

Journal
of
Near-Death Studies

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

Guest Editorial: A Contribution of Frankl's Logotherapy to the Interpretation of Near-Death Experiences • *James C. Crumbaugh, Ph.D.*

The Anatomy of a Transformation: An Analysis of the Psychological Structure of Four Near-Death Experiences • *Patti R. White, Ph.D.*

The Near-Death Experience: A Study of Spiritual Transformation • *Cassandra Musgrave*

Thought Communication, Speed of Movement, and the Spirit's Ability to Absorb Knowledge: Near-Death Experiences and Early Mormon Thought • *Brent L. Top, Ph.D.*

Book Review:

After the Light: What I Discovered on the Other Side of Life That Can Change Your World, by *Kimberly Clark Sharp* • *Reviewed by Bruce Greyson, M.D.*

Letters to the Editor • *Jim W. Knittweis, Patricia Guevara, M.Sc., and Julio Sotelo, M.D.*

Volume 15, Number 3, Spring 1997



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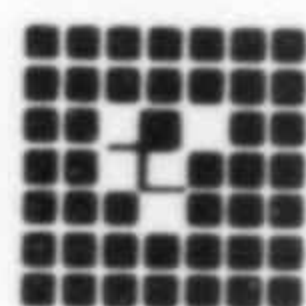
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Journal
of **Near-Death Studies**

Volume 15, Number 3, Spring 1997

- Editor's Foreword** 153
Bruce Greyson, M.D.
- GUEST EDITORIAL** 155
A Contribution of Frankl's Logotherapy to the Interpretation of Near-Death Experiences
James C. Crumbaugh, Ph.D.
- ARTICLES**
- The Anatomy of a Transformation: An Analysis of the Psychological Structure of Four Near-Death Experiences** 163
Patti R. White, Ph.D.
- The Near-Death Experience: A Study of Spiritual Transformation** 187
Cassandra Musgrave
- Thought Communication, Speed of Movement, and the Spirit's Ability to Absorb Knowledge: Near-Death Experiences and Early Mormon Thought** 203
Brent L. Top, Ph.D.
- BOOK REVIEW** 217
After the Light: What I Discovered on the Other Side of Life That Can Change Your World, by Kimberly Clark Sharp
Reviewed by Bruce Greyson, M.D.
- Letters to the Editor** 223
Jim W. Knittweis, Patricia Guevara, M.Sc., and Julio Sotelo, M.D.

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 begins with a Guest Editorial by psychologist James Crumbaugh, in which he applies the principles of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy to our understanding of near-death experiences (NDEs). Crumbaugh suggests that logotherapy can resolve the conflict between orthodox scientific views of the NDE as hallucination and the experiential view of them as experiences of an afterlife.

We also include in this issue two empirical studies of the aftereffects of NDEs. Psychotherapist Patti White analyzes the psychological structure of four experiences, and identifies the transformational aspect of the experience within that context. Transpersonal counselor Cassandra Musgrave presents a survey of NDErs focusing on changes in their religious lives, lifestyles, careers, and relationships.

Next, religious historian Brent Top highlights the similarities between three "core elements" of the NDE—thought communication, speed of thought, and the ability to "absorb" knowledge—and doctrinal teachings of 19th-century Mormon leaders. This issue also includes my review of social worker and NDEr Kimberly Clark Sharp's book, *After the Light*. Finally, we end this issue with Letters to the Editor from Jim Knittweis describing a pilot study comparing the electrical fields of NDErs and nonexperiencers; and from Mexican neuroscientists Patricia Guevara and Julio Sotelo suggesting a mechanism by which endorphins may play a role in hypoxic NDEs.

Bruce Greyson, M.D.



Guest Editorial

A Contribution of Frankl's Logotherapy to the Interpretation of Near-Death Experiences

James C. Crumbaugh, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT: Viktor Frankl's logotherapy seeks to help individuals find meaning in personal life experiences. It resolves potential conflicting sources of meaning by the application of the Laws of Dimensional Ontology, which validate apparently conflicting viewpoints. The application of these laws to the interpretation of near-death experiences (NDEs) resolves the conflict between the orthodox scientific view of NDEs as hallucination and the experiential view of them as experiences of the afterlife to come. Applying Frankl's shadowgraph analogy, both seemingly irreconcilable interpretations of the NDE can be accepted as having valid meaning in different dimensions of reality.

When the basic tenets of Viennese psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy are examined from the perspective of near-death experiences, a relationship between his concepts and the interpretation of the experiences can be seen. The three basic tenets of his orientation may be briefly stated as follows:

First, logotherapy is (a) an existential philosophy, (b) a theory of personality, and (c) a technique for the treatment of neuroses and emotional problems of everyday life.

Second, the fundamental paraphysiological or psychological need of humankind is to find a meaning and purpose in the individual *gestalt* of one's life experiences. Logotherapy, from the Greek work

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logos = meaning, is treatment or guidance in finding meaning in one's personal life experiences, regardless of tragedy even as great as Frankl experienced in four of the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. As an existentialism it holds that humankind is both free and contingent: free to choose the *attitude* taken toward each of life's experiences, and destined to a fate contingent upon these choices.

Third, finding this meaning is accomplished by review of the individual's life experiences from the standpoint of his or her unique complex of values. A value is an approach to life that has meaning to the individual.

As an example, gaining wealth may be the basic motivational orientation of one individual, who gets greatest meaning from financial success. Another person may be only minimally motivated in this direction. The two have very different goals, but each will find meaning only by pursuit of goals in line with personal values. The predicted outcome of each avenue of pursuit is, of course, open to speculation by proponents of each type of value.

Potentially conflicting sources of meaning may often be mollified by recognition that each source has valid meaning, although in different dimensions. This resolution of conflicts is accomplished by gaining a perception of the different systems of values and finding some common denominator between them. The balance of this paper is devoted to application of the above point to the interpretation of NDEs.

The orthodox scientific interpretation of NDEs versus the experiential interpretation by persons who have had them can be examined for a common denominator. Orthodox science starts with the 17th-century axiom of John Locke, the first of the British empiricist philosophers. Locke said, "Nihil est in intellectu quo non prius in sensu [Nothing is in the intellect that is not first in the senses]." Thus NDEs have to be experiences gained from the individual's past sensory data. This makes them hallucinations or dreamlike phenomena, which arise under extreme conditions of bodily insult, such as a heart attack, stroke, or car accident. On the other hand, the experiential approach takes them at face value as experiences of an afterlife to come.

The seeming irreconcilability of the two views vanishes or is mollified by what Frankl called the Laws of Dimensional Ontology, or the Laws of Multidimensional Meaning. The First Law states that phenomena that have one meaning in one dimension of reality may have an entirely different meaning in another equally valid dimen-

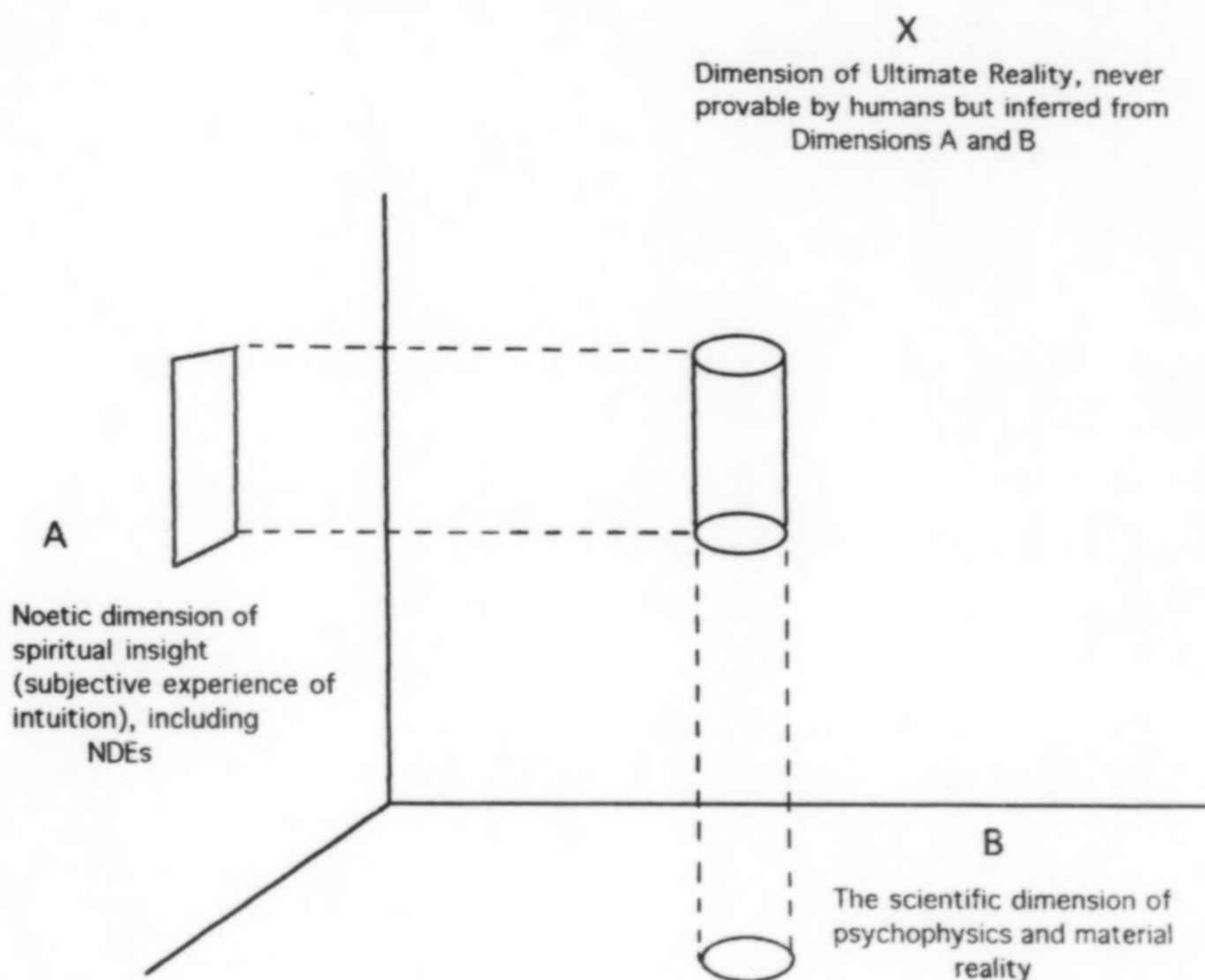


Figure 1. Frankl's First Law of Dimensional Ontology: Phenomena that have one meaning in one dimension of reality may have an entirely different meaning in another dimension. For example, true NDEs may be seen as such in the spiritual dimension but rejected as false in the physical or material dimension.

sion; this is illustrated in Figure 1. The Second Law states that phenomena that appear identical in one dimension may be easily isolated and differentiated in another dimension; this is illustrated in Figure 2. We will examine each law in turn to see how it applies to the interpretation of NDEs.

The First Law of Dimensional Ontology

Frankl was a master of analogy, one of the three basic methods of reasoning given to us by Aristotle. While no cause-and-effect relationship can be proven by analogy, it is often the most convincing form of reasoning, because by definition it has "face validity"; that is, it appears reasonable on the face of the issue at hand. An analogy

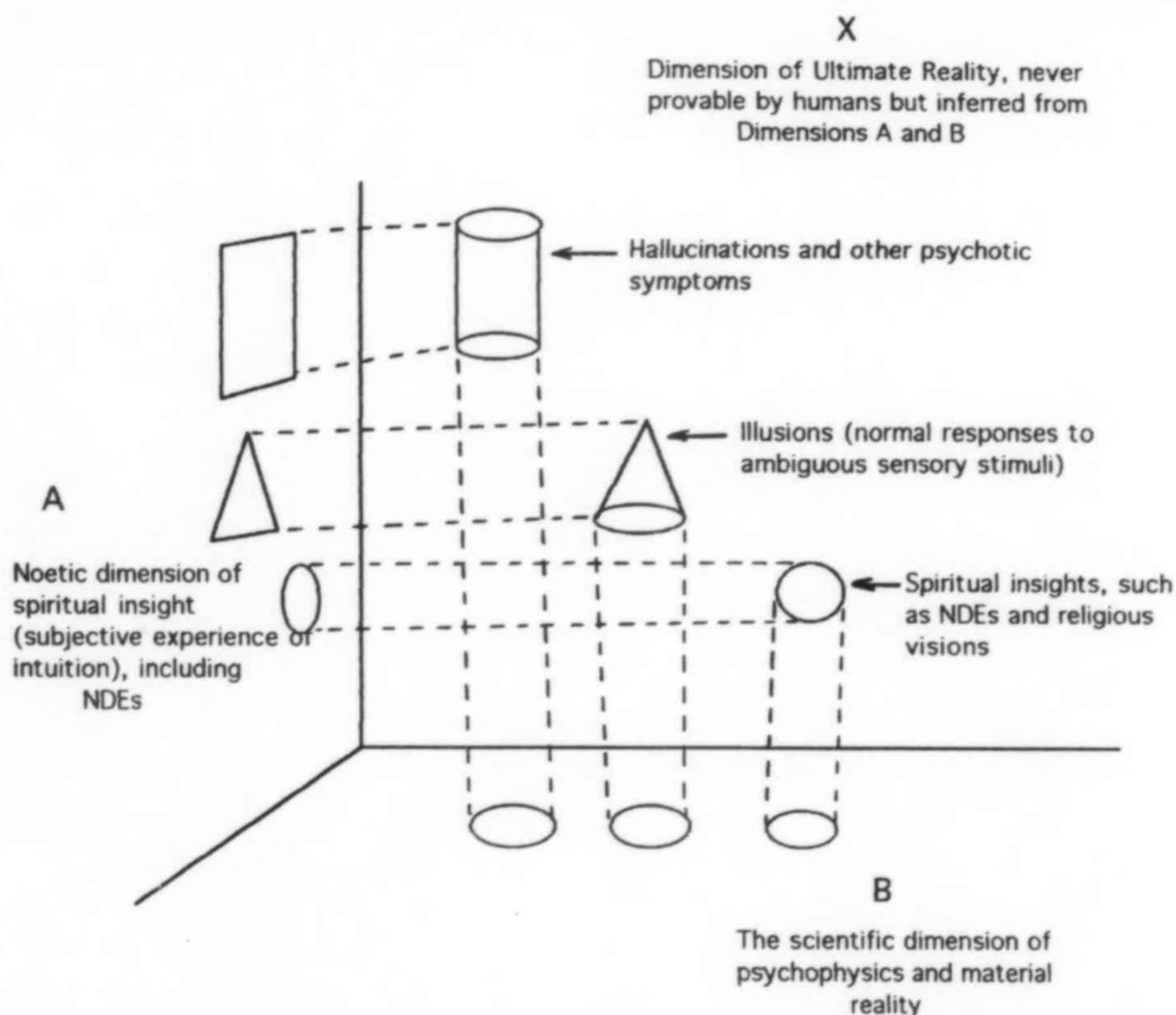


Figure 2. Frankl's Second Law of dimensional Ontology: Phenomena that appear identical in one dimension may be easily distinguished in another dimension. For example, true NDEs may be rejected in the material dimension of physical science but accepted in the spiritual dimension. Materially they seem no different in dimension B from illusions and hallucinations; but they may be discriminated as genuine in the spiritual dimension.

that clearly parallels a situation under consideration may receive more weight than either deductive (syllogistic or *a priori*) reasoning or inductive (scientific or *a posteriori*) reasoning, Aristotle's other two methods. And analogy is especially powerful where data from the scientific or experimental method do not exist or are inadequate.

Applying the method of analogy, as Frankl did in his First Law of Dimensional Ontology (or of Multidimensional Meaning), to the meaning of NDEs, we obtain the representation in Figure 1. Frankl illustrated his laws by shadowgraphs cast by an object in two dimensions of space, A and B. Dimension X represents what he called "ultimate meaning" or ultimate reality, which the philosopher Emmanuel Kant called *das Ding an sich*, the thing in itself, and which can never be known with certainty by humankind. It is analogized

here. A beer can or soft drink can, if illuminated from above, will cast a circular shadow on Dimension B, but if illuminated from the right side it will cast a rectangular shadow on Dimension A. Both shadows are equally valid representations of the can, but they differ radically in the two dimensions.

