ANABIOSIS
The Journal for Near-Death Studies

Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences in a Melanesian Society .............. Dorothy Ayers Counts

Are Out-of-Body Experiences Evidence for Survival? .................. Susan Blackmore

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BOOK REVIEW: Easy Death ............... John White
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Anabiosis — "A restoring to life from a death-like condition; resuscitation."

Anabiosis—The Journal for Near-Death Studies is a semi-annual periodical whose principal purpose is to publish articles concerned with near-death experiences and allied phenomena. Although the Journal will consider for publication any worthwhile manuscript from professionals or lay persons, it particularly welcomes submissions from scholars, scientists, researchers, and practitioners whose work is concerned with the study of human consciousness as it is affected by the prospect or occurrence of death. The Journal will publish articles dealing directly with near-death experiences as well as with such related phenomena as (1) out-of-body experiences; (2) death-bed visions; (3) experiences of dying persons, or those in contact with them, prior to the onset of death; and (4) experiences of persons following the death of another. The Journal may publish articles on other topics or experiences if such articles make a definite contribution to the understanding of the experience and meaning of death (for example, experiences suggestive of reincarnation).

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Editor's Foreword

In response to some production difficulties we have had in the past two years with the December issue of ANABIOSIS, resulting in delayed distribution of this issue, we have decided to change the journal from its current June and December publication schedule to a Spring and Fall schedule.

This change will be implemented with Volume 4, Number 1, which accordingly will be distributed in Spring, 1984. We will continue to accept manuscripts for publication and letters to the editor throughout the year, as specified on the inside front cover of the journal.

Bruce Greyson
Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences in a Melanesian Society

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ABSTRACT

The texts of three near-death experiences, one vision, and one dream by Melanesian villagers are presented and analyzed with regard to their cultural context. Comparison of these experiences with those reported from North America and India suggests that while they have common features (such as the appearance of apparitions, and visions of paradise), their interpretation is structured by cultural expectations.

INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1980 I read Raymond Moody’s Life After Life (1975) and Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson’s At The Hour of Death (1977). I wondered if experiences such as those reported in these books are shared by the New Guinea people with whom my husband and I have done field research since 1966. So, when I began preparing to return in 1981 to Papua New Guinea, one of the subjects I planned to investigate was whether the Kaliai people of West New Britain have near-death experiences, and, if so, what form these experiences take and how they are interpreted. This paper is a report of that research and a tentative attempt to explain my findings.

The Melanesians with whom I work live in the Kaliai electorate of the north coast of West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea. They have been missionized by the Roman Catholic Church since 1949, and many of them are, at least nominally, converts to Catholicism. The Kaliai mission established primary schools throughout the Kaliai area so that almost all of the coastal people born

during or since the 1950s have had some formal education. Schooling has been much more problematic for the people of interior Kaliai. Although the people of Kaliai have undergone rapid change since the end of the Second World War, their customary rituals are still in place, and people say that they initiate their children, celebrate marriage, and mourn their dead in much the same way as did their grandfathers. People also share a cosmology that is similar to those reported for other Melanesian peoples. This cosmology rests on assumptions about the nature of the human spirit and the process of death that are much different from those made by people of European and North American societies, and contains elements that are compatible with near-death experiences such as those reported by Moody (1975) and by Osis and Haraldsson (1977), and with out-of-body experiences such as those discussed and described by Ian Currie (1978).

First, the concept of a unitary human spirit or soul is alien to them. They have been introduced to the notion of “soul” by Christian missionaries, and the word has entered their vocabulary as the Tok Pisin term, sol. The Kaliai assume that the human spirit is two-faceted. In the Lusi language, spoken by about 1,000 coastal Kaliai people, the two facets of the human spirit are the -tautau, “spiritual essence,” and -anunu, “shadow” or “image.” Illness occurs when one of the spiritual components is separated from the body and cannot reunite with it. If the separation is permanent, death results. The complex notion of spiritual being is expressed in these two Lusi terms, which are used interchangeably by people who are discussing ghosts or spirits. No animals have this spiritual component, while it is a part of all living human beings, including the fetus and the mentally incapacitated. Either aspect may leave the body of one who is ill, and either the “spiritual essence” or the “image” of a dying individual may be seen by others several miles from the still-breathing person. People disagree about what happens after both aspects of the spirit leave the body. From comments that informants made in 1966 and 1967, I conclude that many Lusi once believed that one or both aspects of the spiritual component of the deceased person remained near the body until it decomposed (Counts and Counts, 1974). In 1981, after fifteen additional years of Roman Catholic influence, the same consultants maintained that the unitary sol goes to be with God immediately after death. Only if the surviving kin fail to pay to have a final Mass said for the deceased would the soul remain near the grave. It is my opinion that this latter belief, introduced by the Roman Catholic Church, exists simultaneously with the assumption
that one aspect of the spiritual component of the deceased person remains near the community where he lived. This would explain why, in 1981, villagers attempted to contact the spirit of a young man who had been dead about a year in an effort to learn who had killed him with sorcery.

A second concept critical to an understanding of the Kaliai notion of near-death experience is the conceptual content of the indigenous notion of death. It is widely reported that the understanding of life and death held by Melanesian people is quite different from our own. As long ago as 1912, William H.R. Rivers observed that the boundaries of the term mate, a term found in many Melanesian languages and which is usually translated as "dead," are not the same as ours. The category of mate includes the very sick, the very old, and the dead. Furthermore, it is a state that may last for years, as people become socially disaffiliated, and it is not separated from life in the way that we consider death and life to be apart. To the Melanesian, Rivers argued, "... existence after death is just as real as the existence here which we call life... Further, life after death has the same general aspect as life before death" (reprinted in Slobodin, 1978, p. 21).

The Lusi speaking Kaliai, with whom I am most familiar, share this notion that death is a process rather than a single event. There are widely known signs that physical termination has occurred; however, death is a process, it may begin long before the physical signs are manifest, and, within reasonable bounds, it is reversible. In Kaliai the physical stage of the dying process usually begins with unconsciousness or "partial death" and moves on to "true" or "complete" death. A dying person may return to life at any time, including after he is truly or completely dead, but not after the body has begun to decay.

The dying process is well advanced if the person's breath smells of death (an odor that is referred to as being salty or sweet), if he stares without blinking or shame into the face of another person, if he is restless, and if he loses bladder control. Death is complete when breath stops, when heartbeat ceases, and when the eyes and mouth open (the spiritual component leaves through the eyes or mouth, or occasionally the anus). The corpse is usually uncovered for public viewing until it begins to bloat. Then it is wrapped in pandanas mats. The dead body usually becomes tight and rigid within several hours, but sometimes this does not occur, and occasionally people are buried whose limbs and body are still flexible. Adults are usually buried between twenty-four and thirty-six hours after phy-
NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

When I returned to Kaliai in 1981, I asked my consultants if they knew of anyone who had died and returned to life and who could remember what had happened to them while they had been dead. I was told of a number of people, including young children, who had returned to life after dying, but of only three men who died and returned, and remembered the experience. These were Kaliai-defined deaths and were not verified by a physician or by advanced medical technology. I was also told of two other persons who had not died but who had reported having experiences that were similar to those of the returned dead. I interviewed both these men as well as the men who had returned from the dead. Because the content of their experiences is similar to the content of the near-death experiences, I include them here.4

Frank

Frank is the most highly educated and acculturated of the men who had a near-death experience. He has been headmaster at the Kaliai community school and was, in 1981, serving as Member of the Provincial Parliament from Kaliai. His near-death experience occurred while he was campaigning for election to this office. He became ill and fell asleep on another man’s bed, a bed he subsequently came to believe had been ensorcelled. The next morning he began to suffer from a pain that began in his toe and shot to his head. During the day the pain became much worse, and the next morning he was unable to walk or to eat. His brother carried him to the Kaliai clinic, where the nurse gave him an injection in his leg. The next day, when he was no better, he asked his kin to carry him to the beach and place him under a canvas lean-to, a clear sign that he expected to die. The following day he died. His story follows:

I think I died for about five minutes. I saw a group of aulu [ancestor spirits] who showed me a road. I followed it and saw a man with white skin and long white robes, a beard and long hair. He was bright, as though there were a flashlight focused on him, and although he did not light up the area around him, his light seemed to be directed at me. He had large hands which he held up, palms toward me, blocking the road. He moved his middle fingers, motioning me to stop, and stared at me. Then he motioned to me to turn around and come back.

Then Alois [a fellow villager who had died some time before] cut my
leg and spit ginger on it. It was as though I were asleep, but my eyes were open. I saw a group of men singing and dancing and an old man whose name was Kasiru. He said to me, "Who do you think did this to you? You climbed mount Kavilvil and your knee is tight so you must die." Then the others scolded him for poisoning [ensorceling] me and they made a song which has in it the words Kasiru and "knee is tight." When I came to myself I remembered the song and I have taught it to others.

Although I will discuss below the cultural context of this and the other experiences, for purposes of clarification I should note here that spitting ginger on a wound is a traditional healing practice, especially when a wound becomes infected as a result of sorcery. Ginger is thought to have great healing power, and some types, those that are especially potent, have a spirit associated with them.

Andrew

Andrew is a young man who lives in the Anem-speaking interior village of Bolo. His death occurred at the small hamlet of Vuvu, which is located about a kilometer from Bolo. His experience, which was well known throughout the Kaliai area, was thought to be especially remarkable because during his vision he saw the spirit of a woman whose death had occurred shortly after his and about which he could have had no knowledge. His experience was also remarkable because, according to local definitions of death, he was dead for several hours. His kin had gathered, pigs for his first funeral feast had been killed and the meat was being prepared for division, and his grave had been dug before he returned to life. Shortly after Andrew's death occurred at Vuvu, the wife of the lay minister of Bolo took some food to the young boys residing in the Bolo men's house. She was returning to her own house when she collapsed and died in the village square. She did not recover and was buried the next day. It is this woman whom Andrew reports meeting during his near-death experience. After Andrew recovered from his illness, one of his legs was withered, and he now walks only with the aid of crutches.

The day I died I was very sick and was sleeping in my house. I died at noon [when the sun is high] and came back at six o'clock that afternoon [at dusk]. At the time I died there was a woman who hadn't died. She cooked food and distributed it. But when I died my spirit met hers on the road.

When I died everything was dark, but I went through a field of flowers and when I came out everything was clear. I walked on along the road and came to a fork where there were two men standing, one on either
road. Each of them told me to come that way. I didn’t have time to think about it, so I followed one of them.

The man took my hand and we entered a village. There we found a long ladder that led up into a house. We climbed the ladder but when we got to the top I heard a voice saying, “It isn’t time for you to come. Stay there. I’ll send a group of people to take you back.” I heard his voice, but I couldn’t see his face or his body.

I walked around trying to see him, but I couldn’t. But I saw the dead woman that I had met on the road. I saw her leave me. I wanted to call out, “Hey, come back!” but I couldn’t, for this house turned in a circle. I couldn’t see the man who talked to me, but I did see children lying [on platforms] over the doors and windows. As I was walking around, trying to see everything, they took hold of me and took me back down the steps. I wanted to go back to the house, but I couldn’t because it turned and I realized that it was not on posts. It was just hanging there in the air, turning around as if it were on an axle. If I wanted to go to the door, the house would turn and there would be another part of the house where I was standing.

There were all kinds of things inside this house, and I wanted to see them all. There were some men working with steel, and some men building ships, and another group of men building cars. I was standing staring when this man said, “It’s not time for you to be here. Your time is yet to come. I’ll send some people to take you back. You cannot stay. This woman you saw coming here, it was her time and she must stay. But you must go back.”

I was to come back, but there was no road for me to follow, so the voice said, “Let him go down.” Then there was a beam of light and I walked along it. I walked down the steps, and when I turned to look there was nothing but forest. I stood there and thought, “If they have started mourning for me, I won’t go because the voice said ‘Stand there and listen. If there is no mourning and no dogs howling, you go back. But if there is mourning you come back.’”

So I walked along the beam of light, through the forest and along a narrow path. I came back to my house and reentered my body and was alive again. I got up and told my father of my experience, for he didn’t realize what had happened. I died at noon and came back at six o’clock. I spent a long time wandering around this house before they sent me back.

Q: When you were a spirit, did you see your body?
A: No, I didn’t see my body. I just came back, and when I got up I was well and told everyone what had happened.

Q: Were you sorry or happy to come back?
A: I wanted to go back there. It’s a happy place, and I wanted to go back, but I couldn’t. See how my leg is crippled here.

Luke

Luke is an elderly Anem-speaking man, originally from an interior Kaliai village, who has spent many years working as a laborer on Iboki plantation, which is located on the Kaliai coast and is the only...
commercial plantation in the area. He now lives in a small house on the plantation grounds. This interview was conducted by David Counts.

I had gone to get areca nuts at the village of Kandoka, had come back through the village of Lauvori, and had bathed in the Vanu River when I fainted. I lay there in the sun until my daughter, Ann, found me. She told me to get up and helped me walk back home where I went to bed. I was unconscious for two days and a night. They put me on a litter and carried me up to the aid post at Rigiala. While they were carrying me, my arms began to shake and they said, "Hurry! Carry him to the aid post!"

When I finally got to the aid post, unconscious, I was put in one of the two wards. But when the staff saw me they said, "He's already dead!" So the men brought a pig intending to have my death feast and to bury me the next day.

I was gone. I was no longer conscious of that place. I had gone. A dead kinsman of mine, Raul, and my uncle Bill came down and I saw them. They said, "Come on, let's go." We followed a wide path that starts on the other side of the government rest house and aid post in Salki Village. It was a really wide path, and we followed it to a village. There were houses lined up side by side on either side of the path. Underneath they were barred with rails that ran parallel to the ground. We wanted to go inside one of the enclosures, but after my companions entered the bars closed up, leaving me alone outside. I stood there looking under the house, watching while they went up into the house by a ladder that was pulled up behind them.

Once the ladder was pulled up and the house was closed, I stood looking around for a while, and then I started up the path, taking a left-hand fork. I was alone because the two men who had come for me were gone, so I left the houses and just wandered along.

After a while I came to a place where there were houses with verandas that were absolutely packed with people; they were as thick as leaves. There were also magnets, like manhole covers, lined in a row. These magnets were scales, and as I came to them, and was recognized by the people, a loudspeaker announced, "This is a place for sorcerers. Sorcerers come here for judgment. Here is someone for trial. Don't speak to him. Just watch what he does."

I heard the loudspeaker from the roof of the veranda. I walked in front of the first men and they clapped their hands lightly and pointed for me to go sit down on the scale. But I didn't sit down; I stood up on it. After standing there for a while, I stepped back down to the ground and all of them applauded, and motioned me to the next one. They told me to sit on it, but once again I stood on it, and as I stood there the people on the veranda began to clap. When I had stood on all the scales, the loudspeaker said, "Here's Manlan! Manlan, open the door here and let this important man come and sit down. Let him smoke and chew betel."

Manlan came carrying a key. He went up on the veranda and opened a door, and the loudspeaker said, "Come on up and sit down." I did. Then the loudspeaker said, "Here is a sorcerer from Aikon Village." He tried to go up the steps. Manlan waited inside for him and opened the door for
him, and the loudspeaker said, "All right. Come on up." But he couldn’t. The magnet on the scale held him fast.

Then the loudspeaker said, "Aruari!" and a man came carrying a crowbar, and all the spectators clapped. He used the bar and pried the man’s legs free from the magnet. When he was free the loudspeaker said, "All right, you go and chew betel. We see you as a little boy. But you were a leader in your village. You had a reputation, so you go and sit and chew betel and smoke."

As he climbed up the steps, everyone slid over to let him pass. He walked along the long veranda that joined the houses until he found a place to sit down. Then they gave him tobacco and lit it for him, and when he’d finished smoking, the loudspeaker said, "All right. Speak for yourself, pitiful man. You had a big reputation, but you came here and the men captured you and held you as if you were a small boy. Speak now!"

The man said nothing. He just kept smoking. After a while, the loudspeaker said, "Aruari, bring knives!" As this was said, there was a huge dish filled with knives. Aruari ran inside and got the knives and brought them to ten men. Each of them took one and they began to chop him up.

The open mouth of a large pipe came out of the ground nearby as they chopped him up. The pipe quivered and they started an engine underneath the ground. It rumbled and roared "Rrrrrrr," and the ground shook.

They threw the parts of the man into the pipe and I could hear the bones crunch "Brrrs! Brrrrs! Brrrs!" It boiled and three puffs of smoke came out. When it finished boiling, the flesh of the man was put into two enormous dishes. The loudspeaker said, "Aruari, here’s the food." So Aruari carried one dish and another man, Amole, carried the other one.

As I watched, I wondered, "Where are they taking the flesh of this man they’ve ground up?" I stood up and watched as each of the men carrying a dish placed it underneath a house. I looked up and I saw Mount Andewa and a ridge leading up to the peak, and I noticed the coconut fronds waving. I looked back at the food, and I saw a large dog eating the meat from one of the dishes. When I looked at the other dish, I saw a huge pig eating there. The dog finished eating first, but the pig continued to eat while the dog looked on, licking his lips. I watched for a while, and then once again I glanced toward Andewa where I could see the coconut fronds waving. When I turned back again to look at the pig, I saw that the dog was a long stone lying there. And I thought, "What’s happened to this dog that it’s now a stone?" Then I looked at the pig, and the same thing had happened.

After this, the loudspeaker spoke again saying, "When you were in your village you claimed to be an important man. But in this little place you have been eaten up by a knife, a dog, and a pig. And now fire will utterly destroy you." When the loudspeaker had finished, a fire blazed up and destroyed the remains.

Then I began walking and I found my daughter, Maria, who had died. She was putting areca nuts into a large basket. When it was full, she put the basket on her head and I asked, "Where did you get the areca nuts?"

"I got them in the village here."

Then I saw my grandfather with her, so I asked my daughter, "Who’s that with you?" I was trying to trick her, because I really knew who it
was. She replied, "This is my ancestor here." Then she said to me, "Papa, here's some areca for you. Bring your towel here." (When I died I carried a towel.) So I gave her the towel and she put it on the ground and filled it to overflowing with areca nuts. Then she got a rope and tied it up and said, "There! Take your areca nuts and go."

As I watched, my daughter turned and followed her ancestor along the path, and I grieved for them and tried to follow them, but the path disappeared. So, heartsick, I turned away. I thought, "Well, I'll get the areca nuts my daughter tied up." I picked up the towel with the nuts in it and stood looking at the path when I saw a woman coming. Her tongue was hanging down to her chin and her eyes were bloody. She was carrying a knife and was coming to stab me. So I ran until I reached the aid post. I went in and I yelled, "Help! All of you get up. Chew some of this areca." All of the nurses were astonished. "My Lord! This dead man is talking!"

