

A Measure of Heaven

Near-Death Experience Data Analysis

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Near Death Experience Data Analysis**

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1. Introduction

A. Background

A near-death experience refers to a wide range of intense, personal sensations and after-effects which may occur when a person faces a life-threatening trauma. These sensations may involve seeing a light, traveling outside the body, meeting unearthly beings and deceased loved ones, and experiencing powerful emotions, such as overwhelming love. The after-effects often include changed attitudes about death, a renewed sense of life purpose, and even psychic and healing abilities. The definition is complicated by the fact that many people report a similar set of experiences and after-effects even when their health is not threatened. This may occur, for example, at times when a person is depressed, has an emotional shock, or when in a prayerful, meditative state.

The study of near-death experiences (NDEs) took a giant leap in 1975 with the publication of Dr. Raymond Moody's *Life After Life* (1). His medical credentials and sober approach provided an aura of legitimacy to a subject steeped in controversy, namely the idea of the continuation of consciousness after death of the body. Accounts from people on the brink of death generated a wave of

curiosity about the possibility of an after-life. Subsequent researchers, such as Bruce Greyson (2), Kenneth Ring (3) and Michael Sabom (4), shed more light on the phenomenon, and established near-death studies as a valid topic in academic and scientific circles.

Along with the deepening scientific investigation of NDEs, there developed a widespread public interest in the subject, due to its religious, spiritual, and philosophical implications. Detailed autobiographical accounts became popular, such as Betty Eadie's *Embraced by the Light* (5), and Kimberly Clark Sharp's *After The Light* (6).

B. Statistical Advantage

Many of the pop-culture NDE accounts and scientific enquiries were limited to a small number of cases and contained anecdotal references. Eventually, researchers were able to gather and report on larger numbers of people who underwent an NDE, and this made inferences from the data more reliable. Two research organizations were able to collect thousands of reports. These groups are:

1. The International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), at www.IANDS.org
2. The Near-Death Experience Research Foundation (NDERF), at www.NDERF.org.

A curious statistical effect takes place when you accumulate data on more than 500 people: the odd cases, the "outliers" at the extremes on any one measure, begin to cancel each other out, and cumulative values become a more valid measure of the total population, in this case the people who report near-death experiences.

IANDS has been collecting NDE reports from the 1960s up to the present. The reports include narrative descriptions as well as answers to yes/no and category questions. The IANDS on-line survey is currently (2009) being revised. The survey questions from the following report, therefore, may not match what you find on the Internet.

A summary of 787 near-death experience reports collected by the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) is reported in the following chapters. Statistical findings are interspersed with narrative descriptions in order to paint a more colorful portrait of the NDE phenomenon. The sample is not representative of the US population, as it was collected over the Internet, by mail, and by verbal reports from people around the world. Respondents are more often female and in the younger age groups than both the US and world populations. The sheer number

of cases, however, makes this a valuable resource for researchers and investigators. The database of reports supplied by IANDS required editing and coding in order to adapt it to statistical data processing. The NDERF web site incorporates a survey that is similar to the IANDS survey. The survey results for that site are a close match to the IANDS findings.

Some examples of IANDS survey findings appear below:

- Most NDE events are considered wonderful, 54.0%, while 37.3% have mixed perceptions. Only 8.6% describe their experience as frightening.
- Sometimes, an important finding is that there are no significant differences between groups. No differences in near-death experiences, for example, were found between white and non-white respondents.
- The NDE contains many common elements. Two thirds report an out-of-body experience, and almost as many see a light. More than half report strong emotional tone and receiving knowledge. Almost half report seeing unearthly beings.
- An out-of-body experience is more often associated with clinical death, 75.1% versus 63.0% for those with a non-life threatening trigger for their experience.
- Encountering unearthly beings is reported more often by females, 53.1%, compared to males, 40.3%.
- The development of healing and psychic abilities is significantly higher among women, 71.4%, compared to men, 60.7%. Such abilities occur most often for those who report clinical death, 75.5%, compared to 61.9% for those with a non-life threatening experience.

The real value of a statistical analysis is in the comparison of subgroups, such as male versus female, or cross-tabulations by age groups on a particular question. In the following chapters, important and statistically significant differences will be discussed for each subject heading as appropriate.

For those who are statistically oriented, a full report of the cross-tabulations is available on the Internet at
<http://www.NearLifeExp.com> (7).

C. Sampling Considerations

The reports submitted to the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) represent a convenience sample, as self-selected respondents voluntarily submitted reports. This creates sampling errors; those factors that render the sample less than perfect because of the collection method. The fact that the sample is over 700 cases, however, provides a strong argument that all aspects of NDEs are included in this database. The multiple-source sample also shows a skewing by age and gender, compared to the known population of the US. No attempt was made to correct, or “weight” the data to reflect the US population. The tables in this section omit respondents from other countries, in order to compare the American respondents to US Census data.

D. Editing, Coding, and Data Clean-up

Data editing and recoding is often required on a raw database when respondent information is unclear or contradictory. For example, in the question ***Your Condition During the Experience***, someone may check “Other”, then go on to describe a drowning where they were under water for 15 minutes, with no vital signs. This must be recoded from “Other” into the “Clinical Death” category. All edits and recoding were reviewed by three researchers in a procedure whereby two researchers agree on the recoding, and a third reviews the procedure and acts as a tie-breaker.

Two important variables, ***Your Condition During the Experience***, and ***Circumstances of Your Experience***, required extensive editing and recoding, while other variables required only minor editing. The ***Circumstances*** question required the creation of a few new response categories. Respondent comments to questions, captured along with the numerical data, were used to guide the recoding decisions.

In addition to the need for data editing, the survey questionnaire itself suffered from design flaws, such as vague wording, overlapping response categories, and a lack of key demographic measures. These difficulties will be addressed with the discussion of findings.

References, Chapter 1.

- (1). Moody, R. *Life After Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon - Survival of Bodily Death*. New York: Bantam, 1975.
- (2.) Cardeña, E., Lynn, S. J., & Krippner, S. (Eds.). *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2000.
- (3). Ring, K. & Valarino, E. E., *Lessons From The Light: What We Can Learn From the Near-Death Experience*. Portsmouth, NH: Moment Point Press, 1998.
- (4). Sabom, M. *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982.
- (5). Eadie, B. *Embraced by the Light*. New York: Bantam, 1992.
- (6). Sharp, K. C. *After The Light: What I Discovered on the Other Side of Life That Can Change Your World*. New York: William Morrow, 1995.
- (7) [Http://www.NearLifeExp.com](http://www.NearLifeExp.com), *Statistical Summary of Near-Death Experience Reports*, by Vince Migliore.

2. Demographics

A. Age, Gender, and Country

NOTE: Questions from the IANDS survey appear in bold italic.

Your age at time of experience:

Your gender:

The age of reporters at the time of their experience is skewed toward younger age groups, with people over 50 under-represented in the sample (Table 1). Likewise, women are over-represented in the sample (Table 2). This type of error makes it difficult to tell, for example, if women actually have more NDEs, or perhaps more likely, they simply report their experiences more often than men.

Table 1. Age at time of experience versus U.S. population.

Age at time of Experience	Survey % (n=604 for US)	US Population (2000 Census)
Under 10	13.6	14.1
10 to 19	18.2	14.5
20 to 29	24.3	13.6
30 to 39	20.4	15.4
40 to 49	14.9	15.1
50 & Over	8.6	27.3
TOTAL	100.0	100.0

A good number of reports come from children. The reports are often related by their parents. Experiences of children can be just as vivid and moving as those of adults. An example from the Near-Death Experience Research Foundation (NDERF) web site illustrates this point.

"They're so pretty Mommy," he added. "And there are lots and lots of birdies." My wife was stunned. Into her mind the sweet comforting spirit enveloped her more soundly, but with an urgency she had never before known. Brian went on to tell her that the "birdies" had told him that he had to come back and tell everyone about the "birdies." He said they brought him back to the house and that a big fire truck and an ambulance were there. A man was bringing the baby out on a white bed and he tried to tell the man that the baby would be okay, but the man couldn't hear him. He said the birdies told him he had to go with the ambulance, but they would be near him. He said they were so pretty and so peaceful, and he didn't want to come back. Then the bright light came.

He said that the light was so bright and so warm, and he loved the bright light so much. Someone was in the bright light and put their arms around him, and told him, "I love you but you have to go back. You have to play baseball, and tell everyone about the birdies." Then the person in the bright light kissed him and waved bye-bye. Then whoosh, the big sound came and they went into the clouds.

- NDERF, case #161 (1).

This shows that excellent reports can come from any age group.

Table 2. Gender versus U.S. population.

Gender	Survey % (n=502 for US)	US Population (2000 Census)
Male	38.5	49.1
Female	61.5	50.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0

Most reports were received from people within the US (Table 3). Europe provided the next largest group of contributors. The survey results presented here cannot be projected to represent the population of the US, or the world population, but rather simply summarize the reports collected by IANDS up to 2001.

Table 3. Country of report.

Country	Count	Percentage
USA	615	78.7
Canada	37	4.7
Mexico	6	0.8
South & Central America	11	1.4
Asia	5	0.6
Europe	82	10.5
All other	25	3.2
TOTAL	781	100.0

Reports from other countries suggest the NDE transcends cultural differences. The following report from China shows much of the same content as that for Westerners.

I had a family and my father was very strict upon me. I believed in Marxism. I joined the Chinese Communist Party when I was in university and I had a great ambition when I was employed. I deeply believe in materialism and I strongly rejected anything that relate to idealism. Neither did I believe in God. However I experienced an NDE and it has changed me completely.

I was injected and the nurse left the room to treat other patients. About 30 seconds, I experienced a strong tinnitus and I dropped into a dark tunnel, rushing with an incredible speed. I was extremely frightened because I didn't know what happened to me. I could neither shout nor stop, and I couldn't go back or ask for help. I then realized that it was caused by the allergic reaction. I was in despair, floating in the tunnel. I couldn't imagine why I did not lose my consciousness and why I still exist.