By analogy, the perception of NDEs by scientists and experiencers differs radically in the two dimensions. The NDE may be truly a psychophysical phenomenon of autogenous brain activity based on stored memories of past sensory data on the one hand, and on the other hand, equally truly an insight into another dimension of reality, which Frankl called the *noetic* dimension, from the Greek word *nous* = the spiritual or intuitive side of mind. Therefore, proponents of both views of the NDE can find a common meeting ground where they can recognize each other's orientation and still "save face."

Orthodox positivistic scientists will continue to maintain the interpretation of autogenous brain activity generated under stress as the explanation demanded by the scientific "law of parsimony," which says we must take the simplest possible explanation of any cause-and-effect relationship. They will continue to reject the experiential view because the actual phenomena reported can be explained without the assumption of an afterlife. On the other hand, experiencers will continue to maintain that the phenomena are extremely real and not just cortical activity, because they seem more real to the experiencer than any amount of abstract logic or scientific analysis of causation.

Neither side has to fall to the other, and both sides maintain a dimension of validity. The common denominator that makes this shadowgraph analogy with NDEs useful is that of validity itself, which can be maintained as equal in both dimensions without either's imposing upon the other.

The reader may ask how it is really possible that NDEs are both intrinsic cortical activity based on past sensory experiences on the one hand, and also true revelations of an afterlife to come. The answer is found in Frankl's First Law and in his admonition to avoid reductionism. He did not deny the material, physical, mechanistic side of human life, but he warned against the fallacious trap of reducing all human experience to that side. Humankind, he held, is composed of three facets: mind, body, and spirit. Mind may be an abstraction for bodily (including brain) function, and spirit is also manifested through bodily activity. But no one has proof that the spirit world does not exist in another dimension than that of human

experience, or that the dimensions can never overlap in some times and places. True, the burden of proof is scientifically placed on the positive claimants; but since no one presently has proof either way, we are scientifically justified in maintaining a personal faith in whichever camp seems to us as most probably correct.

Perhaps we should note in passing that Frankl has said of NDEs, when Elisabeth Kübler-Ross brought him her data for comment, "While her data do not prove the existence of an afterlife, I don't think we can write them off" (personal comment in my presence, Oakland, California, 1977). And when asked if he believed in an afterlife, he replied that instantly upon death time and space cease to exist for that person, and that all which has been always is: past, present, and future blend, and the question is impossible to answer. This seems similar to Raymond Moody's conclusions, and it is interesting to note that both Frankl and Moody have doctoral degrees in philosophy as well as medical degrees.

The Second Law of Dimensional Ontology

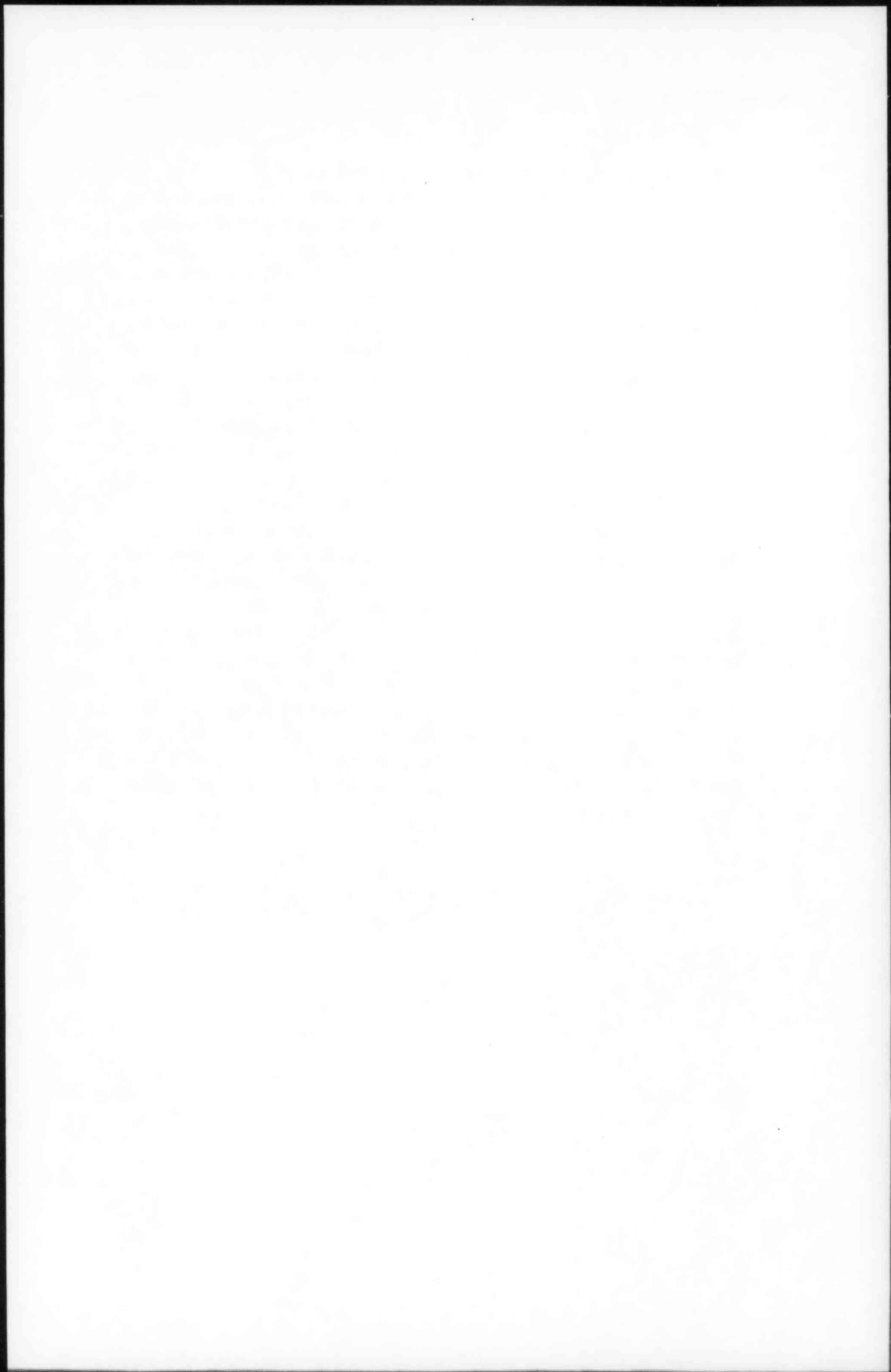
But what about differentiation in the noetic dimension between true noetic or spiritual experiences, assuming that such do occur, and phony experiences that are either made up purposely or the simple product of a vivid and creative imagination? Frankl had an answer that can be applied to this also, embodied in his Second Law, depicted in Figure 2. It states that phenomena that appear identical in one dimension may be easily isolated and differentiated in another dimension. Notice in Figure 2 that a true spiritual insight, represented by the circle shadow, can appear the same as illusions or hallucinations in Dimension B, represented by two additional circle shadows. But in the noetic Dimension A, these phenomena are easily differentiated, just as the shadowed objects—can, cone, and ball, are differentiated. In other words, those in the noetic or spiritual dimension can perceive the subtle differences and latch onto them, whereas those limited to the material or sensory dimension cannot perceive them.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, then, how should we view the meaning of NDEs? To be truly scientific we must view them with an open mind,

recognizing both interpretations as possibly valid and neither as exclusively and necessarily right. To go even further into the noetic or spiritual dimension, we can even cast Frankl's concept into theological terms. Although Frankl himself never entered into theological speculation, he recognized that logotherapy and religion are very compatible. He cautioned, however, that each individual must choose personally whether to step from the platform of logotherapy to the parallel platform of religion. In theological terms, we can assume by faith that God motivates the individual's conscious experiences to enter the noetic dimension and to receive the NDE, while still expressing it through channels of previously perceived sensory data. A suggestion that this is true is found in one of the most universally noted characteristics of NDEs, that the experiencer is at a loss for words to describe the experience: it is ineffable.

The believer can take encouragement from the conclusion that this is exactly what would be expected if the experience had objective reality. If one day it is proven that at least some of these experiences do represent the existence of an afterlife, all people, both living and dead, will be aware of this. But if it is not true, no one will ever know this with certainty. No one will ever be able to taunt a believer with "I told you so," because both will be dead. But the reverse does not protect the unbeliever, because he or she will be conscious in the presence of the believer. Unless an entirely new method of studying these experiences is found, however, neither side will have to worry in this life. In the meantime, encouragement of new research should be the order of the day.



The Anatomy of a Transformation: An Analysis of the Psychological Structure of Four Near-Death Experiences

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I discuss the general psychological structure of four near-death experiences and the evolutionary nature of the mental processes that occur. I suggest that the transformational aspect of each near-death experience comes at the culmination of the mental processes through archetypal imagery drawn from the context of the experiencer's life.

Researchers have studied the phenomenon of the near-death experience (NDE) from many angles. They have attempted to find variables that might correlate with NDEs, such as age, sex, religion, socioeconomic status, and severity of physical trauma during the NDE. Ultimately, there seems to be no significant relationship between demographics, religious affiliation, or religiosity and the likelihood of a near-death experience (Mickel, 1985; Osis and Haraldsson, 1977; Ring, 1984). Studies to date have found that nearly all near-death experiences deeply and positively transform the people who have them, and that there is a strong belief in life after death as a result of this transformation (Groth-Marnat and Schumaker, 1989; Moody and Perry, 1988; Rhodes, 1990).

This transformational aspect of the NDE appears to be the end result of a psychological process in which the NDEr encounters "some

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of the deepest structures of the psyche" (Bache, 1994, p. 42). In the process, the ego is confronted by its own illusion, which leads to a recalculation, as it were, of reality. Kenneth Ring wrote that "we take our ego with us into the first stages of the NDE where we retain our sense of separateness. . . . [I]t is the lens through which we have become accustomed to see the world" (1994, 60). The NDEr's ego-based reality is overwhelmed by the omniscient and universal reality of the light, and a point of reference is created from which life and death have transcendental meaning thereafter.

David Feinstein wrote:

A principal consequence of NDEs . . . is that life takes on a different meaning when it is understood within the context of a larger story. One seeks to discover not only the local code for right action, but the code that is part of this bigger plan. The attitudinal changes that researchers have consistently identified following NDEs . . . provide a phenomenological list of the emotional, cognitive, and spiritual changes associated with assuming an experience-based belief in an afterlife. (Feinstein, 1990, p. 263)

This paper presents four near-death experiences as psychological profiles in which their structure, essence, and personal impact are explored, compartmentalizes each NDE to examine the evolutionary nature of the mental processes involved, and takes a closer look at the transformational aspect represented through the archetypal imagery within each NDE. The archetypal imagery reflects the context of each experiencer's life in such a way that the psyche understands that which must be transformed because the ego has been transcended through this altered state of consciousness. In other words, to paraphrase Feinstein, our lives are put into perspective once we see the big picture.

John Pennachio wrote that "Ego transcendence frequently accompanies catharsis and regeneration. Catharsis and regeneration are powerful instruments for transformation and are often referred to as a death/rebirth experience" (1988, p. 164). The "death/rebirth" experience is foundational to the mental processes of the four NDEs presented here and further supports the transformational aspect as a "restorative function inherent in the psyche that facilitates catharsis and self-healing" (Pennachio, 1988, p. 167).

P.M.H. Atwater described this transformational aspect of the NDE as a "growth event that allows for a course correction" in a person's life to change whatever is "weak or missing in character development" (1992, p. 157). I apply her model of the four types of near-death

experiences to each of the four NDEs presented here, to illustrate how the archetypal imagery promotes personal transformation through a course correction in each experiencer's life.

The General Psychological Structure of the Near-Death Experience

Based on Amedeo Giorgi's (1975) methodological outline, the complexity of the near-death phenomenon can be examined under four headings to depict its psychological process: the *Before* stage delineates what was going on for the NDEr cognitively and emotionally immediately before the near-death experience; the *Emergence* stage describes what was happening cognitively and emotionally as the near-death experience commenced; the *Configuration of the NDE* stage portrays the NDEr's mental processes and feelings within the structure of the near-death experience; and the *After* stage details the lasting effect, the transformational aspect, of the near-death experience on the person's life. These phases reflect immanent meaning and not external realities. They also do not necessarily adhere to chronological time progression, as a person may continue to live or return to earlier psychological stages. Each phase is an integral part of the whole phenomenon besides being a complete moment unto itself.

A brief synopsis of each of the four NDEs precedes the four phases of the psychological process, which includes direct quotes from interviews with the experiencers. All names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.

Case #1: Emily's NDE

Emily is a 44-year-old divorced Caucasian woman with four children, who is a health professional at a major university. She had her NDE at age 29, 12 weeks after giving birth to her fourth child. Due to birth complications, she returned to the hospital for a vaginal hysterectomy and expected to be in the hospital only 48 hours. After her surgery, she began to experience chest pain and within several hours she became more uncomfortable and anxious. She began going into shock, 12 hours after her operation, from undetected bleeding in her abdomen. She was returned to the operating room in an attempt to drain the blood.

The near-death experience began when she was on the operating table. She felt disoriented and a rocking sensation as she entered a tunnel. There was no sound. She remembers leaving her end of the tunnel and walking toward a light at the other end. About halfway through the tunnel, she heard her husband's voice saying, "This is the only wife I have!" She felt herself slipping backwards into her body.

The General Psychological Structure of Emily's NDE

Before. Before her NDE, Emily was already going through a very stressful situation that was not at all an everyday experience: namely, the birth of her fourth child before the age of 30; severe complications that necessitated surgery, which would leave her unable to bear any more children; and unpredictable complications to that surgery, which left her near death.

Emily was not prepared to die when she went in for the hysterectomy. Indeed, she had expected to be hospitalized only for 48 hours: "I was still nursing my 12-week-old baby girl." Being a medical technician herself and having a doctor for a husband, Emily felt confident that she understood the forthcoming medical procedures and risks. Her intention was to have a vaginal hysterectomy, recuperate for a few days, and return home to her family.

The Emergence. Unannounced and unexpected, another theme began to emerge, which shattered the expectation of a routine medical procedure and Emily's plans to resume ordinary life. Emily remembers:

Unknown to the medical staff, there was a slow bleeding process in my peritoneum. Several hours after my surgery, I began to experience a great deal of chest pain. I was uncomfortable and anxious.

As Emily began to become aware of her increasing pain, she remained confident that the medical staff would rectify the problem. Emily accepted the pain medication and noted that she was being given "three or four times the normal amount." Emily was conscious through the entire second operation and had "memories of faces and hands and name tags of nurses and doctors."

The Configuration of the Near-Death Experience. The structure of Emily's near-death experience had four constituents: (1) a feeling of disorientation; (2) the tunnel and feelings of comfort; (3) the light; and (4) return to the physical body.

First, Emily began to feel disoriented and had "a rocking feeling." She heard no sound and there was an aura of softness. She was no longer in the familiar operating room but rather in a "different realm." Second, Emily had the distinct feeling of being separate from her physical body. She felt as if she had entered a tunnel-type room and had a pronounced sense of fearlessness, gentleness, and comfort. She recounted:

I remember it felt cold at first and then I became comfortable in terms of temperature. At first it was very quiet and then I think there was a sound like an ocean wave. I didn't feel like I was walking through the tunnel; it was more like floating.

Emily intellectualized what she was experiencing in an attempt to understand it: "I had it real memorized because I was in there for a long time." She described the following:

The tunnel was bluish-silver and it felt like it got narrower as I traveled through it. It enveloped me rather closely but comfortable enough so that I could reach out to the sides. There was a light at the end of the tunnel. I was attracted to it and it welcomed me.