Then they asked me, "What happened?" I replied, "There was a spirit woman carrying a knife who was trying to stab me, and I ran all the way back here." While I was talking, I could hear the spirit woman chopping at the planks of the aid post, striking at the walls around. I said, "You wait until you see this woman, the one that chased me." Then I went and sat down on a bench. All the time I sat talking I could hear this woman cutting at the planks. They built a fire and we talked until we could hear the cows lowing. Then I said, "Bring me some food and some water." I washed out my mouth, and when the food came, I ate it. I wanted some pork, but they told me that I couldn't have pork, I should only have vegetable food.

And that's all.

OTHER EXPERIENCES

The following two experiences, of Jakob and Wallace, are not near-death experiences: one is a dream, but the other may be an out-of-body experience, a vision, or an experience of hypnagogic imagery. I should make two points before presenting Jakob's vision.

First, the woman, Gagandewa, whom Jakob wants to meet, is the heroine of a pelunga, a myth that people believe to be based on fact and to recount events that really happened. Gagandewa is a spirit woman who lives in a village on Mount Andewa, the home of the dead. The myth recounts a time when, because of the marriage of Gagandewa to a mortal, social relationships were possible between humans and the spirits of Andewa, and people were able to see the Andewa village. Now when people go to Andewa, all that is visible is forest (and a helicopter pad recently installed by a scientific survey team). The reason Luke placed emphasis on his ability to see coconut fronds on the ridge leading to Andewa in the preceding account is that coconut palms are a sign of human habitation. On Andewa, no signs of occupation are visible to human eyes, but while he was
dead Luke was able to see evidence of the spirit village that is invisible to the eyes of the living. David Counts and I have recorded Jakob’s version of the story of Gagandewa and have for years discussed at length with him and with other Kaliai the significance of the events recounted in it. Jakob’s preoccupation with meeting Gagandewa may, therefore, be partially attributable to the interest that we have shown in the story. The complete text of this myth is in Counts (1982); an analysis of the cultural context and an interpretation of it is presented in Counts (1980a). Jakob was the primary source for the versions of the story retold in these publications.

The second point is that Jakob had obviously thought a great deal about the nature of his experience, and he had emphatically rejected the possibility that it was a dream. He enumerated the following differences between his vision and normal dream state:

(1) It took place while his family and he were sleeping near their gardens, but he felt his spirit leave his body, a feeling that is not normally part of a dream.

(2) He was aware of minute details, such as the texture of the foliage around him and the litter on the path beneath his feet, details one does not attend to in a dream state. He says that he noticed this detail while he was having his vision, and that during the experience he rejected the idea that he was dreaming. The thought that he might be having a dream occurred to him at that time because of the fantastic nature of the things that were happening to him.

(3) He was aware of the color of things.

(4) He could look about himself in the same deliberate way that a person in an ordinary state of consciousness would stare with curiosity at his surroundings.

(5) He was thinking rationally and critically during the experience. The experience, he says, had none of the bizarre and illogical character of a dream state. It was, “Like a dream, but it was different too. It was as though I left my body and went on a journey.”

Jakob’s vision is similar to the experience of hypnagogic sleep. According to Alcock (1981), this is a common phenomenon that is experienced by most people sometime in their lives during the period between wakefulness and sleep. For example, a person who is just drifting off to sleep when he hears the telephone ring and gets up to answer it only to discover he was mistaken, has experienced a hypnagogic image. It is characterized by:

“1. Colors, lights, geometric forms.

“2. Vivid and detailed images of faces and objects . . .

“3. Landscapes and scenes of unusual grandeur and beauty”
The hypnagogic experience is unlike a dream in that the person is convinced it is real. Some participants also see their own images during the experience, and their participation increases as they move into deeper levels of the hypnagogic state (see Foulkes and Vogel, 1965, cited in Alcock, 1981). Alcock cited Palmer's (1978) argument that hypnagogic imagery is the most likely way of accounting for out-of-body experiences, and suggested that many dying persons, especially those who have near-death experiences, likely pass through this psychological state.

Because the text of the interview with Jakob is quite long, I have summarized it.

When his vision started, Jakob found himself with a lame fellow villager, Karl, who was carrying his walking stick. (Karl denies having shared this experience.) They decided to enter the mangrove swamp to fish, and because it was dark, they lit a pressure lamp. While they were fishing they heard a large canoe enter the swamp, and, fearing that they might encounter hostile Kove who occasionally come there to fish, they put out their lamp and made their way to the other edge of the swamp where there was solid ground. When they got there they found a large paved road going up onto Mount Andewa. They did not relight their lamp, for it had become as bright as day. There were car tracks on the road, and they decided to try to get a ride if a car came by, for Karl was tiring quickly. They continued walking until finally they heard roosters crowing and they came to a village. There they found two of Jakob's kinsmen, both deceased, who greeted them and asked why they were there. They explained, and as they sat talking, Jakob looked around and saw that there was an outer village with houses made of thatch in the usual manner, and an inner village with houses that were new, bright, and shiny. Jakob then noticed a pile of food, taro and bananas, and since he was hungry he asked his kinsman, Narai, for something to eat. His kinsman refused, saying, "No! You can't eat one of those bananas. If you should eat it, you couldn't return home. You would have to stay here." Jakob protested that he was very hungry and that the statement was ridiculous, but Narai refused. Then Jakob asked how his kinsman had grown such large taro, for the corms were much larger than anything in Jakob's garden. Narai replied, "You understand, in the place where you now live everything is small. But here everything is large. Our village is large, and so is our taro."

They were sitting and talking when a bald man appeared and reacted with anger when he saw Jakob (no more mention is made of Karl) sitting there. He insisted that Jakob leave, and when Jakob
refused, he left saying that he would do something about it, for Jakob did not belong there. Then Jakob asked Narai to show him the house where Gagandewa lived, for by this time he realized that he must be in the spirit village on Andewa. Shocked, Narai refused, advising Jakob that the woman was a powerful spirit to be avoided.

Jakob then asked Narai to show him more of the village, but Narai replied that he would soon have to go to work. Surprised, Jakob questioned his kinsman and learned that all of the village residents worked for wages and that pay was differential depending on how long a person had been there. Narai earned one hundred and fifty kina a day, but another young man from Jakob’s village who had died only two weeks before admitted that he made a daily wage of only fifty kina.

Once again the angry bald man came, this time with soldiers, to drive Jakob away, and so Jakob’s kinsmen agreed that they would take him back to a place where he could find his way home. After a series of adventures growing out of Jakob’s insistence that he be allowed to meet Gagandewa before he returned home, he found himself once more in the spirit village near Narai’s house. Looking about him, Jakob realized that there seemed to be a gap between two of the houses in the village. He asked Narai to show him what was beyond the gap and at first Narai refused. Finally he and another kinsman took Jakob by the arms, and they walked between the two houses. Then, Jakob says:

We didn’t take many steps. From the middle of those houses we took only three steps, but when I looked around I could see for miles.

“Narai, is that what it’s like?” I asked.

“Yes!” he said.

I saw speeding cars, I saw flowers lining the roads, I saw multiple-lane highways crossing and recrossing each other. There were so many cars that I was confused. I saw men and women walking along, and cars running, but there were no collisions, no accidents. It was a beautiful place, a good place without mistakes. I saw nothing wrong, I heard no children crying. The place was illuminated by a strong light that lit up the flowers and the houses so that the colors were brilliant and clear. It made my eyes pop out. I asked Narai, “Narai, where does that light come from?”

“It doesn’t have a source. It’s just there.” I looked and as far as I could see, until they were tiny in the distance, there were houses. Then I looked behind me, but the thatch houses weren’t there. I asked Narai, “Narai, we only took three steps. Where are the thatched houses?” Narai laughed and said, “I already told you, This is a big place. The thatched houses you’re asking about are a long way away.”

“A long way? How did we get here? Where are we?”

“Do you think that time and distance are the same here as where you
live? No! It is not the same here. Time and distance are different here. It doesn’t matter whether something is far away or near. Here they are the same.”

I looked but I couldn’t see the edge of the forest. All I could see was the city and the light. There were no trees or grass. Once again I asked Narai, “Narai, when we are down on the beach and we look up here, we see forest and mountains and huge rocks. If we try to climb up to Andewa the way is steep and we are afraid of falling. Where is all that?”

He replied, “It’s here. This is the mountain. But when you see it from down there it seems to be rough and steep. When you come here you can see that it’s not so. There are no mountains. There is no jungle. It’s all clear and settled.”

Jakob stood there in wonder, so that he did not notice that he was being surrounded by a group of people who took hold of him and began turning him around until he was “spinning like the propeller of an airplane.” Then he was in bed in his little shelter at his garden. He awoke his wife to tell her of his adventure, and she laughed and told him that it was only a dream. However, Jakob is certain that his experience was no ordinary dream and that if his spirit had eaten food or if he had stayed in the spirit village, he would have died. His experience has changed him, he says, for now he has seen the land of the dead and he no longer fears death.

Wallace

Wallace says that his experience was a dream. I include it here because it shares elements with some of the near-death experiences and with Jakob’s vision, and because a number of Kaliai consider Wallace’s dream to provide a glimpse into the world of the dead. Wallace is an Anem speaker who lives in the coastal village of Karaiai.

At the beginning of my dream there were many of us, but I became separated from the others on the road. I wanted to follow them, but I didn’t know which way they had gone, so I went inside a door. I thought I’d find the way if I went through that door, but I didn’t. Instead, where I was there was sunshine, and it was light in the distance, but in between it was dark. I felt my way along the road and finally I came to a clear place on Mount Andewa.

As I walked along I realized that my older brother, who is dead, was there. He was sleeping and, as it was dark, I too lay down to sleep. When it became light I saw that it was indeed my older brother. He left, and I realized that I was alone.

I had been sleeping near a glass wall which surrounded Andewa and the village inside, while there was bush outside the wall. I could look through the glass and see men inside. I got up, and suddenly I found myself on the inside.
There were two men standing there, and as I approached them, I recognized them. One of them took his knife and they said, "Come on. Let's go now." One of them went first, I came second, and the other man came last. As we walked I saw that the place was tidy and very nice. There were flowers and the short coconut palms with the red nuts planted along a wide road, and there were many smaller roads with flowers planted along the edge, just as white people plant flower borders along their streets. The sun wasn't strong. It was as though it was covered by a cloud so that the light wasn't bright or hot. We walked along a ridge until we came to my mother's house. My mother was sitting on her veranda, and when she saw me she said, "Say! Why did you come here with those men?" She went inside her house and got a box, which she put outside on the veranda. I climbed up and sat down on the veranda, but she went back inside her house so that I didn't see her again. We sat there for a while; then the two men said, "Hey! Let's go."

As we walked they said, "Let's go see where those who have drunk fish poison or who have hanged themselves stay. We'll show you where they live." We went to the place where they lived and sat down. They said, "Watch them. It won't be long until lunch."

When the cook rang the dinner bell they all came running to get their food from her. They snatched food from each other and ran with it so that nobody got to eat properly. And their homes weren't any good. They lived in half-finished houses of thatch or metal, and their settlement wasn't inside the wall. Rather it was outside on the edge of the jungle. Their place was swampy, so that they had made paths through the mud with logs and limbs, and these paths led from one house to another. When they had finished eating they sat around, and some of them started singing. Then one of them saw us and they tried to kill us. They got their spears and clubs and rocks and came after us, so we ran away.

We ran until we came to a huge breadfruit tree growing at the edge of a river. The fruit was about a half a meter long. I started to sit down when I saw a man: his jaw was hanging down onto his chest and his eyes were huge, like something out of a nightmare. We ran away from him, back inside the wall, and we began walking down the road back toward where we had started. Eventually we met another road where there were many people. There was much smoke, the sounds of engines and of men hammering, and there were many cars running back and forth. We went inside a house and sat down, and I asked the owner, "Say, I've heard that when we die we'll all go into the fire. Is it true?" He replied, "No! It's just a parable. When we die we go to work." Then he asked, "When you came, did you see a big road?" We replied that we had indeed seen a highway covered with smoke and he said, "That's it! That's where all the sorcerers are. We don't work. We just relax, and in the afternoon they bring us our food. All we have to do is to relax and eat. They have to work and provide the food." We sat there a while; then he said, "Do you know that man from Lolo who had two wives? Well, he doesn't speak his own language any more. Now he speaks Anem. When we are alive we speak many languages: Kaliai [Lusi], Kombei, Bariai, Lolo. But when we die we come here and we all speak one language."

As we sat there talking a woman came and sat down beside us,
She began to scoot over toward us and we moved away from her on the bench until I was at the very end. Then the bench tipped over. The other end flew up and I fell onto the ground, and then I was awake.

**DISCUSSION: CULTURAL CONTEXT**

While it is not appropriate to include lengthy ethnographic description in this paper, a few comments placing the experiences in cultural context will make them more understandable to the reader who is not familiar with Melanesian custom and society. I have already mentioned the use of ginger in curing ritual, especially when the problem is sorcery-induced infection or illness. As is the case with other peoples who do not have ready access to modern medical technology, most Kaliai experience death while they are still relatively young. They cannot expect to die of old age, as we do. Death most commonly strikes children and adults in their prime. People die of trauma, infections, acute illness, childbirth, and childhood disease. Understandably, then, they do not consider death to be the natural conclusion of the life cycle in most cases. Instead they search for an external cause to explain why death occurs, and the usual explanation is sorcery. With only one or two exceptions, all the Kaliai whom I know firmly believe that sorcery causes illness and death. If there were no sorcery, my Kaliai friends insist, there would be no premature death. In general, sorcerers are men who are antisocial members of the community. They are considered to be greedy, violent, vindictive, unpredictable men, often from outside the local community, who readily use their knowledge of magic as a source of power and to terrorize others in order to have their way. The problem is exacerbated for the Kaliai by the fact that they feel powerless to deal with the problem. Before European contact, villagers could band together and kill a sorcerer. Today such action results in conviction for murder. National law does prohibit sorcery threats, but the punishment for conviction of the offense is a few months in jail. Then the enraged sorcerer returns to his village determined to avenge himself on his accusers. It must seem to many Kaliai that the only justice they can expect is from supernatural sources: thus the judgment and punishment of sorcerers in Luke’s near-death experience and in Wallace’s dream.

Although there was no pre-contact notion of the judgment of the dead for their sins, the dead did not all share the same fate. However, the significant differential was not the way in which people lived—not their moral standards—but the way in which they died. Suicides,
especially, were thought to become fearsome ghosts who, as in Wallace’s dream, were outside normal spirit society and were dangerous to the living. The spirits of suicides were condemned to stay outside the spirit community, a menace to the living, and the familiars of sorcerers (see Counts 1980b for a detailed discussion of suicide).

In Andrew’s near-death experience, Jakob’s vision, and Wallace’s dream, the land of the dead is perceived as a happy place. It is, however, not the pleasant garden reported by Moody (1975) and by Osis and Haraldsson (1977). Instead it is a land that is described as having factories and wage employment. It has an appearance that reminds me of the view approaching Los Angeles from the air. This view of the land of the dead is consistent with the belief complex known as cargo belief (see Counts 1972, 1978, and Counts and Counts, 1976, for detailed discussion of cargo belief and activity in Kaliai). Briefly, cargo belief involves the assumption that whites may not be fully human but may be, instead, spirit people or returned ancestors. Their possible nonhuman status derives from their appearance, for spirit people are thought to be pale or white, and from their technological superiority. Many Melanesian people, including the Kaliai, seem to assume that humans do not create their culture (see Lawrence, 1964, for an excellent discussion of the evolution of a similar cargo belief on the Rai Coast of New Guinea). Instead, language, knowledge, and technology are given to humans by the spirits and/or the ancestors. This is true for whites as well as for Melanesians; therefore, the goods that whites possess must be created by the spirits, ancestors, or God (depending on the content of the particular belief system) in the land of the dead, which is rich with divinely given technology. The rituals that develop from cargo belief are intended to persuade the spirits or God to give villagers the same goods and technological knowledge that they have already given whites. Paradise, the land of the dead, is a place of factories, automobiles, highways, airplanes, European houses and buildings in great numbers, and manufactured goods. One man’s smoggy freeway is another man’s heaven!

Finally, the Kaliai do not recognize the same boundaries between the empirical and nonempirical world that most North Americans do. Spirit beings of many kinds inhabit the forest, and things that seem to belong to the empirical world may, in fact, be spirit beings in changeling form. Beings that one meets in the forest may appear to be animals or humans, but they may in fact be spirits who are potentially dangerous. Boulders of unusual shape may once have been spirit beings who changed their form to stone, but they possess
the power to return to their original form, as did the dog and pig seen by Luke.

CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most interesting questions for an anthropologist who wishes to study the phenomenon of the near-death experience are, How much of the content of such experiences is culturally derived? and, Do these experiences have common qualities that cut across cultural differences? Obviously, three near-death experiences that occurred during deaths that were not verified by trained medical personnel, one vision, and one dream from a Melanesian society are insufficient to warrant any profound general conclusions. Nevertheless, these cases do represent a start in the collection of cross-cultural data, and they do permit some tentative observations.

First, some of the experiences common among the people interviewed by Moody (1975) and Osis and Haraldsson (1977) were not reported by my consultants.8

1. In no case did a Kaliai look down upon his sleeping or dead body.
2. No one reported feelings of strong emotion or of floating in space.
3. No one said he experienced a feeling of exaltation shortly after death or before having his vision or dream.
4. No one reported hearing a loud buzzing or ringing sound or music at the beginning of his experience.9
5. There were no reports that people felt as though they were moving at great speed through a long, dark tunnel. Instead, all of my informants journeyed by foot on a wide path or road. All but Frank and Andrew specifically traveled toward the mountainous interior of New Britain, and three of my informants saw or went to Mount Andewa and the village of the dead.
6. Only Frank, who is the most highly educated and acculturated, and the only English speaker, reported seeing a man with white skin and long beard and dressed in white robes.
7. No one mentioned having a new body, and the only unusual power mentioned was the ability to see evidence of spirit habitation on Mount Andewa. Jakob's ability to see and travel long distances was a result of the unusual nature of the spirit world and not an artifact of a new and especially powerful body.
8. No one spoke of having feelings of love, joy, and peace during his experience, and only Jakob volunteered that as a result of his
vision, he no longer fears death. Andrew did express reluctance to return to life and pointed to his withered leg, an artifact of his nearly fatal illness, as giving him reason to regret his return.

Second, there were similarities as well as differences between the Kaliai experiences and the typical near-death experience. The data from Kaliai, when compared with the evidence collected by Moody (1975) and by Osis and Haraldsson (1977), suggest that there may be features that are shared cross-culturally by those who have experiences that are variously known as near-death, visionary, out-of-body, or hypnagogic experiences.

(1) While on the journey, each person saw an apparition of some sort. Some apparitions were deceased persons known to the individual having the vision and included a daughter, a mother, an ancestor, unspecified kinsmen, a neighbor who died after the subject, and fellow villagers. Others seem to be derived from mythic or religious symbolism: Gagandewa in Jakob’s vision; the ancestor spirits and the white-skinned, robed, bearded man seen by Frank; the monsters seen by Luke and Wallace.

