

# Letters to the Editor

## NDEs and the Pursuit of the Ideal Society

To the Editor:

In your Foreword to the Winter 1991 issue of the Journal, you invited other scholars to pursue Allan Kellehear's (1991a) lead regarding the near-death experience (NDE) providing a pattern for the ideal society. Presumptuously, I will claim to be a scholar in order to accept that invitation. My involvement with NDEs dates back to the 1981 beginnings of the International Association for Near-Death Studies, which may imply some credentials, but in another area, as a lifelong Swedenborgian, Kellehear's article and the five subsequent commentaries cry out to me for a different response.

Kellehear based his article on reports by experiencers of a wondrous realm of love, harmony, and peace, and suggested that these transcendent societies provide models from which we mortals can create a utopian civilization on earth. The unbelievably widespread near-death experience has seldom been claimed as an extended adventure into heaven and/or hell. The brief glimpse and usually deliberate choice to return was compared to a traveler's arriving at the airport but reembarcking before really seeing the sights. No matter how attractive the brief stay, few would consider the NDE as fully representing an eternal life in paradise—or the unattractive alternative.

As I pointed out a decade ago in this Journal (Rhodes, 1982), few accounts compare with the supernal experiences of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), who moved freely between mortal consciousness and exploration of the spiritual world awaiting us all after death. His bestseller *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell* carried the subtitle *From Things Seen and Heard*. This astonishing claim was made by Europe's foremost scientist, respected for his keen analytical mind and impeccable honesty, and still ranked among the leading philosophers of all