However my fear gradually disappeared. I felt myself floating somewhere and it was comfortable. An indescribable "stream of consciousness" was accompanying me. He gave me the answer of my every question and he comforted my frightened heart. I didn't know how to describe him. He had no shape or voice, but he was bright and broadminded, warm and gentle. He could answer every question. He surrounded me and guided me. He communicated me with telepathy. He revealed everything of the universe. I was no longer in the tunnel but I was in the bright warm world. I felt a complete relief from pain and suffering. I felt the existence of everlasting harmony and happiness.

- NDERF, case #1828 (2).

Age now

Most of those who faced an NDE reported it during middle age (Table 4). Since most of the experiences occurred prior to age 30 (56%, Table 1), and most reporting occurs after age 30, it appears there is a time lag between the actual event and the time of reporting.

Table 4. Age at time of reporting the event. Total sample.

Age	Count	Percentage
Under 30	59	9.5
30 to 39	151	24.2
40 to 49	220	35.3
50 to 59	145	23.2
60 & Over	49	7.9
Total	624	100.0

There were too few cases of minority racial categories to make meaningful comparisons. Instead, all the non-Caucasian respondents were grouped and compared to Caucasians. Sometimes, an important finding is that there are no significant differences between groups. This is true for race. No differences in near-death experiences were found for white versus non-white respondents. Similarly, there were few differences between those inside versus those outside the United States.

B. Demographic Differences and Similarities

Survey analysis revealed many differences in responses by age, gender and country of origin. Where these differences reach statistical significance they will be discussed in the findings of each question on the IANDS survey. All statistical significance testing uses the industry standard of +/-5% at the 95% level of confidence. What is more impressive than the differences, though, is how extraordinary the reports are, and how similar they remain across most demographic categories. Some examples follow.

This report is from a 5-year-old. It illustrates the complete lack of caring about the body once it's seen from the outside:

I went with my parents and aunt and uncle to an outdoor swimming pool (I was 5 years old at that time), I couldn't swim but my parents took me inside the water anyway. At a certain point, they were so busy talking that they didn't pay attention to me, and that was the time that I fell into the deepest part of the swimming pool. I was at the bottom of the pool.

All of a sudden I knew that I was going to die, and after what seems minutes under the water, I was about to breathe out for the last time. At that moment I remember thinking, "Well, this is it. I am going to the other side!!" At that moment, a beautiful feeling came over me, a very joyful, sacred and warm feeling!

I was not scared, I was not in panic, but I was ready to go to the other side, and the incredible feeling of joy and happiness was unearthly!! At that point, all of a sudden somebody rescued me out of the water.

- IANDS, anonymous on Sunday, July 25, 2004 - 11:57 am,
age 5 (3).

Here is another typical out-of-body experience, this time by a female:

I could no longer hear the hospital room sounds. I was aware that I was surrounded by a purple colour and existed in what can be described as misty energy. I didn't have a body, but seemed to exist as a light bluish energy. I felt the most overwhelming sense of belonging, like I had come home. It was pure love, just pure existence in love. It is very difficult to describe in words the intensity of that feeling. I was aware that behind me were other energy beings, people whom I knew so well, like I had really come home. I felt so happy and wanted to turn around to greet them, but I got the message--there were no words or touch--that no, now is not the right time. I felt them gently guiding me back.

- IANDS, Lost connection with the physical plane (4).

The following is an account which includes a guardian angel, from a male reporter:

The peace was absolutely overwhelming. I felt like I could burst at any moment because of the intense love that streamed through me. I witnessed countless trees and plants that seemed in perfect shape. All of the scenery seemed to go into infinity.

My guardian angel was dressed in a pure white robe and seemed kind of transparent. I noticed my body was very different as on earth. It lacked nothing; no pain or limitations; just perfect. I became particularly interested in the robe I was wearing. I glowed and my whole body seemed to emit light that made me also kind of transparent. There were countless people there, all dressed in white robes; some were walking in the garden. Others were flying through the air at incredible speed. All around was just happiness in its purest form.

- IANDS, Living Water (5).

These NDE reports come from every age and ethnic group, yet they all exhibit a transformative quality which provides a peek into the spiritual realms.

References, Chapter 2.

- (1) Http://www.nderf.org/a_father%27s_story.htm. NDERF case #161.
- (2) Http://www.nderf.org/chen_m_nde.htm. NDERF case #1828.
- (3) <Http://www.iands.org/msgboards/messages/544/104048.html?1093051379>.
- (4) Http://www.iands.org/nde_archives/experiencer_accounts/lost_connection_with_the_physical_plane.html.
- (5) Http://www.iands.org/nde_archives/experiencer_accounts/living_water.html.

3. Antecedents

A. The NDE with Medical Conditions

One of the early questions on the survey asked about the medical condition of the respondent immediately prior to the experience.

Q1. Your condition during the experience:

Clinical death occurred in one fourth of the sample population, 24.8%, while serious conditions occurred in 39.1% (Table 5). This is a difficult question to answer due to the lack of clinical data, which often makes it impossible to tell which category applies. Such uncertainty diminishes the value of the results. It is interesting that approximately one quarter of all respondents, 24.3%, report the experience was connected with a non-life threatening situation. Researchers have known for some time that you don't have to be near death to have a near-death experience.

Table 5. Your condition during the experience.

Circumstances	Count	Percentage
Clinical death	193	24.8
Serious condition	304	39.1
Non-life threatening	189	24.3
Other and indeterminate	92	11.8
Total	624	100.0

Male respondents reported clinical death more often than female respondents, 28.7% versus 21.8% respectively. Those who were in poor health at the time of their experience also reported clinical death more often. Similarly, non-life threatening NDEs were more often reported by those in good to excellent health 31.1% versus 12.8% for those in poor to fair health.

The people who claimed clinically death also check more of the content categories for their NDE, Table 10 in Chapter 5. Just under 12% checked the “Other” box for this question; a category that includes conditions that cannot be readily classified along the spectrum of medical trauma. A drug overdose, for example under “Other” might include chemicals that destroy the liver or kidneys, and is therefore truly life threatening. It may, on the other hand, be a substance that is not physically damaging at all, but rather alters consciousness or perceptions. This inability to classify responses severely diminishes the accuracy, and therefore the usefulness of this question. Its wording breaks a cardinal rule of market research: that the respondent be capable of answering the question. If the “Other” category is eliminated completely, then the remaining percentages are altered significantly. The key finding of Table 5 may simply be that conditions prior to the NDE can easily range from no physical danger at all to severe life threatening situations, and yet all of them result in a near-death experience.

The examples that follow compare a clinical death report with a non-life threatening experience.

A clinical death experience:

When I went under I dreamed a dream...only, it was real! . . . I dreamed I was going through a large tunnel. It was miles wide and long with a misty white light at the end. I felt so at peace there, I didn't want to leave. I was not alone; someone was there with me. It was dark but I was not afraid. We spoke to each other. Not with lips and speech, it was like telepathy. We could understand what each was thinking and answer spontaneously. I was asked a question. "Are you ready to die now?" I hesitated. I was able to see my fiancée crying in the waiting room. I immediately responded, "No! She needs me!" And then I woke up!

I was clinically dead three times while comatose, per the docs. Clinical death is not the same as actual death. It's when the monitors are no longer able to detect brainwaves or heart activity. Yet brain waves came and went. The day before I woke up, I could hear muffled voices. I felt my fiancée's hand on mine. I felt a cool liquid on my head. . . . There is a twist in this story. That cool liquid I felt was my pastor anointing my head with oil for last rites.

- IANDS, Misty White Light (1).

This case involves a non-life threatening situation:

I am unsure if you qualify my experiences as "near death" as there was no sickness or injury involved. . . .

Everything I have shared with you up until this point leads to my last out of body experience. This one moment was defining to who I am today, and without it - I most likely would have recalled everything else as an overactive childhood imagination. I "awoke" to find myself already at the ceiling,

and unlike all other times - completely comfortable and relaxed in this state (with my ever-present guide at my side)."He" led me through the adjoining wall into my parent's bedroom where they were sleeping peacefully. I vividly recall that the curtains were closed and I wanted to pull them back. A brief moment there, then we proceeded to go to our living room. The curtains were open, and outside it was light. I know it was night but everything was illuminated and my vision was so clear... much sharper. It was late winter/early spring and there was still snow on the ground glistening. For some strange reason I always think that there were 3 or 4 deer just to the side behind our hedge... I don't believe that they were actual deer - but somehow was only acceptable to picture what was there as deer (I know that makes little sense). Nothing to this day has been more beautiful or inviting than what I saw right outside the window that I looked out everyday. Except it was different this time - enhanced. I was overcome with the desire to place my "hands" on the window... and just go through it (like we had passed through the walls within the house) and be a part of that scene. As I willed myself to do just that, I was told it (was) not time yet - and escorted back to my body.

- IANDS, Anonymous on Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:30 pm (2).

Both of these examples contain an out-of-body experience, communication with a spirit guide, and a decision to return to the body.

Q2. Circumstances of the experience:

As with Q1, this topic poses difficulties, as often there are multiple, overlapping conditions existing prior to the NDE (Table 6). Accidents and illnesses are the most common causes.

Table 6. Circumstances of experience.