(2) People are reluctant to awaken or to return to the world of the living, for the place that they perceive as being the world of the dead often is a pleasant, happy place. However, the content of paradise varies and seems to be culturally defined. People apparently experience the land of the dead as having desirable aspects that are unobtainable, or at least not ordinarily experienced in this life. North Americans and Europeans see a beautiful garden, while Kaliai find an industrialized world of factories, highways, and urban sprawl. Notice that whereas North Americans do not report going to hell or being judged for their earthly behavior, and Indian notions of karma are only vaguely suggested (Osis and Haraldsson, 1977), some Kaliai do experience a judgment in which the individual having the vision is vindicated, while others who are hated and feared (specifically sorcerers) are punished.

Clearly, near-death and other types of visionary experiences are widespread cross-cultural phenomena that share some basic features. Also, clearly, the way in which people interpret these experiences is influenced by the expectations that they have learned from the cosmological and philosophical teachings of their particular culture. The culturally structured nature of these experiences is consistent with the explanation that out-of-body and near-death experiences are the result of a psychological state known as hypnagogic sleep. The Kaliai data presented here suggest that this, rather than an objectively experienced “life after death,” is the most
reasonable explanation for the phenomena. This is, however, only a small sample of cross-cultural data and, as I indicated earlier, no profound conclusions can be drawn from it. Obviously there is a need for researchers to collect cross-cultural data so that it will be possible to begin to separate the culturally derived content of these experiences from the content that is shared by people regardless of their heritage.

NOTES

1. The field research for this paper was conducted between June and September, 1981, in West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea, with the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Waterloo. Interviews were conducted in Tok Pisin by myself and by my husband, David R. Counts.

2. Tok Pisin is the trade language spoken by almost all people of West New Britain. Much of its vocabulary is English derived.

3. The term -anunu also means “dream” (anunugu, “my dream”) and “reflection,” while -tautau incorporates the notions of “essence” and “self.” The edible meat of a coconut is niu aitautau, the fleshy part of a woman’s breast is aituru aitautau, and informants say the portion of something that is called aitautau is its “true” or essential part. The term aitau also means “himself,” “herself,” or “itself,” as in aitau iraui, “he struck himself,” while taugau may be glossed “myself” (taugau ngaraugau, “I struck myself”).

4. In order to protect the privacy of my consultants, I have changed the names of everyone but Jakob. Jakob’s experience draws heavily on the myth of Akro and Gagandewa, and he is cited in other publications as being the source of the text of this myth (Counts 1980a, 1982).

5. One explanation for the appearance of this woman in Andrew’s vision is that while Andrew lay dead, the news of her death came to Vuvu and the villagers attending his body began to mourn and to discuss this second tragic event. If we interpret Andrew’s death as a comatose state rather than as clinical death, it is possible that in that state he continued to receive and process information that affected his vision, including information about the death of the woman in the nearby village. This rests on the supposition that Andrew’s attendants
confused a comatose state with death. Not having been present at the event, I am unwilling to assert unequivocally that this was the case. Kaliai are ordinarily very clear about the signs of physical death.

6. There are no paved roads in Kaliai. There is a dirt track leading from the coast to the mission with its associated school and aid post a mile inland. There are no other roads that would be suitable for automobile traffic, only dirt paths linking villages with each other and going to the gardens.

7. The kina is a Papua New Guinean unit of currency. In 1981 one kina was worth about $1.45 U.S.

8. My methods may, in fact, make my data non-comparable to that collected by Moody (1975) and by Osis and Haraldsson (1977). I did not describe to my consultants the content of the typical near-death experience as reported by these researchers. Nor, with the exception of the questions included in my interview with Andrew, did I specifically ask my consultants if their experience included episodes that were consistent with the episodes reported in the typical near-death experience. I was reluctant to probe for these characteristic events because, in my experience, Kaliai are eager to provide me with the data that they think I want and I feared that such questions might suggest the "right" answers to my informants.

9. The sounds of the sorcerer-cruncher and the loudspeaker in Luke's vision do not seem to be equivalent in type or content to those in the accounts of Osis and Haraldsson (1977) and Moody (1975).

10. It is unclear to me whether the white skin of Frank's apparition owes its appearance to Frank's Christian training (most pictures of the Christ figure that I have seen on the walls of New Britain missions portray him as having white skin), to the traditional belief shared by many Melanesians that the spirits of the dead have white skin, or, of course, to the possibility that Frank actually was met by a white-skinned being.

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Are Out-of-Body Experiences Evidence for Survival?

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that for both theoretical and empirical reasons the out-of-body experience (OBE) cannot provide evidence for survival of death. Definitions of the OBE are discussed and typical features described, including the fact that OBEs often convince people of survival. OBEs can provide survival evidence only if it can be shown that (1) something leaves the body during an OBE, and (2) that that “something” could survive the death of the body. There are serious difficulties in conceiving of anything that could perform the movement, perception, and information transfer required in an OBE. The evidence suggestive of something leaving the body includes (a) perception at a distance during OBEs, (b) the detection of a double or astral body, and (c) near-death experiences. That evidence is reviewed and argued to be inconclusive. A psychological theory of the OBE is presented in which the out-of-body world is seen as constructed by imagination from the cognitive map. It is argued that this theory provides greater hope for understanding mystical and related experiences.

It may be rather rash of me to ask whether OBEs are evidence for survival, not because the answer is so obviously “No,” nor even because it is “Yes” or “Maybe,” but because some of the issues raised are so problematic. Nevertheless I think it is an important question because it forces us to confront the theoretical obstacles involved and the inadequacies of the evidence. Having considered these problems, I shall argue that it is far more profitable to look at the OBE in quite a different way.

This question has a long history and has never been satisfactorily answered. When the Society for Psychical Research was founded over a hundred years ago, the major motivation behind it was the quest for evidence for survival. The subject has since had declines but now seems to be coming back into vogue. Both then and now OBEs have been considered as part of that evidence. Indeed, many writers seem to take it for granted that the occurrence of an OBE

implies both the existence of something that leaves the body, and the possibility of that "something" surviving death (see, e.g., Mitchell, 1981; Badham and Badham, 1982; Rogo, 1983). That view has of course been challenged (e.g., Noyes and Kletti, 1976; Siegel, 1980), but why has it become so popular in the first place?

From time to time people claim to have seen things at a distance during an OBE. That is therefore "paranormal" and provides an apparent justification for OBEs being considered to be "psychic experiences." However, I believe that by far the more important reason is that having an OBE so often persuades people of personal life after death.

The argument goes something like this: "I have been out of my body during life. Therefore 'I' am not my body. I can live without my body and therefore when it is dead I shall still live." In other words death is no more than an extended, or permanent, OBE. The argument is demonstrably false, but that does not detract from its power. It is strangely true that the persuasiveness of an argument need bear little relationship to its validity. The argument seems to be terribly convincing with very little justification.

What I hope to do here is to discuss briefly some logical and philosophical problems with relating OBEs to survival, to discuss some of the evidence bearing on their relationship, and finally to show why I believe there are far more interesting questions to ask about the OBE. But first I should say a little about the nature and definitions of the OBE.

It is almost impossible to describe a "typical" OBE because the experiences differ so very much. I shall therefore indulge in relating my own first OBE, as an example. This happened one evening in a friend's room in college at Oxford. I was very tired, had had a small amount of cannabis, and was lost in a pleasant imaginary tunnel of trees, when one of my friends quite unexpectedly asked me where I was. I suppose that should have seemed a silly question, since he could obviously see me; however, I struggled to answer and found myself apparently looking down on my own body from the ceiling. I watched as my own mouth opened and closed in telling him where I was. I suppose that should have seemed a silly question, since he could obviously see me; however, I struggled to answer and found myself apparently looking down on my own body from the ceiling. I watched as my own mouth opened and closed in telling him where I was. I seemed to have some sort of duplicate body "up there," and it was connected by a "silver cord" to the body. I could move at will, by thinking, and found that it was a delightful sensation to do so. It was not hard to leave the room, the building, and even Oxford, and I spent more than two happy and excited hours exploring that amazing state, and telling my friends all about it. At first I was sure I was seeing the actual room and surroundings, but later I seemed to
be in what the occultists have long described as the "world of illusion" or a "thought-created world." Everything is biddable by thought, and the only limits seem to be what one can imagine.

Now I must emphasize that mine was not a "typical" OBE, but then none is. To give an idea of what most seem to be like, though, various figures are relevant. Surveys have shown that something like 10-20 percent of ordinary people claim to have had an OBE at some time in their lives, although extreme figures of 8 percent and 50 percent have been obtained with certain groups (see Blackmore, 1982a, 1982b, and 1982c for a review). As far as we can tell, people who have OBEs (OBErs) are not odd in any way. They are not more often male or female, are not cleverer, more educated, richer, more religious, or different in any very obvious way (see Green, 1968; Palmer, 1979; Kohr, 1980), nor do they show any special psychological profile (Gabbard, Twemlow, and Jones, 1982). Recent findings suggest that they may have slightly better spatial imagery skills and are better able to immerse themselves in experiences to the exclusion of the outside world (Irwin, 1981), but basically we can say that there is nothing odd about someone who has an OBE.

Some OBEs take place during stress, accidents, or operations. Others occur when a person is deeply relaxed or meditating, but some happen for apparently no reason at all. Most are fairly short. A minute is relatively long for an OBE. Perhaps the most interesting finding of modern case studies is that so few OBEs fit the classical astral-projection pattern. The doctrine of astral projection asserts that an OBE is the result of the astral body being released from the physical body and taking "consciousness" with it. The two remain connected by a silver cord, at least as long as the body is alive, and the astral body can travel at will in the astral worlds. In view of that it is interesting to find that only about 20 percent of OBErs report having had another body. Most seem to be just a point or blob. And less than 5 percent have anything remotely like a silver cord (see Green, 1968; Osis, 1979; Blackmore, 1982a). Was my silver cord only the result of expectation? Whatever its origin, the facts seem to contradict the astral-projection model, which has to be stretched yet further to accommodate them. That means an already vague and elastic theory becoming even more so.

Another fact to note about the OBE is that what is seen varies widely. Many people see their own bodies, but that is not universal. Quite a few travel long distances, but many only glimpse their own room and the experience is over. A few, but I must emphasize that it is only a few, claim to have seen things at a distance that they
could not possibly have known about, and finally, even fewer claim that they appeared as an apparition to someone else.

That may give some idea of the variety of OBEs, but what about their definition? I would define the OBE as an experience in which a person seems to perceive the world from a location outside of his physical body, or more simply as the experience of seeming to leave one's body. The definition is important, and those I have given are neutral regarding theories of the OBE. One might prefer to say that an OBE occurs when a person does leave the body, but that immediately raises awkward questions about what we mean by a person and so on. Also, if the definition assumes that something does leave the body, then not only is one presuming what has to be tested, but it also becomes impossible to know whether any particular OBE is "genuine."

Several authors, notably Karlis Osis (1974) and Horne111111Hart (1954), have tried to distinguish "genuine" or "bona fide" OBEs from others on the basis of whether any paranormal perception was involved. That attempt is clearly doomed. If we have learned anything in one hundred years of psychical research, it surely includes the fact that we can never be sure on any particular occasion whether anything paranormal has occurred or not. We can therefore never be sure whether any OBE was "genuine" or not on that basis.

That is just one of the reasons why I prefer to stick with an experiential definition. We need not commit ourselves on that most important question of all, "Does anything leave the body in an OBE?" If we someday have an answer to that, or if we find some objective measure of whether someone is having an OBE or not, then we can easily change our definition accordingly.

Of course the experiential definition carries costs. If someone says he has had an OBE, we have to believe him, since it is defined as an experience. That raises the important distinction, to which I shall keep referring, between what people say they saw in their OBEs and how they interpret what they saw. At a certain level the distinction breaks down, but for most discussion it is terribly important to make it clear. I make a general policy of always believing what people say about their experiences. If they say they flew over St. Paul's, then I believe that was what they experienced. That is quite different from believing that any particular thing flew over St. Paul's. The latter is not implied by the experience, and it is what we have to find out. Does anything actually travel in an OBE?

We may now tackle the question of what bearing the OBE has on the evidence for survival. There are two steps here. First is the
question of whether anything leaves the body in an OBE. That question is crucial because if OBEs are to be considered evidence for survival, it is necessary (though not sufficient, of course) to show that something leaves the body. Second is the question of whether that something could survive the death of the physical body.

There are two major approaches to answering those questions. One involves logical and philosophical arguments; the other, empirical evidence. I shall consider each in turn.

First, why did I reject the argument from experience out of hand? The main reason is that it involves quite unwarranted leaps from what the experience feels like to a particular interpretation. Clearly, in most OBEs the body is alive and functioning during the experience, and it is unjustified to say that the "real me" was "out" or that it did not depend on the body. I know how much it feels as though the body is nothing, but that is no reason for assuming it is. I shall mention later cases in which the brain may not have been functioning, but for the most part it is clear that it could have been responsible for the experience. The big question becomes, can the whole experience be accounted for by imagination, memory, and so on, or does something actually leave the body?

The main problem to face is conceiving of anything that could do so. The "whatever it is" must not only be capable of leaving the body, but must be able to move, to perceive at a distance, and to transmit the results back to the body. That is a very tall order. If we conceive of some sort of pseudo-physical entity doing all that, then we must face all the problems of energy transmission from place to place, and movement and perception without detection.

W.A.H. Rushton (1976) pointed out one problem, that in order to see, the "double" must pick up light. If it picks up light, it must be opaque, and hence must be visible. In various forms that argument is compelling because perception necessarily involves interaction with the environment. Of course the interaction need not involve light, and one could postulate some kind of interaction that was hard to detect. Nevertheless, it should in principle be detectable. The problem may not be insoluble, but it is a real problem.

We must next explain how information gets from the distant entity back to the body, and that raises all the problems that psychical researchers and parapsychologists have been grappling with so unsuccessfully for so long.

To get away from those kinds of problems, many have preferred to argue that the double is an astral body and that it travels in the astral, not physical world. That maneuver leads to either of two
suggestions. One may postulate an astral world that duplicates the physical and so face problems of communication between astral and physical (much like mind-body problems). Or one may have a kind of astral world with no connection with the physical. In that case OBEs could not involve travel in the physical world and can be seen as private fantasies. (As I shall try to show later, that may in fact be a more interesting result, but it is not what is usually meant by astral projection and does not really entail anything leaving the body.)

To escape from all of these problems, some people (see Rogo, 1978) have resorted to suggesting that what leaves the body is just consciousness, or just a perceiving point. However, it seems very hard to define consciousness in any way that allows it to do the job required in an OBE. Consciousness is not normally considered to be the kind of thing that has a location at all, and to expect it to be located outside of the body and capable of perceiving, moving, and so on is to distort any normally recognized notion of consciousness unacceptably far. The final option, of saying that all that leaves is a perceiving point, also fails. The point is defined only by where it is perceiving from. One of the very few things we know for certain about the OBE is that people often make errors in what they see. Whether they are sometimes correct is in dispute, but that they are often wrong is not. Clearly, then, the hypothetical perceiving point hits a problem. It seems to be at a rather distorted version of a point rather than at any actual place, so in what sense can it be said to have left the body or indeed to exist at all?

In my opinion all attempts to find something that could leave the body in an OBE fail on theoretical grounds. For that reason I prefer explanations of the OBE that do not involve anything leaving the body; psychological theories of the OBE, for example. If nothing leaves the body in an OBE, then there is nothing to survive, and the OBE cannot be cited as evidence for survival.

However, I am quite prepared to believe that my arguments are wrong. One can read many philosophical works of twenty years ago expressing cogent reasons why one could never know that someone was dreaming, and could never answer such questions as how long dreams take, and whether babies dream. The arguments may have lost none of their force. However, there are few who would deny the importance of the progress in the psychology of dreaming that took place when objective correlates of dream reporting were discovered. And we have now been able to answer those awkward questions, at least to some extent. I mention that because I do believe that however convincing are my arguments against anything
leaving the body, that is no justification for refusing to look at the evidence. It might still be the case that there was evidence that forced me to say, "I can’t believe it, it can’t be true, but the evidence suggests it." So is there any such evidence?

I shall consider any evidence that suggests something leaves the body. There are at least three types. First there is evidence that during OBEs people can see things at a distance without using the recognized senses (i.e., using extrasensory perception [ESP]). Secondly there is evidence that the double or astral body can be detected. And finally there is evidence from OBEs occurring near death. I shall consider each in turn.

In each case we may consider both anecdotal and experimental evidence. The spontaneous-case, or anecdotal, evidence is in some ways the most interesting and persuasive, but it is also the most problematic. In any case in which someone reports out-of-body vision, there are problems of collecting the reports, the vagaries and distortions of human memory, the difficulty of finding relevant witnesses and checking the details claimed, and the problems of eliminating expectation, sensory cues, and even fraud.

A case that illustrates all of these problems is that most famous of spontaneous OBE cases, the Wilmot case (Myers, 1903). Mr. Wilmot was travelling on a steamship from Liverpool to New York in 1863. As the story goes, his wife was worried because there was a severe storm at sea. She had an OBE and travelled to her husband’s ship. There she saw him lying in his stateroom, and she went in and kissed him before returning home. Mr. Wilmot, meanwhile, was sleeping well for the first time in nine or ten days at sea, and dreamed he saw his wife come to his cabin. In the morning he was amazed to find that his own vision of her had been shared by his roommate, who chastised him for having a lady in his room at night. Apparently they had both seen Mrs. Wilmot, and she had seen them. On arriving home, Mr. Wilmot was asked by his wife if he had received a visit from her on the night in question (Myers, 1903).

This story sounds very convincing until you look a little further. It is now not possible to talk to the people concerned, of course, and I have found that there are no passenger lists or plans of the ship in existence. However, just reading the reports raises a host of questions. The whole story depends on the coincidence of Mr. Wilmot’s and his companion’s visions with the experience of Mrs. Wilmot. However, we are told all three sides of the coincidence by none other than Mr. Wilmot himself, and he had been suffering from days of seasickness and sleeplessness at the time. That reduces its
value, but worse still is that Mrs. Wilmot never reported having had an OBE at all. Mr. Wilmot reported that she was worried and seemed to go out to seek him. But in her own report she only alludes briefly to her “dream,” and she gives no description of what she saw. She says she thinks she told her mother about it the next morning, but there is no report from her mother. By the time the case was written up in 1889, the roommate was dead and unable to give his account. It seems to me that this case does not bear close scrutiny. I am not trying to say that it is worthless — it is a very interesting story — just that it is not the kind of evidence that would convince a reasonable person of the existence of accurate out-of-body vision, or of the accurate detection of a person in the out-of-body state.

