

Editor's Foreword

An enduring question in the field of near-death studies is the extent to which near-death experiencers' (NDErs') reports of their experiences and aftereffects are influenced by culture. In the opening article of this issue, Aotearoa New Zealand scholars Natasha Tassell-Matamua, PhD; Kate L. Steadman, MA; and Karen E. Frewin, PhD, of Massey University contribute to an answer to this question. Their qualitative analysis of reported NDE aftereffects of 28 experiencers from culturally diverse New Zealand yielded results indicating overall similarity with aftereffects reported by predominantly Western NDErs. Regarding the few features in which they found a difference, they speculated about possible cultural factors that might provide explanation.

The next piece addresses a question that, to my knowledge, has never been asked in the field: In exactly what phase related to unconsciousness do aspects of near-death experiences (NDEs) occur? This work appears as a Brief Report, a category that comprises studies with methodological limitations but tantalizing results calling for further investigation. In this case, a Norwegian medical team—Øystein Buer, cand.theol.; Mary Kalfoss, DrPH; Lars Weisæth, MD, PhD; Hans Stifoss-Hanssen, PhD; and Bjørn Bendz, MD, PhD—administered the Norwegian translation of Bruce Greyson's Near-Death Experience Scale to 23 Norwegian survivors of a close brush with death, and then interviewed each one to find out in what state related to unconsciousness each endorsed item occurred. Though they reported that most features occurred during unconsciousness, some occurred before and/or after unconsciousness. The authors discuss the implications for an understanding of NDEs, for healthcare providers who have patient or client NDErs, and for future research.

This issue concludes with three book reviews, organized chronologically by book publication year. First is a review by Dutch scholar Titus Rivas, MA, MSc, of Dutch anesthesiologist Gerald E. Woerlee's 2014 book *Illusory Souls*, in which Woerlee sought to answer the question of whether the concept of a human soul is an illusion. Rivas had published a briefer review online to which Woerlee had responded online; this current review is an expanded version in which Rivas seeks to clarify his critique. In this review, Rivas illustrates how he can re-

spect Woerlee's earnestness while disagreeing emphatically with his conclusion that the human soul is illusory.

Next, Nancy Evans Bush, MA, scholar of distressing NDEs, reviews the 2016 book *A Guided Tour of Hell: A Graphic Memoir* by Shambhala Publications founder Samuel Bercholz, in which he used his distressing NDE to provide impressionistic insight into the question of the nature of hell. Although this book is not the typical scholarly work considered appropriate for review in this *Journal*, it qualifies for inclusion based on its attention to distressing NDEs, a topic for which NDE scholars tend to be hungry to know more. Bush asserts that Bercholz's work provides unique food for thought in this regard.

Finally, the issue comes full circle with another work addressing the question of NDEs and culture. James Matlock, PhD, reviews Gregory Shushan's 2018 book *Near-Death Experience in Indigenous Religions* in which Shushan addressed the question not of the influence of culture on NDE reports but of the possible influence of NDEs on cultural developments such as religious beliefs and institutions. Despite certain reservations about Shushan's method of research, Matlock finds that this work is indispensable for anyone with serious interest in NDEs.

It is my hope that readers find valuable new insights in the varieties of questions—and unique answers to them—afforded in this issue of the *Journal*.

Janice Miner Holden, EdD
Editor
University of North Texas
Jan.Holden@unt.edu