

Revelations

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I didn't begin my research of near-death states as most of you did, and I didn't end it the same way, either. Forgive me if I sound too personal for a researcher, but there are times when deviating from protocol is appropriate. This is such a time.

After 26 years of fieldwork with near-death studies, using police investigative techniques for my methodology, I am withdrawing from the active role I have had in the past. I am not "retiring" per se, as I plan to remain involved as much as possible, be available as a consultant, give talks and workshops, and eventually finish the theoretical model I have been building since I first started. The bulk of my work in the future will involve subjects of related interest, like the afterlife, the soul, death and dying, evolution, etc. This includes my interest in divinatory skills and rune casting, as my book, *Goddess Runes* (1996) will soon be republished.

There is no denying my beginnings as a researcher. It was the Voice I heard in my third near-death experience which declared: "Test revelation. You are to do the research. One book for each death." Book one was not named, books two and three were. I was shown what the message meant, what was to be in each book, yet no mention was made of how to do the job or how long it might take me. It wasn't until the following year at O'Hare Airport, when I met Elisabeth Kubler-Ross that I learned what I was to research had a name, "The Near-Death Experience," and that I was a "Near-Death Survivor" (her term). Talking with her was helpful, still, our discussion actually created more questions in my mind than it gave answers. That was July, 1978. I began my research in November. Three years later Kenneth Ring telephoned. He had heard of me and wondered if we could meet. He and his companion became our guests at our home, then in Harrisonburg, Virginia. We talked nearly all night. He was amazed at the data I had gleaned already from my work; I was equally amazed to learn that anyone else was doing the same thing. It was Ken who told me about Raymond Moody and his book, *Life After Life* (1975), and insisted that I, too, write a book about what I had discovered.

June 8, 2004, while I was putting together the research paper I would deliver at the IANDS Conference in Evanston, Illinois, the air around me filled with sparkles and the sparkles came together and formed a sentence. Suspended in air in front of my nose were the words: "Your work is now complete." It was over, just like that, just that fast. I had not decided anything, thought anything, when suddenly 26 years of work halted. During that time I averaged a six-day week, 8 to 10 hours per day, turning down most opportunities to party, vacation, or relax.

I cannot adequately describe for you what that was like, that moment. The passion that drove me to do this work was relentless and I was unstoppable. The energy I was given in death came in floods afterward and continues to this day. That energy enabled me to travel the countryside (as part of various jobs I had to earn enough money to keep going), and be "available." I use the term "available" because that was all it took for me to find other near-death experiencers. It was as if I wore an invisible sign that said "Tell me about the time you died. What was it like?" Over the years I did advertise in various magazines and newspapers for volunteers, and I made mention of this at various talks I gave. But the bulk of the nearly 4,000 sessions I have

held with adult and child experiencers came about because of happenstance. I was there (not saying anything), and they simply started talking. They did not know me and I did not know them.

How do you reckon this? How can any of you as researchers explain this? And how do you explain the floods of energy that course through me, that enabled me to work as long and as hard as I have? There is no questionnaire, no research protocol, that can even address what I have been through or what it is like to see (and hear in my heart) the words "Your work is now complete." On the 26th of June, I concluded 26 years of research at the IANDS conference. My joy is that I did it. I held forth and completed my mission. You would have to be a fellow experiencer to understand the depths of meaning this has for me. I shook for days afterward.

It is important to me that I "sign off" with a few statements, a brief summary of what I have discovered as a researcher. For starters, I want to emphasize that no one can validate a near-death experience except the experiencer. As researchers, we are confined to recognizing and isolating details and patterns, with the hope that commonalities will shed some light on the death experience, the possibility of life after death, and the survival of consciousness. Yet it is the aftereffects, both physiological and psychological, that impart real meaning to the experience and give it greater impact.

The spread of aftereffects can be linked directly to the intensity of the episode itself, not how long the scenario was or how complicated or how many elements it contained. Research of the near-death experience, then, must include the aftereffects to avoid the possibility of distortion in one's findings. This is why I do not utilize the "classical near-death model" introduced by Raymond Moody (1975) and established by Kenneth Ring (1980). My observations are based entirely on first-person contact: simple questions, using words initiated by the experiencer, body language study, sessions with significant others, findings cross-checked with different social, ethnic, and racial population groups at varied times for comparison.

The most common elements I found, regardless of experience type, were out-of-body episodes, the presence of a great loving light, and a greeter of some kind. Less than a third of the experiencers I met mentioned anything about tunnels. The first national survey on near-death experiences, conducted by the Gallup Poll (Gallup and Proctor, 1982), identified less than nine percent of the people reporting anything like a tunnel. "Tunnels" did not become a frequent feature of near-death states until *after* the Moody model became popular in the late '80s and early '90s. The "tunnel" is now considered synonymous with near-death experiences, even though research does not support that claim.

I prefer to use "near-death phenomenon" as an umbrella term to cover both the experience and its aftereffects. One does not exist without the other in equal measure. As concerns the physical body, I have noticed that the brain, nervous system, digestive system, and skin exhibit the most changes. The intensity of the experience appears to be the determining factor in the spread of aftereffects. Although before and after brain scan testing has yet to be done with experiencers, ample evidence from other brain scan projects establish that impactful, exotic, or traumatic events can and do alter brain structure, function, and chemistry, long-term. It is not a stretch for me to state that the near-death phenomenon is such an event.

I hasten to add here that as good as the aftereffects often sound, they can be quite confusing to deal with, even depressing. It is not unusual for experiencers to go through long bouts of depression and doubt, questioning the state of their sanity. It is as if too much happens to them too fast, and they are challenged to find meaningful ways to cope. Bright ones met in death can continue to manifest; out-of-body episodes can occur spontaneously and inappropriately. Added to this is possible alienation from family and friends, conflicts with employment, plus the inability to find counselors or therapists knowledgeable of the typical aftereffects of near-death states. Too many experiencers are still misdiagnosed or drugged, rather than supported in their quest to understand what happened to them. As a result, experiencers often suppress or

deny what they contend with.

As I conclude my fieldwork, I want to make these points. In order to proceed with the research now needed in the field, we must untether ourselves from the Moody model and open the field to embrace other types of investigative modalities and protocols. We need to draw from a larger and more diverse group of professionals who compare notes with each other, and are willing to conduct research not only in hospitals but in other places as well. And we need to put more emphasis on the aftereffects and on educating the medical and health-care field about what is typical and common to the phenomenon. The spin-offs from this will affect many aspects of society.

The three near-death experiences I underwent in three months in 1977 are balanced impact-wise with the research I have since done. Countless experiencers have told me that my work "saved their lives," whereupon in fact, they saved me. Nothing can compare to the experience I have had of seeing myself reflected back to me from thousands of eyes. What I saw enabled me to integrate my own experiences in a healthy manner. I am humbled that I could return the favor.

The field of near-death studies takes us to the edge of death and beyond. The rewards of this work are nothing short of magnificent.

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