So where do we look for more solid evidence? We can look for more modern cases. I recently presented one myself (Blackmore, 1982d). A Canadian architect claimed to have visited London, and described in detail the houses he saw in a certain area of Fulham. Apparently he had asked an English colleague of his about that particular area of London, and the colleague had “proceeded to describe the character of the streets, the buildings, the style, the building setbacks and entrance yards — all exactly as I had seen them!” (p. 3). It seemed an exciting case and was easy enough to check, but as soon as I did I found that there are no houses even remotely fitting the description in Fulham. Like so many other cases, this one does not seem to stand up to examination. The main lesson we have to learn, I believe, is that nothing has changed. A hundred years has not produced the evidence, and yet we go on looking for it in the same old ways. Will we never learn?

Some would say that the experimental evidence is far stronger. There is a little such evidence from early this century. For example, hypnotized mediums were asked to “exteriorize” their doubles, and the doubles were then supposed to be able to see things presented before their eyes, while the mediums could not see them. The same was done with smells, tastes, and touch, but the most elementary precautions against normal perception were not taken, and those experiments cannot be considered seriously (see Blackmore, 1982a).

For a long time nothing along experimental lines was attempted, and then twenty years ago laboratory research on OBEs began. Charles Tart (1967, 1968) was the first to test a subject who claimed to be able to have an OBE at will in the laboratory. Tart set up an experiment in which the subject was to lie on a bed, above which was a shelf with a five-digit number on it. The subject’s aim was to see the number when out of his or her body. Robert Monroe (well
known for his book *Journeys Out of the Body*, 1971), was the subject on nine occasions but failed to see the number at all. Then a girl referred to as Miss Z tried and, on her fourth and last attempt, managed not only to have an OBE but to see the number and report it correctly. That seemed to be a great breakthrough. One of the most persistent problems in parapsychology is that results are easy to collect, but terribly unreliable. Here it seemed that although it was hard to get anyone to see the number, once seen it was seen correctly. That would be a great advance if it could be repeated and would put out-of-body vision in a class altogether different from "normal" ESP. The hope, however, was short lived. Miss Z was unable to come to the laboratory any more, and no other subject has ever achieved that accuracy again. It is also a pity that the number was in the same room as the subject, because however unlikely it seems to be (and Tart [1967,1968] has argued that it is very unlikely), it is possible that she saw the number normally. If the result cannot be repeated, we shall never know for certain.

Subsequent experiments of the same kind (e.g., Osis, 1974; Mitchell, 1981; Osis and McCormick, 1980) have produced results much like so many others in parapsychology. That is, they are sometimes suggestively above chance, but not much more than that.

Those experiments raise an additional tricky question about the interpretation of out-of-body vision. Even if people could see at a distance during OBEs, that is not necessarily evidence that something leaves. After all, they could be using ESP. The ESP problem has worried parapsychologists since modern research on OBEs began some twenty years ago. The problem is how to distinguish between ESP and out-of-body vision. In some sense, it is logically impossible. ESP is defined negatively and therefore can never be ruled out. However, some ingenious experiments have been designed to try.

Karlis Osis (1975) designed the "optical-image device": a box containing a mass of pictures, colored filters, and mirrors. Looking in through the lid, one would see all of these in a jumble, but looking in through the viewing hole, one sees a particular picture of a certain color appearing in one of four quadrants. Osis's subject, Alex Tanous, was asked to try to travel, during an OBE, to a distant room and to look into the optical-image device. The idea was that if he "saw" the right picture, he must have been using localized viewing rather than generalized ESP. In fact the results were inconclusive. Osis (1975) claimed that they supported the hypothesis of localized viewing, but it was only by marginal effects. And in any case one
could never be sure that ESP could not operate like localized viewing. We simply know too little about the workings of ESP.

So what are we to conclude? I genuinely believe that the fairest and most reasonable interpretation is to say that out-of-body vision has been tested and has not been found. Here many others certainly disagree with me, but I can only present the conclusion that seems to me to fit the evidence best.

One last thing to point out is how very little the research has changed in all these years. Nearly one hundred years ago Frederic W.H. Myers (1903) had a good idea of what would be considered acceptable evidence. Psychical researchers twenty and thirty years after his death were still looking for it and using basically similar methodology. In spite of advances in experimental design, we are still using it today; that is, testing whether people can see some concealed object or target at a distance while having an OBE. It may be considered a mark of a progressive science that the problems it tackles change as it develops. In Imre Lakatos's (1978) terms, there is a progressive problem shift. By this criterion, research on OBEs has not progressed at all in a hundred years. I think it is about time it did.

Much the same criticism can be leveled at research of the second type; that is, the attempts to detect the double. Early this century the doubles of hypnotized mediums were asked to sit on weighing scales and to ring electric bells and were even photographed (see Blackmore, 1982a). However, when the research methods were improved, the early exciting results disappeared. More recently, sophisticated apparatus has been used to try to detect the presence of a double or astral body while a subject is having an OBE in a different room. The most notable of that research was a long series with the subject Blue Harary at the Psychical Research Foundation. Humans, animals, and a mass of different physical systems were used, but the final conclusion was, “Overall, no detectors were able to maintain a consistent responsiveness of the sort that would indicate any true detection of an extended aspect of the self” (Morris et al., 1978, p. 1).

There have been some indications of detectability. For example, in one of the experiments Blue Harary was apparently able to influence the behavior of one of his two pet kittens. The kitten miaowed and moved significantly less when Harary was having an OBE as compared with control periods. Some have seen that as evidence that the double left the body, but it depends on a small statistical effect with one of two kittens, and it was not repeatable. Also there still remains the problem that it could have been ESP or psychokinesis between man and cat.
Osis and Donna McCormick (1980) claimed to have detected Alex Tanous's out-of-body presence while he was engaged in a perceptual task. Strain gauges were placed near the optical-image device, and they showed greater activation on trials when he correctly perceived the target in the box than on those when he was wrong. They argued that in some sense he was more exteriorized on those trials and unintentionally affected the strain gauges. I have pointed out (Blackmore, 1981) that overall the results of the perceptual task were equal to those expected by chance. So if he was “really there” on hit trials, there must have been psi-missing on the other trials. Julian Isaacs (1981) has also noted problems with the apparatus used.

Many people would argue with my conclusion that the evidence is not good enough. For example D. Scott Rogo (personal communication, 1982) has argued that if I had been at the experiment with the kitten and seen its behavior, I would “know” that it had detected Harary’s presence. I can only say that I wish I had been there to see for myself. But going on the basis of published findings, I think the only fair conclusion is that of Robert Morris, et al. (1978). The out-of-body “whatever it is” seems to be undetectable as yet.

The third type of evidence concerns OBEs occurring near death. It has long been known that people approaching death report visions of many kinds, and these visions can include OBEs. Research into near-death experiences (NDEs), from Raymond Moody’s (1975) pioneering work to more recent research by Kenneth Ring (1980) and Michael Sabom (1982), has made it clear that the OBE is an important and frequent constituent of the NDE. Whether OBEs occurring near death are the same phenomenon as OBEs occurring under other circumstances is not yet clear. However, they are certainly similar enough to treat as one until we have any evidence to the contrary.

Other components of the “typical” NDE include roaring noises in the ears, the experience of rushing along a tunnel (like my tunnel of trees), seeing a light at the end of the tunnel, meeting with dead relatives or religious beings, and glimpsing another world. The big question is, of course, whether all NDEs could be creations of the dying brain in its last moments, or whether they are what they seem, a prelude to, and glimpse of, the world to come.

This is not the place to consider such evidence in detail, but I should point out the few suggestions that something paranormal may be involved. In particular Sabom (1982) has presented evidence that people having NDEs while unconscious and unresponsive have correctly reported details of medical procedures and apparatus that
they could not possibly have known about. In addition he found that cardiac patients who had not had an NDE were unable to imagine such scenes in the same accurate and convincing way. However, these patients did not have the auditory and other information that may be available to people coming close to death, so the comparison is not as fair as it first appears. The importance of the additional auditory information is something to be determined by future research.

I believe it is too early to say whether near-death experiencers can actually see things paranormally. There is certainly evidence in that direction, but it is not clear-cut, and we shall have to await the results of future work to find out whether or not it stands the test of time. However, it may be useful at this stage to consider what sort of evidence would be convincing. First, there could be better evidence for paranormal perception during NDEs. If that is obtained, then I would be forced to reconsider my position. But it would still be a long step to concluding that OBEs provide evidence for survival. We would still have to deal with the thorny question of ruling out ESP as an alternative explanation, even to conclude that something leaves the body. And even that is only the first step.

The second is to ask whether that “something” could survive death or operate without a physical body. One way of approaching the problem is to ask whether NDEs can occur when brain activity has ceased. If a complex structured experience occurs, involves the paranormal acquisition of information, and could be shown to occur at a time when there was little or no brain activity, then that would strongly challenge any purely cognitive or psychological account of the experience. The ability to collect that kind of evidence is in sight, and it would be important if found. However, I must add that even that still would not get round the problem that anyone who can tell us about his or her NDE was not actually dead at the time. Awkward problems like that beset the search for survival evidence at every turn.

I have now considered, albeit very briefly, the kinds of evidence that might persuade one that the OBE was evidence for survival, and the only verdict I can reach is “unproven.” The evidence, as it stands at the moment, is not sufficient to persuade me to reject my arguments against the possibility of something leaving the body, or of there being a double, astral body, spirit, or soul to survive. Why then do so many people disagree with me?

I think there are two reasons. The first I have already discussed; that is, the convincing nature of OBEs to those who have them.
But I think there is a more important reason. That is that the alternatives presented are always so feeble. All too often the choice presented is between “something leaves – wow – we have a spirit – everything is exciting” and “it’s all in the mind, or just imagination.” It is that “just” that infuriates me. Imagination is far too vast and exciting a world to be denigrated with the word “just.” But the psychological theories of the OBE are very weak, as pointed out for example by Rogo (1983). It is therefore not surprising that people don’t take them seriously. What we need is a viable and exciting alternative to the “something leaves” theories. We could then make a reasoned choice between them.

The test of a good theory is, in my opinion, that it leads to progressive and productive research. Looking back over the research of the last hundred years, it is crystal clear that it has not progressed. The same questions are being asked, the same awkward problems faced, and the same difficulties tackled now as a hundred years ago. I believe it is because the whole research program is fundamentally misguided and inappropriate.

We need to start all over again. Let us make some new assumptions, ask some new questions, and see where they lead. If that attempt fares as badly as previous research, we can soon abandon it.

Let us assume for the moment that all experiences depend upon a functioning brain, that there is no soul, spirit, astral body, or double, and that nothing leaves the body in an OBE. Why then do people have OBEs? Indeed, why do they have NDEs and profound mystical experiences? And why are people so very moved by these experiences, as clearly they are?

Let us start by looking at the OBE as something telling us a lot about brain function, rather than the reverse. In the psychology of perception a great deal has been learned from the study of visual illusions (e.g., Gregory, 1966). When the visual system concludes that one of two equal-length lines is longer, for example in the Ponzo illusion, that does not tell us that the brain has gone wrong, but rather it tells us how the visual system draws an incorrect inference from perfectly reasonable processes. In other words the illusion tells us about those processes.

Similarly the OBE may tell us about how we normally structure our perception and our images of ourself. The process of perception involves building models of a world “out there” viewed by a stable self. If under certain circumstances our brain concludes that “we” are outside our bodies, I think that tells a lot about what it means to think we are inside. Most of the time most of us think we are in
our head, behind our eyes, or in some other convenient spot within the body. Wherever it is, that does not tell us that there is a soul or something at that spot, rather it tells us that we have chosen to organize our perception and self image that way, as a convenience in our construction of experience. Why then should people sometimes make the odd decision that they are outside the body?

Normally we create a stable model of ourselves that includes our body position and immediate surroundings, seen from our own “personal viewpoint.” The whole process of perception is one of modeling, and as we move, see, and hear, we update our model of “reality” to accommodate changing input. We also use information from memory, from the “cognitive map” of the world. For example, when you see a wall in your own home, you may easily be able to imagine the room behind it, even though you cannot see it.

The reason we maintain a “personal viewpoint” consistent with the body’s position is that sensory input keeps on confirming it. However, if sensory input is cut off, or drastically reduced, we may go on building models, but they cannot be tied to input or to the correct body position. The result is that the model may drift from the correct viewpoint, and an OBE occurs.

In that unusual state, if you try to work out where “you” are, you have none of the normal mechanisms operating that will tell you. In an attempt to, as it were, regain normality, you may imagine the position you know yourself to be in and your own body sitting, standing, or whatever it was doing. That will provide a relevant image, but the coordination is lost and the result is that you seem to be wherever you imagined the scene from.

An interesting question raised is why so many OBErs find themselves seeming to be above and behind the level of the head. A possible answer is that that is a most convenient place from which to structure imagined places. In particular, if you try to imagine any familiar room, you may well find that you do so from just such a position because it gives a better overall view than normal head height. That possibility could clearly be tested.

The idea that the OBEr’s brain constructs a world to explain what it perceives leads to a lot of interesting conclusions. First it becomes clear why the occultists refer to a “thought-created world.” That is precisely what it is. And you can travel in it at any speed you can imagine travelling. Sylvan Muldoon (Muldoon and Carrington, 1929) described the three travelling speeds in the “astral plane,” and those conform closely to the ways in which we can manipulate visual images in our cognitive map (that is, the mental map we build from
our perceptual experience). Try to imagine, for example, travelling from your home to work or to a friend's house. You will probably find that you can either see every detail as you would when walking, or can skim the streets very fast, or can just start at one and end at the other. Those are almost identical to the "astral" travelling speeds.

We also know a lot about the sorts of errors made in OBEs. People may not see things that are there, may add likely objects like chimneys or doors and windows that aren't actually there, and so on. That is exactly what we find in the cognitive map. Imagine the same route as before, and look at a certain building as you pass by. How many windows has it or how many steps up to the door? You may well find that you can "see" the windows or steps but are unable to count them. That is probably because your image is not really like a picture at all. It is a representation of what you know about the building. You know it has windows so you "see" windows, but you have never counted them, so the number of windows is not represented. I am convinced that the astral world is just like that. It is a world of mental representations, and that is why it has all the qualities of the cognitive map. The occultists hit the nail on the head with their expression "thought-created world."

Another interesting point concerns the end of the OBE. Typically it ends suddenly, with a snap back to the body or even a momentary "blanking of consciousness" (Crookall, 1961). That is just what we would expect on this model. If at some point sensory input starts to reassert itself, the normal mechanisms will reinstate the usual viewpoint. One cannot sustain an in-between state, seeing both from the normal position and from the out-of-body position. The normal one will always win, so back one comes with a rush. That may also account for some of the apparent discreteness of the OBE.

I would also like to say more about the tunnel. It seems there are good reasons why a tunnel should appear. It is known to be a common form in drug-induced hallucinations (Siegel, 1977; Drab, 1981) and of course in NDEs and OBEs. One possible reason is that concentric rings in the visual field are represented by straight lines in certain parts of the visual cortex. In a hallucinating state there may be electrical noise in the cortex that runs in straight lines. The effect is to produce the appearance of concentric rings, or a tunnel, as though being perceived. Any other images at the same time are seen in this perspective. The same argument applies to tunnels in migraine, which is certainly associated with cortical noise.

Another idea works by analogy with visual constancy mechanisms. We see a plate as round regardless of its angle to us, and it stays the
same size as it approaches us, because of constancy mechanisms. Also, everything we see is in perspective, and that has to be counter-acted so that straight lines appear straight. However, if we applied this same "correction" to internally produced noise, it would have the reverse effect and produce a tunnel. That idea needs testing, but the important point is that there are various psychological reasons why we might expect tunnel forms, and these need no recourse to astral bodies or spirit worlds.

The crucial point is clearly whether all these speculations can lead to any testable predictions or not. I believe they most certainly can, and I will give just a couple of examples.

In the state I described as necessary for an OBE, anything imagined appears "real." If one imagined the room as from one's actual position, it should seem real whether or not one's eyes were open. I have had the experience of seeming to see with my eyes closed in a state that felt like that necessary for an OBE. So in a recent survey I asked this question: "Have you ever seemed to see with your eyes closed?" OBErs answered "yes" to the question more often than did control subjects. More generally, people who reported OBEs also reported all sorts of hallucinations, and I have found that in a random sample of people, among students, and among schizophrenics (Blackmore, 1982b, 1982c, 1984; Blackmore and Harris, 1982).

If the OBE is basically a product of the imagination, then we should expect people with better imagery to be more likely to have OBEs. That idea has led to a lot of controversy, and in fact it seems that OBErs have no more vivid imagery (Irwin, 1981), but there is good evidence that they can more easily become immersed in an experience to the exclusion of the outside world (Irwin, 1981). This research is still in its infancy, but already it seems to be producing far more in the way of reliable findings than the paranormally based research has ever done.

These are just a few of the hints that it is worth pursuing the idea of the OBE as a product of the imagination rather than as something leaving the body. It is too early to boast that we have gotten very far, but I am convinced it is worth following this route. If this approach is correct, it implies that there is no astral body, other than one invented by the imagination, and nothing travels in the OBE. Correspondingly there is nothing to survive, and the OBE cannot be seen as evidence for survival. Therefore the answer to my original question is "No."

But we mustn't fall into the trap of saying that the OBE is "just imagination." Rather, it provides a privileged glimpse into the
structure of imagination. We have scarcely begun to look into this world, and the sooner we start to understand it the better. Understanding the OBE in these terms, and abandoning the search for paranormal aspects, may be just a beginning.

The next steps are towards understanding NDEs and mystical experiences. At the moment we have no science of mystical experience. Theologians study the implications for theology, psychiatrists denigrate them to abnormality, and doctors are only interested if they relate to pathology, and parapsychologists if they involve the paranormal. A few psychologists have made just a beginning (e.g., Maslow, 1971; Neher, 1980). I hope we may see the future psychological study of the OBE leading to a larger study of mystical experience; one that may finally give some non-religious and non-medical insight into those experiences that to so many people are the most important thing in their lives.

We have a long way to go, but the first step is to say that the OBE is not "just" imagination. It is imagination, and that may be quite the most exciting thing it could be.

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Near-Death Experiences, Altered States, and Psi Sensitivity

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ABSTRACT

This investigation compared the frequency of psi experiences, psi-related experiences, mystical states, dream experiences, and a variety of demographic variables for three criterion groups. Comprising the three groups were 358 individuals who had never come close to death, 105 people who claimed to have had a close call with death but without an intense experience associated with it, and 84 individuals whose responses to a questionnaire indicated they had had a near-death experience (NDE). Analyses revealed that the NDE group manifested a significantly greater incidence of psi and psi-related experiences, dream experiences, and mystical states. The study also reported on an item analysis of NDE characteristics and on an effort to develop an NDE score. The NDE group was further separated into "moderate" and "deep" experiencers based on the NDE score. Comparisons of these two groups resulted in fewer significant differences in psi experiences than in the original three-group analyses.