Third, when Emily described the light experience, her intellectualizing was temporarily suspended and she became emotional:

I was attracted to the light, not in a harsh way but a gentle way. The light was so loving. The closer I got to it, the warmer it became. The light was misty and an incredibly intense whiteness. I never saw that color before. Not blinding, but then, I did not get that close to it.

The prior disorientation had clearly stopped and had been replaced by fascination and a continued sense of peace.

Fourth, as Emily was proceeding toward the light with an increasing willingness to release and let go, another unexpected theme emerged. Halfway through the tunnel, she suddenly heard her husband's voice saying, "This is the only wife I have!" Immediately she felt herself moving backwards and "slipping back with a sense of speed" into her body. Back in the physical body, the pain from the needles in her arm and awareness of the operating room returned. There was no transition period and no sense of being able to control the return.

In an instant, there was a multitude of feelings: emptiness, from leaving the splendor of the light; pain, from the needles in her arm; confusion, from the nurses and doctors responding to her husband's angry outburst ("If I hadn't come in here you would have killed her!");

and confusion over whether she had a choice to return. Emily lost consciousness upon reentry into her body.

After. Emily spent a good deal of time reflecting upon her NDE during the next year as she recovered, and it was difficult for her to find someone to talk to for fear of being ridiculed or not believed. Emily chose to tell her twin sister, the only person who knew her for a long time. To this day, 15 years later, she is still quite selective as to whom she tells: "I have to feel safe."

The predominant theme in this After stage was one of ambivalence. Why didn't she die? she asked herself. If she had been given a choice, she "would have continued into the light," yet she "needed and wanted to take care" of her children. If this was not her time to die, what was the meaning and purpose of her near-death experience? she wondered.

With the benefit of 15 years worth of reflection, Emily feels that her NDE was a profoundly religious experience that has changed many aspects of her way of thinking. Having been raised a staunch Catholic with a rigid belief in heaven, it was "comforting to give myself permission to look into the next life" from a different perspective, which is what she assumed her NDE was all about. As a result of her NDE, she is completely convinced there is life after death and has no fear of dying. Heaven has become for her a less physical and more spiritual place. It has become more of a state of mind where all questions are answered. It has helped her take one day at a time.

Based on her NDE, Emily allowed herself to let go of the parts of the Catholic Church and teachings that she considered too rigid and appreciate the parts that she felt applied to her life. She changed her expectations regarding her children's religious training and became more open to their personal exploration. Emily began to see death as a passage to a higher realm of understanding. She believes the mysteriousness of the near-death experience has to do with what is on the other side of death. She also believes she would find the heart, mind, and spirit of God at the end of her life's journey.

Case #2: Raquel's NDE

Raquel is a 55-year-old divorced Hispanic female who had a near-death experience in November, 1992. It began with a yeast infection that worsened and eventually turned into blood poisoning. She went to the hospital, where doctors worked feverishly to save her life.

Alone in a darkened hospital room two days later, she saw a black swirling hole and felt herself walking towards it. She became very frightened, wondering what it could be. She realized she must be dying, but would not accept this readily because she had so much more to do in this life. She tried crawling out of the hole, fighting every inch of the way. She felt herself flying up and looking down on her body in the bed. She watched as her body moaned with pain. Once again she was back in the whirlpool-like tunnel.

She saw her parents and her grandmother, who had died many years earlier, at the entrance of the black hole. The familiarity brought a sense of relief to her. Her grandmother kept saying, "Come on, mija." Raquel told her grandmother, no, she was too young to go. Her father said, "It's time for you to go. You have done enough. I want you to come." Once again, Raquel resisted and felt herself back in her body. She went back and forth from her body in the bed to the tunnel at least three times. She began praying, telling God she could not die because her children needed her and she had no husband to support them. She felt herself crawl out of the tunnel one final time. As she was crawling out, she saw a bright light to her right. The light must be heaven, she thought, but she was still determined to get back to this life. As her determination grew, the light faded.

The General Psychological Structure of Raquel's NDE

Before. At the age of 55, Raquel was hardly slowing down. A self-proclaimed workaholic, she was quite active in the community as a public health worker and avid Latino rights supporter. Her diabetes had been under control for some time and a yeast infection posed no great health threat under normal circumstances. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case, as the yeast infection developed into blood poisoning, a possibly fatal condition.

The Emergence. Raquel was taken off guard by the swift onset and spread of the infection. Everything was alarming her, even the ambulance ride to the hospital, because she was quickly losing control over her ability to make decisions for herself. Her memories of the hospital included many doctors and nurses working feverishly over her trying to get a pulse, to stabilize her blood sugar, and to control the infection. She remembered awakening in her hospital room two days later.

The Configuration of the Near-Death Experience. The structure of Raquel's near-death experience had six constituents: (1) the black hole; (2) the out-of-body experience; (3) meeting her relatives; (4) the struggle to return; (5) the light; and (6) the return to the physical body.

First, as she began to become aware of her hospital room, Raquel noticed the room was very brightly lit. Her attention was drawn towards a swirling black hole in the middle of the room. "Wow," she thought, "this is really dark!" As it continued to swirl like a whirlpool, she became frightened: "Oh, my God, what is this? I've heard of whirlpools in the water and tornadoes, but what is this?"

The next sensation she felt was being drawn into the black whirlpool and she fought to stop slipping into it. Immediately, she panicked: "I must be dying. I've never been this sick before. But I can't die—I have too much to do."

Second, she felt herself suddenly flying up and looking down on herself in the bed. She saw herself lying there struggling to live. "Nobody's here to help me," she thought. With that, she was pulled back into the tunnel.

Raquel seemed to have no choice whether she stayed in her body or was thrust back into the tunnel. This helplessness exacerbated her fear and resistance. No matter how sick her body was, she was adamant about returning to it. The alternative—the black swirling hole—did not seem a viable option.

Third, as she surveyed the black hole trying to find a way out, she looked toward the tunnel entrance. Standing on the outside of the tunnel were her parents and grandmother, all of whom had died many years earlier. She was initially happy and relieved to see them.

Her grandmother kept saying in Spanish, "Come with us." "No, no, no!" Raquel screamed, "I'm too young! Not yet!" Her father said, "It's time for you to come. You've done enough. I want you to come." Again, Raquel cried no.

Fourth, she returned to her body as she began crying and resisting her relatives' request to stay. Could she will herself out of the hole? she wondered. She remembered slipping back into the hole and struggling out three more times, each time ignoring the pleas from her relatives to stay. Finally, she prayed to God to help her return to her six children. She crawled out of the tunnel and never looked back.

Fifth, as she crawled out she saw a very bright light to her right. The room was flooded with its brightness. She felt a peacefulness

she had never known and wondered if this was the final step before heaven. The contrast was striking between the terror she felt in the black hole and the serenity she felt in the presence of the light.

Sixth, regardless of how beautiful the light was, Raquel was still determined to return to this life. The light began to grow dimmer as she expressed the desire to go back to her body.

After. The echoing theme throughout Raquel's NDE was one of tremendous resistance to giving up her life. The black hole was a very frightening experience and, although she never got to the end of the tunnel, she thought it might have been hell because she felt the darkness at the end held no hope. There was a time in Raquel's life when she was an atheist and operated with very little conscience. The darkness reminded her of the time in her life when she had very little hope. But that time had passed and Raquel once again became involved in spiritual exploration, and she had a strong belief in God and in life after death at the time of her near-death experience. Her spiritual beliefs did not, however, dull the terror she felt in the dark hole.

Raquel believed that her own spiritual power and prayer rescued her from the black hole. Her will to continue her life's work and to be with her family was stronger than the welcoming sight of her parents and grandmother. Even the light's allure did not persuade Raquel to stay. She was not ready to die and was not going to submit without a fight. Retaining her control and exercising her choice to live or die proved to be the most powerful forces to return her to this life.

Case #3: John's NDE

John is a 34-year-old divorced Caucasian man. On February 22, 1992, he and his partner were working on a construction project using nail guns. It is still unclear exactly how the two men ended up facing each other, but John's partner fell against him and John ended up shooting himself with his own nail gun. A one-and-three-quarter-inch finishing nail went directly into his heart through the sternum. With every heart beat, the nail was tearing a bigger hole in his heart. The pain became intense and everything got fuzzy. All of a sudden, John saw himself lying on his back with his arms folded across his chest, looking straight up. There were two waves of light coming over him. A huge right hand moved over the top of him, hovering about

three feet above him. John believed this was God's hand. A loving voice said, "You're all right. I like you." He could then hear people yelling all around and then he heard someone yell, "He's back!"

The General Psychological Structure of John's NDE

Before. John's Before stage consisted of a typical work day with his partner at a construction site. They were working at a steady pace, shooting finishing nails into a beam. The two men were accomplished carpenters and had been on scaffolding many times. Both workers remember taking the necessary precautions and had not compromised their safety.

The Emergence. It is still open to conjecture how the two men happened to fall into each other on the scaffolding. Apparently, John's partner lost his balance and fell toward John. In the commotion, John's nail gun turned inward. John shot himself in the heart with a one-and-three-quarter-inch finishing nail. He looked at his partner and said, "I'm shot in the heart. I don't believe I am going to die!" The two men stood looking at each other for a split second. Quickly, they left the scaffolding and hurried toward their truck. John remembers panicking as his neck and chest started to throb with pain. His partner told him later that he went into convulsions, slamming his head and arm into the dashboard of the truck. He even kicked the stickshift and threw the truck into reverse.

During this stage, John was incredulous about what just happened and clearly frightened he would die. As the pain intensified, he was fighting to adapt to the unfamiliar and strange turn of events. There was not a hint of denial about the situation as John immediately understood getting shot in the heart is most likely fatal. "I was not afraid of death but I was afraid of how I was dying. I knew something was happening . . . but what?"

The Configuration of the Near-Death Experience. The structure of John's near-death experience had four constituents: (1) entering a different realm; (2) waves of light; (3) the hand of God; and (4) return to the physical body.

First, John suddenly saw himself lying on his back with his arms folded across his chest and his ankles crossed. He still felt the physical pain of his injuries but knew he was not in the truck anymore. He remembered thinking that he might be having a near-death experience because he had heard about them. But where was the tun-

nel and the light? The remarkable feature of this stage was that John was not afraid and indeed was curious about his predicament. Having some prior knowledge that he was in the preliminary phase of a near-death experience perhaps reduced his anxiety. He was now in a state of expectancy.

Second, as he was lying there, a wave of brilliant light came over him. "What do you want me to do?" he asked the light. With that, a second even more brilliant light came over his head and the pain left. John described it as "turning over"; the absence of pain marked a higher level, a level of bliss. An ineffable feeling of awe and peace overwhelmed him and he wanted to stay there in that place.

Third, as the second wave of light shone, a large right hand slowly positioned itself over the top of John covering the length of his body, hovering about three feet above him. The hand was the brightest white imaginable and he could see the outline of the fingers as if they were finely sketched in pencil. The hand represented God and John began asking Him what he should do. A voice said, "You are all right. I like you." The hand withdrew and the first wave of light returned, and with it all the physical pain.

Finally, John became conscious as they were preparing to load him onto a helicopter that would take him to the hospital. As he lay on the asphalt he felt the pain and thought about the realm he just experienced. He closed his eyes and prayed to go back to the hand and the light. When he opened his eyes again, he realized he had not returned and he felt angry. Who would not trade total bliss for excruciating pain? John did what he could to stay alive from that point on, but began to reevaluate his life right there on the asphalt.

After. John's partner commented on how calm he was once he regained consciousness on the asphalt. John told him he had been in a "much better place." The first person he told was a therapist whom his employer generously offered. He remembers asking the therapist, "Who would believe me about the near-death experience?" She answered, "Who wouldn't?" Even though John knows he did not have an hallucination or a dream, and in spite of the fact his near-death experience seemed all too real, he has continued to seek reassurance.

John believes his NDE had changed his life "big time." Never again would work be his first priority. From now on, he would appreciate life and help others and not dwell on the small things. For a long while after his accident, however, he had difficulty concentrating and

focusing on his daily tasks. The magnitude of his experience has taken some time to integrate into his life.

Case #4: Jill's NDE

Jill is a 36-year-old married Caucasian woman who had an NDE at the age of 31. While training for a marathon, she experienced fever and stomach cramps so severe that she went to the hospital. When she was examined, the doctors found a large mass within the abdominal cavity. She had her near-death experience after surgery, while in the recovery room. Jill had become a born-again Christian one year prior to her NDE and at the moment she knew she was dying, she asked Jesus Christ's forgiveness and mentally said goodbye to her loved ones. Suddenly there was a very bright light permeating her room and she heard someone speaking to her. "Who are you?" she asked. "The One Who loves you the most," a male voice replied. The voice continued to speak to her revealing the most amazing things about her life and the universe. An invisible hand lifted her out of bed with tubes and intravenous lines still attached to her body. She cried out for Jesus and was told that she would live, but that her life as she knew it was over. She was spared death to begin a new life of love and service to the Lord. Her life was forever changed from that moment.

The General Psychological Structure of Jill's NDE

Before. Before Jill's near-death experience, her mind and body were preoccupied with training for a marathon. She admits to:

an excessively brutal training with borderline anorexia, lack of proper nutrition, plus a host of emotional problems, all adding up to intense stress that, over a sustained period of time, had taken its toll upon me.

Jill had accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior one year previous to her emergency surgery. She remembers the day she recited the prayer of the covenant to the Lord and did not "feel any different." How do people feel when they are "saved"? she wondered at the time. Secretly, Jill felt like a fraud, as though she were pretending to be a Christian. She knew she was not suddenly pure or

holy just because she had been baptized and labeled "born again." She continued her life with all the same old patterns and habits because nothing had really changed in her heart and mind.

The Emergence. The theme for Jill's emergence stage was one of shock, disbelief, and guilt that she had abused her body so badly. She remembers thinking, "I am responsible for my own demise. I had not treated my body as God's temple." Now, she found herself in the hospital with forms being thrust into her hand to sign, granting permission for the surgeons to "remove any organ they wished to." This was a far cry from the early moments when she thought she had the flu. The medical staff recommended a blood transfusion, as she had apparently lost a lot of her blood supply in surgery. Jill refused the transfusion for fear of inadvertently being infected by the AIDS virus: "I believed I was getting ready to die." Even in this state of preparedness, Jill was hardly expecting what was going to happen next.

The Configuration of the Near-Death Experience. The structure of Jill's near-death experience had four constituents: (1) the abrupt awakening; (2) a presence and a voice; (3) the life review; and (4) Jesus' message.

First, having made her peace with God by asking His forgiveness and mentally saying goodbye to her loved ones, Jill remembered:

I completely let go and disappeared into the darkness of death. Extremely abruptly, I was jolted awake. Had I been asleep? Was I coming out of a coma? I couldn't remember where I was or why. I was disoriented partly because of the anesthesia and partly because I was trying to make sense out of what was happening to me.

Jill was curious about two things: first, there had always been a steady stream of nurses and noisy carts coming in and out of her room, yet now no one could be found; and, second, in her previously darkened room, someone had turned on all the lights and they were quite brilliant. But why? The overall theme of the Emergence stage appeared to be one of bewilderment, with attempts to fit her reality into a set of circumstances that defied logic. In an attempt to cling to her reality, Jill looked down at her hospital gown and the tubes hooked to her body and found she did not recognize this physical body. Am I dying, she wondered, or am I dead?

Second, in this confusion, Jill heard someone speaking to her. "Who are you?" she asked. A male voice replied, "The One Who loves you most." It was not a voice she heard with her ears; rather it was a

message she simply understood. Then, it was as if an invisible hand "helped lift me right out of that bed. . . . I found myself kneeling on the floor next to the bed. 'Someone' was telling me everything was going to be fine." Jill wondered again about the nurses: where were they? Jill struggled to make sense out of a situation that was beyond her comprehension.

Third, "someone" continued to speak to Jill in a clear and coherent way: "The Voice began telling me marvelous, amazing, and astonishing things about my life mainly, in a perspective I never looked at before and in a nonjudgmental way."