Circumstance	Count	Percentage
Accident	211	27.2
Illness	104	13.4
Surgery related	85	11.0
Heart attack	46	5.9
Prayer, meditation, spontaneous	44	5.7
Depression, emotional trauma	41	5.3
Childbirth	38	4.9
Allergic reaction	31	4.0
Suicide attempt	31	4.0
Dream	29	3.7
Drugs, alcohol	27	3.5
Criminal attack	22	2.8
Combat related	1	0.1
Other	66	8.5
Total	776	100.0

Some of the significant cross-tab findings include:

- Accidents are reported more often by those under 10 years of age, and among males. Accidents account for 27.8% of all NDEs, but that is much higher for children under 10, at 45.1%.
- Illness is reported more often by females, 15.9% as opposed to 10.8% for males.
- Heart attacks are reported more often by men, and those 40 years of age or older. Men report a 9.8% incidence compared to 2.8% for women. Heart attacks constitute 5.9% of the total conditions existing prior to the NDEs, but among those who indicate clinical death, heart attacks account for 14.5% of cases.

Q3. Your status of health after the experience:

Respondents were asked to rate their health at the time of their NDE, and now (at the time of reporting), both using a 4-point scale (Tables 7 and 8). Those who report good or excellent health rose from 68.7% of respondents at the time of their NDE, to 81.4% at the time of reporting. Poor health then is more common at the time of the event than at the time of reporting.

Table 7. Health status at the time of the experience.

Health	Count	Percentage
Poor	83	13.2
Fair	113	18.0
Good	194	30.9
Excellent	237	37.8
Total	627	100.0

Some of the significant cross-tab findings include:

- Respondents under 30 report excellent health more frequently. Those under the age of 10 at the time of their experience report being in excellent health 47.1% of the time, 51.6% for those 10 to 19, and 43.5% for those in their 20s.
- Those who report excellent health are more likely to report a wonderful NDE and also tend to be more liberal religiously. Excellent health is reported by 37.8% of all respondents but this incidence jumps to 44.2% for those with a wonderful experience, and 44.7% among religious liberals. Indeed, those who report their NDE was generated by a non-life threatening event have a relatively high incidence of excellent health, at 49.1%, when compared to 34.0% for those who report clinical death.

Q4. Your status of health now:

Current health status, which was given at the time of reporting the event, was higher than at the time of the NDE. There is often a long lag between the time of the experience and the reporting of the event.

Table 8. Health status at the time of reporting.

Health	Count	Percentage
Poor	23	3.7
Fair	93	14.9
Good	275	44.1
Excellent	233	37.3
Total	624	100.0

Q5. Contents of your experience: Wonderful, Frightening, Mixed

(Q5. At the time, did you consider the contents of your experience: Wonderful, Frightening, Mixed)

Respondents were asked how they perceived their NDE: as wonderful, frightening, or mixed. The majority viewed the NDE as wonderful, and only 8.6% as frightening, Table 9.

Table 9. Wonderful experience.

Experience was:	Count	Percentage
Frightening	66	8.6
Mixed	286	37.3
Wonderful	414	54.0
Total	766	100.0

Significant cross-tab findings:

- Those who report a wonderful experience are more often female at 57.8% versus 47.8% for males. A wonderful experience is described more often in the over 40 age groups; 62.0% for those in their 40s, and 64.1% for those 50 and over.
- Those who report a wonderful experience are highly correlated with the similar question of whether they view the after-effects of their experience as positive or disturbing.

Although most NDE accounts are described as wonderful, or a mixture, there are occasions when the experience is negative. Some examples of hellish experiences are quoted below. In the first case, the subject was intoxicated on alcohol:

"Drunker than you can ever imagine!" I was out of control. I wanted something, someone, to hold onto. I could hear laughing and giggling that seemed almost child-like. But, it carried an air of seduction. As though it wanted me to think it was something it wasn't. But, my drunkenness controlled my inhibitions. I felt a form come towards me that was not male or female; young or old; living or dead. I felt like it was mocking me each time it laughed. . . . My mind was telling me this was ALL wrong. Everything I had been taught to be good and right was now not making any sense. When I looked down at the being I was REALLY SCARED!!!! . . . I looked down. There was blood everywhere! The being began to bathe in it! I felt something grab me. "Get out of here!" "What are you doing here?" I was surrounded by people tugging and pulling on me.

- NDERF, Case #172 (3).

Hellish NDEs may occur as a result of attempted suicide, as in this next account:

The Spirit said [by thought] "it was your fault that you died, because you were not looking after yourself. That is considered a form of suicide, and there is a penalty that must be paid." A screen appeared far in front of me, depicting the negative aspects of my character in HUMAN FORMS. They became animated and started to attack me. I was kicked and punched. I felt the pain of each contact. Curiously, I felt no need to defend myself or fight off my attackers. They then moved backwards as though they were on rewind and got back onto the screen as they were before they animated.

The Spirit then communicated; "YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO HURT YOURSELF OR ANYONE ELSE, BECAUSE YOU AND EVERYONE ELSE ARE THE PERSONAL PROPERTY OF GOD." All this took place in a black void. There was nothing there. All negative aspects of my nature were magnified far more than what they are here in the physical realm. There was/is NO ESCAPING FROM MYSELF. I was then somehow put back in my body, and gradually began to pull myself together. It was not until many years later that I realized that I was given another chance to continue because I had put a young girl's welfare ahead of my own, even though I was dying.

- NDERF, Case #159 (4).

Another hellish experience:

"He that led me had a countenance full of light and shining raiment, and we went in silence, as it seemed to me, towards the rising of the summer sun. And as we walked we came to a broad and deep valley of infinite length; it lay on our left, and one side of it was exceeding terrible with raging flames, the other no less intolerable for violent hail and cold snows drifting and sweeping through all the place. Both sides were full of the souls of men which seemed to be tossed from one side to the other as it were by a violent storm; for when they could no longer endure the fervent heat, the hapless souls leaped into the midst of the deadly cold; and finding no rest there, they leaped back again to be burnt in the midst of the unquenchable flames. Now whereas an innumerable multitude of misshapen spirits were thus tormented far and near with this interchange of misery, as far as I could see, without any interval of rest, I began to think that peradventure this might be Hell, of whose intolerable torments I had often heard men talk.

- NDERF, Case #158 (5).

Less than 10% of NDEs are considered frightening, and even then, it is usually just a transient part of the total experience.

B. Emotional and Spiritual Factors with NDEs

Defining the near-death experience (NDE) is difficult. This is due not only to the wide variation in NDE reports, but also because people report experiences that are similar to NDEs even when they are not facing a truly life-threatening situation. This latter type of experience includes non-life-threatening trauma, emotional and frightful events, and paranormal experiences growing out of prayer and meditation. A landmark study in *The Lancet* encountered similar difficulties with the definition.

“Such experiences are also reported by patients with serious but not immediately life-threatening diseases, in those with serious depression, or without clear cause in fully conscious people. Similar experiences to near-death ones can occur during the terminal phase of illness, and are called deathbed visions.” (6).

Many research groups include spiritual events and altered states of consciousness in a broad definition of an NDE. The Near-Death Experience Research Foundation (NDERF) defines an NDE as:

“A lucid experience associated with perceived consciousness apart from the body occurring at the time of actual or threatened imminent death. . . . It should be noted that there is no consensus among NDE researchers as to a definition.” (7).

Are NDEs associated with an acute medical condition any different from those triggered by benign factors, such as meditation? One approach to answering that question is to compare reports of people who have experienced clinical death with those who report profound, mind-expanding events even though they are not in danger of dying. The content categories in the IANDS survey include:

- Out-of-body experience
- Light
- Strong emotional tone
- Knowledge
- Presence of unearthly beings
- Darkness
- Events out of keeping with beliefs
- Landscape or city
- Presence of deceased persons
- Void
- Boundary
- Life review
- Vision of the future

We looked at two sub-samples; those who reported clinical death, and those who had no medical problems but reported an NDE. Those respondents in the clinical death group show only minor differences with the healthy group. The slight differences were in the incidence of a life review, experiencing a light, and having an out-of-body experience. For 10 out of the 13 content categories listed in the survey, the clinical death group reported higher incidences of occurrence, but the differences were not statistically significant. Both groups reported nearly identical rates for a vision of the future, strong emotional tone, and features out of keeping with their beliefs at the time.

The clinical death group reported an average of 5.3 content categories out of the 13 listed in the questionnaire, compared to 4.7 for the healthy respondents. The fact that there are only slight differences between the two groups suggests that non-life threatening NDEs are just as valid as those associated with a truly life-threatening event.

References, Chapter 3.

- (1) [Http://www.iands.org/nde_archives/experiencer_accounts/misty_white_light.html](http://www.iands.org/nde_archives/experiencer_accounts/misty_white_light.html).
- (2) [Http://www.iands.org/msgboards/messages/544/104048.html?1093051379](http://www.iands.org/msgboards/messages/544/104048.html?1093051379). Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:30 pm.
- (3) [Http://www.nderf.org/john_1%27s_nde.htm](http://www.nderf.org/john_1%27s_nde.htm), case #172.
- (4) [Http://www.nderf.org/peter_r%27s_nde.htm](http://www.nderf.org/peter_r%27s_nde.htm), case #159.
- (5) [Http://www.nderf.org/696_ad_nde.htm](http://www.nderf.org/696_ad_nde.htm), case #158.
- (6) Near-death experience in survivors of cardiac arrest: a prospective study in the Netherlands, *Pim van Lommel, Ruud van Wees, Vincent Meyers, Ingrid Elfferich*: The Lancet, Dec. 15, 2001.
- (7) From the NDERF website: <http://www.nderf.org>.

4. Transitional States

The transitional period between normal consciousness and the near-death experience is uncharted territory. Many people report a sudden shift to an out-of-body state, while others report a rushing or tinkling sound and a feeling of moving out through the head or chest. Some report feeling like they are slipping out of a glove as they become aware of altered perceptions. Many report seeing both the material earth plane and the spiritual landscape at the same time.

The transition to an altered awareness was not part of the IANDS survey, although the narrative parts of the NDE accounts are helpful in understanding this process.

