

From HEADING TOWARD OMEGA:

In search of the meaning of the
Near Death Experience

by Kenneth Ring

What Occurs in the Typical NDE?

← "Near Death Experiences"

As Moody⁸ was the first to say, no two NDEs are identical, but most seem to adhere to a common pattern. NDEs differ principally in terms of how much of that pattern is disclosed to an experiencer. In *Life at Death* I presented a composite description of this pattern as it would be reported by a hypothetical NDEr who had a "complete" experience:

The experience begins with a feeling of easeful peace and a sense of well-being, which soon culminates in a sense of overwhelming joy and happiness. This ecstatic tone, although fluctuating in intensity from case to case, tends to persist as a constant emotional ground as other features of the experience begin to unfold. At this point, the person is aware that he feels no pain nor does he have any other bodily sensations. Everything is quiet. These cues may suggest to him that he is either in the process of dying or has already "died."

He may then be aware of a transitory buzzing or windlike sound, but, in any event, he finds himself looking down on his physical body, as though viewing it from some external vantage point. At this time, he finds that he can see and hear perfectly; indeed, his vision and hearing tend to be more acute than usual. He is aware of the actions and conversations taking place in the physical environment, in relation to which he finds himself in the role of

a passive, detached spectator. All this seems very real—even quite natural—to him; it does not seem at all like a dream or an hallucination. His mental state is one of clarity and alertness.

At some point, he may find himself in a state of *dual awareness*. While he continues to be able to perceive the physical scene around him, he may also become aware of "another reality" and feel himself being drawn into it. He drifts or is ushered into a dark void or tunnel and feels as though he is floating through it. Although he may feel lonely for a time, the experience here is predominately peaceful and serene. All is extremely quiet and the individual is aware only of his mind and of the feeling of floating.

All at once, he becomes sensitive to, but does not see, a presence. The presence, who may be heard to speak or who may instead "merely" induce thoughts into the individual's mind, stimulates him to review his life and asks him to decide whether he wants to live or die. This stock-taking may be facilitated by a rapid and vivid visual playback of episodes from the person's life. At this stage, he has no awareness of time or space, and the concepts themselves are meaningless. Neither is he any longer identified with his body. Only the mind is present and it is weighing—logically and rationally—the alternatives that confront him at this threshold separating life from death: to go further into this experience or to return to earthly life. Usually the individual decides to return on the basis, not of his own preference, but on the perceived needs of his loved ones, whom his death would necessarily leave behind. Once the decision is made, the experience tends to be abruptly terminated.

Sometimes, however, the decisional crisis occurs later or is altogether absent, and the individual undergoes further experiences. He may, for example, continue to float through the dark void toward a magnetic and brilliant golden light, from which emanates feelings of love, warmth and total acceptance. Or he may enter into a "world of light" and preternatural beauty, to be (temporarily) reunited with deceased loved ones before being told, in effect, that it is not yet his time and that he has to return to life.

In any event whether the individual chooses or is commanded to return to his earthly body and worldly commitments, he does return. Typically, however, he has no recollection *how* he has effected his "re-entry," for at this point he tends to lose all aware-

ness. Very occasionally, however, the individual may remember "returning to his body" with a jolt or an agonizing wrenching sensation. He may even suspect that he reenters "through the head."

Afterward, when he is able to recount his experience, he finds that there are simply no words adequate to convey the feelings and quality of awareness he remembers. He may also be or become reticent to discuss it with others, either because he feels no one will really be able to understand it or because he fears he will be disbelieved or ridiculed.⁹

In retrospect, I might be tempted to alter a line or two of this account or add a qualification here or there, but on the whole in the light of subsequent research, this narration holds up very well. There is nothing in it that hasn't been independently confirmed by more recent investigations into the NDE phenomenon. For that matter, it contains nothing that wasn't already stated or implied on Moody's earlier version of the prototypic NDE.¹⁰ One of the firmest conclusions to be drawn from the body of near-death research is that the NDE itself is an authentic and much replicated phenomenon—there is simply no doubt that it occurs. (This is not to imply, of course, that there is any unanimity among investigators concerning its *interpretation*: that is another story, but it is not germane here.)

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