

Letter to the Editor

A New Life for Near-Death Studies

To the Editor:

In an earlier Letter to the Editor (Luciani, 1992) I reacted to Kenneth Ring's planned abandonment of near-death studies by objecting to his shallow conclusion that little is left to be studied. I also offered the view that whereas the vision-oriented near-death wheel may well be worn to near-death, the answer now is not to abandon near-death studies, but to change the wheel. I believe it is high time for scholars to turn their sights to what happens to us in our lives after a near-death experience (NDE), and as an NDEr I have a few ideas to offer.

To begin with, I contend that everyone who has had an NDE has also had an accompanying spiritual encounter. Not all NDErs are aware of having had a spiritual encounter, but where is it written that experiencers must recall the total or even any part of near-death's supernatural encounter? Those who claim to have total recall of their NDEs may simply be certifying to no more than clear recall of whatever they were able to remember.

Why would some experiencers return with key elements of a near-death vision blocked from their minds? It might have to do with a pledge made to the superconscious self on the higher plane, a pledge that the conscious ego sometime later along the return route may see as a threat to one's accustomed way of life. In self preservation, the conscious ego blocks all or parts of this vision. It was that way for me; my own spiritual near-death encounter was partially blocked for many years (Luciani, 1993).

I believe scholars need to get "hip-deep" into the study of how we experiencers respond to our higher-plane pledges. This is where all the answers always were. The NDE's exotic visions may have been the starting gun for scholarly near-death research, but it is now time to move out onto the race track where the more credible, creditable, and inherently more measurable data are found: in life after the NDE.

More to the heart of this new kind of near-death study, I would rhetorically ask whether we have yet learned anything about the how, what, or where of NDEs from studying the visions. Contrary to viewing

near-death studies as terminal, I submit we have now matured in our studies of the trees to the point that we can now begin to view the forest. It is time to pursue the most important question: why? why the physical NDE? why its spiritual encounter? why me out of five billion others on Earth?

Such questions lead to heady hypotheses, but they must be approached through extensive data collection, analysis, and reporting on what experiencers have done with their lives since the NDE. And I suggest this next round of studies should rely to a greater extent on data collected *mano a mano*, verbalized, and upfront, and especially without those lifeless, fill-in-the-blanks questionnaires. Curve-fitting statistical techniques for rejecting extreme values are equivalent in this field to tossing out the baby with the bath water. Today's extreme points, we radical, nonconforming, individualistic loners who responded to our pledges, may evolve under concentrated analysis into the norm.

My next revelation should not come as a surprise to NDErs, nor should it take away any of the fun from researchers. I believe that every NDEr comes back to life with the central mission of serving others, and that to do so *we must do something different* with our relieved lives. While this is not news to most experiencers, what would be news would be near-death researchers wrapped in the luster of credibility drawing the same conclusion from indepth analysis of life after an NDE.

I find it exciting to envision future issues of this Journal spilling over with productive studies of post-NDE lives. What I am calling for awaits the collective genius of probing scholars who are willing to persist in efforts to extract best-fit estimates of what near-death is truly about. I say the indepth future studies of life after the NDE are certain to excite the world far beyond what past accounts of near-death vision ever have. The ball is in your court.

References

- Luciani, V. (1992). Kenneth Ring's swan song [Letter to the editor]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 11, 64-67.
- Luciani, V. (1993). Life after life-after-life [Guest editorial]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 11, 137-148.

Vincent Luciani
General Delivery U.S.P.O.
Kayenta, AZ 86033