INTRODUCTION

With the striking popularity of Raymond Moody's (1975, 1977) books on near-death experiences (NDEs), lay audiences and professionals alike have become intrigued with this fascinating aspect of human experience. Many interesting parallels are observed in NDEs and the phenomenology of mystical insight. Among the features of mystical experience outlined by Walter Pahnke and William Richards (1966) that frequently accompany the deeper NDE are ineffability, a transcendence of space and time, deep positive feelings of intense peace and quiet, transciency of the exalted state, a noetic quality of having received deep knowledge or apprehension of reality, and persistent positive changes in attitude and behavior. In addition, various researchers have suggested that transpersonal states facilitate the acquisition of information through psychic mechanisms (e.g., LeShan, 1973).
Certain features of NDEs also correspond to out-of-body experiences (OBEs), which have a long history in the parapsychological literature (e.g., Crookall, 1970). Charles Tart (1974) presented some interesting illustrations of information acquired paranormally during an OBE. Various observers have advanced the notion that states such as OBEs and transcendent experiences may provide a vehicle for the operation of ESP or psi. Thus, the term *psi-conducive state* was used by Charles Honorton (1974) in his discussion of hypnosis, meditation, dreams, and psychedelic drugs in promoting paranormal experience.

Kenneth Ring (1980a, 1981) touched upon what he termed a flashforward or possible life preview that sometimes occurs in an NDE. In an investigation of precognitive phenomena associated with especially deep NDEs, Ring (1982) described NDE visions of events involving the percipient ("personal flashforward") at some time following the NDE.

In a medical context, cardiologist Michael Sabom (1982) recently described a series of "autoscopic" surgical experiences in which patients perceived themselves as outside their bodies and able to provide amazingly accurate accounts of actions of medical staff and procedural details of their surgery.

The investigation I am reporting received its impetus from research published by Ring (1979). His findings stimulated me to include a special section on NDEs in a large workbook questionnaire I was preparing for the Association for Research and Enlightenment (A.R.E.), headquartered in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The questionnaire was extensive. Major sections dealt with psi, meditation, dreams, health, and near-death-type experiences. Data collected from a national survey of A.R.E. members during 1980 were reported in summary form by Kohr (1982). The present article reports more extensively on analyses that explored the extent to which individuals claiming to have had NDEs differed from those not having such experiences in terms of dream, meditation, and psi experiences.

**SURVEY METHOD**

The survey instrument was a 37-page workbook composed of 221 questions developed from experimental and survey studies conducted by the A.R.E. Research Committee during a five-year period. Contained in the section on death were questions regarding general attitudes toward death and an afterlife, beliefs about reincarnation, and memory patterns interpreted by the respondent as a possible
previous life. Respondents also answered questions concerning a close encounter with death and whether or not various features of the “core” NDE (Ring, 1979) were present. The A.R.E. is an organization with a current nationwide membership of more than forty thousand people intrigued by the legacy of the late American psychic Edgar Cayce. This membership can be characterized as having interests in paranormal phenomena, dreams, meditation, holistic health, and other topics related to human potential. The workbook questionnaire was made known to the membership in its monthly newsletter. Throughout 1980, members interested in participating paid a five-dollar fee to receive a copy of the workbook. Of the approximately 700 workbook questionnaires sent out, 547 were returned. Obviously the respondents represent an atypical population of individuals who are attracted to an organization like the A.R.E. because of their own psi experiences and who are even willing to pay to participate. Despite the necessary constraint on generalizing results from this sample, there is cause for optimism that statistical relationships observed in the data may hold true for samples more representative of the general population. This expectation receives support from the fact that a great deal of correspondence occurred between the correlational results reported by John Palmer (1979) in his 1974 mail survey of Charlottesville townpeople and University of Virginia students regarding psi experiences and those reported by Kohr (1980), who analyzed data from a 1975 survey of the A.R.E. membership using the identical questionnaire.

**DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE**

A geographical breakdown of the respondents revealed a broad national distribution: 27 percent lived in the northeast, 17 percent in the south, 24 percent in the midwest, 12 percent in the southwest, 16 percent in the west coast area, and 3 percent in Canada. The sample was 75 percent female, 98 percent white, and had a mean age of 44. Of the respondents, 68 percent were married, 14 percent single, and 18 percent widowed or divorced. Educationally, 41 percent were college graduates, while another 39 percent had received some post-high-school education including two-year technical programs, nursing programs, associate degrees, and some college work. In terms of political orientation, 20 percent viewed themselves as conservative, 55 percent as moderate, and 25 percent as liberal. Of the respondents, 31 percent classified their community as a rural or small-town environment, 21 percent as a medium-sized city
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DEFINITION OF GROUPS

Based on a series of eight questions regarding proximity to death, the respondents were divided into three groups. The first group, referred to as the Non-Experiencing (NE) group, consisted of 358 persons who answered “no” to the question, “Have you ever come very close to death?”

A second group, labeled the Close to Death Only (CD) group, consisted of 105 individuals who indicated they had come close to death; however, they did not meet other criteria indicative of a deeper quality experience associated with the close call. Eighty-seven answered “no” to the question, “During your close brush with death did you have a deep, moving personal experience?” Eighteen additional people answered “yes” to this question but failed to experience any of the features of a core NDE (Ring, 1979).

The third group, composed of 84 respondents and referred to as the Experiencing (E) group, indicated they had come close to death, had had a deep, moving personal experience concomitant with the encounter, and claimed to have had at least one of the following six types of experience described by Ring (1979) as constituting the core NDE: (1) a profound sense of peace and contentment, (2) a sense of being detached from the physical body, (3) movement into a “space” between this world and another that seemed to be without dimension, (4) the presence of another being who helped assess one’s life and offer a choice of remaining or not, (5) brilliant white or golden light that engulfed one and brought contentment, and (6) unforgettable beauty of colors and/or heavenly music. Relative to the 547 cases in the sample, the NE group represented 65 percent; the CD group, 19 percent; and the E group, 15 percent.

Most research on the NDE has obtained data from extensive interviews rather than questionnaire methodology. Thus, individuals in this study who are classified as E-group members might not have been similarly classified by the interview technique. However, the internal consistency of the items descriptive of an NDE, as described in the next section, suggests the items were measuring a rather stable phenomenon.
ITEM ANALYSIS OF THE NDE CHARACTERISTICS

Respondents having a moving personal experience in conjunction with their close brush indicated whether any of the six core characteristics were part of that experience. Using data from the 84 E-group respondents, the six NDE features were analyzed for their scalability. A FORTRAN computer program (Kohr, 1971) was used in estimating internal-consistency reliability (Cronbach, 1951) and distributional characteristics. A total score ranging from one (answered “yes” to only one of the six questions) to six (endorsed all six items) was produced under the assumption that a higher score would be indicative of a more “profound” experience. The correlation of each item to the total score was estimated using Sten Henrysson’s (1963) adjustment, thereby removing the excessive influence of an individual item on the total score when the number of items is small. Table 1 displays the NDE characteristics and presents the item-analysis results.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Analysis of NDE Characteristics</th>
<th>Percent Responding “Yes”</th>
<th>Adjusted Item-Total Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Near-Death Experience Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Experienced a feeling of profound peace and contentment, so deeply moving that words fail to come close to describing the experience.</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Experienced a sense of being detached from the physical body, whether or not you could actually “see” the body.</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Experienced a movement into a “space” between this world and the next which seemed to be very peaceful and without dimension.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Near-Death Experience Characteristics  | Percent Responding “Yes” | Adjusted Item-Total Correlation

4. Sensed a presence of another being which helped me assess my life and offered a choice of whether to continue in this experience or go back. | 36% | .62

5. Saw a brilliant white or golden light which was restful, comforting, and of extraordinary beauty. | 37% | .47

6. Found myself in a world of exquisite beauty with unforgettable colors and/or “heavenly” music. | 26% | .58

Coefficient Alpha estimate of internal-consistency reliability = .62

Distributional Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NDE Score</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Summary Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>= 2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>= 1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>= 0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>= -1.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Respondents answered “yes” or “no” as to whether each item represented part of their near-death experience.
Experiencing a profound peace (item 1) and a sense of being detached from the physical body (item 2) were the most prevalent features claimed by the E respondents. Half claimed to experience a dimensionless space (item 3), while approximately a third sensed the presence of another being (item 4) or saw a brilliant light of extraordinary beauty (item 5). Lastly, about a quarter of the E group perceived themselves to be in a world of exquisite beauty and/or music (item 6). The pattern of decreasing incidence across items roughly approximates the one described by Ring (1979). The higher incidence of experience observed in the present study is likely due to different question phrasing, the lack of an interview, which permits appropriate follow-up questioning to rule out misinterpretations, and the fact that the percentages are inflated by using just those respondents who displayed one or more of the core characteristics.

All items except the first (feeling profound peace) revealed a substantial adjusted item-total correlation with the total NDE score. The internal consistency (Coefficient Alpha of .62) is quite substantial for a short scale of only six items and provides technical support for deriving a total score as a reliable indicator of the strength or depth of an NDE. Of course further research is necessary to provide evidence regarding the degree of stability and validity of this short measure. It might be mentioned that a recent effort by Bruce Greyson (1983a) to develop an NDE scale to discriminate accurately between individuals having an NDE and those having symptoms of other stress-related syndromes yielded quite promising evidence as a reliable and valid screening device.

Table 1 also reveals the distributional properties of the NDE scores attained by the E group. Twenty respondents (24 percent) experienced only one of the six core features. That would represent only a relatively “light” experience, which, considering Ring’s (1980a) stage concept, should be found in an item typical of a less profound experience. An examination of the response patterns of those individuals who claimed only one feature revealed 13 indicated their single experience was item one (profound peace) and 4 claimed item two (sense of detachment from body). That is consistent with an “early stage” NDE. At the other end of the continuum, 8 individuals (10 percent) claimed all six characteristics (NDE score of 6), which would suggest a profound experience. If one were to regard scores of one or two as a relatively light NDE, scores of three and four a moderately profound NDE, and five or six a deeply profound experience, then 50 percent would fall into the “light” category,
27 percent in the "moderate" category, and 23 percent in the "deep" category.

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPARISON GROUPS

Table 2 contains a brief statistical summary of the comparison groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>NE Group (N = 358)</th>
<th>CD Group (N = 105)</th>
<th>E Group (N = 84)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>43.79 ± 12.74</td>
<td>44.44 ± 12.89</td>
<td>47.37&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; ± 13.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.72 ± 0.45</td>
<td>0.58&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; ± 0.49</td>
<td>0.66 ± 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliation&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.87 ± 0.34</td>
<td>0.83 ± 0.38</td>
<td>0.81 ± 0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.79&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; ± 0.41</td>
<td>0.60 ± 0.49</td>
<td>0.80&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; ± 0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4.38 ± 1.18</td>
<td>4.45 ± 1.22</td>
<td>4.26 ± 1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Type (Pop. Density)</td>
<td>3.21 ± 1.35</td>
<td>3.25 ± 1.38</td>
<td>3.26 ± 1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Orientation</td>
<td>3.07 ± 0.80</td>
<td>3.05 ± 0.80</td>
<td>3.08 ± 0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.92 ± 0.81</td>
<td>1.75 ± 0.85</td>
<td>1.67&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; ± 0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about own death&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.36 ± 1.12</td>
<td>3.25 ± 1.34</td>
<td>3.02&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; ± 1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety concerning own death</td>
<td>1.61 ± 0.66</td>
<td>1.66 ± 0.83</td>
<td>1.52 ± 0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety about death of loved ones</td>
<td>2.40 ± 1.00</td>
<td>2.24 ± 1.00</td>
<td>2.14&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; ± 0.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup> Marital status (0 = unmarried, widowed, divorced; 1 = married)
<sup>2</sup> Religious affiliation (0 = non-conventional, 1 = conventional)
<sup>3</sup> Sex (0 = male, 1 = female)

*Signifies that a low score represents a greater degree of the characteristic.

<sup>a</sup> Indicates the mean score is significantly (p < .05) different from that observed for the NE Group.

<sup>b</sup> Indicates the mean score is significantly (p < .05) different from that observed for the CD Group.

The groups did not differ significantly on religious affiliation, educational level, type of community in which they live, or political orientation. Each group tended toward conventional religious affiliation (i.e., Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or non-denominational Christian), typical educational level reached was post-high-school
training, community type was generally defined as a medium-sized city, and political orientation tended toward moderate (on a five-point scale ranging from very conservative to very liberal). The finding of no significant differences on religious affiliation replicates Ring's (1980a, 1980b) observation. Ring (1980a) also reported no differences on a social-class index.

Statistically significant differences were found for age, marital status, sex, and religiosity. The E group was somewhat older (by nearly four years) than the NE group. The proportion of married people was significantly less for the CD group than for the NE group. The CD group also contained a lower proportion of females than the other two groups. Of particular interest is the significantly greater religiosity score for the E group than for the NE group. The religiosity item asked participants how religious they considered themselves to be. The answer choices were on a four-point scale including very religious (scored one), moderately religious, slightly religious, and not at all religious (scored four). Ring (1980a, 1980b) reported that "core" experiencers became more religious following their NDE than non-core experiencers. It is possible that the greater religiosity self-appraisal of the present study's E group reflects such a shift subsequent to their experience; however, there is no way of substantiating that.

Since the NDE literature reports a reduced fear of one's own death following an NDE, it was anticipated that the E group would reveal less perceived anxiety than the CD and NE groups. Although the mean score was in the expected direction, it failed to reach statistical significance. A recent study by Keith Wood and Paul Robinson (1982) found that fear of death was slightly lower for highly self-actualized persons than those of lower self-actualization. They suggested that actualization may be "the degree to which the individual is satisfied with who he is as a human being . . . and fear of death is the degree to which death is integrated into the individual's personal construct system" (pp. 241-242). Possibly the E-group members have integrated personal death more extensively than those comprising the other comparison groups, although as one reenters life and reestablishes goals there may be a degree of "unfinished business" that clouds one's readiness to accept death.

Although the groups did not differ with respect to perceived anxiety regarding one's own death, the E group did manifest significantly more anxiety concerning a loved one's death and more frequent thoughts about their own death than members of the NE group. The CD group did not differ from either the NE or E groups on any attitude-toward-death item.
NDEs AND PSI AND PSI-RELATED EXPERIENCES

Table 3 presents the statistical summary for the three comparison groups in terms of psi and psi-related experiences. The direction of scoring for all types of psi and psi-related experiences is that the higher the numerical value, the greater the incidence of the experience. The experiences are organized in Table 3 in terms of psi perception, psychokinesis and healing, and psi-related and mystical experiences. This structure is similar to the one devised by Palmer in his 1979 survey of psi experiences and subsequently by Kohr (1980). Instead of including psychokinesis (PK) under psi, it is placed in a separate category along with healing, which some researchers have suggested is a special case of PK. Psi-related experiences follow Palmer’s scheme, which includes auras, apparitions, communication with an entity (mediumship or spirit communication), dream interaction, and out-of-body experiences. Mystical experiences are categorized separately although transpersonal experiences are sometimes included among psi-related experiences. The exact wording of the questions measuring psi and psi-related experiences is presented in the Appendix.

Following significant results from analysis of variance, individual t-tests were performed. As a protection against Type I error when sample sizes are unequal and variances likely to differ, the Behrens-Fisher t was calculated along with Welch’s adjustment for degrees of freedom (Kohr and Games, 1977). The analysis revealed little or no differences between the CD and NE groups, but many interesting differences between the E group and the other two groups. In all instances the E group showed a significantly greater tendency to report psi or psi-related experiences such as general ESP in both the waking and the dream state, PK, auras, apparitions, and OBEs.

In addition to each type of psi and psi-related experience, several composite scores were constructed. The total number of types of psi/psi-related experience was found simply by counting the number of different types of experience claimed by the individual respondent. Since there were six response categories (scored one to six), ranging from “never” to “more than 10 times,” the possible score range was 10 to 60. Note that a score of 10 denotes an absence of psi experience as indicated by a “never” response to each of the ten types of experience. Not surprisingly, the composite scores were found to be significantly higher for the E group than for the other comparison groups.

In addition to questions concerning the frequency of psi and psi-
Table 3

Summary of Comparison Group Means and Standard Deviations for Psi and Psi-Related Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psi and Psi-Related Experiences</th>
<th>NE Group (N = 358)</th>
<th>CD Group (N = 105)</th>
<th>E Group (N = 84)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psi Perception</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psi dream</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waking psi</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>3.88a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telepathic communication</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>4.33a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychokinesis and Healing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychokinesis</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing (control over)</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psi-Related Experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing auras</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparitions</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2.83a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with entity</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream interaction</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-body experiences</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-body (control over)</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite: Types of Psi and Psi-Related Experiences</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite: Number of Psi and Psi-Related Experiences</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>9.13</td>
<td>27.38a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystical Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystical experiences</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystical experience composite</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Indicates the mean score is significantly (p < .05) different from that observed for the NE Group.
b Indicates the mean score is significantly (p < .05) different from that observed for the CD Group.

related experiences, respondents were asked, “To what extent are you able to produce this experience voluntarily?” Analyses of that question revealed significantly greater control perceived by E-group members in healing and OBEs. These results are included in Table 3. Group differences in the perceived ability to control other forms of psi/psi-related experiences were not observed and in the interest of brevity are not presented.
Mystical states occurred more frequently for the E group than for the NE or CD groups. A composite mystical-experience score was also computed by combining several items pertaining to whether the experience included an encounter with a spiritual being or a transcendent quality within oneself. Here again, the E group displayed a significantly higher score.

Up to this point analyses have focused on differentiating among three criterion groups. The group of respondents reporting one or more features of a core NDE (E group) has clearly demonstrated a higher incidence of each type of psi or psi-related experience. As suggested earlier, an E-group member with a high NDE score may reflect a "deeper" level experience than the person with a low score. The most extreme difference in this way of assessing depth would contrast the experience of respondents claiming just one NDE feature with those claiming each of the six features measured in the questionnaire. An interesting question is whether the frequency of psi and psi-related experiences is related to NDE depth. In order to have sufficient cases to examine this possibility, respondents claiming one to three features (n=55) were compared with those reporting four to six characteristics (n=29). For convenience, the high scorers are referred to as the "deep" experiencers and the low scorers as "moderate" experiencers.

Statistically significant results were observed for only a few variables. The "deep" group reported significantly more types of psi-related experiences (3.90 to 3.11), a greater number of psi-related experiences (18.48 to 13.66), and a larger number of mystical experiences (3.59 to 3.11).

