

Editor's Foreword

This issue of the *Journal* contains articles on three less- or rarely-addressed topics in the field of near-death studies. In the first article, Gregory Shushan, PhD, makes another contribution to his *tour-de-force* series of books and articles about the relationship of near-death experiences (NDEs) to religion in ancient and indigenous cultures. This time he turns his scholarly focus to the four regions of Oceania: Polynesia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Australia. In this exploration of NDEs that missionaries, explorers, and ethnographers of Oceania published between the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries, Shushan continues to examine evidence for his hypothesis that religious beliefs and practices related to the afterlife have their source in NDEs. Although scholars feel gratified when they find consistent support for their ideas, it is a testament to scholarly objectivity when the nature of the evidence turns out to be much more equivocal. Such is the case regarding the data from Oceania: Shushan finds some—but not uniform—support for his hypothesis. That matter aside, I found it sometimes eerily fascinating to read echoed in the words of people from long ago and far away phrases so reflective of modern-day Western near-death experiencers.

In the next article, two Iranian scholars, Alinaghi Ghasemianjad Jahromi, PhD, and Ali Imaninasab, MA, present the case of a 23-year-old Iranian man who reported that, in the context of a vehicular accident, he had a distressing NDE. The authors provide extensive quotations from their interview with him, which they conducted in Farsi and translated into English. They then compare this man's NDE elements and aftereffects to those of Western NDErs—finding predominant commonality between the two—and speculate about the role of culture, particularly religious beliefs, in NDEs. I feel gratified that, having hosted Ghasemian as a visiting scholar at the University of North Texas in the fall of 2015, he has not only completed his PhD and continued research focused on NDEs but also continued to find that despite whatever divisions may exist between people of the world, there is much in the universal features of NDEs that unites us.

In the final article of this issue, having visited the NDEs of Oceania and Iran, readers return to the US where Ryan D. Foster, PhD, along

with his research team of Bethany M. Kahoe, BA, and Danijela H. Nardelli, BS, continues inquiry into a relatively-recently identified NDE aftereffect: spontaneous mediumship experiences. In this NDE aftermath, experiencers are visiting unexpectedly by deceased entities asking the experiencer to convey a message to another living person. Following two previously published articles on this topic—one quantitative and the other a presentation of case studies—these authors present their results of an analysis of qualitative data that accompanied the data of the quantitative publication. The 19 themes they identified continue to deepen an understanding of the nature of, challenges of, and mechanisms for coping with this rather newly identified phenomenon.

This issue closes with a book review that is long overdue—not because of any negligence on the part of reviewer Rebecca S. Valla, MD, but because for over a year I have been unable to squeeze the review into any issue. At last, Valla is able to bring to readers her strong recommendation for a book in which critical care physician Lauren Bellg discloses her experiences with her patients' NDEs and related transpersonal experiences—those that transcend the usual personal limits of space, time, and/or identity. Valla argues that in the ongoing cultural debate, in science in general and medicine in particular, between philosophical materialism—the belief that all phenomena can be explained in physical terms, including that NDEs can somehow be explained through brain/biological function—and philosophical idealism—the belief that all phenomena are essentially non-physical, including that in NDEs people realize the fundamental independence of the brain and consciousness—a book such as Bellg's is important. Healthcare providers who affiliate with materialism run the risk of dismissing or unfoundedly pathologizing transpersonal experiences, thereby potentially harming patients and, thus, violating the most fundamental ethical imperative to do no harm. Valla finds that Bellg is a singular model for how not only to listen without judgment but also to fellow-travel with patients in the face of the mystery of these experiences.

Although the articles of this issue may seem diverse in their foci, they share the theme of making a unique contribution to the field of near-death studies. It is my hope that readers enjoy the novelty in and fresh perspective of each of these works.

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