A. Cessation of Pain

One aspect of NDEs that may signal the transition to an altered state is the cessation of pain. During a medical trauma, pain is often intense. The sudden cessation of that pain is then reported as the NDE begins. Some examples:

My pain stopped. I heard the bell ringing and hospital personnel saying, "Code blue, code blue." I thought oh someone died and they need to take care of the people and are going to leave me alone to do that. Then when I came out of the CAT scan tunnel I saw all of these people running over to me but I was above them looking down. I then realized I was dead.

- IANDS, Waved Back by an Angel (1).

The following NDE was told by a woman's daughter.

She was sick in the ER and on a table, lying there and getting worked on when suddenly she was floating in the room above her body. She could see and hear the doctors and nurses in the room. She saw my father threaten the doctor as described in the previous question. The next thing she knew she was floating at high speed down a long, perfectly black tunnel with the sensation of being enfolded in soft, luxurious black velvet. She used the words "black velvet" in her description. She described how wonderful she felt, how good it was, with the complete absence of pain and struggle. No trouble breathing, no distress of any kind. A feeling of pure physical well being and overwhelming goodness and relief.

- NDERF, Dorothy S's NDE (2).

With many aspects of the NDE the reporter has difficulty expressing the events. This last example provides a clear indication of exactly what this category conveys:

Bliss; It's a small word. I think it is one we only feel here like a shadow of what it really means. Anyone who has ever been hurt and had the medicine take effect to stop the pain knows the relief that "absence of pain" can be. Something that to many here is not even a reality to be lost, just the lack of pain, is a treasure to someone who hurts.

When I began this I was in a deep, black heart hurt clear to my bones and now I was freed of that and bliss is the only word that even whispers of the feeling in me as the pain not only was stopped, but removed. The pain was gone and all threat of pain in my heart or body was gone. No one could hurt me again, not even me! I could hurt no one again, ever! I was so comforted! I didn't hurt anymore. I was at peace in myself. Finally, I knew the meaning of peace in my heart. I believe it was the first touch of the Love and Grace reaching out to me.

- NDERF case #1615 (15).

This sense of peace is another indication that the NDE has begun.

B. The Tunnel

Many people report passing through a tunnel. It's not clear whether they are actually traveling through a tunnel or if that is the effect of seeing and approaching a pinpoint of light off in the distance. To be sure, many reports include being able to see the sides of the tunnel, but they just as often describe objects or entities moving through that space at the same speed. They often simply state they feel they were moving at a high rate of speed, and often towards that pinpoint of light.

Here is an example of the pinpoint of light:

It was so dark but peaceful and I remember thinking I must be dead. I couldn't feel my body--don't think I had one, but I was still me with crystal clear thinking. It felt like I was there for a long time. Then I could see in the distance, almost miles away, a small light that was so warm and inviting. Even today, I can still feel it when I think about the light. I thought do I go to it or what, as it sure beat the darkness; it felt right to go there too.

- IANDS, Someone Stopped Me (4).

Another example of the pinpoint of light and entering the brightness of that light:

When I shut my eyes I noticed a small pinpoint of light (behind my closed eyelids) and decided to focus on it as I prayed. As I began to recite the Lord's Prayer the light began to grow bigger and get brighter. It grew and grew and became brighter and brighter and brighter until my whole head was filled with the light. It had begun as a small little spec but grew so large and bright that I couldn't look at it anymore. It hurt. It was too bright. It was incredibly bright. I opened my eyes and noticed that I was out of breath. I was breathing very hard like I'd been running and was out of breath. I was incredulous, very excited about what I'd just gone through.

- IANDS, Face-to-face with Jesus the Christ (5).

The tunnel is described by an 11-year old child in this next example:

The impact of this blow sent me down on my knees and I quickly passed out. I fell into a deep blackness. I remember going through a kind of black hose. At the end of it, I felt being drawn back by a mysterious force, but I resisted because I did not want to go back through that black hose again. I went forward and suddenly I found myself in a grey space.

- NDERF, case # 153 (6).

This example provides more detail about the tunnel.

The next thing I knew I was watching a kind of movie of my life. Not a whole life story as some people experience but only some great and happy childhood memories. I don't know how long this lasted but after this I was in a tunnel and out of body. I realized that my body was behind me but I was afraid to turn around and look. But then, being of a nature that is very analytical, I began taking an interest in the tunnel itself. There was an array of colors--not bright like psychedelic colors but rather pastel and soothing. They rotated with the entire tunnel. In a way (it was) like colors move in a kaleidoscope.

I can remember vividly being extremely aware of moving further and further into this tunnel and being fully aware of having all the natural feelings of having a body but not being able to see it. For example, I would move my fingers and all the sensations were there without a physical form to identify them with.

I never saw a bright light before me or any god figures or anyone. I just continued deeper and deeper into the tunnel and I was having a great time of it. Then, in some unexpected moment, the thought occurred to me that I was dying. I swore a few cuss words and said, in effect--to hell with this. At this very moment I was back in my body, awake and alert.

- NDERF, case #179 (7).

In this last example of the tunnel, the patient report both entering and leaving the tunnel:

I floated up out of my body toward the ceiling and corner of the room. I saw a tunnel and began spinning in the tunnel. It was white all around me. I then heard the nurse come in to check on me and she saw me passed out. . . . As I came to, I came out of the corner in the room and tunnel and went back into my body. I remember the doctor telling me that he almost lost me and it scared him to death.

- IANDS, Spinning in the Tunnel (8).

The experiences of the tunnel seem similar but have varying details.

C. Movement

Some NDE reports describe rapid movement even without the perception of a tunnel. There is a sense of speed, or passing through a vortex.

And then the only thing I felt and knew was no matter what I was being taken by this enormous energy at a super velocity that I couldn't avoid, resist; I was gone.

Then you feel going faster inside something that I cannot really explain with the adequate words. It is so fast that I cannot say it was a tunnel, I just can say that you in whatever existence you are transformed; this force takes you which such power that you only feel the sensation that you are going to a force that is claiming you. Yes is like you belong to it. I call it One.

- IANDS, anonymous on Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:37 pm (9).

Movement in the tunnel is often described as quite rapid.

I felt my spirit leave my body. I saw a light far away but I was moving towards it very quickly. I felt as though I was traveling through a tunnel and I was surrounded by the most beautiful colors, some of which I hadn't ever seen before.

- IANDS. By Anonymous on Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:35 pm: (10).

Both a tunnel and the sense of movement appear in the following account:

Now, here's something that is hard to explain. I was watching myself inside the tunnel at the same time I was looking at myself outside the tunnel, all seeing and all questions happening at the same time. How could I be down in that tunnel seeing a light at the end of it when I'm floating out here seeing a tunnel that is not in a straight line?

Suddenly, I was thrust at a high rate of speed through the tunnel toward the light. It was magnificent. Years later I dove into a warm swimming pool and was brought back to that moment as I floated underwater. It was the water splitting across my face. That was the feeling in the tunnel.

- IANDS, Never Wanted to Leave (11).

D. "You Must Go Back"

Once the person is on the other side, the first words they often hear are: "It's not your time, you must go back." Obviously, since the experiencer has returned to give his report, it certainly was not his time. I can only wonder what the words are for those who do not return!

It's common for the person to resist coming back, as seen in the following report:

I couldn't make out a face but she was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. This I knew. This I still know. She said, "You can't go. I can't let you go." But, I didn't want to listen. She kept telling me that I couldn't go, that she couldn't let me go. After repeating that a few times, she sternly said, "You cannot go." A tear was rolling down my left cheek and she wiped the tear with the part of her index finger between the first and second knuckles. At that moment I was back in the operating room

- IANDS, You cannot go (12).

People seem willing to let the worries of the material life behind them:

The lady told me I had to go back and that I had work to do. I was unhappy with this. I was totally at peace. I felt no wish to return and had no thoughts about who, or what, I had left behind.

- IANDS, A Boundary of Flowers (13).

Many reports come from people who have had traumatic injuries, so the return is doubly painful:

I have never felt such peace and joy and I did not want to return. When I did, it was the worst pain I had ever felt. I am not afraid to die. There is no pain in dying. When it is my time, I will be very eager to go.

- IANDS, A brighter path (14).

In this case, a woman is given the choice to stay or return:

I was given a choice to continue down the tunnel towards a light. The feeling was blue light to the other side of life or to return to my body. I was told that if I woke up I would be very ill and have great pain for a while. I had a discussion with the beings about just having had my second child, and staying would mean leaving the children for my husband to raise. I decided to return as leaving would not be fair to the children.

- IANDS, A choice to continue or return (15).

In this case, too, the person is given a choice and decides to return:

It asked "Are you ready to come home?" I knew it meant death. I thought about it, I really did, I thought so hard and for what seemed like hours I contemplated. Do I really want to die? This was the greatest feeling I had ever experienced, do I want this feeling to end? My answer was 'no'. I wanted to live a life. As soon as I answered 'no' (which was not done verbally, I doubt I even had anything like a body at the time) I was immediately hit with, well, intuitions of the future. . . .

My journey was the same, just backwards. This time I could hear doctors and nurses talking, and machines going crazy. I looked behind and could see my own body laying there cold, with the others cluttered all around me furiously trying to revive me. I look back up towards the ceiling again, and 'close my eyes' once I reached my body, and never woke up until morning.

- NDERF, Jolene NDE (16).

This phenomenon is interesting, as it tends to substantiate the out-of-body aspect of NDEs. If consciousness can exist outside of the body, and pain stops when that occurs, then the perception of pain, and perhaps other forms of suffering, may be meaningless in the spiritual plane.

References, Chapter 4.