Clearly, the "deep" vs "moderate" NDE comparisons turned up far fewer significant differences in psi and psi-related experiences than found in the analyses contrasting the NE, CD, and E groups. Since the "deep-moderate" analyses involved fewer cases, the lower incidence of significant results could be attributed to the reduction of sample size. Relevant to this concern is Jacob Cohen's (1969) concept of "effect size." When mean scores are statistically compared Cohen defines effect size (d index) in terms of standard units, i.e., the size of the difference between means relative to the common standard deviation. When applied to the present data, it was found that the d values were indeed smaller for the "deep-moderate" comparisons than for the E-group–non-E-group comparisons. This finding supports the conclusion that psi experience is more strongly related to having an NDE vs. not having one than the NDE depth.
NDEs AND VARIOUS ALTERED STATES

Table 4 displays the statistical results for an openness to dreams, past-life memories, and meditative practices and experiences. The asterisk found next to the descriptors of most experiences signifies that the direction of scoring is reversed, i.e., the lower the score, the greater quantity or perceived quality of something.

Scaled scores were also computed for most of the meditation and dream variables. The psychometric quality of these constructed scores was judged to be satisfactory on the basis of high internal-consistency reliability coefficients.

The E group demonstrated a greater degree of openness toward dream states than the NE and CD groups in nearly each category. Not only did members of the E group tend to report more color, types and number of sense modalities, and unusual dream states, but greater intentionality in recalling dreams and a greater tendency to regard them as helpful.

The incidence of memories interpreted as past-life recall was also greater for the E group. Likewise, the E group excelled on a composite past-life recall variable comprised of several items dealing with awareness of names, places, and events from apparently out of the past that were unknown prior to the emergence of the “memory.”

With respect to meditation, the E group reported greater intensity, meaning, and positive quality of personal meditation sessions, greater consistency in maintaining a meditation schedule, more days per week engaging in meditation, and a more positive influence of meditation on daily life.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are correlational in nature, and definite causal connections cannot be established. It is interesting to speculate on whether E persons report more psi experiences, more frequent and unusual dream states, and more positive meditation experiences because of their intense experience concomitant with a close brush with death. Or, perhaps, are psychically sensitive individuals, when confronted with a near-death situation, more open to experiencing a transcendent state? The potential of psychically sensitive individuals having greater receptivity to the unconscious and to non-rational material was discussed by Palmer (1979) in his effort to explain the relationship between dreaming, mystical states, and psi experience. Palmer noted that a high frequency of dream recall and
Table 4

Summary of Comparison Group Means and Standard Deviations for Dream States, Past-Life Recall, and Meditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences</th>
<th>NE Group (N = 358)</th>
<th>CD Group (N = 105)</th>
<th>E Group (N = 84)</th>
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*Signifies that a low score represents a greater degree of the characteristic.

aIndicates the mean score is significantly (p < .05) different from that observed for the NE Group.

bIndicates the mean score is significantly (p < .05) different from that observed for the CD Group.
a tendency toward lucid dreaming were indicators of the "degree to which the conscious mind is capable of gaining access to the content of the unconscious mind" (p. 248). He also suggested that mystical experience may reflect availability of the unconscious in the waking state. Palmer (1979) maintained that sensitivity to psi, resulting from accessibility to unconscious material, supported the notion that psi capabilities are "latent in the unconscious mind and potentially available to those who can break through the repressive mechanisms (whatever their basis) that ordinarily prevent them from reaching consciousness" (p. 248). A study by Kohr (1980) confirmed Palmer's results and offered evidence of a general psi-sensitivity trait. This interconnectedness of psi and the main features of the core NDE was alluded to by Ring (1980a) when he proposed that the essential properties of the core NDE "are not unique to near-death states but are potentially available to anyone who learns to operate his consciousness independently of the physical body" (p. 234).

A study conducted by Eugene Thomas, Pamela Cooper, and David Suscovich (1982) found that individuals reporting an NDE were more likely to report having intense spiritual experiences as well. Although they entertained the possibility of NDEs rendering subsequent transcendent states more likely, they preferred to interpret the statistical relationship as reflecting "differences in personality traits or cognitive style that underlies the perception and recall of both near-death and intense spiritual-type experiences" (p. 241). According to Abraham Maslow (1971) an individual's capacity to experience transcendent states depends on a quality of openness that permits them to occur. He argued that constricted personalities, such as those with obsessive-compulsive tendencies, tend to block such "peak" experiences.

Evidence of psi susceptibility following an NDE was recently gathered by Greyson (1983b). He found a significantly greater incidence of reported psi and psi-related experiences after the NDE than before. These included the same psi and psi-related experiences described in this investigation, as well as mystical states, lucid dreams, meditation practices, and efforts to analyze dreams for insight. While the results are certainly suggestive of a tendency toward such experiences subsequent to the NDE, Greyson rightfully articulates several viable alternative interpretations that are also consistent with the data. According to Greyson, the NDE may simply have enhanced the individual's awareness of the psi abilities already possessed. Secondly, since data were collected after-the-fact rather than longitudinally, a recall bias may be operating whereby the individual
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considers the NDE as a major life event and attributes exaggerated changes in personality or psi abilities to the ecstatic experience. A third explanation suggested by Greyson is that since the data are based on unverified self-reports, it could be that a delusional belief in one's psi abilities springs from such an overpowering experience as an NDE. Fourth, Greyson pointed out that some underlying third factor may have given rise to the NDE and was also responsible for the subsequent increase in psi experiences.

Evidence of an NDE's potential for releasing subsequent psi experiences is provided by Sabom's (1982) research. He found three cases in which an NDE apparently led to spontaneous autoscopic (out-of-body) experiences. In each instance the individual had no recall of such experiences prior to his or her NDE. One person reported she learned to go out of her body at will to check on things of concern to her. These purposeful excursions permitted her to look in on her infant son in another room or see whether the doors and windows were locked for the night.

As with most non-experimental research, the causal network is difficult to unravel. While we may search for the best explanation, it is certainly possible for several of the interpretations advanced above to have merit.

Palmer (1979) recognized that dream study and meditation represented a quest for deeper self-insight and proposed that psi experiences often served as a stimulus to such activities. It seems equally likely that an NDE could intensify this sense of quest and result in a similar pursuit of self-understanding.

It is interesting to note that a variety of studies have revealed linkages among psi, transcendent states, psi-related experiences, and NDEs. At this stage of research, longitudinal data, although extremely difficult to collect, are needed if we are to trace the manner in which NDEs, spiritual and "growth" practices, attitudes, and peak experiences influence one another.

NOTE

1. The Association for Research and Enlightenment, Dr. Charles Thomas Cayce, President, maintains a Research Committee consisting of the following members: Dr. Robert Jeffries (University of Bridgeport), Dr. Robert L. Van de Castle (University of Virginia), Dr. Henry Reed (independent consultant, Virginia Beach, Va.), Dr. Richard Kohr (Pennsylvania
Department of Education), and Dr. E. Douglas Dean (independent consultant, Princton, N.J.).

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX**

**SURVEY QUESTIONS ON PSI AND PSI-RELATED EXPERIENCES**

The portion of the workbook questionnaire dealing with psi experience presented a brief description of each type of experience followed by two questions regarding the frequency of the experience and degree of control one could exert over the experience. These two questions were phrased as follows:

How many times have you had an experience of this type?

1. Never  
2. One or two times  
3. Three or four times  
4. Five or six times  
5. Seven to ten times  
6. More than ten times
NDEs, altered states, and psi

To what extent are you able to produce this type of experience voluntarily?

1 I have no control over this type of experience
2 About 10 percent of the times I have tried
3 About half of the times I have tried
4 Almost every time I try

DESCRIPTIONS OF EACH TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

Psi-Perception Experiences

A dream which matched in detail an event that occurred before, during, or after your dream, and which you did not know about or did not expect at the time of the dream.

While awake, having a strong feeling, impression, or “vision” that a previously unexpected event had happened, was happening, or was going to happen, and later learning that you were right. Transmission of thoughts from one person to another without the use of sensory perception and without expecting to have contact with that person.

Psychokinesis and Healing Experiences

The movement of an object originating from no “natural” or physical means of motion that you could discover. This would include inexplicable movement, motion or breakage of objects, cessation of function (such as stoppage of clocks).

The restoration to a balanced physical or emotional condition through prayer, laying on of hands, or other “spiritual” technique.

Psi-Related Experiences

Seeing a light around or about a person’s head, shoulders, hands, or body, which was not due to “normal” or “natural” causes.

While awake, having a vivid impression of seeing, hearing, or being touched by another being, which, as far as you could tell, was not due to any external physical or “natural” cause. (Please do not include here experiences of the Christ or other religious figures.)

Experiencing a “communication” with an entity believed to be dead or apparently controlled or “possessed” by a “spirit.”
This type of experience would include communication by hearing a spirit's voice, having the spirit speak through you by controlling your voice, or by controlling your handwriting (automatic writing).

A dream in which you saw and interacted with someone who reported to you later a very similar or identical dream with you in it.

An experience in which you felt that "you" were located "outside" or "away from" your physical body; that is, the feeling that your consciousness, mind, or center of awareness was at a different place than your physical body.

Two additional questions concerning the OBE described above were as follows:

In how many of these experiences did you "see" your physical body while "outside" of it?

In how many of these experiences did you get information about previously unknown places or events that later proved to be accurate?

**Mystical Experiences**

A profound and deeply moving sense of communication, unity and oneness with all of nature, creation, or God. Mystical states are so intense that words cannot express the grandness, peace, and beauty of the experience.

Two additional questions on mystical experience were asked if the respondent claimed to have had this type of experience.

In your mystical experiences have you ever felt you "met" or saw the actual "person" of God, Jesus, or other spiritual "masters"?

In your mystical experiences have you ever felt you experienced or "met" God within yourself, that is, your own soul, or individual spirit or divine self?

Answer choices to these latter two questions were "yes" or "no."

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The Near-Death Experience in Children: Shades of the Prison-House Reopening

Nancy Evans Bush
International Association for Near-Death Studies
Storrs, Connecticut

But trailing clouds of glory do we come
   from God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
   Upon the growing boy.

(William Wordsworth, Ode: Intimations of Immortality, ll. 64-68)

ABSTRACT

Some critics have argued that the near-death experience (NDE) is merely a culturally conditioned response to a life crisis, a reflection of expectations engendered by education, religious training, social mores, and family traditions. A review of seventeen accounts of NDEs in children, including two youngsters still in childhood, indicates that NDEs that occur at early ages appear to be substantially similar in content to adult experiences. These accounts suggest that cultural conditioning is not a primary determinant of NDE contents.

INTRODUCTION

Although the occurrence of near-death experiences (NDEs) in adults is now widely accepted as a legitimate phenomenon, evidence of such experiences happening to children has been sparse. Accounts of childhood NDEs in the archives of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) are primarily retrospective, written as many as sixty-five years after the event. Though these accounts are often vivid, they are necessarily filtered through an adult consciousness. Melvin Morse (1983) has recently described an NDE occurring in a seven-year-old child, and Glen Gabbard and Stuart Twemlow (in press) have discussed details and implications of NDEs in three children between the ages of five and seven. A study of

contemporary childhood experiences is currently underway at the University of Connecticut School of Nursing, which may ultimately provide fuller information about this aspect of near-death research.

Recently IANDS received letters from two mothers of children who had had NDEs during near-drownings. We present in this paper details from our contacts with these two mothers, and elements of fifteen retrospective accounts of childhood NDEs from the IANDS archives. In the absence of more abundant data from a larger sample, this article offers no interpretation of these experiences. Premature speculation as to their psychodynamic or developmental import for child experiencers might serve only to muddy waters now being explored for the first time. For now, the experiences described here will serve as introduction.

At least in the United States, from which these experiences came, adulthood may be characterized as the time when a person may legally be employed, marry, and drive. In most states, these activities become legal at age sixteen, making this age a convenient measure for defining the onset of adulthood. Experiences occurring above the age of fifteen have been excluded from this survey.

RETROSPECTIVE ACCOUNTS

Of the available retrospective accounts, fifteen are sufficiently detailed to provide a clear picture of the experiences. Fourteen of these have been remembered clearly since the event — a period ranging from 11 to 65 years. The other, occurring at the age of 13 months, was recalled 27 years later under hypnosis.

Causal events were, in most cases, relatively common childhood disasters, at least at the time of occurrence: there are four near-drownings; three ruptured appendices; two unidentified illnesses with prolonged high fever; and one case each resulting from mastoiditis, pneumonia/mastoiditis, drug allergy, and a fall. Of two incidents not typically childhood-associated, one resulted from a "heart attack" (no other information given) and one when a boy was swept into a flood-swollen river (not a near-drowning). There is no correlation between age and precipitating event.

These retrospective experiences are here categorized by their predominant NDE features, ordered by frequency of mention rather than by sequence within the experience(s).
NDEs in children

The Light

The adults interviewed for Kenneth Ring's *Life at Death* (1980) were asked, "Did you at any time experience a light, glow, or illumination?" Thirty-four percent answered affirmatively. In Michael Sabom's study (1982), light appeared as a prominent feature in 28 percent of the responses. In the current survey's unsolicited retrospective accounts, with no question asked that might prompt a mention, light is the single most-noted feature of the NDEs, appearing in 65 percent of the experiences.

A nine-year-old girl had a near-death experience four hours after surgery for a ruptured appendix, her surgeon having already told her parents that she would probably not live through the night. As she described her NDE,

[Then] the blackness was gone and in its place was a beautiful soft pink light. All the weight was gone, and I floated back up into the room as light as a feather. I seemed to be filled with this same light, which was the most profound spirit of love that you can imagine. Nothing has ever come near it since. I opened my eyes, and the whole room was just bathed in that beautiful light. In fact, the light completely surrounded everything in the room, there were no shadows. I felt so happy . . . . I heard my father say, 'What's she looking at?' The light lasted for a little while and it was wonderful.

Another nine-year-old girl, diving off the high board at summer camp, slipped and plunged uncontrolled into the ocean. Underwater for ten minutes, she later reported:

The next thing I remember is floating only an inch or two from the ocean's sandy bottom in the midst of a great light. The light wasn't the bright glaring sort of light that makes you blink. Instead, this light was incandescent, almost ethereal. I could see every indentation and curvature in the sand and minute details in the seaweed. If there were fish or shells, I don't remember them. I felt absolutely nothing. Not the water, nor the sand, nothing. I was surrounded by silence, but I wasn't afraid. I wanted to stay there forever. I have never since experienced such a feeling of peace.

A four-year-old girl descended the cellar stairs with a flashlight because the bulb at the landing had burned out. Years later, she reported:

As I started to take the first step down, I flashed the beam of light up at the light bulb, curious to see if a burned-out bulb looked "burned." I stepped out and fell into the darkness.

The next thing I was aware of, was being up near the ceiling over the foot of the stairs. The light was dim and at first I saw nothing unusual. Then I saw myself lying, face down, on the cement, over to the side of the stairway. I was a little surprised, but not at all upset at seeing myself
that way. I watched and saw that I didn’t move at all. After a while, I said to myself, “I guess I’m dead.” But I felt good! Better than I ever had. I realized I probably wouldn’t be going back to my mother, but I wasn’t afraid at all...

I noticed the dim light growing slowly brighter. The source of light was not in the basement, but far behind and slightly above me. I looked over my shoulder into the most beautiful light imaginable. It seemed to be at the end of a long tunnel which was gradually getting brighter and brighter as more and more of the light entered it. It was yellow-white and brilliant, but not painful to look at even directly. As I turned to face the light with my full “body,” I felt happier than I ever had before or have since.

Then the light was gone. I felt groggy and sick, with a terrible headache. I only wanted my mother, and to stop my head from hurting.

A fourteen-year-old boy and his family, trying to escape from their car trapped on a bridge by rising flood waters, were swept over the side and downstream. He later wrote to IANDS:

I knew I was either dead or going to die. But then something happened. It was so immense, so powerful, that I gave up on my life to see what it was. I wanted to venture into this experience which started as a drifting into what I could only describe as a long, rectangular tunnel of light. But it wasn’t just light, it was a protective passage of energy with an intense brightness at the end which I wanted to look into, to touch.

... As I reached the source of the light, I could see in. I cannot begin to describe in human terms the feelings I had over what I saw. It was a giant infinite world of calm, and love, and energy, and beauty. It was as though human life was unimportant compared to this. And yet it urged the importance of life at the same time it solicited death as a means to a different and better life. It was all being, all beauty, all meaning for all existence. It was all the energy of the Universe forever in one place.

As I reached my right hand into it, feelings of exhilarating anticipation overwhelmed me. I did not need my body any more. I wanted to leave it behind, if I hadn’t already, and go to my God in this new world.

A Sense of Well-Being

Of Ring’s (1980) adult sample, 20 percent identified having experienced a sense of well-being (“happy,” “good,” “beautiful”), with 60 percent remarking on the feeling of peace. Among the retrospective childhood accounts, the percentages are almost exactly reversed — 53 percent reporting the sense of well-being and 35 percent feelings of peace. For the two groups, then, 80 percent of the adult experiences and 88 percent of the childhood NDEs included well-being/peace.

As a developmental issue, it will be interesting to see whether larger samples of children reporting recent NDEs follow the pattern of mentioning having felt “happy” and “good” rather than “peace.”
A thirteen-month-old girl, hospitalized with pneumonia in both lungs and mastoiditis in both ears, was too sick to tolerate surgery. Considered near death, she later relived the experience under hypnosis:

I am strapped down — hands, legs, body. I feel excruciating pain. There [are] big people all around [with] enormous hands . . . All at once I am safe. I am being rocked to sleep in a soft, warm and utterly serene and secure cradle. There is no pain, no noise, no turmoil — only peace, beautiful peace. The overhead light in the room is gone; in its place is all-encompassing light, the light which communicates safety and love. I feel so warm and confident inside. There is no pain. I can breathe easily; my limbs are free to move and I am all safe . . . My eyes fix on the window across the room; it is outlined with the warm and happy light. My mother is looking through the window at me.

A thirteen-year-old boy who nearly drowned later reported:

It was a feeling of no pain at all. Like a floating feeling. It was like a beautiful rest period. If I was near death, it was beautiful.

A fourteen-year-old girl with an abscessed tooth had an allergic reaction to sodium pentathol that she was given. Years later, she wrote:

I was traveling towards [the light] rather quickly. I was very warm and cozy and knew something wonderful was at the end of the tunnel and in the light.

A fourteen-year-old girl with a ruptured appendix later reported:

I did not hurt any more. I was surrounded by a puffy cloud. I really was floating in peace. I have never felt as good. My parents asked me if I needed to go to the hospital. I told them no, because I didn't hurt any more and I was dying.

Out-of-Body Experiences

Ring's (1980) adult sample included 37 percent reporting out-of-body experiences, with roughly 33 percent identified as “visually clear.” Among the retrospectively reported NDEs surveyed here, a total of 47 percent reported feeling separated from the physical body, 41 percent of them visually clear experiences.

An eight-year-old boy whose ears had just been lanced for mastoiditis later reported:

Mother was covering me when I felt I was rising up in the air. Although I could see I was rising toward a bright light, I could also look down and see Mother kneeling beside me . . .

