Letters To The Editor

Counseling After a Near-Death Experience

To the Editor:

I strongly disagree with Joseph Geraci's statements that "the NDE is not a human experience" and that "the most difficult adjustment [for a near-death experiencer] is being human again" (1987, p. 28).

The phenomenon of an NDE is the experience of a reality or dimension not previously known, or possibly only known about. However, the NDEr is not someone different, greater, or even lesser during the NDE. Research has shown that the NDE expands and raises the consciousness of NDErs; it changes their perception and understanding of reality and of themselves (Moody, 1975; Kelsey, 1982; Greyson and Flynn, 1984). Yet they are, in their constitutional nature and essence, still human during and after their NDEs.

Every experience a person has registers, at some level, upon the human psyche or soul, whether in or out of the physical body. It is through the psyche that we experience reality or realities. Now this experience of reality varies. The psyche of a 6-month-old infant perceives, experiences, and relates to reality differently than that of a 35-year-old adult. But the infant and adult are human in their constitutional nature, and always will be. As research has shown, at no point during the NDE do NDErs lose awareness of who they are. Their identity going into the experience is not lost afterwards. This is quite different in the case of psychosis or multiple personality disorder.

It is not a question of how a professional counselor, therapist, or anyone else can help an NDEr "be human again." It is a question of how they can help the human NDEr live in this reality or dimension again without giving up or losing the effects of the reality encountered during the NDE.

I fully empathize with Geraci's experience of the NDEr being "subjected to mere curiosity by some and to dissection by others" (1987, p. 28). It is a shame that the majority of the medical and scientific communities still approach the NDE this way. What NDErs do have is
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an experience that the majority of humanity, no matter what culture, has not yet had. Given the assumption that what NDErs have encountered is a valid reality or dimension of human existence, then what they share can help humanity come to a greater understanding of the nature of things.

In all the research I have read concerning the NDE, it is exciting to note the strong similarity it has with traditional Christian mystical experience. Theologically speaking, what the NDEr and Christian mystic, and mystics of other faiths, share is a strong metanoia where one's values, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and understanding of reality and of oneself are profoundly and positively altered. There is a turning away (metanoia) from one world view to a new world view (Kelsey, 1982; Johnston, 1984; Egan, 1982, 1984). This change for the NDEr appears to be quicker due to the intensity and uniqueness of the NDE.

If in time sound clinical research reveals that the most common and profound part of the NDE is the encounter with or experience of the presence or "being of light," and that that is the same experience of God that the Christian mystics have had during deep contemplative prayer, then, as Geraci has clearly stated, "it's time to give the NDEr a chance to 'successfully intervene in the adjustment process'" of humanity experiencing and living in this reality of time and space.

References


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