- (1) Waved Back by an Angel.
Http://www.iands.org/nde_archives/experiencer_accounts/waved_back_by_an_angel.html.
- (2) Http://www.nderf.org/dorothy_s_nde.htm.
- (3) Http://www.nderf.org/dw_nde.htm NDERF, case #1615.
- (4) Http://www.iands.org/nde_archives/experiencer_accounts/someone_stopped_me.html, Someone Stopped Me.
- (5) Http://www.iands.org/nde_archives/experiencer_accounts/light_heals_veteran.html, Face-to-face with Jesus the Christ.
- (6) Http://www.nderf.org/guenter_w%27s_nde.htm. Case #153.
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- (8) Http://www.iands.org/nde_archives/experiencer_accounts/spinning_in_the_tunnel.html, Spinning in the Tunnel.
- (9) <Http://www.iands.org/msgboards/messages/544/104048.html?1093051379>. Anonymous on Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:37 pm.
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5. Pervasive Content

A. Experience Content

Q6. Did your experience include (check all that apply):

Respondents were shown a list of possible content categories with check boxes and asked to indicate which elements were present in their NDE (Table 10). The vast majority of respondents checked multiple boxes. Two thirds report an out-of-body experience, and almost as many see a light. More than half report strong emotional tone and receiving extraordinary knowledge. Almost half of the respondents report seeing unearthly beings.

Table 10. The NDE experience included.*

Experience included:	Count	Percentage
Out-of-body experience	533	67.7
Light	508	64.5
Strong emotional tone	480	61.0
Knowledge	413	52.5
Presence of unearthly beings	379	48.2
Darkness	275	34.9
Events out of keeping with beliefs	224	28.5
Landscape or city	206	26.2
Presence of deceased persons	200	25.4
Void	192	24.4
Boundary	185	23.5
Life review	170	21.6
Vision of the future	152	19.3
None of the these	4	0.5
Total	769	100.0

* Percentages add to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

There are 13 items that may be checked on this experience list. Overall, respondents selected an average of five items (4.98), with the highest number of selections in the 30 to 39 age group (average 5.35 items each). A higher than normal number of items was also selected for those reporting clinical death (5.30 items each). This suggests that those who reported a clinical death NDE had a richer, more detailed NDE.

Table 10 shows that 2 out of 3 reports include an out-of-body experience. More than half report seeing a light, experiencing strong emotional tone, and receiving knowledge. The prevalence of each item is not necessarily the same as the sequence of events. For example, darkness might be the first characteristic mentioned, followed by a pin-point of light developing into a bright light, and then an awareness of being out of the body. If someone who has an NDE reports just one of these 13 items it is the out-of-body experience. If the report includes just two items, it is most often the out-of-body and the presence of light. This pattern continues for the

top 5 items listed in Table 10. Cross-tabulations of findings for each of these characteristics of an NDE will be discussed with examples of each on the following pages. Sometimes the lack of significant differences is an important finding. There are generally few differences found in these categories by gender or race, or whether reports come from the US or other countries.

Sometimes the NDE content exhibits symbolic meaning. The boundary, for example, might be a river, a gate, or a canyon.

B. The Out-of-Body Experience

An out-of-body experience is an awareness and perception that appears from a viewing point outside of the confines of the body. The visual perception usually resembles normal human vision but may also include the ability to see 360 degrees in all directions. Sometimes this perception includes the ability to see through objects, to view the interior workings of bodies or objects, as in X-ray vision, and, on occasion incorporates the ability to zoom instantly to distant locations or microscopically to minute detail.

The out-of-body experience is more often reported by those under 40 years of age. For the total sample 67.7% report an out-of-body episode but this is significantly lower at 59.6% for those aged 40 to 49, and 48.4% for those 50 and older. The highest incidence is 76.2% in the 10 to 19 year age group. An out-of-body experience is also higher than average for reports associated with clinical death, 75.1%.

The following case is typical. The percipient can see family members gathered around his body during a swimming accident.

Playing in a creek with my family, I slid in a sandy area in water over my head. I then blacked out. I awoke out of my body, watching my family and relatives trying to revive me. I was above them about 25 feet looking down. I watched them revive me. I then was back in my body.

I remember the placement of the people and the clothes they wore. I remember seeing things in cinema-scope with sharp, clear vision and colors. No tunnel. No lights, but in a calm place watching everything. They can't see me though. My family was standing around my body, my father giving mouth-to-mouth. I was above them floating.

- NDERF, case #182 (1).

The out-of-body state often includes a total lack of concern for the welfare of the human form.

I decided to stay outside and I instantly realized that my body had to die, meaning total destruction by decay. I thought to myself: "How sad for my mother!" As for me, I did not feel any regrets, because my body was now only a wrapper to me, a burden of which I freed myself the moment I had decided to stay outside.

Presently I realized that I was able to move freely about in a way I had never experienced before. I was floating right through the walls of our house and up into the sky.

- NDERF, case #153 (2).

From the out-of-body vantage point, percipients seem to be able to see through walls and know what's going on around them.

What I remember is like floating high up over the bed and I could see myself lying in the bed looking very white (I noticed that because I have olive skin and never look pale). I saw the nurse taking my temperature and my mother and father were sitting on the bed with me and my mother was crying, not loudly but very softly. I remember that my sister tried to come in the room, but my grandmother would not let her. Then I saw a man walk in the room with this big brown paper sack full of ice. It was the man who lived next door and he had a truck so he had gone to get the ice from the icehouse downtown. I remember seeing him keep placing more and more ice on my body, but I did not feel any cold or anything. All during this time I just remember the floating sensation.

- IANDS, Anonymous on Friday, August 20, 2004 - 08:19 pm: (3).

Some reports include perceptions of an alternate body, one made of light or a semi-transparent body with all of the senses intact.

After that breath I went black, everything was dark. I don't know how much time had lapsed when I was out of my body. I didn't feel or remember leaving my body but it was like I was just there, I was standing over my body with my spirit/soul feet and ankles in my dead bodies head, I was looking down at myself but didn't remember being hurt, I had no idea I was dead or injured. I was now a translucent shadow like with hands, feet, a whole body, but it was made of energy, power, and strength. I looked at my right arm and made a fist. I looked at my left arm and made a fist. I felt so strong and powerful I was energy.

- IANDS, Anonymous on Friday, August 20, 2004 -
08:17 pm (4).

This body of light is sometimes referred to as an astral body.

C. Seeing a Light

Light is one of those difficult-to-define items. Certainly, in these reports, light refers to a bright illumination. The definition in the case studies, though, is often expanded to include an intensely bright light, or one that appears to have substance and qualities associated with the symbolic meaning of light, such as understanding, and expanded perceptual abilities. Report of light is higher among females (67.2%) than for males (59.7%). Seeing a light is more often associated with a wonderful NDE experience, 73.4%.

In this case we get suggestions of the symbolic qualities of the light:

As if by a giant magnet the light drew me to it and I was submerged in its interior where all there was, was light. I forgot I had a body and felt fused with the light. In that moment I experienced a feeling of "plural unity" and understood everything with extreme clarity all of a sudden. I discovered what reality is and saw and understood with my consciousness alert that allowed me to comprehend everything with infinite perfection, without any doubt.

From my heart sprang an "Ah Ha!!!!" feeling, as if there were something I had always known but had forgotten and that I can't explain with words or human language. I felt like a co-participant of creation.

- NDERF, case #1609 (5).

Another example of light where it also refers to enlightenment:

We got closer and closer to that light. I began to feel warmth and a feeling of being drawn to that warmth. Is it corny to say that I just "knew" that if I could reach that light that everything would be okay. It was everything we love wrapped up into light. It was the feeling of home, family, reassurance and love. It was a feeling of belonging that I have never found since.

The light seems to hold me, like someone carrying or cuddling me. The only way I can describe it is feeling like I was part of the universe. I remember not feeling surprised, like I knew all along that I would soon be there, like I had been there before. I was more at ease than I could ever imagine in life . I sincerely felt like I was back where I came from and knew it.

- NDERF Case #154 (6).

With the light comes a sense of peace:

The clouds opened up in a circle above me so that I could see blue sky. As I went farther up, the blue sky became increasing pale and transitioned to white and finally a brilliant white. There I stop going higher and just floated freely. With the brilliant white light came the most incredible love and peacefulness. It was as though every cell of my body was being bathed in love and on a molecular level. This was a love as I have never experienced before. All fear was gone and I completely surrendered to the love. After staying there in the white/love for some time, I remember thinking, "OK, I understand, I can go back now." And, at that, I was out of the white and awake in bed. I am not sure who I was saying "OK" to or what I meant by "I understand", except that I had the understanding that "love" connects all.

- IANDS Anonymous on Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:33 pm: (7).

D. Experiencing Strong Emotional Tone

Intense emotional content is a hallmark of the NDE. The vast majority of cases include positive states, such as euphoria, a sense of belonging, and overwhelming love. The person reporting the event often has difficulty expressing the magnitude of the feelings. In some cases there is fear or sadness. Strong emotional tone is higher for those reporting a wonderful experience, 68.1% compared to 54.2% who report a mixed experience. Those who report a frightening experience also report a strong emotional tone, 57.7%.

The best way to appreciate these emotions is to jump right in to some case narratives. The first case shows the difficulty in describing the content. The emotions swing from happy to sad:

The experience is so intense, that it is hard to explain because it doesn't follow a logical sequence and it is totally wrapped up in emotion. Words are far too limited to explain, but I'm doing my best to try to say what happened. . . . The best way I can describe it was, "OH MY GOD! WOW!!!" . . . As happy as I was over there, I got uncontrollably sad. I remembered that I didn't say goodbye to my children. I needed to go back to say goodbye. Then I popped back into my body.

- NDERF, case #180 (8).

Typically, the experience is permeated with love:

Then something happened that I would never, never forget. Love, pure, utter love came pouring down on me along with incredible warmth. My whole soul or being was immersed in this love. He lifted me up and gave me a kiss on my mouth. This being of light loved me deeply, infinitely deeply, and more and more intensively. I was happy! I could have stayed in this beam of love forever.

- NDERF, case #153 (2).

Sometimes it's difficult to separate out the emotional content from the action of the event:

I went to a place of knowledge, where I knew everything. It was here that I knew that there was no such thing as time or space. It was here that I realized that I had created all of the melodramas in my life and it made me laugh (I call that my cosmic giggle).

