

From the light in times of ordeal to the theory of the absolute being

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2006

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In press

The light in times of ordeal

Scientific research of NDEs is far from complete but already permits some "practical applications" or, more modestly, it invites us to share the beauty and the teachings of this transcendental experience with those who seem to be able to benefit from it in a concrete and immediate way. Apart from being an intellectual challenge, the knowledge we now hold of the phenomenology and the consequences of near-death experiences (NDEs) should help persons who are more immediately facing the limits of human existence. The new perspectives they open, the softer conception of death they suggest, the hope they locate beyond known limits, should be at the disposition - if they so wish - of the ill and the terminally ill, the bereaved and, more generally, of everybody who is sensitive to the finality of the human destiny. Let us explore together why NDEs, more than any other research field, hold such an extensive life-changing potential.

NDEs offer a new perspective of death... and life

NDEs open the possibility of survival of consciousness after bodily death. As an experience undergone by millions of persons, this theoretical and theological concept became, if not a proof, definitely a very plausible option. For NDErs, survival is not a speculative mind construct but an unshakeable certainty. Why are NDEs so comforting in times of life crises? What stands the shock of the death of a beloved one, or the announcement of our own terminal illness? What can truly help us in times of ordeal? Faith? Maybe, but religious beliefs don't always hold in extreme life crises, probably because they are not experimental, but purely intellectual. NDEs are of a completely different nature, they are *experiences*. NDErs don't *believe*, they *know*, they had the direct experience and they all came to the same conclusion: death is an illusion! Ganga Stone puts it in simple words: *"Are you beginning to be convinced that survival is real? If you need to build your certainty about this (which you probably do), your best bet is to read as much firsthand accounts of near-death experiences as you can"*¹.

Indeed, we don't need to undergo an NDE ourselves to benefit from its insights. It appears that they can be transmitted vicariously, simply by presenting relevant information on the subject to individuals who are or become interested in NDEs. If someone is open for them, they can internalize its essential benefits and make them

¹ Ganga Stone « Start the Conversation : the book about death you were hoping to find". – New York : Warner Books, 1996, p. 47

their own. Therefore, we consider NDEs as a “benign virus²” which propagation we wish to support. When we first hear NDE testimonies, we begin by marveling at them, but after a while, we find that they have silently entered into our psyche and have caused us to have a completely new view of death and that there is no need to fear something that does not exist in the sense we commonly believe.

This utter absence of fear of death is the hallmark of the NDEr. It is such a profound distinction, though an invisible one, that it truly marks the near-death survivor as radically different from the rest of us.

NDE insights also trigger an entirely new existential and transcendental perspective of life. Kenneth Ring states that *“if what we call life is only the prelude to true life, if what we do here carries over to what we are there, if there is only a discontinuity, but no end, no annihilation, just a transition, then what we do here has enduring significance, because it does not cease when we cease bodily. In this case, everything that we do, everything that we create, all of our actions continue to find a home in some place beyond death.”*³

Love, an aged term for a new significance

NDErs tell us persistently and unanimously that love is the most important issue in life, even its primacy. But what do they actually mean by this term? This word, so over-used, does not mean much anymore. It isn't the kind of sentiment which can be genuine and deeply felt, but which nevertheless is frequently cramped and selfish, which binds us to particular people. Very often people love in a conditional, self-interested sort of way. NDErs talk about something completely different... a powerful and generous emotion, a holistic altruistic dynamic which goes beyond individual interest. This is what they understood when they were united with the light during their near-death experience. They remained themselves, with their personality and their individuality. Nevertheless, they were closely connected to all human beings. All of us, we interact continually, without realizing it, and it is only in an extension of our consciousness, like the one taking place during an NDE, that we realize that we are all one. The meeting with the being of light, which is the quintessence of the journey to the other world, is an illustration of this love. That emotion, for which it would be necessary to coin a new word, creates meaning itself, and seems to be the force that binds together all living beings, the ultimate energy which interconnects all the parts that make up the universe. This essential insight triggered by NDEs certainly does provide consolation: love is eternal!