Jill remembers hearing about one's life flashing before one's eyes when one is about to die, and, if this were so, she figured, her life review was going to be a "horrendously miserable" picture. She was not looking forward to seeing all the mistakes she had made throughout her relatively young life. Her apprehension, however, was unfounded.

Her life review commenced with a commentary by the voice and presented an evaluation of sorts. It began when Jill was a small infant in her crib. She saw herself as a crying, kicking baby with a diaper rash. Her mother was quite upset and angry and was roughly applying lotion to the rash. As Jill watched this scene, she "knew" her mother was wishing this little baby had never been born, because she was causing too much trouble between her and her husband, Jill's father. While Jill never actually remembered this scene in her life, she realized in this review that her sense of self worth or lack thereof had been fixed at that point in her life.

The life review presented this and every other image from a non-judgmental perspective. Jill watched her baby scene as a spectator and felt forgiveness and understanding toward her mother. After her life review ended, the voice told Jill about the universe:

It seemed like everything was being revealed to me although I cannot recall much of what those revelations were. Maybe they are still in my mind somewhere. Every single word was loaded with meaning and it went on and on for what seemed like hours.

The theme pervading Jill's life review began with cynicism surrounding the proverbial "life flashing before the eyes." She was prepared for the worst, based on the life she had led up to that point. Her cynicism was replaced by awe as she watched her life from the perspective of love and forgiveness.

Fourth, the voice was gone and Jill found herself on her feet still hooked up to intravenous lines. She cried out to God. She was yelling and screaming and dancing and waving her arms in the air. She "babbled in some other language" and the voice suddenly returned to soothe and comfort her. As she climbed back into bed, a great sense of peace enveloped her: "It was an indescribable, overwhelming bliss." The voice said:

You will live. But you have died. There is nothing left of who you were. You will retain your memory of your past as the other person you were, and there will be times you will respond to mental stimuli provoking these memories of your former life. But that life is over. It's gone forever. You will live. But the life you have now is the life given to you by Me; it is My life. From now on, whatever you choose to do, you will only find success and fulfillment if you live according to My word. You cannot return to your old ways ever again. If you try, you won't be able to do it. I have spared you from death and given you new life, so you will do My work on this earth. I will provide you with everything you need to carry out this work. No matter what circumstances arise, you will never be lost or confused again. For I shall remain with you always. I am real. There is something bigger and greater within you than just the fragile shell you inhabit. The flesh perishes; the Spirit lives eternally.

This segment of Jill's near-death experience was in keeping with her experience as a born-again Christian. She could recognize several characteristics, such as the speaking in tongues ("I babbled in some other language"), the charismatic-type behavior ("yelling and screaming and dancing and waving my arms in the air"), and finally, being told that she was going to die to her old way of living and be reborn to a new one ("You will live. But you have died. There is nothing left of who you were. . . . [T]he life you have now is the life given to you by Me; it is My life").

After. Jill secretly mused that her family should have gone on with her funeral because she saw herself as having died and come home a different person. This was her secret that she tried to tell a few people, but they were "turned off and didn't want to hear about it." It seemed to embarrass them or make them uncomfortable. Unless they were "full blown, born-again, Bible-banging Christians, nobody knew what I was talking about."

Nothing had changed Jill's life so utterly and irrevocably. The wisdom confided to her by her Savior transformed her consciousness and allowed her to change her life direction. She never had any doubt that Jesus had spoken to her and showed her a new life.

Discussion

The four stages of the psychological process—the before phase, the emergence phase, the configuration of the NDE, and the after phase—are by no means the definitive method for analysis of the near-death experience. They do, however, offer a method of understanding the NDEr's motivations contributing to the transformational aspect.

The Before Stage

The before stage of each of these four near-death experiences demonstrated a wide variety of everyday human conditions: Emily was a mother of four; Raquel, a workaholic; John, a construction worker; and Jill, a marathon runner. Each person's degree of religiosity or spirituality also ran the gamut from agnostic to born-again Christian: John attended church on Sundays and considered religion a routine; Emily's and Raquel's spirituality were more an integral part of their lives as they consciously incorporated religious values into everyday living; and Jill was a self-proclaimed born-again Christian silently searching for the meaning of her baptism. This study corroborated published research in finding no conclusive demographic relationship among the four case studies or the occurrence of near-death experience (Gallup and Proctor, 1982; Ring, 1984; Sabom, 1982).

The Emergence Stage

This phase dealt with each NDEr coming close to physical death and the emotional state he or she was in at the time. Of the four cases, one was an accident—John's shooting himself in the chest with a nail gun—and three were due to illness: Emily's gynecological surgery, Raquel's yeast infection, and Jill's stomach operation. A survey of NDEs conducted by Feng Zhi-ying and Liu Jian-xun found that:

alterations in state of consciousness, duration of loss of consciousness, and prior views of death influenced the content of NDEs . . . suggesting that physiological and psychological variables can influence NDE phenomenology. (1992, p. 47)

As these four brushes with death were unintentional, the common denominator among them was the element of surprise at the unexpected onset of a potentially fatal situation. None of these four NDErs had prepared for the possibility of death, and each appeared to react within the normal range of human emotions at that moment: Emily remained confident and trusting with the medical care as she recuperated from surgery; Raquel felt vulnerable as doctors rushed to save her life; John was in excruciating pain from a nail in his heart and struggling to breathe; and Jill was shocked when she realized how sick she was and how she had neglected her body.

The Configuration of the NDE and the After Stage

Ring (1980) described the "basic thanatomimetic narrative" of the core near-death experience. This narrative addressed the developmental stages of the NDE, which included feelings of peace and calm and an ineffability of the experience; feelings of leaving the physical body; the tunnel-like experience; the appearance of the light; and entering into the light. Research on NDEs from all over the world has corroborated the universality of this thanatomimetic narrative, and the four NDEs discussed here follow the pattern as well. Ring later suggested that any deviation from this classic model may lie "especially in the deeper stages of the NDE, where more archetypal imagery comes into play" (1984, p. 47).

Carol Zaleski proposed that NDEs should be viewed as "imaginative and symbolic expressions," which, though "elusive in final meaning, are valid as one way in which the religious imagination mediates the search for ultimate truth" (1987, p. 191). The symbolic expressions or archetypal imagery therefore reflects the experiencer's personal, social, religious, and cultural influences, as these are what constitute the context of a person's life. The archetypal imagery facilitates ego transcendence through its pertinence to the individual's state of being. It is like a unique code that translates for the ego what must be transformed.

Four Types of Near-Death Experience

Atwater (1992) devised a model defining four types of NDEs, based on the concept that a person's life remains in context in life, at the

moment of death, and—most likely, although understandably unsubstantiated—after death beyond the NDE. Atwater maintained that the NDE was a “growth event that allows for a ‘course correction,’ enabling the individual involved to focus on whatever is weak or missing in character development” (1992, p. 157).

Each of the four NDEs presented above falls into one of Atwater’s categories of NDEs. Each NDE illustrates how the archetypal imagery is fundamental to the resulting transformation.

Initial Experience (“Non-Experience”)

This type of NDE involves elements such as a loving nothingness or the living dark or a friendly voice. It is usually experienced by those who seem to need the least amount of evidence for proof of survival, or who need the least amount of shakeup in their lives. Often, this becomes a “seed” experience or an introduction to other ways of perceiving and recognizing reality. (Atwater, 1992, p. 156)

Emily’s near-death experience most closely fit this category of “loving nothingness.” She described herself floating through a tunnel and moving toward a peaceful light at the other end. She felt welcomed and attracted to the light and believed she would have continued on into it if it had not been for her husband’s voice suddenly provoking her reentry back into her body.

The archetypal imagery in Emily’s NDE reflected her already strong spiritual beliefs, appreciation for life, and duty to family. Emily had a strong belief in God and an afterlife before her near-death experience. Raised a devout Catholic, she believed as Catholic doctrine dictated that heaven and hell were actual places and that people either went to a heavenly reward or were condemned to hell. She believed in a loving Creator and a just reward, both of which she sensed in the tunnel by the inviting light at the end. Her NDE, however, put her previous stringent religious training into perspective, giving her a greater latitude of belief with less restriction. God became more personal, and this brought her a great deal of comfort.

Her husband’s voice represented the obligation she felt for her family and the decision to return to them. Emily’s focus as mother and wife was clear, and her NDE was an affirmation of her life’s choice. The near-death experience as a growth event allowed Emily to see her life from a different perspective, in which she first valued herself as a person who was expressing her love as a mother and wife. Later,

when her marriage dissolved in a difficult divorce, she drew strength from the unconditional peace and serenity she had experienced in the tunnel.

Unpleasant and/or Hell-Like Experience (Inner Cleansing and Self-Confrontation)

This type of NDE involves an encounter with a bardo, limbo, or hellish purgatory, or scenes of a startling and unexpected indifference, or even "hauntings" from one's own past. It is usually experienced by those who seem to have deeply suppressed or repressed guilts, fears, and angers, and/or those who expect some kind of punishment or accountability after death. (Atwater, 1992, p. 156)

Raquel was not actively pursuing what she thought was a destructive lifestyle at the time of her near-death episode. There was no obvious reason why she had a hell-like NDE, and yet she was absolutely certain that hell was at the end of the black, swirling tunnel: "the darkness at the end held no hope." From the beginning of her near-death experience, Raquel fought to stay out of the tunnel and return to life.

The archetypal imagery of Raquel's remarkable struggle to stay out of the whirlpool was the most striking feature of her NDE, for it was reminiscent of the struggle to control her own destiny in life. Having outlived two failed marriages, she had raised six children virtually on her own. Most of the time, she was the family's sole means of support. Raquel was also politically active throughout her adult life in the Latino movement in her community to improve living conditions and ensure equal treatment for Hispanics. Her life was a portrayal of fighting against the odds, and that theme continued in her near-death experience.

Upon recovery from her illness, Raquel could hardly dismiss her intensely disturbing NDE and the lesson it tendered. She realized that her workaholic nature, her constant struggle, had contributed to her body's deterioration. She had overcontrolled every aspect of her life to the point of self-destruction. There was no control to be had in the black hole, though. Raquel felt utterly helpless and desperate.

As Raquel made her final departure from the tunnel, she saw a bright and loving light. All the turmoil and despair disappeared and was replaced by an incredible peacefulness and insight. Atwater

wrote, "It has been my experience that whatever we need to awaken the truth of our being will manifest when we need it" (1992, p. 158). Raquel awoke from her near-death experience with a different attitude: she quit her job, allowed her body the time it needed to heal, and devoted herself to her own best interests for the first time. The anger she had repressed toward those around her and toward society at large had manifested itself physically and almost killed her. She learned there was no need to fight anything or anyone, only to love and submit to the loving peacefulness the Light offered. Raquel believed her NDE showed her a perpetual purgatory or state of limbo that awaited her, not only on the other side of death but in this lifetime, should she continue her destructive lifestyle. Upon returning to this life, Raquel gave up her job to nurse her body back to health.

Pleasant and/or Heaven-Like Experience (Reassurance and Self Validation)

This type of NDE involves heaven-like scenarios of loving family reunions with those who have died previously, reassuring religious figures or light beings, validation that life counts, affirmative and inspiring dialogue. It is usually experienced by those who most need to know how loved they are and how important life is and how every effort counts. (Atwater, 1992, pp. 156-157)

In his near-death experience, John encountered a "reassuring religious figure," God's Hand, who succinctly and omnipotently validated John's life: "You are all right. I like you." Prior to the NDE, John had been going through a divorce and facing separation from his three small children, who would be moving far away with their mother. John felt he had failed his marriage and let his children down, and the loss of his family was devastating. Against this backdrop, John had a construction accident and a near-death experience that was life-transforming.

John became emotional when he recounted his experience of suddenly finding himself lying down with his arms crossed over his chest, with waves of light moving over him, and then what he considered to be the Hand of God hovering above his body. All of his pain ceased and an incredible feeling of bliss overwhelmed him. John asked for direction and God assuaged his fears and affirmed His love: "You are all right. I like you."

The archetypal imagery of a huge hand bringing reassurance and strength was symbolically significant for two reasons: first, John used his hands as a construction worker to support and sustain his family, the family he was now losing; and, second, it was John's own hand that shot the nail into his heart, probably to end his life.

God's Hand represented the Perfect Hand that could hold, help, and heal, everything John thought he could no longer do as a father, husband, and man. At a point in his life when he truly thought his "hands were tied," he was given another perspective and a sign through his NDE that he had the strength to "handle" the challenges of his life. The Hand was a symbol of self-renewal, self-validation, and reassurance, and, as Atwater wrote, a reminder of how loved he was and how important life was. John's NDE forced him to look at his feelings of abandonment and failure as a husband, father, and human being. John's previous low self-esteem was reframed by his NDE in terms of a spiritual awakening that God is the source of strength and consolation. John reconnected with his faith in God and in himself and renewed his commitment to the church he had been attending.

Transcendent Experience (Expansive Revelations, Alternate Realities)

This type of NDE involves exposure to otherworldly dimensions and scenes beyond the individual's frame of reference, and sometimes includes revelations of greater truths. It is usually experienced by those who are ready for a "mind stretching" challenge, and/or who are most apt to use, to whatever degree, the truths that are revealed. (Atwater, 1992, p. 157)

Jill had become a born-again Christian one year before her near-death experience. By her own admission, at the time of her baptism, she had felt nothing special and even felt guilty she might be "pretending" to be a Christian. Her intent to be born-again was sincere; unfortunately, something was missing after her conversion that she could not identify.

In retrospect, she was primed for her near-death experience through her religious devotion and learning. She had laid the foundation for her revelatory near-death experience and embraced it with excitement. Jill listened carefully to the voice she believed to be Jesus': "The Voice began telling me marvelous, amazing, and

astonishing things . . . in a perspective I never looked at before." Jill rejoiced in her new-found knowledge and began "dancing and waving her arms in the air and babbling in some other language." Jesus told Jill that her life as she knew it was over, in effect she had died, and she would be given a new life, Christ's life. The archetypal imagery of rebirth, dying, and taking Christ's life as her own, epitomized the concept of being born again. And Jill was born again, both spiritually and physically. Her deep desire to serve the Lord before her NDE was heightened when she experienced a personal relationship with Him through her NDE, the very element that had been missing one year before. Jill's NDE provided the bridge between her previous baptism as a born-again Christian a year before and the bliss she searched for but which eluded her as a newly committed Christian. Jill's NDE laid to rest any doubts she had about her conversion and the direction her life was to take. Her NDE empowered her to apply her Christian values to her everyday life in a practical and useful way, something she had struggled with and resisted until her body broke down.

Conclusion

These four case studies have demonstrated that the near-death experience is, in addition to a physical and spiritual process, a psychological one as well. The individual continues to experience thoughts and feelings consistent with his or her personality and life situation throughout the different phases of the NDE. The NDEr begins the journey into an altered state of consciousness where the ego is transcended, preparing the way for transformation through archetypal imagery. Archetypal imagery is the individual's unique code drawn from the context of the person's life, which allows the psyche to move from an ego-based reality to the Universal Reality. Upon returning to the physical body, the transformation is manifested through a "course correction," which enables the NDEr to focus on some aspect of his or her life that needs an adjustment at the conscious or subconscious level.

Continued study of the psychological processes of the near-death experience would have a tremendous effect on the psychology of dying, as society would no longer shun this natural transition but prepare for it. Preparation for death must come from a societal shift in values, which medical personnel, schools, families, and the public in

general must make in order to enhance the inevitable transition. All four NDErs described above showed no fear of death after the NDE and all four looked forward to their ultimate journey into the light. Based on these data, near-death experiences reduce death anxiety and allow for course corrections in life so as to ensure a peaceful approach to death and the equanimity to accept the transition.

Finally, the near-death experience offers hope that our essence continues in some form after our bodies die. It is a comforting thought that our specialness and uniqueness are preserved as the four case studies attested to in both the pleasant and unpleasant experiences.

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The Near-Death Experience: A Study of Spiritual Transformation

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ABSTRACT: Fifty-one near-death experiencers (NDErs) were surveyed in person and through the mail to discover if and how their lives were changed as a result of their NDEs. Results showed major changes in participants' lives, especially in the areas of religious belief and practice, lifestyle, career, and relationships.