I went into a flow of oneness that I think is God, (I called that the isness); it is a state of bliss where I am all there is. It is formless. It is like waking from a nightmare and finding yourself safe at home. Life on earth is the dream and this oneness/bliss is the reality that you wake up into safe and sound.

- IANDS, Oneness is reality (9).

In this final example the emotion comes from a sense of reunion, of returning home to a familiar place or person:

All of a sudden someone pulled me out of the car. I started to cry and remember saying "I know you wouldn't let anything happen to me. I didn't know who she was, but I knew "her." She was me and I was her. I felt such joy being with her again. It sounds crazy but we were going through each other. It was as if we were invisible, but I felt such love as I went through her.

- NDERF case #1149 (10).

The strong emotional tone is usually positive and loving. Many NDE reports include a brief period of confusion where fear may be involved, but for the most part, the emotions are loving and satisfying.

E. Receiving Extraordinary Knowledge

Knowledge refers to the sudden understanding of life's mysteries and the workings of the universe. During the NDE, the soul appears to fully comprehend the reasons behind life events.

Knowledge is reported highest in the under age 10 group at 59.2% as opposed to 45.9% for those in their 40s, and 40.6% for those 50 and over. The imparting of knowledge is also higher for those reporting a wonderful experience, 58.7%, compared to those with a mixed experience, 48.3%, and those with a frightening experience, 36.4%.

In this first example, the person reporting the NDE is given full knowledge, but is unable to remember key components once he is returned to normal waking consciousness:

I had some insight at the time about life's mysteries. I remember thinking, "Wow, now I know." But I don't remember what I learned. I guess God doesn't want us to know certain things. Now I feel that's why faith is so important, so God can see how much faith you have in him.

- NDERF case #133 (11).

Sometimes the knowledge is quite specific:

Then I was taken into this forest and shown a cure for cancer. I was so excited I couldn't wait to get back to tell everybody. I felt so smart because I was not very smart in school. I believe it had to do with flowers and leaves. God told me I would not be able to talk about it because that memory would be taken away from me until later on in my life.

- NDERF case #134 (12).

Knowledge is sometimes combined with telepathy, and this appears to aid communication:

I would "ask" then would "know" the answer from the golden, glowing, loving being. I had no lips to speak and no ears to hear but I heard and spoke somehow. So did it. I reveled in that complete, pure, communication. There was no possibility of misunderstandings or evasions. There were no words to confuse the issue, only the truth of learning and knowing each other between us.

- NDERF case #1615 (13).

Knowledge often nudges the recipient to re-evaluate difficult personal situations:

I realized that I understood everything with a great clarity and super-lucidity I had never experienced before. I discovered that I had personally chosen to take on a physical body and have the life experiences I was having. I realized I had wasted time in suffering and what I should have been doing was using my freedom to choose true love, and not pain, in all that came into my life.

- NDERF case #1609 (14).

A comprehensive understanding seems to be the natural state of existence on the spiritual plane:

Things were assimilated instantly and within that instant, knowledge was completely consumed. These beings were not male or female. Since there is no way to measure time, I have no idea how long this went on. I was shown and told things unimaginable.

- NDERF case #186 (15).

Often, the knowledge comes in the form of being able to answer questions as they are formed in your mind:

The nearest description that I can give is that it was like being right in the middle of a vast, huge, huge molecule frame, such as the ones that chemists make to demonstrate the properties of chemicals. This one was MASSIVE. It was multi-dimensional and I could understand EVERYTHING. . . . Then I realized that whatever thought came to me, I could make that happen. Suddenly, I could see mathematical calculations in multi-dimension, describing how everything works in the universe - magnetism, density, light, color, energy, etc. It was just fabulous.

- NDERF case #311 (16).

Although many experiencers report receiving knowledge, they often don't recall what was revealed, or they begin to lose that information once they are back on the material plane.

F. Seeing of Unearthly Beings

Several types of beings are described in NDEs. Some are human, or nearly human. Many are other-worldly, such as spirit guides or angels. Sometimes the being is not given a name, but may be god-like, or all-powerful. Encountering unearthly beings is higher for females, 53.1%, compared to males, 40.3%.

The following is an illuminating and comprehensive description of a spirit being:

That being was "human" or "like me" in feeling but powerful beyond description. I was fascinated by it. We were alike and alive but I was in awe of it. That Being was so much more in every way than I was that I felt small compared to it. I felt physically smaller. I felt my lack of my control over my self as less powerful.

The essence of it, the "self" or, rather, "selflessness" of it is so much harder to tell. I felt the power the Being appeared to create and that was sent out from it. It was like standing in the sun but instead of sunshine LOVE warmed you. It was like nothing and no one I have ever seen or met but I knew it only loved. There was no other word close to what I experienced. Pure Love came from that being.

The Power of Love created and sent out by that being was a force, like electricity is a force. I could feel it being sent out and touching everything around it. I try to write it and there are no experiences in my life to compare it to that captures the essence of what I felt. It was unlike anything on this world.

That being was composed of love; It created love, it emitted love, it directed love. It lived on love. It was Love; Love the Power. There was nothing in that entire experience with the other Divine Loving Being that was not totally "good" and powered by "love".

- NDERF case #1615 (13).

On occasion, reports include a large number of people or beings. These groups may be a procession with religious figures. This case includes a classic Christian symbol.

Suddenly, coming out of this light, I saw a myriad of beings dressed in white who followed someone who carried himself with great magnificence, who had a white beard and wore a kind of tunic-like vestment that was whiter than that of the others and was very beautiful. He came down on my left to where I was standing, without touching the earth (floating above the peaceful sea). On his breast he wore a gold Cross of Malta, surrounded by a circle that was also golden and he looked at me with serenity.

- NDERF case #1609 (14).

This next case includes a female being with angelic features:

I awakened from the surgery, blinded by a river of white light. I thought it was an after-effect of the general anesthesia. I though it was odd that it pushed beyond my optic nerve and went through my entire body. I immediately rose to my feet, and looked at the nurse who had helped me up. She wasn't a nurse. She was clothed in light, extraordinarily beautiful, and loving. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, and I almost cry when I think about it. I fell in love the instant I looked at her. I was in ecstasy. She wore a loose-fitting, white gown, and it gave off light of its own. Her light was golden and white. She was thin, blond, with shoulder-length hair. She was about 5'7", and fair but golden in her skin hues. She was definitely female, but radiated power and intelligence, as well as love and care. She was responsible and carried massive authority.

- NDERF case #198 (17).

A frequently mentioned spirit being is Jesus Christ. A powerful, authoritative presence is quite common in the IANDS spirit being cases, although that being is not always identified as Jesus. There are too few reports in this current sample to make cross-cultural comparisons with other prominent religions. The following report mentions talking with Jesus:

The light was everywhere; it even passed through me. I can remember looking at my hand and the light passed through it. My hand was transparent, but this did not surprise me. As I walked with a heavenly person, his countenance shone forth with such brightness. I can't even begin to describe it. I knew this heavenly being was Jesus because I recognized him as a familiar friend. He didn't announce who he was because this wasn't necessary. I remember walking with Jesus, but we weren't walking in the physical sense. The best way I can describe our walking is in mid-air, floating a bare spare above the ground of a beautiful garden.

- IANDS, Spirit communication (18).

Here is a brief but typical case involving Jesus:

There was Jesus standing there about 100 feet tall, with his right arm extended. He was glowing, with long brown hair, copper skin, and a long white robe. The feeling of love and being home was awesome. I reached up and put my hand in his. We spoke with our minds and he gave me a guided (tour) of heaven. The colors were awesome, peace, love, and beauty. As we walked, I turned to look back for my grandmother, and my dog Rusty, who I did not see. As I turned to look forward there was sheer curtain, with people standing there as far as far as the eye could see. Then I heard God say, you have to go back. I begged him to please let me stay, but he repeated, you have to go back.

- NDERF case #1431 (19).

Angels and spirit guides are common in NDE reports. Here the reporting person seems to know an angel is present even without seeing his face:

I was walking toward a light. It was very bright... and white. And then, at the end of the way, I seemed to step out of a hallway into the purest light that I have no real words to describe. It was not at all offensive to my eyes. Very wonderful! I took a hand and although I didn't look at the angel, I knew it was an angel. He had a white sleeve, looking like that of a robe, and his hand was like that of a full grown man, except it had absolutely no sign of age. We walked to a pedestal that had a big book. The book had a tapestry front and looked to be ancient somehow, but again not aged. I think it was a needlepoint type of design. The Angel opened the book and turned to a place about 2/3 of the way through it, and I watched him run his finger down a long list of names and stop at my name. I didn't read my name exactly, but I actually did see it. I just knew it was mine.

- IANDS, Anonymous on Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:25 pm (20).

Angels can often serve as guides, as in this case:

I had closed my eyes tight, I remember someone saying open your eyes, I was in a pure white space, and could see rooms with spirits walking around, I started to cry, but no tears, I remember looking at my hands and they were translucent, then an angel appeared, she had such a radiant glow to her beauty to behold, she comforted me, telling me I was safe, I remember telling her I wasn't ready to die, she said she knew that, then she pointed down, and I could see the doctor's doing CPR on a little Girl, not really understanding that was me, I watched my whole operation, CPR, and all, I told her that was so sad, she looks so young, then she said they are bringing her back, and I felt like I was pushed and thrown back into that painful body

- NDERF case #1863 (21).

In this case, a guide or companion is present, and it might be described as an angel. One of the most common messages is that "you must go back."

