

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

On Prophetic Visions and Dreams of the Future

To The Editor:

Near the end of the February, 2016, Monthly Near-Death Experience emailed to members of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), I was stunned to read this passage:

The last thing they [two female angels] showed me was a silver ribbon splitting the United States apart. I was given knowledge that this ribbon was a river. I am assuming it was the Mississippi River, but they gave me no explanation as to the meaning of this “ribbon” other than “the ribbon gets larger”

What does “splitting the United States apart” mean? Or “the ribbon gets larger”? The report does not answer these obvious questions, but its context suggests a dark and literal interpretation is not farfetched. In addition to a corrupt government destroying world peace even while being overthrown, the future foreseen in this near-death experience (NDE) includes both human and natural disasters, plus a financial system so collapsed that survivors are reduced to barter. It’s also silent on when such havoc might occur, though thoughtful projection of our increasing dependency on highly integrated, highly vulnerable, global systems side by side with permanent warfare and mayhem easily conjures dire scenarios. With little stretch of imagination, these fit credibly into the decades directly ahead. So should readers conclude this NDE is warning of a calamitous future?

Perhaps not. In 1988, NDE researcher Kenneth Ring wrote an article for this *Journal* concerning a subset of NDE life reviews that include apparent precognitive visions of the future. Calling these previews “flash forwards,” Ring (1988) cited cases in which future events came to pass as foreseen in the NDEs. He also cited comparable research findings, all from the early 1980s, by Raymond Moody (Kenneth Ring, personal communication, February, 1988), John Audette (1981), and Margot Grey (1985).

Of particular interest, the “prophetic visions” (PVs) documented by these four researchers followed a common pattern Ring (1988) described as follows. The experiencer, beginning with a sense of “total

knowledge” including Earth’s entire evolution and history, foresees the Earth and all humanity undergoing increasingly severe natural and manmade catastrophes leading to societal collapse. Emphasizing the reports’ consensus, Ring (1988) spelled out uncanny agreement between his findings and those of Margot Grey, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and famines. All the reports agreed that humanity will survive these upheavals and enter a new era

marked by human brotherhood, universal love and world peace. Though many will die, the earth will live. While agreeing that the dates for those events are not fixed, most individuals feel that they are likely to take place during the 1980s. (Ring, 1982, pp. 55–56).

Most of the experiencing individuals felt these great troubles would begin in the 1980s, the most difficult time being around 1988. Despite the correspondence between NDErs’ reports, Ring (1988) argued that “PVs are . . . expressions of the felt need for cultural renewal and therefore should not be taken literally as prognostic of drastic physical changes on Earth” (p. 4). Indeed, it is with relief and no little irony for the believability of NDE reports that I observe how far humanity has come beyond 1988 and that no such awful things have happened—at least not many. So is humanity home free?

I do not think so. As noted, reasonable literacy in the causes and dynamics of global overheating, balanced against the momentum of humanity’s increasingly industrialized, corporatized, systemically integrated global economy, easily enables one to envision how business as usual is sweeping humanity unknowingly past vital tipping points.

Glaciers worldwide are melting. Polar icecaps are in slow-motion collapse. Deserts are spreading even as unprecedented floods break all-time records. The oceans are warming and rising while acidity from CO₂ absorption may soon drive all shellfish extinct. Fueled by warmer oceans, tornados and hurricanes grow in frequency and ferocity. Agricultural chemical runoff is creating gigantic “red tide” pollution in most seas and embayments. Every living creature on earth including human children and fetuses now carries toxic chemical molecules in its cells to concentrations of at least parts per million. Aquifers worldwide are approaching depletion. The green revolution is history while world food production is strained to the limit as soil fertility plunges and global population is poised to add billions more hungry mouths. Via simple supply and demand, clean drinking water will soon be more costly than oil, and hedge fund speculators—entrepreneurs that they are—are buying up water rights on every

continent. These facts, now omnipresent in scientific, economic, and popular literature merely begin the litany of burgeoning problems facing humanity's next generation.

What does all this have to do with a few prophetic NDE visions that did not come to pass in 1988? I think the experiencers simply got the date wrong. There are good reasons why I think so. I've never had an NDE, but over the course of eight decades a series of deeply meaningful dreams and two wide-awake spiritual experiences taught me to pay attention, to move beyond longstanding agnostic uncertainty, and to speak out from my now-heightened sense of responsibility. And so I now do.