The near-death experience (NDE), innately transformative by nature, enhances not only the experiencer, but also others who may be touched in some way by the NDEr. Accounts of NDEs most often reflect an indescribably glorious afterlife filled with great peace, balance, harmony, and magnificent love vastly unlike our often stressful earthly lives. The NDE strongly suggests that death is not a final destination, but part of a wondrous journey to yet another level of the soul's spiritual development. Many experiencers reveal that in the "light" of the other side, surrounded by profoundly loving caretakers, their real spiritual nature is reawakened and they are truly "home."

Through my private practice, I have been involved in others' personal processes, sometimes assisting in the assimilation of their NDEs, as well as the near-death or death experiences of their loved

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ones. Those who had prior knowledge of the positive spiritual aspects of the near-death process were greatly comforted in their times of need when a loved one died or nearly died. For the experiencer, direct knowledge of a heavenly existence kindles an incontestable inner *knowing* that most often eliminates any future fear of death. For the nonexperiencer, such knowledge can also decrease a fear both of death and of the mysterious unknown after death. Thus, in our world of increasing disturbance, near-death studies can offer benefit, inspiration, and knowledge to a humanity hungry for inner peace and truth. Such information can provide courage and spiritual direction for one's daily life and when a soul makes its transition to yet another realm of existence.

Twenty years have passed since Raymond Moody's first groundbreaking book on the NDE opened the door for the scientific, psychological, and spiritual study of this previously little-known subject (Moody, 1975). In the past twenty years considerable research has been conducted on NDEs, which has suggested that NDErs become more spiritual in a personal way and less religious in a formalized way. NDErs also become more open-minded regarding spirituality and religion. In addition, they become more open-minded in general, have reduced or lost fear of death, feel emotionally stronger and less fearful of life, are more service-oriented, are more appreciative of life, are more compassionate and understanding towards others, have developed astute intuitive abilities, and are much more aware of being guided by God or a higher power than before their NDE (Ring, 1984).

My own personal thirst for "the Divine" and my endless fascination with the spiritual aspects of the near-death experience led me to develop this particular NDE survey and subsequent research. The purpose of this study was to investigate the purported life-changing impact of the near-death experience (NDE) on individuals. The intent was to discover if and how NDErs' lives have been changed as a result of their coming close to death. The set of questions used in this study was developed to focus previous researchers' themes, specifically to study whether the lives of NDErs have been changed as a result of their near-death experiences, and if so, how. The hypothesis to be tested was that each NDEr's life has been changed in significant ways, as a result of his or her near-death experience, particularly in the area of spirituality or religious belief and practice.

Methods

Subjects

The International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) sponsors local chapters (Friends of IANDS) to serve as a contact point for near-death survivors, their families, professionals, and others interested in NDEs. Friends of IANDS is a community-based network of support and discussion groups around the world that share information through the auspices of the organization. It offers support, sharing, discussion, and education at monthly meetings.

The participants in this study were recruited from members of the Seattle, Portland, and Salt Lake City chapters of the Friends of IANDS. The Seattle Chapter of Friends of IANDS (Seattle IANDS) was started in 1982, the Portland Chapter (Portland IANDS) in 1993, and the Salt Lake City Chapter (Utah IANDS) in 1992. Attendance averages approximately 100 individuals (range = 60-300), about one-third of whom have had NDEs, at the Seattle meetings; approximately 16 (range = 10-30), one-fourth of whom have had NDEs, at the Portland meetings; and approximately 80 (range = 10-100), one-fourth of whom have had NDEs, at the Salt Lake City meetings.

The majority of the participants in this study attended the May 7, 1994, meeting in Seattle, where surveys were distributed; other members of the chapter who did not attend offered to complete surveys by mail. Survey participants must have had an actual NDE.

Fifty-one surveys were given to participants, and all 51 were returned in usable form.

Materials

The questionnaire used was compiled specifically for this study. After preliminary research, a list of questions was compiled that would best serve the survey purpose and ultimate hypothesis. Twice, the questions were revised after receiving suggestions from pilot subjects.

Thirty-one multiple choice questions were used. Six dealt with the actual NDE and served to establish that an actual near-death experience occurred. These questions, derived from previous near-death research and including particular experiential elements considered essential to a classic NDE, were used to measure the individual's NDE.

Twenty questions were designed to examine beliefs, feelings, and behavior before and after the NDE, to explore changes in the spiritual, emotional, professional, personal, and practical subjects' lives.

Two questions established the subject's willingness to share the experience, based on others' reactions. Two other questions established subjects' age at the time of the NDE and at the time of the survey.

Procedures

The proposed project and survey requirements were discussed with the presidents of the Seattle, Portland, and Salt Lake City groups, and permission was granted to offer surveys to qualified members at monthly meetings and through the mail.

In May 1994, surveys with cover letters were given to the 51 individuals who agreed to participate, some at the Seattle meeting and others, from all three chapters, through the mail.

Results

Friends of IANDES participants returned 51 surveys for a return rate of 100 percent. The results of this survey are presented in the order in which questions were asked on the questionnaire.

1. Have you ever had a near-death experience?

All 51 subjects reported they had had at least one NDE. A total of 64 NDEs were reported, for a mean of 1.3 experiences per respondent.

2. What caused your NDE?

All 51 subjects responded with at least one event that caused the NDE. A total of 64 precipitating events were reported, for a mean of 1.3 events per person. The most common causal event reported was accident, listed for 23 NDEs (36 percent); illness was reported for 16 NDEs (25 percent), surgery for 12 NDEs (19 percent), drug overdose for 3 NDEs (5 percent), and dental treatment for 2 NDEs (3 percent). Heart attack, being choked, electrocution, war wounds, seizures, hanging from a cliff, childbirth, and emotional shock were each reported for 1 NDE (2 percent).

3. *During the NDE did you perceive yourself to be dying or on a path toward death?*

Twenty-seven respondents (53 percent) answered "yes" to this question; 23 (45 percent) answered "no," and 4 respondents (8 percent), including 3 who had answered "yes" or "no," said they were not sure.

4. *In retrospect, how close did you come to actual death?*

Nineteen respondents (37 percent) reported that they were "most likely dead"; 29 respondents (57 percent) reported that they had been "obviously close to death"; 5 (10 percent) reported they were "not sure if death would have occurred"; and 3 (6 percent) reported they had been in "no real danger of dying." (Total responses exceeded 100 percent because 5 respondents gave more than one answer.)

5. *During the NDE did you experience any of the following?*

Specific phenomena reported are listed in Table 1, along with number and percent of subjects reporting them.

6. *If you saw spirit beings, who were they?*

Thirty-nine subjects (76 percent) reported seeing some spirit being or beings. A total of 111 responses were reported, for a mean of 2.2 responses per subject. Seventeen respondents (33 percent) described these beings as "familiar to me", and 11 (22 percent) described them as "not familiar to me."

Sixteen respondents (31 percent) described them as light beings, teachers, or guides; 14 (28 percent) described them as deceased relatives or friends; 12 (24 percent) described them as angels or angelic-like beings; 12 (24 percent) described the being as Jesus Christ; 5 (10 percent) described them as just "some being"; 3 (6 percent) described it as "God as energetic presence"; and 2 (4 percent) described a "lady in white." "Many souls," historical or Biblical figures, a grandmother, one's spiritual self, a greeter, "eternity as entity," and a "singular light/sound presence" were each described by 1 respondent (2 percent).

7. *Do you recall coming back to life?*

Forty-one respondents (80 percent) answered "yes" to this question, and 12 (24 percent) answered "no"; 2 subjects answered both "yes" and "no."

Table 1
Specific Phenomena Reported by NDErs (N = 51)

<i>Phenomenon</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
peace, painlessness, pleasantness	46 (90 percent)
seeing, enveloped by, or entering light	39 (77 percent)
being separated from the body	37 (73 percent)
entering a dark region or tunnel	36 (71 percent)
hearing a voice or voices	35 (69 percent)
sense of existing as "mind" only	32 (63 percent)
seeing or greeting spirits	29 (57 percent)
choosing to return to life	23 (45 percent)
life review	20 (39 percent)
being told not to die, or to return to life	20 (39 percent)
subjective sense of being dead	18 (35 percent)
had no choice but to return to life	16 (31 percent)
seeing or reaching a border of life	16 (31 percent)
choosing to return to life	12 (24 percent)
being asked if ready to die	11 (22 percent)
hearing noises like wind or buzzing	11 (22 percent)
hearing news of own death	7 (14 percent)
hearing music	3 (6 percent)
feelings of wonder or awe	2 (4 percent)
seeing colorful beings	2 (4 percent)
being asked if he or she wanted to stay	1 (2 percent)
being told not to be afraid	1 (2 percent)

8. At the time, were you angry at coming back to life?

13 respondents (26 percent) answered "yes"; 5 (10 percent) answered "somewhat"; and 34 (67 percent) answered "no." One respondent gave two answers and another gave no response.

9. What was your religious denomination before your NDE?

Twenty-three respondents (45 percent) described themselves before the NDE as Protestant, 11 (22 percent) as Mormon, 6 (12 percent) as Catholic, 4 (8 percent) as Episcopal, 3 (6 percent) as Baptist, 2 (4 percent) as Assembly of God, 2 (4 percent) as Lutheran, 2 (4 percent) as Unity; 1 (2 percent) as Anglican, 1 (2 percent) as Methodist,

1 (2 percent) as Greek Orthodox, 1 (2 percent) as New Thought Christian; and 1 (2 percent) as Jewish.

In addition, 15 respondents (29 percent) described themselves before the NDE as "spiritually oriented, not church involved"; 6 (12 percent) described themselves as agnostic; 4 (8 percent) as having no religious denomination; and 1 (2 percent) as atheist.

10. What is your religious denomination since your NDE

Eight respondents (16 percent) described themselves now as Mormon; 6 (12 percent) as Unity; 5 (10 percent) as Protestant; 2 (4 percent) as Catholic; 2 (4 percent) as New Thought Christian; 1 (2 percent) as Assembly of God; 1 (2 percent) as Baptist; 1 (2 percent) as Lutheran; 1 (2 percent) as Pentecostal; 1 (2 percent) as Presbyterian; 1 (2 percent) as Church of the Master; and 1 (2 percent) as Eckankar.

In addition, 29 respondents (57 percent) described themselves now as "spiritually oriented, not church involved"; 2 (4 percent) as having no religious denomination; 1 (2 percent) as agnostic; and 1 (2 percent) as atheist.

11. How spiritual (personal) and/or religious (church) were you before your NDE?

Seven respondents (14 percent) answered that they had been "very" spiritual or religious before the NDE; 15 (29 percent) answered "quite" spiritual or religious; 13 (26 percent) answered "fairly" spiritual or religious; 10 (20 percent) answered "not too" spiritual or religious; 5 (10 percent) answered "not at all"; and 1 respondent did not answer.

12. How spiritual (personal) or religious (church) are you since your NDE?

Thirty-four respondents (67 percent) answered that they are now "very" spiritual or religious; 10 (20 percent) answered "quite" spiritual or religious; 2 (4 percent) answered "fairly" spiritual or religious; 3 (6 percent) answered "not too" spiritual or religious; and 2 (4 percent) answered "not at all."

13. Before your NDE how strong was your belief in God?

Twelve respondents (24 percent) described their belief in God before the NDE as "absolute"; 12 (24 percent) described it as "strong"; 15 (29 percent) described it as "fairly strong"; 2 (4 percent) described

it as "not too strong"; 1 (2 percent) described it as "nonexistent"; and 9 respondents (18 percent) answered that they were unsure.

14. Since your NDE, how strong is your belief in God?

Forty-two respondents (82 percent) described their belief in God now as "absolute"; 5 (10 percent) described it as "strong"; 1 (2 percent) described it as "fairly strong"; 1 (2 percent) described it as "not too strong"; and 2 (4 percent) described it as "nonexistent."

15. Before your NDE, did you believe there was one path to God?

Fourteen respondents (28 percent) answered "yes"; 14 (28 percent) answered "no"; and 23 (45 percent) answered that they were unsure.

16. Since your NDE, do you believe there is one path to God?

Thirteen respondents (26 percent) answered "yes"; 33 (65 percent) answered "no"; and 5 (10 percent) answered that they were unsure.

17. Before your NDE, did you believe in an afterlife?

Eleven respondents (22 percent) answered "definitely"; 7 (14 percent) answered "strongly"; 15 (29 percent) answered "probably"; 3 (6 percent) answered "not at all"; and 15 (29 percent) answered that they were unsure.

18. Since your NDE, do you believe in an afterlife?

Forty-seven respondents (92 percent) answered "definitely"; 3 (6 percent) answered "strongly"; and 1 (2 percent) answered "not at all."

19. Since your NDE, what are your feelings regarding a fear of death?

Thirty-five respondents (69 percent) answered that they had lost all fear of death; 10 (20 percent) answered that they had decreased fear of death; 8 (16 percent) answered that they had never been afraid of death; and 2 (4 percent) reported no change in feelings. None reported increased fear of death. (Total responses exceed 100 percent because 4 respondents gave more than one response.)

20. Before your NDE, what were your conceptions of death?

All 51 respondents answered, and gave a total of 93 responses, for a mean of 1.8 answers per subject. Thirteen respondents (25 percent) answered that they conceived of death as a transition or new beginning; 12 (24 percent) answered that their conception of death in-

cluded heaven and hell; 7 (14 percent) had a conception of death that relates to reincarnation; 4 (8 percent) answered that their conception of death included heaven only; 6 (12 percent) answered that they had a conception of death as finality; and 43 (84 percent) answered that they were not sure.

21. Since your NDE, what are your conceptions of death?

Fifty respondents (98 percent) answered, and gave a total of 146 answers, for a mean of 2.9 responses per subject. Of those 50 respondents, 47 (92 percent) answered they they conceived of death as a transition or new beginning; 19 (37 percent) answered that they had a conception of death that relates to reincarnation; 3 (6 percent) answered that their conception of death included heaven and hell; 45 (90 percent) answered that their conception of death included heaven only; 1 (2 percent) answered that he conceived of death as annihilation or finality; 3 (6 percent) responded "not sure"; and 1 (2 percent) gave no response.

22. Since your NDE, have you changed in the following ways?

Specific changes are listed in Table 2, along with numbers and percents of respondents reporting them.

23. Are you angry now at having returned to life?

Two respondents (4 percent) answered "yes"; 9 (18 percent) answered "somewhat"; and 40 (78 percent) answered "no."

24-A. Since your NDE, have you experienced changes in career?

Twenty-six respondents (51 percent) reported a positive change; 5 (10 percent) reported a negative change; 10 (20 percent) reported a neutral change; and 12 (24 percent) gave no response.

24-B. Since your NDE, have you experienced changes in lifestyle?

Thirty-seven respondents (73 percent) reported a positive change; 3 (6 percent) reported a negative change; 7 (14 percent) reported a neutral change; and 6 (12 percent) gave no response.

24-C. Since your NDE, have you experienced changes in relationships?

Forty respondents (78 percent) reported a positive change; 9 (18 percent) reported a negative change; 3 (6 percent) reported a neutral change; and 3 (6 percent) gave no response.

Table 2
Specific Changes Reported by NDErs (N = 51)

<i>Change</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
more helpful toward others	42 (82 percent)
more compassionate or understanding	42 (82 percent)
more open-minded in general	42 (82 percent)
more spiritually or religiously open	41 (80 percent)
more intuitive	40 (78 percent)
more aware of guidance by higher power	38 (75 percent)
more appreciative of life	37 (73 percent)
emotionally stronger	35 (69 percent)
more purposeful	33 (65 percent)
less fearful of life	26 (51 percent)
more depressed	4 (8 percent)
a "born again" Christian	3 (6 percent)
more fearful	1 (2 percent)
more fearful of life	1 (2 percent)

24-D. Since your NDE, have you experienced changes in spirituality?

