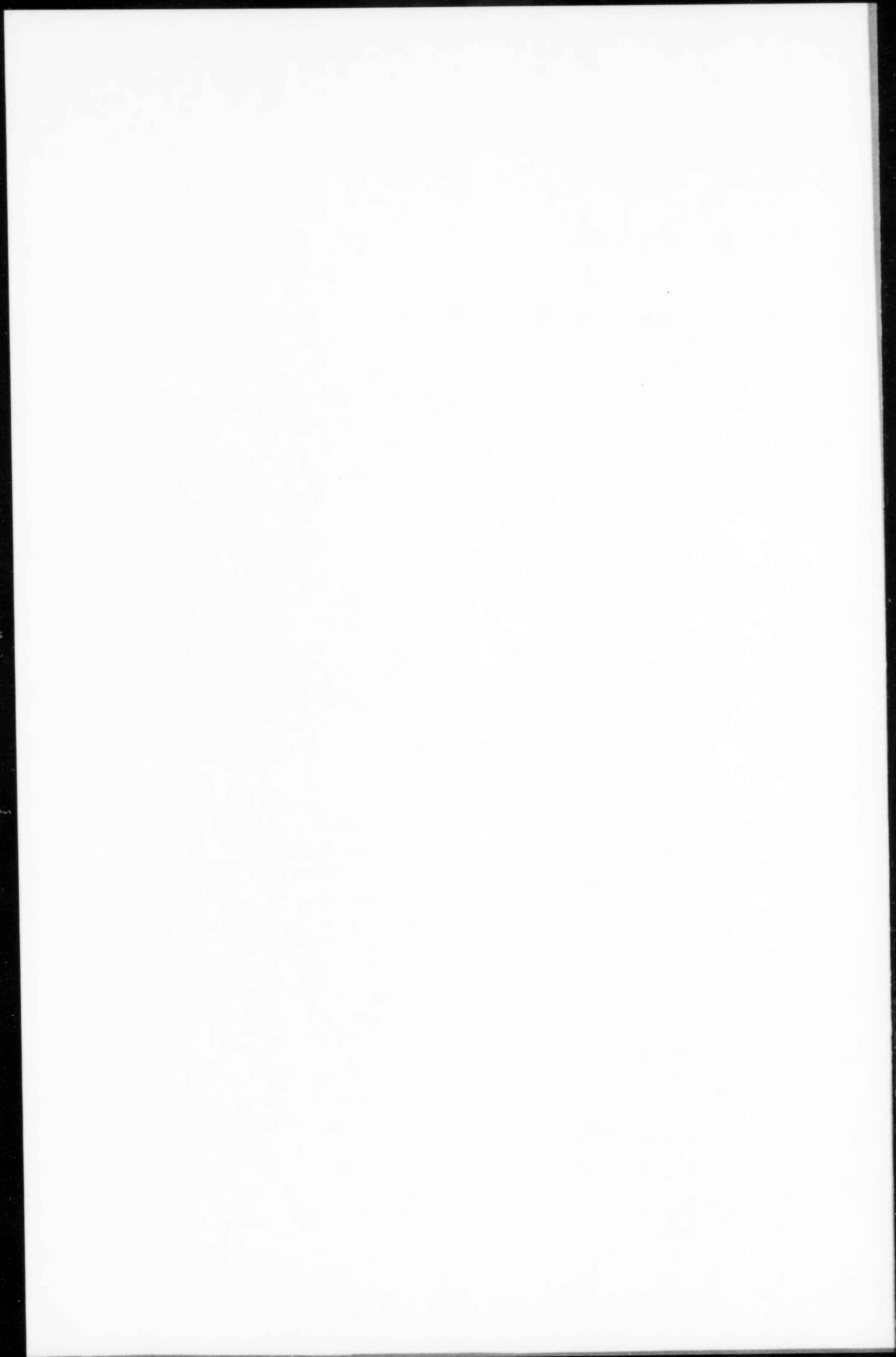
The Board of Directors of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) is pleased to announce the establishment of a research fund that will underwrite educational programs and investigational activities. Bruce Greyson, M.D., Research Director of IANDS, will assist the Board in overseeing the organization and direction of this special project, which was initiated by Board Member P. M. H. Atwater.

The fund will be earmarked for a variety of purposes: to establish a central working committee of professionals from varied disciplines to review the field of near-death research, identify accomplishments, and outline needs; to recommend research topics, protocols, and methodologies and work toward the establishment of international standards; to create and test laboratory controls for assessing and measuring possible physical aftereffects such as electrical sensitivity and other purported physiological changes; to establish a centralized database available for access internationally; and to produce a wide array of educational materials.

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GENERAL REQUIREMENTS: Logical organization is essential. While headings help to structure the content, titles and headings within the manuscript should be as short as possible. Do not use the generic masculine pronoun or other sexist terminology.

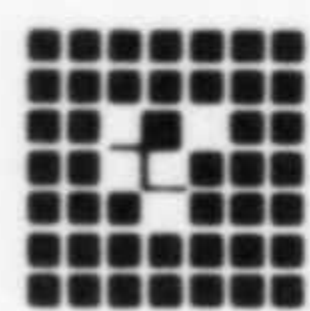
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