Letter to the Editor

More on the Future and Scope of IANDS

To the Editor:

I have enjoyed the exchanges between Kenneth Ring (2005) and Ken Vincent (2005) and others in the most recent issues of the Journal. I agree with Ring that mystical religious experiences should not be included in the work of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). To me, one of the greatest lessons of the near-death experience (NDE) is that religion is man-made, but I don't want to get started on that here.

However, ignoring all varieties of experiences in this present day seems to me very short-sighted. Our group, Chicago IANDS, began in May 1998 and now, after seven years, we have a database of 1500 people and more than 100 people coming every month (150 in October) to an auditorium in one of the largest hospitals in Chicago to discuss these things. In a rough estimate, over half of those attending have had some kind of experience. I would estimate about 30 percent have actually had an NDE. The rest have had either an out-of-body experience, an “Other” experience, or a loss of some kind that triggered a mystical experience or curiosity about death, as well as those who are just interested and/or curious.

Scientific research is important and we must continue to do that, not only for the answers produced, but also for credibility. But unlike the early meetings of IANDS, when most of those involved in the organization were scientists, doctors, or other professionals, most people involved now are people who have seen a greater reality and really don’t care what the research shows. They already know the answer, and that is: the experience is real. So rather than spin their wheels trying to prove it, their needs have turned in another direction: they need support in their knowledge and guidance for the future. Socialization with like-minded others, a chance to hear the stories of others, and presentations by those who have had an experience and are using it to benefit their fellow human beings in some higher way provide a real service and guidance that needs to be available to these people.
One can't help but ask why, when the numbers of NDEs are increasing daily, are the membership levels of IANDS decreasing? I don't think the answer is only that more information is available on the internet, as Vincent (2004) suggested. There seems to be a larger picture of the NDE now forming that depicts the NDE as part of a series of mystical happenings, which is changing how the world, God, religions, and our existence are being perceived. NDErs often come back with a sense of a mission, of being part of a larger picture. I believe that it is those concerns that now need to be addressed in order to make membership more appealing.

Whether that is something that the current IANDS organization can deal with remains to be seen. It is possible that IANDS could continue to be the hub of scientific research and a new sister organization might be developed that can better address the needs of these millions of people who, for whatever reason, have embarked upon a search for a way to integrate this new knowledge of an expanded reality into their everyday lives.

References


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