Forty-five respondents (88 percent) reported a positive change; none reported a negative change; 3 (6 percent) reported a neutral change; and 3 (6 percent) gave no response.

25. Has your NDE changed you?

Fifty subjects (98 percent) responded, and gave a total of 251 answers, for a mean of 4.9 answers per subject.

Forty-eight respondents (94 percent) answered that the NDE changed them spiritually; 42 (82 percent) answered that it changed them mentally; 31 (61 percent) answered that it changed them physically; 23 (45 percent) answered that it changed them professionally; 16 (31 percent) answered that it changed them financially; and 4 (8 percent) answered that it changed them emotionally.

In addition, 44 respondents (86 percent) answered that the NDE changed them for the better; while 3 (6 percent) answered that it changed them for the worse.

26. *In general, since the NDE how much has your life changed?*

Thirty-nine respondents (77 percent) answered "dramatically"; 6 (12 percent) answered "somewhat"; 3 (6 percent) answered "not at all"; and 3 (6 percent) gave no response.

27. *If you feel you have found your purpose in life, do you attribute it to having had an NDE?*

Twenty-six respondents (51 percent) answered "yes"; 11 (22 percent) answered "somewhat"; 3 (6 percent) answered "no"; 8 (16 percent) answered that they had not found their purpose; and 3 (6 percent) gave no response.

28. *When sharing your NDE, how have others reacted?*

Thirty-five subjects (69 percent) answered that others had been open and receptive; 16 (32 percent) answered that others had been disbelieving and skeptical.

29. *In general, how do you feel about sharing your NDE?*

Twelve respondents (24 percent) answered that they were open and willing to share their NDE; 39 (76 percent) answered that they were fearful of ridicule or negativity.

30. *Exactly how old were you at the time of your NDE?*

All 51 respondents provided answers for a total of 64 different NDEs. The mean age at the time of the *first* NDE was 29.2 years.

31. *What is your present age?*

The mean age of the 51 respondents was 51.9 years.

Discussion

This survey confirmed the study hypothesis. Survey results suggest that one's sense of personal spirituality and willingness or interest in subscribing to outer religious influences, such as church, were radically altered after the NDE, indicating major change in the area of personal spirituality and formalized religious practice. The majority of experiencers, regardless of religious affiliation, became more spiritually oriented and less church-oriented after the NDE. For these experiencers, it appears that a sense of spirituality or inner God-connection gained in the NDE took precedence, to a large extent,

over subscribing to formerly held and currently available religious doctrine.

However, it is interesting to note that those who described themselves prior to the NDE as "spiritually oriented, not church involved" or as New Thought Christian or Unity appear to have remained more steadfast in their prior convictions, as these categories did not decrease in number after the NDE but, in fact, significantly increased (spiritual/not church involved, from 29 to 57 percent; New Thought Christian and Unity, from 6 to 16 percent).

Results indicate a decline in percentages in all traditional denominational categories: Protestant (from 45 to 10 percent), Catholic (from 12 to 4 percent), Baptist (from 6 to 2 percent), Jewish (2 percent to none), and Mormons (22 to 16 percent). No changes occurred in the atheist (2 percent) category; but agnostics declined (from 12 to 2 percent). Interestingly, many respondents described being affiliated with more than one religious denomination, particularly before the NDE.

Furthermore, those who considered themselves to be "quite" or "very" personally spiritual and/or religious since their NDE increased (from 43 to 87 percent). Likewise, those with an absolute belief in God increased dramatically (from 24 to 82 percent).

An additional finding of interest was the NDE was associated with a marked increase in belief that there is not just one path to God (28 to 65 percent). This might be related to the finding that only 24 percent reported seeing Jesus during their NDE.

However, of the 12 people who did report having seen Jesus, only 2 (17 percent, or 4 percent of the total surveyed) reported a belief in one path to God. In addition, 6 percent reported a belief after the NDE in heaven and hell, and 6 percent reported having become "born again" Christians after the NDE.

Results on questions relating to a belief in the afterlife are particularly notable. Definite belief in an afterlife increased dramatically (from 22 to 92 percent). No one after the NDE expressed uncertainty about their response to this question, again suggesting strong, definitive after-NDE attitudes.

Data regarding one's fear of death support the proposed hypothesis: 89 percent reported a decreased or totally eliminated fear of death, while none reported an increased fear.

The respondents in this study reported a marked shift in their conceptions of death after their NDE. These results are particularly interesting since they offer a likely, meaningful explanation for the NDErs' greatly reduced fear of death.

Belief in heaven and hell fell after the NDE (from 24 to 6 percent), while belief in heaven alone rose (from 8 to 90 percent). In addition, belief in death as a transition increased markedly (from 25 to 92 percent), as did conceptions of death related to reincarnation (from 14 to 37 percent). One might assume that viewing death as a transition and heavenly destination and not a possible hellish state would serve to reduce or eliminate one's fear of death. Further, a belief in reincarnation could also lead to a reduced or absent fear of death, because the death process would have been previously experienced.

Regarding the hypothesis that NDEers' lives are changed for the better, significant majorities of those surveyed reported that since the NDE they were more helpful to others, more appreciative of life, more open-minded and understanding, more religiously open-minded, more intuitive, more aware of spiritual guidance, more purposeful, emotionally stronger, and less fearful in daily living. Reports of strongly positive changes in the areas of spirituality, relationships, lifestyle, and career support these findings and also assist in confirming the initial hypothesis.

These data indicate that some of the most profound changes in after-NDE lives occurred in the areas of personal spirituality and relationships, followed by lifestyle and career. It is interesting that out of the four categories, relationships, while primarily affected positively (78 percent), also had the highest rate of negative effects after an NDE (18 percent), despite data showing that after the NDE, the majority of experiencers gained in qualities that would likely enhance relationships, such as becoming more understanding, more open-minded, more intuitive, and more aware of spiritual guidance. This might reflect significant others' difficulty accepting the individuals' NDE and the implications of it, particularly if religious views had been altered. This interpretation is supported by the finding that many of those surveyed were fearful of sharing the NDE with others. One might assume that they were quite selective in doing so.

Additional support for my hypothesis comes from the finding that 77 percent of those surveyed said their lives had changed dramatically as a result of their NDE, 51 percent attributed their having found their life purpose to the NDE, with an additional 22 percent reporting that the NDE somewhat contributed to the discovery of their life purpose. Thus, 73 percent of respondents felt their sense of purpose in life was positively affected by the NDE.

This study, although small in scale, supports and enhances previous research documenting the dramatic, life-changing impact of the

NDE on an individual. Much of the near-death literature dealt in a general way with the topics addressed by my hypothesis, and much of it focused on the actual NDE and not on the long term after effects of the NDE on the survivor. What research has been done on after-effects was often presented in an anecdotal fashion, without recourse to statistics; and what statistics were available, though interesting, often led to more questions.

The findings of this study are somewhat similar to those reported by Ring and Moody, especially in regard to the actual NDE, the general spiritual impact of the experience, and its after effects. However, the specific questions asked in this survey have not been examined before, such as those pertaining to religion and spirituality, and to encounters with other beings during the NDE.

The survey results proved to be consistent with my proposed hypothesis. Even results suggesting that some NDErs were more depressed (8 percent) or had changed for the worse (6 percent) were not surprising. NDErs, while admitting positive changes in their lives, often experience varying degrees of confusion and depression also, in a longing for the heavenly experience. Somewhat surprising, however, were findings that many respondents had had more than one NDE, with some persons reporting three or four experiences.

Furthermore, although previous researchers had reported this, I found it curious that only a low percentage of persons encountered Jesus during the NDE, and that while a high percentage of persons reacted favorably to hearing of a NDE, a significant percentage of NDErs were fearful of sharing the NDE with others. One might conclude that those who reacted favorably to others' NDEs had been carefully chosen by the experiencer beforehand, possibly after prior negative experiences in this regard.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

Results indicate the majority of NDErs surveyed undergo similar experiences while in the near-death state, which not only alter previously held conceptions, but create similarity in the belief systems of experiencers after the NDE. Such conceptions involve one's personal life and views on religion, God, death, living, and the afterlife.

Major changes occurred in the lives of survey participants as a result of their NDEs in every area proposed by the hypothesis. The

majority held an absolute belief in God, belief in the afterlife, and considered themselves to be very spiritual after the NDE. In addition, the majority experienced greatly altered conceptions of death, including the loss of a fear of death, and a radical shift in their choice of religious denomination and in their belief regarding a single path to God. Furthermore, a majority attributed their having found their life purpose to the NDE, as well as positive changes in the areas of personal spirituality, relationships, lifestyle, and career.

Further research in specific areas included in this survey could prove to be even more informative, if certain adjustments were made. Using a much larger survey group might provide more conclusive results. In addition, respondents should be instructed to answer questions based on one NDE only, as answers that referred to multiple NDEs proved somewhat confusing to tabulate. The most appropriate denominator for some responses was the number of subjects (51), while that for other responses was the number of NDEs (64).

Questions regarding one's spirituality and religious qualities should not be lumped together but should be separately defined and explored. In addition, the question regarding "one path to God" needs precise definition, as it appeared that some respondents may have assigned different meanings to that phrase.

In the section regarding religious affiliation, respondents should be instructed to choose only one category, so as to avoid possible confusion. Questions addressing changes in one's lifestyle, career, relationships, and spirituality should be more detailed, to examine the nature of the changes. For example, which relationships were affected negatively and which ones positively, and in what ways?

Finally, it would be interesting to add more detailed questions regarding one's experience of Jesus during the NDE, and of any reinforcement of or changes in former religious convictions after the NDE.

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Thought Communication, Speed of Movement, and the Spirit's Ability to Absorb Knowledge: Near-Death Experiences and Early Mormon Thought

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ABSTRACT: Three of Charles Flynn's (1986) "core elements" of near-death experiences (NDEs) have special interest to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) because of their striking similarity to the doctrinal teachings of 19th-century Mormon leaders and theologians. This article illustrates these three NDE characteristics—thought communication, speed of movement, and the ability to "absorb" knowledge—by comparing contemporary NDE accounts with both the religious teachings of 19th-century Mormon church leaders and the accepted doctrines of modern Mormonism.

Virtually all of the recent studies of near-death experiences (NDEs) have included accounts of those who have "died" discovering enhanced abilities, far beyond earthly abilities, in the areas of communication, travel and movement, and the acquisition of knowledge. These three different aspects of the near-death experience, included in Charles Flynn's (1986) list of "core elements" of the NDE, have special interest to Mormons. There are striking similarities between the modern descriptions by NDErs concerning thought communication, the speed of their movements, and their ability to absorb knowledge, and the theological teachings of early Mormon leaders in the

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mid-19th century. While there are some accounts of near-death experiences recorded in Mormon literature from both the 19th and 20th centuries, there is no historical evidence that these leaders, whom Mormons accept as modern-day prophets, ever had their own near-death experiences or were basing their teachings on the experiences of others. They merely taught these concepts as theological facts based on their understanding of scripture and what they purported to be revelations from God.

The purpose of this article is not to prove or disprove the truthfulness of Mormon theology, but merely to show the remarkable parallels between 19th-century Mormon teachings and near-death experiences. Recognizing these similarities and understanding basic Mormon religious beliefs about the afterlife also helps to explain why Mormons exhibit such a strong interest in the field of near-death studies.

Spirit Communication

In 1829 Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, taught that divine communication consists not of hearing with ears, but rather through thoughts of the mind and feelings of the heart (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 1981, 8:2). Shortly before his death in 1844, Smith also taught his followers that those who have died "know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions" (Smith, 1957, Vol. 6, pp. 50-52). These earliest intimations on spiritual communication were later elaborated with much greater detail by some of the leading Mormon theologians and Church leaders of the day. In a major discourse delivered in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City on October 22, 1854, Elder Orson Pratt, one of the Church's Twelve Apostles, spoke of "language, or the medium of communication in the future state." In this address, Pratt articulated in great detail the manner of communication that exists among spirit beings after death. He contended that, as the holy scriptures teach, God perceives the thoughts and intents of the heart by a higher power of communication and that communication after death is the utilization of such divine power:

For instance, how does God perceive the thoughts of our hearts? Is there not here a language by which He can discover and discern the thoughts and intents of the heart? Are we not told in many of the revelations how that God can perceive the thoughts of man, and that for every idle thought we are to be brought into judgment? Yes,

He discerns the thoughts, and the intents of the hearts of the children of men. Suppose we had some of that power resting upon us, would not that be a different kind of language from sound, or from written language? It would. . . .

For instance, do you suppose that spirits after they leave these bodies, communicate one with another? Do they communicate their ideas by the actual vibrations of the atmosphere the same as we do? I think not. I think if we could be made acquainted with the kind of language by which spirits converse with spirits, we would find that . . . they have . . . a more refined system among them of communicating their ideas. This system will be so constructed that they can not only communicate at the same moment upon one subject, as we have to do by making sounds in the atmosphere, but communicate vast numbers of idea, all at the same time, on a great variety of subjects; and the mind will be capable of perceiving them. . . . If the mind has such faculty as this, then there must necessarily be a language adapted to such a capacity of the mind. . . .

Well, inquires one, "can you imagine up any such system, or language in this world?" I can imagine up one, but it cannot be made practicable here, from the fact that the mind of man is unable to use it. For instance, the Book of Mormon tells us, that the angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, and man when under the influence of it, speaks the language of the angels. Why does he speak in this language? Because the Holy Ghost suggests the ideas which he speaks; and it gives him utterance to convey them to the people. . . . Suppose, instead of having arbitrary sounds, such as we have here, to communicate these ideas, that the Holy Ghost itself, through a certain process and power, should enable him to unfold that knowledge to another spirit, all in an instant. (*Journal of Discourses*, 1855-86, Vol. 3, pp. 100-102)

Such an idea of thought communication among deceased spirits seems to be corroborated by many NDE accounts. It is fascinating that these early Mormon teachings correspond not only with earlier teachings of Swedish philosopher and 18th-century NDEr Emanuel Swedenborg, but also with many accounts recently published in diverse near-death studies. In his classic work *Heaven and Hell* (1990), Swedenborg described how "angels" communicated with him in his purported visits to the world of spirits:

The angels who sat by my head were silent, only their thoughts communicating with mine. When these thoughts are accepted, the angels know that the person's spirit is in a state to be led out of his body. The communication of their thoughts was accomplished by looking at my face, this being in fact how communication of thoughts takes place in heaven. (p. 346)

Swedenborg further asserted that though the spirits of deceased men and women, or what he called "angels," may speak with their lips to mortals, their words are communicated primarily through thought processes:

The speech of angels or spirits with man sounds just as audible as the speech of one person with another. However, it is not audible to people nearby, only to the individual himself. This is because the speech of an angel or spirit flows into the person's thought first, and comes by an inner path to his physical ear; it thus activates it from within. (1990, pp. 178-179)

Numerous near-death experiences illustrate precisely the concept taught by Swedenborg in the 18th century and taught by early Mormon leaders in the early to mid-19th century. Raymond Moody included in *Life After Life* (1975) the account of an NDEr who reported:

I could see people all around, and I could understand what they were saying. I didn't hear them audibly. . . . It was more like knowing what they were thinking, exactly what they were thinking, but only in my mind, not in their actual vocabulary. I would catch it the second before they opened their mouths to speak. (p. 52)

In many other published near-death studies there can be found accounts that reflect this notion of spiritual communication between "mind and heart" that is an integral part of Mormon theology:

I saw people that I knew had died. There were no words spoken, but it was as if I knew what they were thinking and at the same time I knew that they knew what I was thinking. (Grey, 1985, p. 50)

I was seated by the tree of life . . . there I saw many thousand spirits clothed in white. . . . They did not converse by sound, but each knew the other's thoughts at that instant, and conversation was carried on in that way, also with me. (Rogo, 1989, p. 62)

While it is evident from these accounts that afterlife communication is on at least a different, if not higher, plane, it is also clear that the spirit beings of deceased people continue to communicate one with another in much the same sense as women and men in life converse. Through his alleged encounters with "angels" or spirits of deceased people, Swedenborg attested to the notion of continued communication between these deceased spirits on all varieties of subjects:

Angels talk with each other just the way people in the world do, and they talk of various things—household matters, political matters, issues of moral life and issues of spiritual life, for example.