As I recall, the instant I had the thought, "This isn't what it's supposed to be like," there was a lady at my left shoulder even with my head. She was wearing an almost indescribably beautiful deep red crushed velvet dress that flowed to the ground (but there really wasn't any ground; I don't know how else to describe it. She had the most beautiful shiny ebony hair, wavy, flowing down below her waist and almost to her feet. I couldn't make out a face but she was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. This I knew. This I still know. She said, "You can't go. I can't let you go." But, I didn't want to listen. She kept telling me that I couldn't go, that she couldn't let me go. After repeating that a few times, she sternly said, "You cannot go." A tear was rolling down my left cheek and she wiped the tear with the part of her index finger between the first and second knuckles.

At that moment I was back in the operating room where I saw a chrome bar over me, and a person in hospital greens across my feet.

- IANDS, You Cannot Go (22).

G. Encountering Darkness

The questionnaire included both darkness and a void as possible NDE content. The distinction, frankly, isn't clear. This represents a questionnaire design flaw that may compromise the findings for both the darkness and void categories. Darkness may mean that non-visual senses, such as hearing, smell, sense of air temperature, and touch are still intact, while a void is often described as pure silence with no sensation at all, except being conscious of your thoughts.

Reports of encountering darkness and a void drop off significantly after age 50. Mention of darkness and a void are higher for those reporting a frightening experience. Darkness is reported at 56.1% for those reporting a frightening experience, compared to 28.3% for those reporting a wonderful experience. For void, the corresponding percentages are 39.4% and 19.3% respectively.

In this example, other senses appear to be operating:

I was comfortably wafting along a black tunnel, no specific direction since I had no body to gauge and (I) noticed it was a blackness like I had never seen. It was full of love and joy and peace and just nurtured me along. Waves just came over me and gently guided me along. I was overcome by the love that surrounded me and that I could return the feeling.

- NDERF case #186 (15).

The darkness is sometimes associated with being in deep space:

I looked out at a 45 degree angle and shot off like a rocket into this infinity of darkness I could see into. It was not like being in a dark room or closet; it was a darkness I could see into an infinity. I felt like I was in space. I was looking for something but didn't know what I was looking for. I knew I was looking for something but I had no urgency to find it. I was calm, no pain or worry. I was just looking for something. I was zooming through this darkness like a rocket but I could not feel wind; it was motion going forward at a 45 degree angle. I could not hear voices during this motion through space.

- IANDS, Anonymous on Friday, August 20, 2004 -
08:17 pm (4).

Again, it's difficult to distinguish between darkness and a void. In this case it might be judged either way:

What I do remember is this: I was in a very, very black room. Blacker than I have ever seen. I do not think that I was really conscious of anything for a while, kind of like nothing mattered. I remember that it was very quiet and peaceful there. To me it seemed as though this was a blank room with nothing in it but me; I did not have a body. For a long while there was no sound.

- IANDS, Black room (23).

The content categories listed above are quite pervasive, often occurring in more than half of all NDE cases. In the next chapter we will discuss less common content categories.

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6. Ancillary Content

The next group of content categories occurs frequently, but they are not as predominant as those discussed in Chapter 5. Each of the ancillary content categories is mentioned by less than 30% of respondents to the survey.

The ancillary categories are:

- Events out of keeping with beliefs, 28.5%
- Seeing a landscape or city, 16.2%
- Presence of deceased persons, 25.4%
- Experiencing a void, 24.4%
- Encountering a boundary, 23.5%
- Having a life review, 21.6%
- Seeing a vision of the future, 19.3%

A. Events Out of Keeping With Beliefs

Beliefs cover a wide range of topics, so this aspect of the questionnaire is somewhat nebulous and poorly worded. It may refer to the belief that consciousness can exist outside of the body, or belief in angels, or broad religious convictions. Among all respondents, 28.5% report experiences out of keeping with their belief systems, but this is significantly higher for people who describe themselves as religious liberals, 35.9%.

This first example gives a hint of the types of beliefs that undergo change from a voyage to those spiritual abodes:

Suddenly, I was "sucked backwards" at warp speed, as though "through the roof." Then the blackest black, nothingness. I saw no tunnel, no light; just blackness. It didn't inspire fear. I felt perfectly fine, and somewhat like a detached observer. And everything seemed to be happening too quickly; I didn't have time to think. Then, I was Home. Earth and this life were a bad summer camp, in comparison, and I knew I wanted to stay. I didn't want to go back to camp. That's all I knew. I didn't "see God," but I felt as though I was sitting in the lap and wrapped in the arms of the most wonderful, loving [giant] "parent." This is where it gets frustrating, because there are not, now, and will never be words to convey how this feels... I detest using the word "God," because of the great perversion we humans have made of the concept, but I will use it from this point onward, merely for the sake of expedience.

I was "sitting in God's lap," wrapped in the warmest embrace, and immediately involved in a "conversation." We communicated -- telepathically? Don't know how else to describe it. I didn't want to come back. That was my focus. I was Home, I liked being Home, just let me be Home. But God was holding me tighter [in the best of ways], and showing me the life to which I must return.

- NDERF case #1866 (1).

The "change in beliefs" may not necessarily refer to altered religious views, but rather to the shift that occurs when you are catapulted into this alternate reality. Suddenly you find yourself above the earth, floating in space. Is that a change in belief systems? In this next example the shift seems to refer to an altered perception of self:

Then there was a sudden awareness that I had to go back now. It was as like I went through a dimension, like a wall I popped through and then I was floating in the darkest space. There were bright stars all around. I thought - oh no, there's been a mistake, and I saw forms of hands and arms trying to reach me through this dimensional wall. They couldn't get me. I felt they were crying 'Catch her, catch her!' I was floating through space and began to get very worried. I knew that this was the 'real me', and that my '**dream me**' was having a surgery and that something wrong had happened. I felt as though I floated in this darkest space for a very long time, and had lots of time to realize that I was in serious trouble. There was nothing around me but bright stars far away and I was totally alone. Suddenly, I felt like I was grabbed and body slammed back into my body. I was in the recovery room and a nurse was shaking me, telling me to wake up.

- NDERF case #1830 (2).

In addition to the altered perceptions encountered in the NDE, people who come back from such an experience will also undergo changes in their core beliefs, such as religious affiliation, or life purpose. These will be discussed further in the chapter on NDE after-effects.

B. Viewing a Landscape or City

Landscapes in NDEs range from gardens, to crystal cities, and even to the proverbial "streets of gold." Some often-mentioned features include a river, a library, or hall of records, where the life stories of souls are stored. The oldest age group, 50 and over, more often report seeing a landscape or city, 37.5% compared to 26.2% for the entire population.

Fields of flowers are quite common, as this first example shows:

I saw the most amazing forest and flowers on the other side. The flowers were all over the place with no resemblance to flowers on earth. Although I can't describe the smell, it was gorgeous! The flowers glowed in different indescribable colors.

- NDERF case #134 (3).

The physical characteristics of natural items often appear different in the spiritual landscape. Species of flowers are not found on earth, and the colors are generally more intense:

On the other side of the fence I could see a small clearing with a field of flowers in such wonderful colors; they looked as if they glowed of their own light. To the left was a lake or some other large body of water that too glowed of its own light, as if the sun was shinning on it from on top and from under the water. To the right was a forest of trees also glowing with their own light, as if it was coming from both an outside source and within.

- IANDS, Anonymous on Monday, January 3, 2005 -
09:16 pm (4).

The garden is often just a way-station, as the experience evolves to other events:

Instantly I was outside my body, surrounded by a landscape of natural beauty.

I seem to be flying without the aide of anything, or anyone. I was aware of my state, I was surely going somewhere, but where I did not know. I was passing over hills and valleys; there were all of these green trees, and shrubs. I was taken up by its total beauty, but I knew that was not what it was all about.

- NDERF Damaska C. NDE (5).

As mentioned above, some reports include seeing El Dorado, or a city of gold, as mentioned in this account:

When I arrived there I had a scenic view over the scenery that unfolded in front of me. Down below in the bottom of the hill where I stood I could see all kinds of animals and people in white robes playing. There was a river and a pure golden bridge that crossed over it. In the distance I saw a city with towers all in gold and white and amazing bright colors. It seemed that the great city was emitting light that shoots out from it with such energy you could feel the power.

- IANDS, Living Water (6).

The environment that experiencers report can range anywhere from a self-contained bubble, to a featureless room, and even to vast cities with all kinds of structures.

C. Meeting Deceased Persons

Deceased persons generally refer to friends or relatives who have died and are known to the experiencer. Seeing deceased persons is highest in the 30 to 39 year age group, 36.8%.

Seeing deceased persons is usually a joyous reunion. In this case, a woman meets her deceased grandparents:

Standing by this body of water I looked across it where I saw the same lovely trees and light and also I saw my maternal grandparents. At that time I decided I was visiting them at their farm in Alabama. They looked exactly as they did when they were alive. I did not remember at that time, their death in the 70's. They looked so extremely happy and so healthy and strong. They were sitting on a log together in this wonderful forest. That seems funny to me now, but it was perfectly natural there. When I was a little girl and went to visit my grandparents, my grandmother would come to the screen door, clapping her hands and saying "Oh come in, come in." She was doing that in heaven. My grandfather was motioning me to come where they were with his hands. He also was extremely happy to see me.

- NDERF, Linda K (7).

In this case, the experiencer sees someone from church who has passed over, and sees other religious figures:

Then I thought of a man who wrote a book in our church that was the leader of the church for a long time. He died a few years ago and was a good example to me how we should live our life on earth. There he was right in front of me. I thought that he could certainly give me advice to return here when it was my time. He told telepathically many things which I don't quite remember all. One thing I do remember is that he said I should persevere till the end. He said that was how I can attain paradise again. A little further off from where I stood was a

place where some people sat around a being. I immediately recognize them as the apostles, Elijah and David of the Old Testament. I was amazed to see them. It was like you knew everyone for a long time and just forgot who they are. In the middle sat someone that seemed to emit such great light it was so bright and powerful that you really couldn't look right at it. I just knew it was Jesus.

- IANDS, Living Water (6).