A twelve-year-old girl was rushed to the hospital with a ruptured appendix. She later wrote IANDS:
I became aware that not only was I completely out of pain, but that I seemed to be somehow floating along, above the ambulance. I could see my still, white form lying on the stretcher, my mother with tears in her eyes, leaning over my body, my father in the car behind the ambulance, white knuckles grasping the steering wheel. In addition, I could see my grandmother pacing up and down our living room, about fifteen miles in one direction, and my [physician] uncle at the hospital, fifteen miles in the other direction. At the time, nothing seemed odd about being able to be with all of those people at the same time. I remember feeling very detached from them, much as I feel if I walk down a strange street and casually glance into someone’s back yard.

A six-year-old boy with polio fell face-down in foot-deep water in which he was wading without his leg brace. Years later, he wrote:

Suddenly I was viewing the scene from a vantage point about two or three feet above, behind, and to the right of my mother’s right shoulder. She was sitting on the beach in a folding chair. My next older brother was playing in the sand to her right, and I could see myself floundering in the water between and beyond them. Just as I got there, my mother put down the newspaper she was holding open in front of her and reading, saw me in the water trying to call for help, and then turned to my brother and calmly told him, “Go pull your brother out of the water.” I remember the words distinctly. I saw my brother stand up, walk out into the water where I was, and reach down and grab me by the shoulder. The next thing I knew, I was back in the water with my brother pulling me up.

The Tunnel, Darkness

Once again, the childhood retrospective accounts show a higher percentage of mentions of entering darkness or “the tunnel” than adult accounts. The adults surveyed by Ring (1980) reported a 23 percent incidence of “entering the darkness” (41 percent in the retrospective accounts), with an 18 percent incidence of the tunnel (30 percent in the retrospective accounts).

A ten-year-old boy, sick for several weeks with an unidentified illness, had an NDE shortly after “the doctors had given up”: . . . I don’t remember the entrance, but in a little while I was in a dark tunnel. There was absolutely no sound, and all was black. I couldn’t see to make my way through the tunnel, but I was being wafted along as a speck of dust, pitch black, but as I went along with neither sight nor sound, I felt at ease. I thought I was discovering a new cave.

After a while the tunnel became square in section, and along I went and I became annoyed, and thought to myself that the journey was pointless and fruitless and I was wasting valuable time. Just when I was about to turn back in disgust (I was completely alone), I saw a tiny speck of light ahead. I went on, and as I did the speck grew larger, and I thought it was well I hadn’t turned back because I was going to discover something at last.
At about 150 yards from the end, I saw plainly that there was brilliant white light out there beyond the square end of the tunnel. It interested me and I went on. All was yet quiet, and I went blissfully on, enjoying the journey at last.

When I was about twenty-five yards from the end, the light became the most brilliant I have ever seen, yet it did not hurt my eyes. I began to wonder about that light because all I could see was light: no landscape, no people, nothing but a sea of light. And not a single ray entered the tunnel. The tunnel was black right to the end, and then there was the sea of light.

I went closer, cautious now because it seemed that the end of the tunnel was pretty high up on the side of a cliff, and since I couldn't see through the light, I didn't know how far the drop might be, if I left the tunnel. When I was near the end, I took a good look around at the sea of light. I was urged to jump into it, and assured that I would not fall to ground. No voice said this, it just came to me from a kind of presence. I thought it might be fun to try; but in an instant I knew that if I left the end of the tunnel I'd never find it again, and hence never get back home.

I turned around and started back through the tunnel, and that is the last I remember.

[The final paragraph of this account reads, "Believe me, if you go through what I have described, you come back with the thought that it's a good thing you didn't dive into that whipped cream of lovely light too soon. But you know you have 'seen the light.'"]

A post-operative nine-year-old girl, the first case described above, reported:

Then a strange uneasiness came over me, and as I watched, the darkness from the hall gradually came into the room and filled it. It seemed to have a weight to it, and as the room got darker, it became harder for me to breathe, like there was a weight on my chest. It felt as if this darkness was pushing me down, and as I looked up at the ceiling I noticed that it was getting smaller and smaller. It was like being pushed slowly down a mine shaft.

A fourteen-year-old girl with an allergic reaction to sodium pentothal, described above in the section on "Well-Being," also reported:

All I knew was I was traveling — not walking or running, just somehow moving smoothly — down a long black tunnel with bright green and red lights on either side. At the end of the tunnel was a yellow or golden light. I was traveling towards it rather quickly. . . . It seems I got about half-way to the light when I started to reverse and it got colder. The next thing I knew . . . the dentist said, "You gave us quite a scare."

The fourteen-year-old boy swept over the bridge, also described above, stated:

This experience . . . started as a drifting into what I could only describe as a long rectangular tunnel of light. But it wasn't just light, it was a pro-
tective passage of energy with an intense brightness at the end which I wanted to look into, to touch.

CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

The near-death experiences recounted here occurred between the ages of 13 months and 14 years; they were written down by the now-adult experiencers anywhere from 11 to 65 years later. Median age of the adults at the time of writing was 48, with a range of 25 to 72 years.

Specific analysis of the differences between retrospective accounts and those of children remembering recent experiences will obviously provide useful information; however, that study must wait for the accumulation of an adequate population of recent child experiencers. The two accounts that follow are more recent, as the experiencers are still children. Both are direct transcriptions of the child's experience as told to the mother. Although it would be highly desirable to have a tape of the child describing the NDE himself, this lack may be counter-balanced by the fact that in relating the account to his mother, the child was in a natural setting in which he was, quite literally, "at home," and without the need to adjust to an unfamiliar interviewer.

Robin

Because of its remarkable force and openness, Robin's mother's letter is reprinted here almost in entirety.

On December 18, 1971, I had my son. My husband Jose and I were overjoyed. A beautiful perfect strong son. He would kick so hard in the bathtub I would be frightened of his strength. A beautiful boy. So good. He never cried much. He smiled so early. Never sick. So strong.

The morning of August 9, 1975, my husband was very nervous all morning. He was to meet my sister, husband, and two children for the first time. He agreed on that, but all the way up to our family home, Jose would say, "I don't want to go to Crystal Lake." [But] we all went...

We got on a boat to go out to our own private area... Robin cried all the way on the boat across the lake. I remember the heat was very intense. Dry, too. When we arrived, I can remember pulling him with all my strength off the boat. Jose came over to me and said, "I hate it here." I had Robin in my hand and he was still angry. I let go of his hand and told him, "Robin, Mommy is going to get you an inner tube," but he said, "No." I turned around and he was gone.

I looked around and everyone was swimming or sunbathing. My sister Beth had already put her blanket down and was laying down sunbathing. She had two boys with us, one Robin's age. The men were already swimming. I let out a scream of death. "Beth, I can't find Robin!"
Within seconds, everyone on the beach was looking. Ten minutes went by. No Robin. I ran up on a hill. Jose followed. The rocks on the hill felt like razors on my feet but I didn’t care. I hoped Robin went up the hill. Jose embraced me. I felt totally helpless as I screamed in his arms and he cried in mine. I just knew he was dead.

As we looked down the hill, a lifeguard boat drove up. Everyone screaming to have him help. Jose left me and went back down to look. Three lifeguards. About fifteen men by this time.

As I started down the hill, Robin came up feet first by the lifeguards. Fifteen minutes in ten feet of water by the dock. No one knew the dock was deep because the lake about two feet away was shallow. A new lake and no signs. By this time, sheriffs were holding me away from Robin. Jose was holding me, too. I remember feeling worthless because I couldn’t get to my own son. I prayed. My sister left a second and came running back. “He is alive, they have a heartbeat.”

I said, “No, she is saying that so I won’t go crazy.” When I saw a helicopter, I then felt maybe, because they wanted to take him to the hospital nearby.

[At the hospital] we met a lady doctor. She told us, “He’s alive, but very, very sick.” She stayed with Robin for many hours. Robin was in a deep coma. Machines and a plastic box over his head. I couldn’t touch him. My baby, three years and eight months. Our tears were endless.

The doctor transferred him to [the] Medical Center and stayed with him all night until he was stabilized. I drove out [there] three times a day because my work wouldn’t let me off. We tore our car apart, but I didn’t care.

Two weeks. No change. One day I went in his room. His bed was stripped. No sheets, no Robin. I dug my fingers into Jose. A housekeeper came in his room and said, “He’s down the hall.” We walked down the hall, always numb. I thought he was dead. As we slowly walked into the room, Robin was laughing at a clown passing out balloons.

The next day he was in a wheelchair. We took him down to the cafeteria for lunch. He ate like a horse. Talking to us. Walking with us slowly for a few days.

In three weeks he was back to the day-care center.

No brain damage. Just ear damage that has been corrected.

Robin is eleven now, and about six months ago he shared something with me about the white light. I couldn’t understand until I listened carefully.

. . . He said, “A long time ago I was awake. Not asleep! I was going up in the air and saw you and Papa crying. Something came to me and said you have to go back. I felt good [to come back], but I liked all the people I saw.”

I asked Robin who he saw, and he said they were too bright, but, “One man held me and I felt so good I wanted to stay, but he said no.”

Just a few days ago, I reminded Robin of what he told me and he didn’t remember and laughed at me. Maybe someday he will remember again.

I do know God gave me back my son, but I know he is not mine forever. He is a gift I must take good care of until he is ready to share his life with others.
Jer was four when he fell into the deep end of the apartment house swimming pool. A year later, his mother heard of IANDS and wrote, saying, “I need help in trying to explain certain things which I know nothing about. Don’t think this is a crack-pot letter. I’m really confused about this.”

What follows is a verbatim account (rearranged for chronological sequence) of a lengthy telephone conversation with Jer’s mother.

The day it happened, Jer had gone outside to play. Maybe ten minutes. I had checked on him maybe ten minutes before. The other boys came running and told me Jer was in the water.

My girl friend pulled him out of the pool. I knew he was dead. I could see it on his face. His lips were pale blue. I knew he was dead. I started mouth-to-mouth, and then my other girl friend took over. He was in the water four or five minutes, in the deep end. The paramedics got there real quick.

The day of the accident, two doctors had come from [the Medical Center] to do a conference on the new controlled coma procedures for drownings. They were still at our little hospital and they drove back to [the Medical Center] with Jer. They started him on the drugs right away.

They put him into a controlled coma for seven days, with his temperature way down. The first brain scan they did was unreadable. They said there was just nothing there.

Then we'd go in and say, “Hi, Jer, Mom’s here,” and I’d kiss him. And his heart rate would go up. Some of the doctors said we didn’t have to be there, that it was too much for us every day, but I knew we had to be there. I know he knew somehow that we were there. They told us to keep talking to him. His heart rate went up, and other things.

Two or three days later, they did another brain scan. The nurse said it was better, but the doctors still said there was major brain damage. They said he might die when they started to warm him up. They started warming him up on Thursday. They said it might take until Sunday, because they were doing it real slow, but he started coming around almost immediately. They didn’t know what to do, he was coming around so fast.

They said he wouldn’t remember anything about the experience, if he could remember anything at all. They really expected him to be so damaged. But when he woke up, the first thing he said was, “Get me a doctor – I’m drowning.”

I should tell you, Jer has always been terrified of water. He was just terrified. After we got him home from the hospital, we had a little party for him. Kind of a welcome back. I mean, we were just so glad that he was – well, that he was back at all. And the first thing he did, he said he wanted to go in the pool. I nearly died. I never wanted to go near the thing
again. But I put his floaters on him and he went over and dove right in the deep part. When he came up, he said to his brother, “See, Jon, I came back again.”

He walked around with this for almost a year, and then one day he came to me and said, “Sit down. I have to talk to you, Mother.” That’s not a five-year-old. He never calls me “Mother.”

He said, “When I drowned, I didn’t want to come back. I saw something real pretty in the sky. I saw you and Josie and another lady working on me. I was sitting on the roof and I could see you.

“Then it got real dark and I walked down a tunnel. There was a bright light at the end, and a man was standing there.”

I asked him, “Who was the man?”

He said, “It was God. And I said I wanted to stay. But God said it wasn’t my time yet and I had to come back. I put my hand out and God put his hand out and then God pulled his hand back. He didn’t want me to stay.

“On the way back, I saw the devil. He said if I did what he wanted, I could have anything I wanted.”

I said, “You know God is good and the devil is evil.”

He said, “The devil said I could have anything I wanted, but I didn’t want him bossing me around.”

I said, “Mom and Dad wanted you back real bad, and God knew that. He let you come back to us.” And he said, “When I fell in the water, I called and called for you, but you didn’t hear me.”

Since his experience, Jer’s mother reports, he has become moody, with dreams — good and bad — that affect his behavior the following day. She says he gets “a faraway look” and says his dreams are sometimes about “castles in the sky.”

The beginning of school led to severe behavioral disruptions that have led Jer’s parents to take him for counseling. Believing the near-drowning experience to be related to the behavior changes, Jer’s mother told the psychologist about it; however, the response was, “You know children and their imaginations.” The therapist will not discuss it.

Our interview concluded with the following:

When he gets moody, I’ll ask him why.

“I think I’ll keep that my business for a while,” he says. It’s like a grown-up person in a little body. He seems to have no sense of fear, and that scares me. Pain doesn’t seem to bug him, either. It just doesn’t bother him.

He gets this faraway look and if I ask he says it’s so nice there. Is he going to try to do something to get back there? I think there’s something there, too, that he doesn’t want to talk to Mom about. Something is bothering him that he can’t tell me. What do I do? I mean, I’m saying, “Come on back, Jer,” and God’s up there, and I’m saying — what do I do now?
FEATURES OF CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Adherents to the "tabula rasa" view of childhood development may find these accounts disquieting. There is no indication here that children's experiences are simpler, less detailed, or different in structure from those occurring in adults as described by Raymond Moody (1975), Ring (1980), Sabom (1982), and George Gallup (1982). What may be most remarkable about them is that, when compared with the content of adult experiences, they are so unremarkable.

Quantitatively, differences in the rates of occurrence of specific features are obvious, using Ring's (1980) data for comparison. However, as Ring's respondents participated in a structured interview and the childhood experiencers did not, the comparability of the percentages may not be reliable. With this qualification, the percentages are given in the Table on page 189.

Child/Adult Experience Comparisons

The incidence of certain features in these childhood NDEs varies from those of adult experiences.

Life review and judgment. Both Moody (1975) and Ring (1980) found a strong relationship between the life review and the idea of judgment. It is all the more interesting, then, that none of the childhood accounts includes a life review, for nowhere in any of these experiences is the word "judgment" mentioned, nor "judge," nor the idea that one's life might be evaluated as "good" or "bad." The concept is totally absent, even among the older children who might have been expected to identify more closely with adult thought patterns, and in the three who believed themselves either dead or dying.

Four of the children encountered a figure or presence, variously identified as "God," "a big man," or "like a giant." Although the ages of the four are three years and eight months, four, nine, and fourteen years — obviously representing widely differing developmental stages — the concept of judgment or of "goodness/badness" is absent from them all. Fear is not mentioned as an element in the encounters, nor are awe, joy, bliss, nor any of the other characteristics described by adults. One could call this group of children matter-of-fact in encountering the presence.

Encounters with deceased persons. It is probably not surprising that only two of these childhood accounts report meetings with
## PERCENTAGES OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCERS REPORTING NDE FEATURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Incidence</th>
<th>Childhood N=17 (Unsolicited mentions)</th>
<th>Adult N=49 (Solicited mentions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of well-being</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(happy, good, beautiful)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation from body</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering the darkness</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunnel</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of fear</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter with spiritual</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presences, voices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No pain</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floating</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom, “knowingness”</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffability</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative elements</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter with deceased people</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of dying</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of a boundary</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believed self dead</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life review</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chose to return</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told to return</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Just came back”</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information about return</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
deceased persons. One, a twelve-year-old, said he met “a teacher and a schoolmate”; the other, an eight-year-old boy, reported entering a garden and meeting a girl somewhat older than he who identified herself as his sister. Asking his parents about her later, he discovered that an older sister had died at birth.

**Knowing; the feeling of wisdom.** Although adults have reported a powerful sense of knowledge, of being suffused with information that sometimes — and startlingly — surfaces after resuscitation, the children’s experiences tend to be presented in specifically age-related terms. “The overwhelming feeling was one of wisdom or a great ‘knowingness,’” wrote a woman of her experience. “That is a strange feeling for a twelve-year-old who one moment has the sense that all grownups know so much and then the next moment feels so wise. I recall sort of pausing to savor that feeling.”

Another wrote, “I felt wonderful and calm and strong. I wasn’t nine years old, I was eternal.”

And about an experience at the age of four, a woman noted, “I felt strong and confident, with a strong sense that everything was all right. I didn’t feel like a little child or any age at all.”

**Absence of fear.** Although mentioned more frequently by adults (47 percent as compared to 35 percent in children), absence of fear appears as a strong element in the six accounts in which it is explicit. In all cases, the lack of fear is especially noted for its contrast to the child’s usual feelings; its absence is marked, specific, and clearly remembered. In their accustomed selves, said the writers, they were timid, afraid of heights, fearful of separation from their parents, frightened in strange situations, or aware of being powerlessly small; yet during the NDE, these terrors vanished.

By contrast, adult comments about being unafraid are stylistically more casual, on the order of an offhand remark. Reading a group of the childhood experiences, by contrast, evokes powerful reminiscences of the nameless terrors that accompany being very young.

Worth mentioning for its fearless tone is the account of the ten-year-old boy exploring the “pitch black” square tunnel. “I thought I was discovering a new cave,” said the writer, and then, “… I was wasting valuable time. Just when I was about to turn back in disgust … I saw a tiny speck of light ahead. … I thought it was well I hadn’t turned back because I was going to discover something at last.” Despite a lapse of forty-five years, the account carries with it a whiff of Huckleberry Finn.

**Negative elements.** Sabom reported that “Momentary fright or bewilderment sometimes accompanied the initial passage into dark-
ness. . . . In time, however, these unpleasant emotions were replaced with calm, peace, or tranquillity” (1982, p. 41). Ring noted that “Although people sometimes report feeling scared or confused near the beginning of their experience, none felt they either were on their way to hell or that they had ‘fallen into’ it” (1980, p. 192).

In general, the childhood accounts corroborate these remarks, with some qualifications. One lengthy account describes an experience, not characterized by its writer as “hellish,” which was nonetheless very frightening to her right up to a last-minute rescue by a presence. The experience of the four-year-old who said he met “the devil” has not yet been investigated by direct interview with the youngster to elicit his reaction to or interpretation of the incident. His account, as reported by his mother, is unusual not only for its specific mention of “the devil,” but also because the pattern of his experience moves from positive (strongly wanting to stay with the presence he identifies as God) to negative (encountering, and not wanting to remain with, a presence identified as negative). This is in contrast to the Ring and Sabom findings that negatively inclined experiences resolve positively.

The tunnel. A curious finding is that the only four-cornered tunnels mentioned in all of IANDS’ archives are the two appearing in these accounts, one described as “square in section” and the other as “a long, rectangular tunnel.”