About 10 years ago I dreamed I was in the gondola of a great dirigible flying southeastward from places we presently call southern "Ohio" over eastern "Kentucky" to "West Virginia." The dirigible seemed natural, for that's how "long distance" travel occurred. I saw forests reaching to every horizon, with scattered clearings around small towns and adjacent fields. I was with a group, but I was not me; rather, I was a future me, bigger and taller than my present self. And I knew—just *knew*, without conscious thought—that I was 300 years in the future. And a few hundred miles westward was a great inland sea that reached northward from the former Gulf of Mexico, up across the former central plains, past the old Great Lakes, and far on into Canada to connect with old Hudson Bay. It was a beautiful blue sea toward which I felt warmly disposed, a place I loved and called M'sippisea.

During my long lifetime I have experienced a dozen or so dreams that, phenomenologically, felt dramatically more real than my typical dreams. These more real dreams shared certain features: They were highly lucid, and, both upon awakening and to the present day, I remembered them vividly in much greater detail than my ordinary vague dreams that usually fade quickly from memory. The M'sippisea dream was lucid indeed. It seemed to have come out of nowhere and has influenced my thinking ever since. I might not have regarded it so significantly had I not encountered those other definably spiritual experiences and significant dreams over the years. Collectively, they contributed much to knowing myself and have been quite as transformative for me as I gather NDEs have been for others. And then along came the February 2016 Monthly NDE: ". . . *the last thing they showed me was a silver ribbon splitting the United States apart.*"

A few years after this dream, and informed by many years of science-based familiarity with Earth's global warming trajectory, I wrote a scenario describing one of the several ways whereby an overheated

atmosphere can precipitate earthquakes severe enough to drown the Mississippi Valley. The scenario I selected is distressingly credible. Too long to describe here, it may be read on my blog (fixypopulist.com) where it appears as Chapters 30–33 of *Populist Corrections* posted between April 8 and 19, 2016. I welcome readers' thoughtful feedback, for the true importance here is that many more people should join me in *thinking deeply and knowledgeably about these matters*. I would like also to mention an excellent article called "Helium Dreams" in the *New Yorker* magazine (Laskas, 2016). It's all about heavy lifter dirigibles and how a significant coterie of engineering-style dreamers are convinced such long-neglected aircraft are our only logical entrée to the future of air travel—indeed, all long-distance travel—after the oil and diesel fuel stop flowing.

For some years I felt anxiety over humanity's future through coming decades and on into the next century—because, as seems apparent at least to me, the cause-effect juxtaposition of impending environmental calamity with our dysfunctional political institutions and economic systems is all too sadly real. Peace finally replaced anxiety, in large part thanks to this dream in which I personally felt and saw a much-reduced humanity, and human culture, in vibrant survival. The year Ring's research turned up clearly should not have been 1988. But with allowance for a two-digit error or easy-to-make misinterpretation, perhaps the year was supposed to be 2088. Given existing trends, it is entirely believable that the predicted catastrophes may be well underway by then—and can be expected to continue for a century and more thereafter.

I believe the things we are learning from NDE reports and comparable insights raise by an order of magnitude the responsibility of IANDS, and its members, toward our fellow humanity. We few are gaining important knowledge vital to the future of all living beings over the coming century. What shall we do with it?

I submit that the knowledge and heightened understandings we attain via NDEs and comparable first-person experiences are a privilege, and that privilege raises the bar on our personal and collective responsibility to our society and our world. Unfortunately, it also raises other bars. Our natural allies in science reject our non-standard first-person way of knowing because it cannot fit the mold of their treasured third-person scientific method. Our natural allies in the many religions reject our non-standard faith because it says none of their treasured doctrines come close to the whole truth. Mindsets are closed, yet all can see the environmental catastrophe coming on

like a freight train to crash everything most of humanity holds dear. What shall we do about these truths? Just sit here and await calamity's inevitable arrival because *We Did Not Act?*

Albert Einstein sagely noted that those who fail to advance their thinking are destined to perpetuate their problems brought on by that same thinking. In the extraordinary context of the important matters described here, I believe IANDS should take on a broader, more responsible role, regardless how difficult that role may seem to be. Simply researching this fascinating subject and being endlessly fascinated by it are not enough relative to the dangerous reality at hand. Though I welcome contact from anyone who cares to share thoughts on the expanded IANDS role I advocate here, I really hope such thoughts, pro and con, will find their way into IANDS publications where they may—more publicly and hence more meaningfully—contribute to broad-ranging discussion by all concerned. Since “all concerned” encompasses the uniquely NDE-based perspectives of so many IANDS members, the broader this discussion the better.

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