

## Editors' Foreword

This special issue of the *Journal* consists of the proceedings from the third annual conference of the American Center for the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences (ACISTE). Three articles are followed by two extended abstracts—the latter providing more detail than a typical abstract but less than even a Brief Report.

The relevance of ACISTE's work to that of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) and this, its *Journal*, is that near-death experiences (NDEs) may be considered one specific type of STE—and STEs also include experiences related or similar to NDEs. In some circles, STEs are termed alternatively as, for example, exceptional human experiences, peak experiences, or mystical experiences. Thus, much material about STEs is also relevant to NDEs.

Preparation of this special issue involved a unique review process. Because the ACISTE presentations had been selected through peer review, only we two editors reviewed and edited the submitted manuscripts—except in the case of the article for which I (Holden), was lead author, which also underwent an additional masked review. This special issue also involves a somewhat unique focus. Because ACISTE's mission emphasis is on preparing professionals and paraprofessionals to assist people in their STE integration processes, the conference proceedings do not always reflect the *Journal's* typically strict research criteria but rather take a decidedly more clinical slant meant to provide readers with a broad base of understanding about psychotherapeutic and spiritual responses to STEs.

In the first article, *Spontaneous Mediumships Experiences: A Neglected Aftereffect of Near-Death Experiences*, my (Holden's) research team, including Ryan D. Foster, Ph.D., at Marymount University and Lee Kinsey, M.S., at the University of North Texas, presents our exploratory investigation of a phenomenon we termed spontaneous mediumship experience (SME). In an SME, a person is visited uninvited by a discarnate (deceased person) and asked to relay a message to another living person—known to the discarnate but not necessarily to the experienter. Though we found some reference to this phenomenon in the professional after-death communication literature, we did not find it addressed explicitly in the near-death literature. To familiarize

readers with SMEs, we present an example and a case study. Then we describe our study that, as we expected, indicated that SME is a rather common aftereffect of NDEs. We discuss implications of our findings for healthcare professionals and for consciousness researchers.

The following two articles address clinical issues related to STEs. First is *Integrating Spiritual Experiences: Peaks to Plateaus* by Tobin Hart, Ph.D., psychology professor at the University of West Georgia. Dr. Hart entered the professional domain of STEs in the early 1980s as a psychotherapist. In the mid-1990s, following the disclosure of spiritual experiences by his then six-year-old daughter, he researched the secret spiritual life of children. Since then, he has studied psychospiritual development across the lifespan. In the course of his explorations, he observed in spiritual experiencers three forces activated by their STEs, challenges those experiences presented, and a three-phase process for integrating the experiences. In his article, Dr. Hart presents these observations.

Next is an article by Washington licensed mental health counselor Janet Colli, Ph.D.: *From Trauma to Transcendence: Clinical Perspectives on an Evolutionary Process*. Dr. Colli discusses the role of trauma and dissociation in initiating and integrating STEs. She illustrates the dynamics of this process through her own autobiographical account, through musician Joni Mitchell's biographical material, and through case studies from her clinical practice.

In the first Extended Abstract, *Exploring Resistance to Spiritual Emergence*, Sofia University doctoral candidate Katrina Burgos, M.S.W., presents a condensed version of the literature review for her in-progress dissertation. By bringing together material from various sources in the transpersonal literature on the topic of resistance related to STEs, Ms. Burgos provides focused attention to a phenomenon not often comprehensively addressed in the literature but one of substantial clinical significance.

This issue closes with a final Extended Abstract by Elizabeth J. Sabet, who recounts her experiences as co-founder and Executive Director of the nonprofit Holistic Options for People Everywhere (HOPE) in Lubbock, Texas. In *The Healing Power of an Alternative Supportive Community for Spiritual Seekers*, we editors heard echoed many of the rewards and challenges that we have experienced and/or have heard others describe as long-time leaders of IANDS local support and interest groups. We believe that both experienced leaders of such groups and readers contemplating starting such a group will both resonate

with Ms. Sabet's observations and likely find helpful guidance from them.

It is our hope that not only healthcare professionals but also readers interested in the field of near-death studies for other reasons will find this special issue to be broadening of their knowledge of the field.

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