There is no noticeable difference, except that they talk with each other more intelligently than men do, since they talk more profoundly, from thought. (1990, p. 170)

While many modern NDErs have reported some level of surprise not only at their continued existence but also at the existence and manner of communication between spirits, such ideas are established doctrines of Mormonism. Early doctrinal declarations by Smith, the founder of Mormonism, and by his successor Brigham Young reflected Swedenborg's earlier views and substantiate many modern NDE accounts. "And the same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there [in the afterlife]," Smith taught his followers in 1843, "only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy" (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 1981, 130:2). Six years later Young further elaborated on this concept when he declared: "Spirits will be familiar with spirits in the spirit world, and will converse, behold, and exercise every variety of communication with one another as familiarly and naturally as while here in tabernacles" (1977, p. 380).

Movement and Travel of Spirits After Death

One of the core elements of the near-death experience described in the works of Kenneth Ring, Flynn, and others is that of the remarkable speed with which the spirit after death can travel. From many NDErs' descriptions of spirit travel, Moody summarized:

Travel, once one gets the hang of it, is apparently exceptionally easy in this state. Physical objects present no barrier, and movement from one place to another can be extremely rapid, almost instantaneous. (1975, p. 46)

This "almost instantaneous" movement of spirit bodies after death may sound like something out of the pages of science fiction, but it is a common element of reported near-death experiences. One example is the Viet Nam veteran whose body was lying wounded on an operating table in a medevac unit, yet he reported that he actually returned to the battlefield where he had been wounded. When he could not get the attention of his comrades who were gathering up the dead bodies, he suddenly found himself back in the operating room. He described the swiftness of his transition by saying: "It was almost like you materialize there and all of a sudden the next instant you

were over here. It was just like you blinked your eyes" (Sabom, 1982, p. 33).

In an age before there was knowledge of supersonic jet airplanes, fiber optics, and the theory of relativity, Mormon leaders spoke in a similar fashion concerning the remarkable manner in which beings in the spirit realm move and travel from place to place. "As quickly as the spirit is unlocked from this house of clay," Young declared, "it is free to travel with lightning speed to any planet, or fixed star, or to the uttermost part of the earth, or the depths of the sea, according to the will of Him who dictates" (*Journal of Discourses*, 1855-86, Vol. 13, p. 77). On another occasion, he not only reiterated that spirits can travel at the "speed of lightning" in the next life, but also alluded to the possibility of some degree of time travel:

[Spirits] move with ease and like lightning. If we want to visit Jerusalem, or this, or that other place—and I presume we will be permitted if we desire—there we are, looking at its streets. If we want to behold Jerusalem as it was in the days of the Saviour; or if we want to see the Garden of Eden as it was created, there we are, and we will see it as it existed spiritually, for it was created first spiritually and then temporally, and spiritually it still remains. And when there we may behold the earth as at the dawn of creation, or we may visit any city we please that exists upon its surface. If we wish to understand how they are living here on these western islands, or in China, we are there; in fact, we are like the light of morning, or, I will not say the electric fluid, but its operations on the wires. God has revealed some little things with regard to His movements and power, and the operation and motion of the lightning furnish a fine illustration of the ability and power of the Almighty. If you could stretch a wire from this room around the world until the two ends nearly met here again and were to apply a battery to one end, if the electrical conditions were perfect, the effect of the touch would pass with such inconceivable velocity that it would be felt at the other end of the wire at the same moment. . .

When we pass into the spirit world we shall possess a measure of this power. (*Journal of Discourses*, 1855-86, Vol. 14, p. 231)

Young's views on spirit travel, expressed in the 19th century, seem to also be reflected in the near-death experience of George Ritchie, who wrote of both speed of travel and the relativity of time that he observed in his travels during his out-of-body experience. He reported that he traveled great distances across the United States at remarkable speeds:

I had made two other discoveries about this strange out-of-body realm. First, one goes wherever his/her soul's sincere desire leads

him/her. Secondly, time in this realm, if it exists at all, is much shorter than our normal human realm, or the capacity to cover great distances in a regular period of time is vastly increased, for the distance I knew that I had traveled could not be covered in our fastest airplanes. (1991, p. 14)

In addition to Ritchie, others have also given detailed descriptions of their amazing supernatural abilities of movement while out of body. All of the descriptions seem to share many of the same characteristics or ideas that had been advanced by Young and others. One such account, recorded by Michael Sabom, came from a cardiac arrest victim who described his elation upon discovering this new found freedom of movement:

I could have moved away from my body anytime I wanted to. . . . There wasn't a thing that was mechanical about it, like an automobile or anything. It was just a thought process. I felt like I could have thought myself anywhere I wanted to be instantly. . . . I just felt exhilarated with a sense of power. I could do what I wanted to. . . . It's realer than here, really. (Sabom, 1982, p. 34)

One of the central features of virtually all near-death experiences is that of the presence of light—either general emanating light or specific beings of light. It appears that speed or motion as a characteristic of light has something to do with the mode of travel in the next life. Early Mormon theologians, without the benefit of modern knowledge regarding the speed of light, wrote about the role of light in the realm of spirit travel. Parley P. Pratt, an early associate of Mormon founder Smith and an Apostle in the Church during Young's administration, taught that the nature of the spirit body is a factor in its proficiency in supernatural movement:

It is true that this subtle fluid or spiritual element is endowed with powers of locomotion in a far greater degree than the more gross or solid elements of nature; that its refined particles penetrate amid the other elements with greater ease, and meet with less resistance from the air or other substances, than would the more gross elements. Hence, its speed, or superior powers of motion. (*Journal of Discourses*, 1855-86, Vol. 1, p. 8)

Pratt's brother, Orson Pratt, also a 19th century Apostle in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and considered one of the greatest Mormon theologians, in a monumental discourse on conditions of the next life, implied that because the spirit bodies of the deceased are composed of light they are able to travel at the speed of light:

What does the Lord say in one of the new revelations? "Ye shall live by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God; whatsoever is truth is light and whatsoever is light is spirit," consequently the light that comes from the sun is spirit. How fast does that spirit travel? It can be demonstrated that it can travel [at the speed of light]; if then one portion of spirit can travel with that velocity, it is natural for us to suppose that any other portions of spirit can travel with the same velocity, and thus we shall be able to accomplish, and perform a greater amount of righteousness among other worlds and beings, than if we were compelled to lose three fourths, or nine tenths of our time on the journey. (*Journal of Discourses*, 1855-86, Vol. 3, p. 104)

Ability to Absorb Knowledge

Many NDErs report that one of the most significant aspects of their unique experience, alongside an overwhelming sense of love, is a profound encounter with knowledge. Moody (1977) characterized this increased intellectual and spiritual ability as a "vision of knowledge." Noting that NDErs state that a complete expression of this experience is impossible in this life, he observed that they

got brief glimpses of an entire separate realm of existence in which all knowledge—whether of past, present, or future—seemed to co-exist in a sort of timeless state. Alternately, this has been described as a moment of enlightenment in which the subject seemed to have complete knowledge. (pp. 9-10)

Moody then provided several specific examples of this phenomenon. One woman explained:

It seemed that all of a sudden, all knowledge—of all that had started from the very beginning, that would go on without end—that for a second I knew all the secrets of all ages, all the meaning of the universe, the stars, the moon—of everything. (p. 10)

When questioned by Moody as to how this knowledge was presented to her, she replied:

It was in all forms of communication, sights, sounds, thoughts. It was any- and everything. It was as if there was nothing that wasn't known. All knowledge was there, not just of one field, but everything. (p. 11)

Another person Moody interviewed put it this way:

Because this is a place where the *place* is knowledge. . . . Knowledge and information are readily available—all knowledge. . . . You absorb knowledge. . . . You all of a sudden know the answers. (p. 14)

Ring has also reported numerous accounts from his near-death research that demonstrate a "heightened sensory awareness" in which experiencers feel more alive, vibrant, and aware intellectually than when in their bodies. A man who was the victim of an attempted murder reported:

As my senses expanded I became aware of colors that were far beyond the spectrum of the rainbow known to the human eye. My awareness stretched out in all three hundred sixty degrees. (Ring, 1984, p. 65)

Another NDEr in Ring's research described similar feelings: "It was as if my whole body had eyes and ears. I was just so aware of everything" (Ring, 1980, p. 93). Many other accounts seem to confirm this rarified sense of awareness and the unique ability to absorb knowledge through senses beyond those earthly. This intriguing aspect of NDEs also seems to coincide closely with the views expressed centuries ago by Swedenborg:

For the human mind is just as discerning as the angelic mind. The reason it is not so discerning in the world is that it is within an earthly body, within which a spiritual mind thinks in a natural fashion. But it is quite different when it is released from its tie with the body. Then it no longer thinks in a natural way, but in a spiritual way; and when it does, it thinks about matters unintelligible and inexpressible to the natural person—so it discerns like an angel. (1990, p. 237)

People who are in heaven have far more delicate senses (that is, they see and hear far more precisely) and they think more wisely than when they were in the world. For they see by heaven's light, which surpasses earth's light by many degrees; they hear, too, through a spiritual atmosphere, which also surpasses the earthly one by many degrees. (1990, p. 359)

Swedenborg's teachings and NDErs' descriptions of their ability to absorb knowledge strike a familiar chord to Mormons. Such views were reflected not only in the teachings of Mormon leaders in the 19th century, but are also evident in sacred writings esteemed by Mormons as scripture. One such scriptural account dealt with how Moses was somehow spiritually empowered to view the existence of the world from beginning to end, comprehending every particle of it

and every being who would ever occupy it. Moses' own account of this experience provides some detail:

And it came to pass, as the voice [of God] was still speaking, Moses cast his eyes and beheld the earth, yea, even all of it; and there was not a particle of it which he did not behold, *discerning it by the spirit of God*. And he beheld also the inhabitants thereof, and there was not a soul which he beheld not; and *he discerned them by the spirit of God*, and their numbers were great, even numberless as the sand upon the sea shore. (*The Pearl of Great Price*, 1981, Moses 1:27-28 [italics added])

There are other accounts in Mormon holy writ that demonstrate this remarkable ability to absorb and comprehend knowledge in a supernatural way—"by the spirit of God"—that seems to coincide to some degree with the descriptions given by NDErs. Additionally, there are several fascinating discourses given on the subject by Mormon leaders and theologians in the last century. One of the most significant, "The Increased Powers and Faculties of the Mind in the Future State," was given in 1854 by Elder Orson Pratt of the Church's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. It is interesting to note the similarities of his doctrinal teachings to the actual descriptions of near-death experiences today:

When the Lord imparts to us a principle [the spirit of God] by which we can look upon the past and future, as well as the present—by which we can look upon many intricate objects of nature which are now hidden from our view—we shall find our capacity for obtaining and retaining knowledge to be greatly enlarged. (*Journal of Discourses*, 1855-86, Vol. 2, p. 247)

In that oration, he further elaborated on these magnified sensory abilities of spirits, in a manner similar to Swedenborg's descriptions of "angelic discernment":

Here, then, is a new faculty of knowledge, very extended in its nature, that is calculated to throw a vast amount of information upon the mind of man, almost in the twinkling of an eye. How long a time would it take a man in the next world, if he had to gain knowledge as we do here, to find out the simplest things in nature? He might reason, and reason for thousands of years, and then hardly have got started. But when this Spirit of God, this great telescope that is used in the celestial heavens, is given to man, and he, through the aid of it, gazes upon eternal things, what does he behold? Not one object at a time, but a vast multitude of objects rush before his vision, and are present before his mind, filling him in a moment with the knowledge of worlds more numerous than the sands of the sea shore? Will he be able to bear it? Yes, his mind is

strengthened in proportion to the amount of information imparted. It is this tabernacle, in its present condition, that prevents us from a more enlarged understanding.

There is a faculty mentioned in the word of God, which we are not in possession of here, but we shall possess it hereafter; that is not only to see a vast number of things in the same moment, looking in all directions by the aid of the Spirit, but also to obtain a vast number of ideas at the same instant. . . .

I believe we shall be freed in the next world, in a great measure, from these narrow, contracted methods of thinking. Instead of thinking in one channel, and following up one certain course of reasoning to find a certain truth, knowledge will rush in from all quarters; it will come in like the light which flows from the sun, penetrating every part, informing the spirit, and giving understanding concerning ten thousand things at the same time; and the mind will be capable of receiving and retaining all. (*Journal of Discourses*, 1855-86, Vol. 2, p. 246)

Just as Swedenborg taught the physical body was the main impediment in gaining and comprehending this type of knowledge, Pratt also taught that it is when we leave the physical world and our physical body behind that our intellect will become most enlivened. He taught that we not only will be able to learn more, but will also be able to regain that which we have learned before but have lost as mortal memories dim:

Some of the knowledge we receive here at one time becomes so completely obliterated, through the weakness of the animal system, that we cannot call it to mind, no association of ideas will again suggest it to our minds; it is gone, erased, eradicated from the tablet of our memories. This is not owing to the want of the capacity of the spirit; no, but the spirit has full capacity to remember. . . . It is not the want of capacity in the spirit of man that causes him to forget the knowledge he may have learned yesterday; but it is because of the imperfection of the tabernacle in which the spirit dwells; because there is imperfection in the organization of the flesh and bones, and in things pertaining to the tabernacle; it is this that erases from our memory many things that would be useful; we cannot retain them in our minds, they are gone into oblivion. It is not so with the spirit when it is released from this tabernacle. . . . Wait until these mortal bodies are laid in the tomb; when we return home to God who gave us life; then is the time we shall have the most vivid knowledge of all the past acts of our lives during our probationary state. (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 239)

This supernatural intellectual ability, which includes what could be characterized as "perfect spirit memory," is no doubt related to the life review that is an integral element of near-death experiences

and correlates with Swedenborg's view that in the next life "the most minute details of everything can be drawn from someone's memory, even things he himself has forgotten in the world" (1990, p. 364). Several references to this "perfect spirit memory" can also be found in Mormonism's foundational volume of scripture known as *The Book of Mormon* (1981). There are several passages in *The Book of Mormon* that testify of a supernatural memory of one's life that comes to one at death. "Now there is a death which is called the temporal death;" the prophet Amulek wrote, ". . . and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt" (*Book of Mormon*, Alma, 11:42-43). Other *Book of Mormon* prophets also spoke of this "bright recollection." Jacob, one of the first prophets in the book, spoke of a "perfect knowledge" that comes to each person after death and will play an important role in the final judgment of each individual:

. . . and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect.

Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness.

And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment seat of the Holy One of Israel; and then cometh the judgment, and then they must be judged according to the holy judgment of God. (*Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 9:13-15; see also Mosiah 3:25; Alma 5:18; and Alma 12:14-15)

It is clear from Mormon teachings—both from their scriptures and from sermons of early leaders—that this "perfect knowledge" serves a spiritual purpose in self-examination and in the ultimate judgment of humankind. Herein lies the relationship between what Mormons would characterize as "perfect spirit memory" or "perfect knowledge" and what many NDErs describe in the accounts of their "life review." The following account seems to characterize NDErs' descriptions and reflects the theological teachings found in Mormon thought as well as the postulates of Swedenborg:

It was like I knew everything that was stored in my brain. Everything I'd ever known from the beginning of my life I knew about. And also what was kind of scary was that I knew everybody else in the room knew and there was no hiding anything—the good

times, the bad times, everything. . . . I had total complete clear knowledge of everything that had ever happened in my life—even the little things that I had forgotten. . . . Everything was so clear. (Ring, 1984, pp. 68-69)

Most NDErs report that, next only to the overwhelming feeling of love, knowledge is the most profound aspect of their experience. Their descriptions of the spirit realm being a place of knowledge and learning and of their own unique abilities to absorb knowledge and remember things are familiar themes in Mormonism. One of the most familiar scriptural passages to Mormons—"The glory of God is intelligence" (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 1981, 93:36)—helps explain why such near-death accounts of knowledge and learning abilities are interesting to Mormons, as the concepts contained in such descriptions are fundamental Mormon beliefs.