Light. As indicated earlier, an average of 31 percent of the Ring and Sabom adult experiencers mentioned light as a prominent characteristic of the NDE, while 65 percent of the childhood experiencers described it as a major feature. In an effort to identify specific differences in the descriptions of child and adult experiencers, I was able to find only one minor variance: in none of the childhood accounts is the light termed “magnetic,” although in two instances anticipation is mentioned. Quite possibly because the majority of these accounts are retrospective, vocabulary differences are minimal; descriptions of the light’s color(s) and affective elements show no more variance than can be found within a group of all-adult experiences.

In short, in this sample of childhood accounts, the light is described almost exactly as it is in adult narratives, but is mentioned twice as frequently.

CONCLUSION

Despite the small number and retrospective nature of the available accounts, certain conclusions appear justifiable.
1. Near-death experiences can and do occur in children, quite possibly even among youngsters in pre-linguistic developmental stages. Data collection from very young experiencers will present interesting, though probably not insurmountable, challenges to researchers.

2. Childhood experiences appear to follow patterns similar to those encountered with adults. With the exception of the life review and sense of judgment (at least in the experiences surveyed here), the features of children’s experiences are comparable to those reported by adults in content, affect, and perceived significance, though wide variances have been noted in frequency of certain features.

3. Within the childhood population, age is unrelated to the type or complexity of experience. In an all-child population (as contrasted with the adults writing retrospectively), attained language development may affect the likelihood of capturing complete and accurate descriptions, as may the development of conceptual abilities. In the accounts presented here, it is not possible to determine how much of the affective interpretation is an adult overlay, though the specificity of memory detail in some cases (see “Knowing: the feeling of wisdom” section) suggests that this is not a major issue.

4. According to the writers of these retrospective accounts, the aftereffects of childhood experiences may be subjectively perceived as strongly as those that follow adult experiences. With little “before” and much “after” in the lives of the experiencers, examination of this issue will be muddied as developmental changes mask clear identification of most behavioral aftereffects. However, Jer’s experience alone is sufficient testimony to the need for thoughtful study of NDEs in children, with careful attention given to their aftereffects and the development of interventions that will support the children and their families as they work through integration of the experience.

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Bozzano and the First Classification of Deathbed Visions: A Historical Note and Translation

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ABSTRACT

Ernest Bozzano was an Italian parapsychologist who published, in 1923, one of the most important historical studies on deathbed visions. The book, while influencing such scholars as Charles Richet and Sir William Barrett, remained largely forgotten and untranslated. This paper provides a translation of selections from Bozzano’s monograph illustrating his unique classification of deathbed visions.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, a number of studies have attempted to classify the phenomena of near-death experiences, with particular reference to the visions of the dying (e.g., Moody, 1975; Osis & Haraldsson, 1977; Ring, 1980). Historically, the first such study is generally considered to be William F. Barrett’s Death-Bed Visions (1926), while Robert Crookall (1961) was the first to define the major elements of what is now termed the “core” or “prototypic” near-death experience. Barrett himself was heavily influenced by an earlier, albeit forgotten, investigation conducted by Italian Ernesto Bozzano (1923).

Bozzano was born in 1862, and although he is often referred to as Doctor or Professor, he had no formal degrees and was largely self-educated. He became attracted to parapsychology through the work of Eusapia Palladino during the early 1890s. He wrote numerous monographs on such subjects as mediumship, haunted houses, and ESP. Although his writings cited “data” from academic sources as well as accounts from the spiritualist press, they were well received by lay and professional audiences in Italy and France. In Italy, he was considered the leading psychical researcher among a group that
included Pictet and Schiaparelli (Reyes, 1970). He had only minimal influence on British and American scholars since his only books to be translated into English were three minor works. Several of his papers appeared in the English edition of a French journal, *Annals of Psychical Science*, between 1905 and 1910 (Christopher, 1979). The few case studies mentioned in these papers were nonetheless cited by numerous subsequent investigators (Osborn, 1974).

Bozzano contributed regularly to a number of spiritualist publications (e.g., *Luce e Ombre*, *La Revue Metapsychique*, and *La Revue Spirite*) and soon became the chief spokesman for the spiritualist theory that life survived death. The anti-survivalists at the turn of the century were headed by Charles Richet, who was eventually converted to the survival theory by Bozzano. The source of that conversion was a monograph (1923) appearing in French as *Phénomènes Psychiques au Moment de la Mort*. The date of the original Italian edition is unknown, but references cited in the book include journal articles from 1921. It is important to note that Bozzano's first paper on deathbed visions appeared in the July 1906 issue of *Revue du Monde Invisible*.

Bozzano sent a copy of this book to Richet, who wrote back that he found Bozzano's discussions and case studies on deathbed visions to be explainable only within the framework of the survival theory. In the opinion of parapsychology scholar D. Scott Rogo (personal communication, 1983), Bozzano's book represents one of the three most important historical studies on deathbed visions, the two others being Barrett (1926) and Hyslop (1918). According to Rogo (personal communication, 1983), “Barrett was greatly influenced by Bozzano, [who] helped him to formulate some of his own views about deathbed visions. In fact, he had annotated his copy of the monograph and was going to write more specifically on Bozzano’s views, and his support of them, but died before writing these discussions for his book.” Barrett's book, minus these notes on Bozzano, was published posthumously in 1926.

We have recently obtained a copy of *Phénomènes* from a rare-book dealer in Paris. The book’s 260 pages are divided into three parts: Part I, “Concerning apparitions of the dead at the deathbed” (113 pages); Part II, “Phenomenon of ‘telekinesis’ in connection with the events of death” (66 pages); Part III, “Transcendental Music” (81 pages). In Part I, Bozzano classifies deathbed visions into six categories of phenomena and cites numerous case examples of each. He considered the first two categories of primary importance and devoted more than half of Part I to a discussion of these cases. The remaining
categories were given minor attention. Selections from his classification system are given below.

FIRST CATEGORY

"Cases in which the apparitions of the deceased appear solely to the dying person and relate to persons he knew were dead. [24 cases]

"These are the sorts of manifestations that occur most frequently in the present casuistry; we perceive that they are also the least interesting from a scientific point of view. Given the very vivid state of emotion in which the dying person, who is still conscious, finds himself, and given, also, the hyperaesthesia of the cortical centers, and the more or less morbid conditions in which they are functioning; and, finally, given the inevitable bent of thought of the dying person who can only turn with supreme agony toward the dear and withdrawn ones, and toward those who have preceded him to the grave, one can easily conceive that all this frequently determines the phenomena of subjective hallucination.

"Despite this, scientific research methods require us to note that in the cases of apparitions of the dead appearing at the deathbed, we meet a circumstance that cannot be easily explained by the hallucinatory hypothesis; and that is that if the thoughts ardently turned to loved ones were the determining cause of the phenomena in question, the dying person rather than submit solely to hallucinations about the deceased — sometimes deceased forgotten by the patient — should more frequently still be the subject of hallucinations portending to living persons to whom he is closely attached — which does not happen" (pp. 4-5).

SECOND CATEGORY

"Cases in which the apparitions of the deceased are still perceived only by the dying person, but refer to persons whom he did not know were dead. [6 cases]

"The instances belonging to this category are divided into two distinct classes. The first concerns cases in which the attendants had knowledge of the death of the person who will be subjectively appearing to the patient who is ignorant of the fact of the death; the second refers to cases in which the patient and the attendants are equally unaware of the fact in question. In both circumstances one
arrives again at explaining the facts by the hallucinatory hypothesis combined with telepathy. In the first instance, it suffices to assume a phenomenon of unconscious telepathic transmission on the part of the attendants; in the second, one must have recourse to telepathic transmission at a distance” (p. 42).

THIRD CATEGORY

"Cases in which other people gathered about the dying person perceive the same phantoms that he does. [8 cases]

“This group of cases, with a collective perception of the same phantom, presents a great deal of theoretical interest, where one arrives once again at the hypothesis of telepathic transmission of thought although one does not find oneself facing any special circumstances. In effect, the coincidence of the apparition viewed by third persons, collectively with the dying one, can be attributed to the fact that the latter serves as the transmitting agent of an elaborate form of hallucination in the brain, and that is in the case of simultaneous visualization; if, on the other hand, the phantom is seen by the attendants and the dying person at different times and places, then that fact acquires a great theoretical significance in the sense of spiritualistic interpretation” (p. 53).

FOURTH CATEGORY

"Cases of apparitions at the deathbed coinciding with predictions or similar confirmations obtained by means of mediums. [7 cases]

“In this case, one can always suppose that an apparition at the deathbed, predicted or affirmed by a medium, takes root in a telepathic rapport being produced between the subconscious of the medium and that of the patient, or between that of the medium and the patient, the medium and the physicians” (p. 70).

FIFTH CATEGORY

"Cases in which the intimates of the dying person are the only ones to see the phantoms of the dead. [9 cases]

“Cases of this nature are pretty rare, and that is natural as, in the order of probabilities, we are aware that most manifestations appear
Bozzano and deathbed visions

to the dying persons alone, and that apparitions appearing to the patient and the attendants together are relatively rare and rarer still are those perceived by the attendants alone.

"Concerning the theoretical interpretation of these facts and from an absolutely scientific point of view, they are liable to be explained by telepathic hypothesis, supposing a phenomenon of transmission of thought from the dying person — under special circumstances" (pp. 85-86).

SIXTH CATEGORY

"Examples of apparitions of the dead, appearing a short time after a death and observed in the same house where the corpse lies. [1 case]

"Everyone can readily understand the great theoretical importance of the cases which now concern us. If one could collect a sufficient number of examples, they would make an important contribution in favor of the spiritualist thesis. That possibility is, however, still remote; the facts in question are the rarest ones, which is not surprising, given the extraordinary conditions which are necessary to produce them" (pp. 102-104).

CONCLUSIONS

"With this work on the phenomena 'of apparitions of the deceased at the deathbed,' I have applied myself to a hard task, and the conclusions to which I have arrived can be summarized in the following terms:

"According to the methods of analysis compared between the telepathic phenomena and the 'visions of the dying,' it appears to indicate that when these visions are perceived solely by the attendants, or else by the attendants and the dying person, one must exclude in principle that the event is produced through telepathic communication from the thoughts of the dying person. It therefore follows logically that the visions perceived solely by the dying person cannot have a different origin from the others, and that, consequently — always as a general rule — the same source must be attributed to the entire group of phenomena. As to the nature of this source, one can argue the case of collective visions, or the identity of a phantom that cannot be explained by transmission of hallucinatory thoughts of the dying one returning by necessity the worth of the proof. It is what also proves the kinds of phenomenal manifestations too often irrecon-
cilable with the hallucinatory hypothesis. In other words: according to the scientific study of the manifestations in question, one is brought to the conclusion that the hallucinatory and telepathic-hallucinatory hypotheses are insufficient to explain all the facts, and that, by contrast, the spiritualist hypothesis lends itself to this most admirably” (pp. 112-113).

COMMENT

Prior to Bozzano’s classification scheme, investigators of psychic phenomena had published numerous cases of apparitions occurring at death, but none had concentrated on the deathbed visions per se. And none had attempted to group these seemingly complex and idiosyncratic phenomena into cohesive and well-defined categories. Bozzano accomplished all of that. And while his interpretations were heavily influenced by spiritualist and psychic thinking, he entertained alternative explanations such as the hallucination hypothesis.

In the beginning of the book, Bozzano remarked that he was not trying to prove a thesis but to recall a number of incidents that had a limited scientific value but, when taken together, had a greater value. The collective value of the cases convinced Bozzano, Richet, and others that the survival theory was the most salient explanation for deathbed visions. Bozzano’s arguments may be far from compelling, but we can be pleased that the soul of his work, if not his body, has survived.

NOTE

1. The authors thank D. Scott Rogo for supplying helpful information on the life and works of Ernest Bozzano.

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Requests for reprints to:

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BOOK REVIEW

Easy Death
by Da Free John – Dawn Horse Press, $10.95
406 pp., Quality paperback, 1983

John White
Cheshire, Connecticut

When a genius speaks, it behooves us to pay attention and consider his presentation. Da Free John is a religious genius – an enlightened spiritual master whose presence in the world is a rare opportunity for the rest of humanity to awaken to the Supreme Identity as he himself has. His decade of teaching has produced a prodigious amount of brilliant discourse on a variety of subjects. Altogether, they constitute the basis for human reformation and the emergence of a global culture based on love and wisdom, conducive to accelerating the evolutionary process that seeks to have us all ascend to godhood. Other books of Da Free John comment on meditation, religion, science, sexuality, diet, exercise, spiritual practice, and politics. Easy Death continues his examination of the fundamental aspects of existence and the enlightened stance one should have with regard to them.

There are five parts to this compilation of talks and essays: the truth about death, the transcendence of fear, beyond the traditional wisdom on death, transcending the cosmic mandala, and how to serve the dying. Space doesn’t permit detailed coverage of the book, so I will summarize and quote in order to give the flavor of this tremendously important work, paying special attention to Da Free John’s pronouncements about the near-death experience.

Kenneth Ring, founder and president of IANDS, has provided a most engaging foreword to Easy Death. He notes that Da Free John,

provides a full account of the interplay of neurological, psychological, and psychic factors that together will determine the form of the near-death experience. The framework he offers to us is again not to be found in either the popular or scientific literature in near-death studies. In all

these ways — and in others you will discover for yourself — Da Free John undermines the convenient understanding of this phenomenon and reveals its hidden and deeper meanings (p. xvii).

Death rightly understood, Da Free John says, is a process of transition and an opportunity for transformation-enlightenment by passing beyond all phenomena of nature and egoic-based attentional processes to the source of cosmos and consciousness alike, God or Transcendental Reality. However, we need not — should not — simply wait for death. The difference between ordinary individuals and enlightened beings is the sense of self or identity with which they live. Fear of death is, as Da Free John puts it, “fear of surrender to infinity” (p. 105). Our real identity, our true self is infinite and immortal — Eternal Life. This can be realized while alive; enlightenment is possible now. The ego — the contracted, separate self-sense — can be undone through spiritual practice. “It is only the transcendence of self-contraction, self-possession, fear and the egoic mind of fear that permits us to participate in existence totally, freely, and to the degree of real Happiness” (p. 125).

Fear of death is thus transcended so that “easy death” becomes the moment-to-moment surrender or sacrifice of separate selfhood into the Divine, even at the moment of biological demise:

We should fully consent to die at the moment of death, and so be released toward what is new and awaiting above and beyond the “realities” of the present body-mind. Our ability to do this will be either enhanced or limited to the same degree we are able to surrender in God while alive. Therefore, in order for death to be an ecstatic transition for us, we must not only study and prepare for the specific and terminal process of death itself, but we must also devote ourselves to an ecstatic or self-transcending way of life while alive (p. 46).

Or as Indic scholar Georg Feuerstein puts it succinctly in his long and excellent introduction to Easy Death: “Surrender is the only authentic response to death, just as it is the only true response to Life” (p. 4).

Short of that, Da Free John says, people create all sorts of consoling fantasies about death, including “life-after-life” phenomena. At this point in his teaching, readers of this journal and especially NDErs should prepare for a shock, because Da Free John declares,

... the experiences and visions [near-death experiencers] report should be recognized rightly as hallucinated phenomena that arise from stimulation of the higher centers of the brain during the withdrawal of energy and attention from the body at death. These experiences, like those of the conventional mystic, are, no matter how consoling or sublime, nonetheless founded in ego-consciousness (p. 50).
My first response to that statement was to recall all the instances of paranormal knowledge that NDErs have reported and had substantiated. It seemed Da Free John had overstepped himself, as he occasionally does, when he said "hallucinated phenomena." I was therefore pleased to find his position qualified by acknowledging that there are indeed veridical phenomena such as out-of-body clairvoyance and that he does not deny the traditional cosmology of higher planes of existence populated by other beings. Rather, his point — with which I fully agree — is this: Just as our minds play tricks on us while living, so it is while dying. Anything less than enlightenment is to some degree illusion, misperception, clouded vision, fantasy, even hallucination. Near-death experiences, then, even though they occur genuinely in an after-death environment, are nevertheless productions of an ego-based state of consciousness. They are not ultimate reality. It is, Da Free John implies, inherently impossible for an enlightened person to have an NDE. Only the ego dies; only the ego "goes" anywhere after death; only the ego reincarnates. The enlightened person realizes that he or she is always already infinite, eternal, immortal, the Self of all.¹

Now it is true that NDErs often report diminution of ego-sense and reorientation of their lives toward selfless, compassionate service as a result of their postmortem experience. Thus, Da Free John does not totally devalue or dismiss the NDE. He does, however, point out its tentative, relative nature and deglamorizes it. He says:

> We have the opportunity in the subtler range of our existence [such as the NDE environment] to explore higher conditions of existence and the Transcendental or Ultimate Condition of all existence. That opportunity is directly available to our consciousness in the present moment, but we are dissociated from it through the habit mechanism of attention . . . . What people are seeing in the near-death state are mind forms or tendencies of mind. The tendencies of their attention are causing them to gravitate toward apparitions in the universal realm of appearances. Thus, people do not generally report a direct awareness of the mechanism on the basis of which phenomena are arising. Rather, they describe secondary visions (pp. 257-258).

A little later he says,

> Most human deaths are associated with fear (or egoic non-participation) and are not consciously and meditatively engaged.² The result of any such death is generally the insertion of attention into the immediate inner or etheric side of the gross place of Nature, where personal existence continues, temporarily, much as it did during physical embodiment, and physical reincarnation inevitably follows. There are also profoundly agonizing, terrible, and frightening possibilities in the after-death state, and these, like more pleasant transitions, are experienced because of the
latent tendencies of mechanical mind (developed and reinforced by un-Enlightened habit patterns while alive in gross form). In any case, even such hells and purgatories are only temporary, and they can be transcended (even when they appear) by a profound effort of self-surrender and love-communion with Higher Divine Power, conductivity and upward release of attention, and the direct exercise of real or radical attention (p. 284).

*Easy Death* contains profound wisdom. I recommend it to NDE researchers, IANDS members, and one other group: those who will someday die.

NOTES

1. The editor of *Easy Death*, Georg Feuerstein, commented as follows in response to my review:

   You state that Master Da implies that it is inherently impossible for an enlightened person to have an NDE. This is relatively true/false. In the Enlightened disposition any experience is possible, because even though the ego-identity has shifted to become (or rather has been supplanted by) the All-Identity, the experiential phenomena and states *continue* for the body-mind with which the Enlightened being is *apparently* associated. Thus, one must assume that NDEs are quite possible for the Enlightened being. In fact, Master Da has experienced such states, just as he experienced other altered states of consciousness. *But* he is not defined by those experiences. They pertain to the body-mind and its environments.

2. This would be true of the NDE almost absolutely. In his foreword, Ring notes that he found only a single instance among the hundreds of cases he investigated where the NDEr reported conscious surrender into the process of ego-death at the time of the NDE.
THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR NEAR-DEATH STUDIES, INC. (IANDS)

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