Palliative care

When no hope is left for physical recovery, then it's time to talk about near-death experiences. When nobody dares to pronounce the frightening word “death” but everybody thinks of it, then we must find the courage to name it and talk about it. My concern is to spread NDE knowledge in hospital and hospice settings in Europe, and more generally to inform the ill and the terminally ill, with a particular emphasis for children and adolescents who did not get the chance yet to construct their own personal belief system which could help them face their life threatening ordeal. This

² Kenneth Ring and Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino « Lessons from the Light : what we can learn from the near-death experience ». - Portsmouth, New Hampshire : Moment Point Press, 2000, p. 200

³ Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino « On the Other Side of Life : exploring the phenomenon of the near-death experience ». - New York : Plenum Press/Perseus, 1997, p. 145-146

is the subject of my latest book “Talking with Angel about illness, death and survival⁴”, which, I hope, brings them comfort and a perspective beyond their physical death. A palliative care doctor commented the usefulness of “Talking with Angel about illness, death and survival” *“concerning a topic that is around us 24/7 yet too taboo to be discussed: the preparation of one’s imminent death”*.⁵

Many investigators talk about the ubiquity of NDEs in American hospice settings. The hospice physician Dr. Pamela Kirchner conducted a survey at a meeting of the US National Hospice Organization that revealed that 73% of her sample of hospice-based health care professionals had heard descriptions of NDEs from their terminally ill patients. Dr. Marilyn Webb states that in the 1990s already, a working knowledge of NDEs has been *“officially incorporated into hospice work, into hospice philosophy, and into work with the dying even in mainstream medical institutions”*⁶. And she adds: *“These stories are bringing a new kind of hope to the terminally ill”*⁷.

Death-bed visions

Psychologists Karlis Osis and Elendur Haraldsson have collected the observations of 640 doctors and nurses of what occurred as some 35’540 of their patients died, then they have collected a second set of responses from more than 1’000 health-care workers reporting on some 50’000 patient deaths. They state in their book “At the hour of Death”⁸ that some 84% had visions of dead relatives who had a close relationship to the patient. This enlarged state of consciousness, which seems to be of the same nature than the one induced by NDEs, can be compared to a double vision, since both worlds seem to be there for the dying person simultaneously and it is difficult for them to know which is which and who is in which world. Death-bed visions are a magnificent gift, as much for the dying whose agony is transcended by these visions as for their family and friends who see their loved ones depart in peace, though they cannot see those apparitions or hear their secret conversations.

Dealing with the grief of bereavement : from NDEs to ADCs⁹

Loosing a loved person is not easy and will never be. The stronger the love bond was (and remains), the deeper the mourning will be. The process of mourning must be endured, but it can be greatly smoothed by the belief that the connection with the deceased person is not definitely broken but only delayed. NDE testimonies can be of immense support in these hard times. If “death” is the next step after a near-death experience, the final crossing of the border, then we can assume that our deceased loved ones are fine... but we don’t hold the proof of it. Is it possible to learn more? Are NDEs the closest we can get to the other dimension, to the other existence? There might be one more step we can take, if we so wish...

The single most relevant variety of death-related experience – which represents a direct and obvious extension of the NDE itself – would be “after-death communications” (ADCs). I refer to *spontaneous* and *direct* communications without

⁴Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino «Talking with Angel about illness, death and survival ». – Edinburgh : Floris Books, distribution in US by Steiner Books, 2005

⁵ Personal communication, nov. 2005

⁶ Marilyn Webb « The Good Death : the new American search to reshape the end of life». – New York : Bantam Books, 1997, p. 248

⁷ *ibid*, p. 248

⁸ Karlis Osis and Elendur Haraldsson « At the Hour of Death ». – Alexandria, Va. : Time-Life Books, 1993

⁹ After-death communications

the use of psychics, mediums, rituals, or devices of any kind which, in my opinion, are much more questionable.

ADCs are fairly common experiences. Bill and Judith Guggenheim estimate that at least 50 million Americans, or 20% of the population, have had one or more ADC experiences¹⁰.

The purpose of these spontaneous visits and signs by those who have passed over is to offer comfort, reassurance, and hope to their family and friends and to advise them that they are alive and well. They usually occur one single time, like an ultimate good-bye. These encounters typically reduce grief, generate a conviction in life after death and accelerate emotional healing. The burden is lifted, the joy of living comes back on tip-toes, preventing us from losing precious time *“because you may be, as I was, vulnerable to years of lost life – years stolen by grief all because of a misunderstanding so commonly held in our culture about what happens to the person when the body dies”*¹¹.

The therapeutic potential of spontaneous ADCs is increasingly used by professional grief counselors¹² and Dr. Allan Botkin even induces after-death communications (IADC¹³) with *Eye Movement desensitization and reprocessing* (EMDR) technique as a therapy for grief and trauma¹⁴.

The ultimate decision is ours...