Conclusion

Many of the "core elements" of near-death experiences that have been recounted and published in the last half of the 20th century find a familiar "home" among Mormons because of the similar concepts found in Mormon scripture and sermons of early leaders. In the three areas discussed in this paper—communication, movement and travel, and the absorption of knowledge—there are striking similarities between the descriptions of NDErs of today and the writings and teachings within 19th century Mormonism. While there is no historical evidence that these early Mormon leaders had personal near-death experiences, their sermons certainly contain much of the same descriptions and information that modern near-death accounts do.

When coupled with the numerous descriptions, teachings, and accounts in other religious and cultural traditions, we can see that the messages received and the lessons learned about the immortality of the soul and the remarkable conditions of the afterlife transcend culture, religion, and science. This indicates that near-death experiences have a significant religious meaning that can and should be studied theologically as well as medically, socially, culturally, or psychologically. While many Christian denominations seem uncomfortable with near-death research, the teachings of Mormonism share much common ground with NDEs. Although near-death experiences did not play any actual significant role in Mormonism's theological develop-

ment, it is interesting to note the many parallels can be found between NDEs and the religious teachings of Mormonism.

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BOOK REVIEW

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After the Light: What I Discovered on the Other Side of Life That Can Change Your World, by Kimberly Clark Sharp. New York, NY: William Morrow, 1995, 240 pp + xvi, \$20.00 hb; New York, NY: Avon, 1996, \$6.95 pb.

Kimberly Clark Sharp, former Northwest Regional Coordinator of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) (when IANDS had such things) and long-time coordinator of the Seattle Friends of IANDS chapter, the oldest and largest local affiliate, has produced a remarkable book about her own near-death experience (NDE) and its effects on her life. With so many first-person NDE accounts on the market today, do we need one more? For myself (and, I suspect, for many readers of this Journal), that's a silly question: we can never have too many.

But this is not just another autobiographical NDE story, for Sharp brings to bear on this story her clinical expertise as a critical care social worker and her earthy humor. It contains plenty of "woo-woo" experiences ("woo-woo," Sharp explains, is the sound the spiritual train makes right before it knocks us off the track). But its style, like Sharp's, is so down-to-earth that it's difficult to dismiss these stories. Sharp alludes to her "secret persona" as a stand-up comic: "Put a microphone in my hand and a receptive audience, and you'd have to seal my mouth with duct tape to keep me from spouting one-liners" (p. 143). *After the Light* puts her wit beyond the reach of the duct tape.

While Sharp leaves no doubt as to her traditional Christian orientation, she does not preach or suggest that only Christians are saved. While she takes a Christian approach to her own experiences

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of angelic and divine intervention, she does not impose that interpretation on the NDE as a whole, particularly on her patients' experiences, any more than she imposes on them the medical interpretation ("ICU psychosis") of her professional training. Rather, she takes each experience at its face value, telling her patients first and foremost, "What you experienced is real," and allowing them to formulate their own understanding. Is it true that what every NDEr has experienced is real? As a scientist, I am not certain of that. Is it helpful to NDErs to have their sanity validated? As a clinician, I am quite certain of that.

Significantly, Sharp starts her book not with her own NDE, but with that of Maria and her now-famous tennis shoe on the ledge. Maria was a migrant worker admitted to Harborview Medical Center's cardiac care unit (CCU), where Sharp was working as a social worker. While her body was undergoing a cardiac arrest, Maria floated out of the hospital and saw, on a third-story window ledge on the side of the hospital farthest from the CCU, "a man's dark blue tennis shoe, well-worn, scuffed on the left side where the little toe would go. The shoelace was caught under the heel" (p. 11). Despite Sharp's having had an NDE herself, her professional training led her to doubt Maria's story until she finally located the shoe by going from room to room, pressing her face against the windows—although the scuffed toe could only be seen from a perspective outside and above the window. Sharp first published this account in my 1984 NDE anthology (Clark, 1984), and it has been repeated several times, most recently by Susan Blackmore (1995); but the detailed account here is the definitive "Maria's tennis shoe" story.

Sharp flashes back in Chapter 2 to her own NDE at age 22. Since she was ostensibly unconscious for much of the experience, she provides her father's first-person account of watching helplessly as his daughter stopped breathing and received cardiopulmonary resuscitation. She then relates her own account of the NDE, using humor to get around the ineffability of the experience ("*Fade to black. Fade to blacker*"). The juxtaposition of Sharp's own experience with her father's is compelling, and her down-to-earth style lends credibility to her story:

The only words I could formulate in the midst of this incredible Light were from my childhood: "Homey home." It was something I used to say when we had been on an outing and I began to spot the familiar landmarks of our neighborhood. (p. 25)

In the following chapter, aptly named "We're Not in Kansas Anymore, Toto," Sharp describes the bizarre aftereffects that made her fear she'd gone crazy ("Not lunatic crazy. Just a little 'off'"). A spiritual force pulled her away from everything she'd found security in: her family, her friends, her fiance, and, yes, Kansas. She describes the paranormal events that became commonplace in her life as she followed the signs west, and following a ride in which her car seemed to steer itself without a driver, concluded: "The reality test was over. Reality lost" (p. 38).

Events turn from bizarre to ominous in Chapter 4, "Dance With the Demon," in which Sharp describes her new residence in a farmhouse apparently haunted by a malevolent force. Much of the apparent demonic content of this chapter is hard to integrate, as Sharp relates it as she experienced it, rather than from a clinical perspective. She rejects the notion that she was hallucinating (even though she had narcolepsy and was prone to sudden daytime nightmares), and she also rejects the notion that her house was possessed by Satan; yet she could not deny that the evil presence was real. Some of my difficulty integrating this material derives from Sharp's continued use of humor to deal with the inexplicable; these matters are not funny, and one wonders why she continued to live in the house as long as she did. This chapter will disturb many readers who, like myself, would rather not acknowledge evil as a distinct force, rather than just a shortage of goodness. By the end of the chapter Sharp comes to terms with these experiences without fully understanding them, and tries to immerse herself in the here-and-now atmosphere of her work in the Harborview CCU—which brings us back chronologically to her encounter with Maria.

Chapter 5 outlines Sharp's approach to patients with NDEs, not by a dry list of clinical guidelines but by a series of vignettes and quotes from her patients. She suggests gentle but effective ways to open a discussion of patients' NDEs: "What was your last memory before losing consciousness? Do you remember anything after that?"

The next few chapters return to Sharp's personal story, from her "going public" about NDEs when a television talk-show host surprised her on the air by asking about Maria and the tennis shoe; to further encounters with ostensible demonic spirits; to her whirlwind romance with her fiance, his tragic death, and his visitations afterwards; to her Dark Night of the Soul, the inner explosion of wrenching doubt.

With her characteristic self-effacing humor ("C'mere, Kenny, I said, pulling him to my side. 'I feel a metaphor coming on'"), Sharp

introduces a graphic analogy for the interface between the two worlds she found herself inhabiting. Passengers on a ferry see the world around them as reality, and when they look down into the water they see only the surface reflection of that "topside" world. But on rare occasions, individuals may catch a glimpse of another world below the surface, as intricate and varied as the one "topside." Experiences like NDEs allow us to part the veil that normally separates the spiritual realm from our familiar "topside" world.

In Chapter 9 Sharp describes the founding of the Seattle IANDS chapter, the oldest continuous near-death support group, and relates the stories of some of the founders and their efforts to overcome "the damnable thing about a near-death experience": its ultimate ineffability. She then takes us through further encounters with spirits, angelic and demonic, and her eventual synchronistic meeting with "Mr. Right." Through this odyssey, Sharp came to understand spiritual visions not as predetermined events but as maps, from which we can chart our own courses.

In Chapter 11, Sharp returns to her role as social worker and near-death clinician. She details with compelling anecdotes her clinical approach to patients who have had NDEs; provides examples of the wide variety of near-death phenomena, including frightening NDEs; and reviews various physiological mechanisms that have been proposed to explain NDEs. Her prescription for working through the pain of spiritual growth is the same as for natural childbirth: "Breathe through it, try to stay focused, and emerge with something truly wonderful when it's over" (p. 159).

Bouncing back to her personal story, Sharp relates more "woo-woos" involving visitations from deceased persons; balancing marriage and motherhood with her increasing professional notoriety; and being forced, after 15 years as an "NDE expert," to reveal in public her own NDE. But the most difficult chapter in Sharp's life was the discovery that she had an unusually deadly form of breast cancer, followed by the discovery that she was also pregnant again. Without treatment, the cancer, fed by the hormones of pregnancy, would quickly kill her; but the poisonous cancer treatment would certainly kill her baby. Unable to sacrifice her baby to save her own life, Sharp struggled with personal death again, finally yielding to her husband's plea not to leave him alone with a 2-year-old and a newborn already damaged by the radiation from her bone scan and mammograms. She dedicates *After the Light* to this never-born baby: "To

David Eugene Sharp and all of the other unborn who never left the Light of God."

In the weeks of nausea and pain that came with the chemotherapy and radiation, Sharp lost much of her hair, skin texture, energy, and dignity, but not her sense of humor. She was scheduled to have the radiation target tattooed on her breast on April 1. "I had to do something. On my left breast, with a red magic marker, I wrote WRONG BOOB in enormous letters. Underneath, in smaller black letters I wrote, APRIL FOOLS" (p. 228). With her remission from cancer came a re-mission, a rededication to live the lessons she'd learned, to walk in faith and be the Light, as she had seen and felt it, for those not so blessed.

Throughout *After the Light*, Sharp's life story is intermingled with her death story. This intermingling is sometimes awkward, when the "topside" world clashes with the spiritual. But I think that intermingling is part of Sharp's message: when you live in both worlds, life is awkward. Some readers will find this juxtaposition of seeming opposites uncomfortable. I'm sure Sharp found it uncomfortable as well—but at least we have the option of putting the book down.

People who are looking for integration—of the material world and the spiritual, or of demonic and angelic forces, or of Sharp's spiritual journey and her professional role—will not find it here. Sharp lays out her story in compelling prose, but does not tie together the loose ends. For those looking for a neat package, those loose ends are annoying; for those seeking the truth, loose ends are how it is. For many readers, any well-written NDE book (and this is surely one) will be welcomed. For those uncounted who have been touched by Sharp over the years, this book is long overdue. For the remainder, this is still a book worth reading. It made me cry; it made me laugh; and it made me rethink some of my fundamental ideas. As Sharp might sing into her microphone, "Who could ask for anything more?"

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Letters to the Editor

Electrical Sensitivity of Near-Death Experiencers

To the Editor:

It has been reported by Kenneth Ring (1992) and P. M. H. Atwater (1994) that approximately one out of every four near-death experiencers (NDErs) has some sort of electrical sensitivity. Some are sensitive to excess light, while others report they stop watches, or cause aberrations in computers and telephone lines. It has also been noted that some NDErs report enhanced healing abilities after the experience.

I decided to see whether there are detectable differences between electrical fields of experiencers and those of nonexperiencers.

Methods

I employed two devices in the tests. One device was a thermistor mounted in an amplifying circuit. The output went to an ammeter. At room temperature, a steady reading is seen. When a subject holds the thermistor between thumb and forefinger, the heat of the subject's finger reduces the resistance to current flow, and the microamperage reading increases. I took readings from left and right hands, and recorded the change from baseline to when the meter stopped rising. A diagram of the circuit is available from me on request.

The second device used was an electronic electroscope. This device measures the electron flow from the subject's forefinger when he or she touches a metal antenna to the circuit. The output of the circuit was hooked to a millivoltmeter. Baseline readings are steady. When touched by the subject, the flow of electrons into the circuit deflects the reading downward swiftly, and the reading quickly returns to baseline. The maximum downward deflection was recorded on both left and right forefingers.

A composite score was given to each subject, computed as follows: The highest reading achieved by any of the subjects in each of the

four tests (thermistor left hand, thermistor right hand, electroscope left forefinger, and electroscope right forefinger) was assigned a normalized score of 100. Each subject's score was then expressed as a percentage of the maximum score for that test. Each subject's four scores were then added to yield a composite score, with a maximum possible value of 400. This method gave equal weight to each of the four tests.

Results

Seven NDErs, four of whom reported having disturbed electrical equipment, were tested, as were 10 control subjects who had not had NDEs, none of whom reported having disturbed electrical equipment. The seven NDErs included five females and two males, while the 10 control subjects included six females and 4 males.

The mean composite score of the NDErs was 192, while that of the control subjects was 157. The difference between those two mean scores was just short of statistical significance, by t-test.

Three of the NDErs claimed to have developed healing abilities as a result of their experience, and actively do healing as part of their work (as a minister, a psychotherapist, and a psychologist); they also reported having disturbed electrical equipment. These three subjects had composite scores of 276, 238, and 218, respectively. The mean composite score of these three NDEr/healers was 244 (S.D. = 13.8), which was significantly different from the control subjects' mean score ($t = 8.90$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$). A fourth NDEr, who is studying healing under the psychologist NDEr and who also reported having disturbed electrical equipment, had the highest composite score, of 283.

Discussion

A tentative conclusion to be drawn is that most near-death experiencers do not show differences in heat or electron flow from their hands, compared to control subjects; but that NDErs who have gained healing abilities from their experience do seem to have more overall heat and electron flow coming from both hands compared to controls.

This preliminary study testing a small number of volunteer subjects with homemade devices may provide sufficient evidence of electrical anomalies among NDErs to justify a larger scale study using scientifically calibrated devices under controlled conditions.

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Could Endorphins Participate in the Limbic Pathways Responsible for NDEs After Acute Cerebral Hypoxia?

To the Editor:

Near-death experiences (NDEs) have been provoked by T. Lempert, M. Bauer, and D. Schmidt (1995) in healthy volunteers by experimentally induced syncope, through hyperventilation and Valsalva maneuver. Those authors concluded that acute cerebral hypoxia may induce an agonal limbic syndrome responsible for visual and auditory hallucinations, most of them pleasant and peaceful, whose characteristics were rather similar to those described in reports of NDEs. We have measured brain opioids in cerebrospinal fluid and brain tissue of dogs subjected to acute cerebral ischemia and hypoxia secondary to cardiac arrest, and found a significant increase of β -endorphin immediately after the induction of hypoxia (Sotelo, Perez, Guevara, and Fernandez, 1995). Our findings could explain the "pleasant, detached and peaceful" experiences reported by the subjects with experimental syncope through a sudden liberation of brain opioids induced by acute cerebral hypoxia.

The comparison of NDEs with experiences due to recreational drugs (Siegel, 1978), particularly opiates (Lipp, 1991), supports the idea that endogenous opioids could participate in the limbic syndrome

of NDEs. The fact that these experiences are particularly frequent in survivors of cardiac arrest (Sabom and Kreutziger, 1977) may indicate that sudden hypoxia in a normal functioning brain activates limbic-mediated pathways related with complex pleasant and peaceful mental perceptions, in which endogenous opioids could play a crucial role. Moreover, a limbic syndrome could be an ancestral brain mechanism of analgesia and sedation developed to mitigate the natural pain and fear associated with the conscious perception of the proximity of death. If this is true, then NDEs should be more conspicuous in subjects with sudden brain hypoxia than in subjects with structural or metabolic brain damage.

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INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

THE JOURNAL OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES encourages submission of articles in the following categories: research reports; theoretical or conceptual statements; papers expressing a particular scientific, philosophic, religious, or historical perspective on the study of near-death experiences; cross cultural studies; individual case histories with instructive unusual features; and personal accounts of near-death experiences or related phenomena.

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.

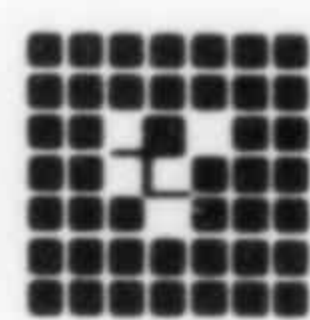
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