We are not in the field of hard science but in the realm of trust (not of religious belief). Trust is the result of a personal reflection and spiritual evolution, indeed nourished by experiences of others (NDEs) and the insights they trigger put at disposal by researchers, yet ultimately it is a personal decision. When trust turns into conviction, then we get close to something very solid which will be of invaluable help in times of life crises like illness, grief of bereavement and, finally, when we will be facing our own death. The concern of NDE researchers is to spread the information, but everyone must trace their own path towards their truth, that is the price of freedom, the price that must be paid for our choices which, solely, will hold in the face of the final step which we all must take alone.

The theory of the “Absolute Being”

I tried to incorporate near-death experiences, death-bed visions and after-death communications, which all seem to be of the same nature, into a larger, integrated concept. I hypothesize that the human being can be seen as one of the multiple – or maybe infinite – dimensions or facets of a so-called “absolute being” (which could be visualized as a die), the human condition being only one of them. In other words, a human being would be only one of the possible expressions or representations of the absolute being. Let us presume that the absolute being exists and, as a human being, incarnates into a body, disincarnates at the moment of “death” and then invests another of its multiple facets. Intrinsically, the nature of the absolute being

¹⁰ www.after-death.com

¹¹ Ganga Stone « Start the Conversation », p. XVIII

¹² Louis E. LaGrand « The Nature and Therapeutic Implications of the Extraordinary Experiences of the Bereaved » IN : Journal of Near-Death Studies, vol. 24, Nr. 1, Fall 2005

¹³ Induced after-death communications

¹⁴ Allan L. Botkin « Induced After-Death Communication : a new therapy for healing grief and trauma. – Charlottesville, Va. : Hampton Roads, 2005

remains unchanged, though empowered by more or less powerful properties. Each of these dimensions would therefore be “true”, consistent and observable in a given context. Thus, in the context of the “living”, one would observe the “human being” with his/her reality, like birth, happiness, illness, and, finally, “death”.

“Death” is therefore seen as a transitory process which would permit the human being to move to another dimension and thereby activate another of his/her facets. When dying, human beings change state, they do not cease to exist as beings.

This change of state is not a change of nature. This is similar to the states of water which can be solid, liquid, or gas, but which, fundamentally, always remains water. This analogy is quite simplified, as these different states of water all take place in the same context which is not necessarily the case for the different facets of the absolute being. Like the different states of water, the transition between the facets of the absolute being can also be understood as bi-directional. Therefore, the absolute being could be in its “living”-state on multiple occasions, after having invested another of its forms of expression.

Certain properties or characteristics are linked to each facet of the absolute being. According to which state is activated, inherent capacities are activated. The human-being state is probably the state with the most limited characteristics and capacities. We know that during the near-death experience, individuals have access to larger knowledge that can be defined as “absolute knowledge”. They perceive the meaning of life and “death”, the reason why their earthly life unfolded the way it did, the nature of human condition, the destiny of humankind from the beginning to the furthestmost point in the future and the mysteries of the universe.

The human-being-state is submitted to limited characteristics or perspectives permitting to see (understand) only certain issues. Let us illustrate this idea with another analogy. When you are in a river valley, you have a limited perspective; you can see the fields around you, and maybe a forest clinging to the side of the mountain in front of you. But if you go to the top of the mountain, you can see the valley in its totality, dotted with hamlets, traversed by the river which meanders to the horizon. You even might catch sight of a far-off town. You will see the entirety of the valley and you will understand the necessity of its geography, such as the river had no other choice than to follow the exact shape of the terrain.

I hypothesize that it is only when human beings leave their body temporarily during an NDE and, presumably, when they leave it definitely, that they attain a perspective which allows them to have a transcendent perception of their human state. They understand the necessity of the unfolding of their existence and are finally in peace with their destiny.

I presume that NDEs, death-bed visions and ADCs situate in the intersection between these two states.

When leaving the body, human beings enter into a new dimension of their nature of absolute beings. Material constraints do not exist anymore, time and space are abolished, they move from one point of the universe to another in no time. In fact, they do not “move” as this verb is characterized by time that flows, they simply are. Even their representation becomes obsolete as this is yet another human referential. And so it is, I suppose, with otherworldly visions during the near-death experience: trying to explain them is again another human referential.

Near-death experiences, death-bed visions and after-death communications strongly suggest that “death” is not the end of everything but rather a transition to an

otherworld reality of overwhelming beauty of which our human-being state does not permit to say much more than that...