Deceased loved ones are not only encountered as a welcoming committee, but may be shown engaged in other activities. In this case, a woman meets her sister:

My sister, who had passed away 21 years before my experience, she was doing some type of work with other beings, who had human form, but I do not remember their faces. This was in a one-level structure that looked like a long house from the outside. She was giggling and quite happy; she greeted me and told me there was someone she wanted me to meet.

- NDERF, Linda S, case #1864 (8).

The deceased persons seen are usually known to the viewer, although there are occasions when the person seen is not identified until some time in the future, such as when viewing a family photo album.

D. Experiencing a Void

Void, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is difficult to distinguish from darkness. The void experience during NDEs appears to be a state where there is no sound or sensation, yet the person is able to think. It appears to be a state of pure consciousness, and is usually a transient episode during the NDE.

In this case, memory of the earth is lost:

There was no comparison to make with anything because it completely erased my memory of earth while I was 'there'. I can't adequately describe it but now I call it the 'void' because that feels right for it. I do remember thinking "my mind is working so well!!" I felt like an exquisite flawless diamond.

- NDERF, Judith P., case #1635 (9).

The void is explained more fully in this case:

I can remember the EMTs saying I was dead, and discussing the use of charcoal. But I was leaving for another place. I do not remember the transition/journey. But I was fully cognizant of the place I was in. I had no sensations, heat, cold, sound, light, touch, not even pain. I felt my eyes were functioning normally. I had no trouble breathing. I felt I was in a place of great sorrow. All was black, as I felt my eyes were working the darkness seemed to go on forever into the distance in all directions. I turned in different directions searching the darkness, listening, but there was nothing. It seemed forever but then light, the lights and the ceiling of the ER came into focus. They had revived me.

- NDERF, Michael K. (10).

As mentioned above, the distinction between darkness and a void is not entirely clear.

E. Coming to a Boundary

The boundary mentioned in NDEs generally takes on a symbolic nature. For example, the barrier could be a gate as easily as a river, or a row of trees. A boundary is seen most by those in fair to poor health, 29.6%, compared to 21.6% for those in good to excellent health. Those who report a wonderful experience see a boundary 25.8% of the time, compared to 15.2% for those who report a frightening experience.

The barrier in this case is a rock wall:

In front of me was an opening in a barrier built of golden light. It appeared to be a low wall that ran in front of me. It seemed to be built of glowing, golden rocks. Like a stone wall with a small opening for a gate, it seemed to me. It was a border, not a defensive wall, it seemed. Too low for protection it just marked the boundary of what ever place this was.

I was aware of another, smaller "glow" behind me and to my left, on the same side of the barrier as I was. It stood between me and the dark I had come from. I didn't know what it was. It felt like a protector is the closest I can come. The being who stood behind me felt like it had my back, if I had one still. I never saw this one very well. It wasn't much larger than me, but it felt bigger and stronger.

Beyond the opening and over the top of that barrier I could see an immense, golden, glowing globe shape that seemed "way over there." I don't think it was a far distance but I had no way to measure. I just knew it was "over there" and I was "over here". It was golden and white with the light it gave off. It seemed huge yet far away.

- NDERF, DW, case #1615. (11).

This barrier is a curtain of light:

She led me off to the side, and I realized that we were looking through a wall at my sleeping body, from another room. After calming me, which didn't take long, she showed me some amazing views. There was a curtain of light around her, a veil of energy behind her. I wasn't allowed to pass through that veil. I was in a resting area between worlds. To our sides, there was a multi-colored halo of glittering lights in geometric shapes. They seemed electrically charged, moving, and shimmering, like a ragged border between her world and mine. Through a fog-like mist, we peered into the physical world.

- NDERF, Steve T, case #198 (12).

The barrier in this case is felt but not seen:

In the distance, I saw a great shining ball, which was the sun. I felt irresistibly attracted to it by its brightness and I wanted to go right into it. No sooner had I thought this when I hit something that catapulted me far out into blackness.

I tried once more, but it all happened again. I quickly learned that there had to be an invisible barrier that I could only approach but not overcome. I had another go and this time I stopped right in front of this barrier in order to watch the sun, which was now shining in a reddish glow.

- NDERF, Guenter W., case #153 (13).

Barriers can be any boundary demarcation, such as a fence, a river, or even a doorway.

F. Having Life Review

The life review has been described as a rapid-fire series of images, like a sped-up slide show, depicting events in the person's life. Although it is often perceived in a split second, the report often states that every detail, most long forgotten, is included in the review. On occasion, a guide will allow the viewer to experience the emotions of both the soul and those he or she has interacted with. This affords the viewer the opportunity to evaluate his or her own actions, and usually represents the only "judgment" aspect of the review. A life review is least common for those aged 50 and over. They report a life review at 10.9%, about half the 21.6% reported by the entire sample. The life review is also higher for those who report clinical death.

This first case is a good example of the speed of the images being presented:

As my body hit the ground, pictures of my life went through my mind. It was like a freight train of knowledge moving at the speed of light. Each car was experiences of my life (both good and bad), from the time that I entered my mothers womb, until the present. I was the only one to judge my actions. I remember feeling so bad that I hit a frog with a stick as a young child. The last frame was a shot of seeing my wife with my two children, 2 and 4 years old.

I saw everything in the blink of an eye - a whole life review. It would take years of Earth time to relay my life, frame by frame, to another person. The flow of the information was conveyed in the flow of light.

- NDERF, Bob A., case #124 (14).

Here we see the viewer has forgotten most of the events in his life, but is reminded of them:

The figure on my right, who was guiding me, stopped and I could not see his face and as though we were at a small, enclosed beach, there was a hill that served as a place for projecting my life from beginning to end several times. At first rapidly and afterwards more slowly. It was amazing how my life was shown with events I had completely forgotten about and others that were so insignificant that it felt like I was seeing each frame of the personal movie of my life on Earth.

- NDERF, Hafur, case #1609(15).

This case is another typical example, again with the viewer being the only judge:

I began to think about my life and I wandered if it was going to be like my auntie used to tell me; that our lives would be played back and we would be judged accordingly. But as I was thinking about it I could SEE all of the things I did throughout my life just as they happened but faster; showing the good, the bad, and the ugly. Everything I was proud of and every dirty little secret I kept hidden from everybody. But, there it was, only this time I felt remorse, fear, and shame for my indiscretions. I could understand very clearly that we all have negative things in our past, but became aware that we must account for all that we do.

- NDERF, John L., case #172 (16).

The life review is often associated with judgment. See Chapter 7, the section on Judgment, for further discussion.

G. Being Given a Vision of the Future

A vision of the future can be a prophecy for the entire earth or a personal glimpse into life events of the person having the experience. Many times the experiencer is shown what would happen if they decide to stay or go back to the earth plane. A vision of the future occurs mostly for those under 40 years of age. Those 40 and over report such visions at about half the rate of those under 40.

In this case, a woman is shown her family life in the future:

God then showed me my whole life. He told me I would have 13 children, but 3 would not live. I would be married three times. The second marriage would be like going through hell with an abusive husband. The third man would change my whole life around and would be my reward later in life. He showed me the hell I would be living and before I come back to heaven. He told me my daughter would come back to heaven which has happened.

- NDERF case #134 (3).

In this case, a woman is motivated to open a Dungeons and Dragons den, a popular role-playing game for young people:

I knew I was to open up a Dungeons and Dragons den to help children. I could only come back if I made a difference in someone else's life. I would touch a lot of lives, but one person in particular. There would be a female who came to the den, her hair wet, she will be tense trying not to scream. I would be able to help her. Then there will be a passage of two – two hours, two days, two years, I don't know – just two. Then I can go from this world. I get released from this reality. This reality is so awful right now. I feel like a kite without tail, as it spins it does not have stability. It crashes. I had to do this as an agreement to come back. This is my destiny and the appearance of the woman is a milestone in my life. I had to satisfy these requirements to be allowed to come back and say goodbye to children.

- NDERF, case #180 (17).

Although people will on occasion receive a glimpse into the future, that future is not all roses. The next account comes from a child who had an experience at age 3:

My life was shown to me in the form of a long road...and it didn't look like a road I'd choose to travel [though I knew I HAD chosen the road]. I saw many of the different places I'd live and people I'd know. Jobs. Experiences. Too much sadness. I didn't want it. But God just kept gently showing me that I was going back.

The movie kept running, the road kept going...so fast...so much "information." Personal, universal. Mostly about Thought and Love. And, way down the road, late in my life, it seemed the trip would become more enjoyable. God told me [crappy earth translation ahead] to stay true, "follow the clues," and all would be well. The totality of God's love for me was the predominant feeling/understanding, at all times [luckily, that feeling has stayed with me, though I don't necessarily understand it, any more]...

The next thing I remember is sitting in the front seat of the car, between my parents, leaving the hospital.

- NDERF, case #1866 (1).

Usually, the glimpse into the future is personal, but on occasion, the experiencer is given prophetic predictions about the future of the earth.

References, Chapter 6.

- (1) Http://www.nderf.org/v_nde.htm, case #1866.
- (2) Http://www.nderf.org/kate_b_possible_nde.htm, case #1830.
- (3) Http://www.nderf.org/mary_anne_f%27s_nde.htm case #134.
- (4) <Http://www.iands.org/msgboards/messages/544/104048.html?1093051379>, by Anonymous on Monday, January 3, 2005 - 09:16 pm.
- (5) Http://www.nderf.org/damaska_c_nde.htm.
- (6) Http://www.iands.org/nde_archives/experiencer_accounts/living_water.html.
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- (9) Http://www.nderf.org/judith_p_nde.htm, case #1635.
- (10) Http://www.nderf.org/michael_k_nde.htm.
- (11) Http://www.nderf.org/dw_nde.htm, case #1615.
- (12) Http://www.nderf.org/steve_t_nde.htm, case #198.
- (13) Http://www.nderf.org/guenter_w%27s_nde.htm, case #153.
- (14) Http://www.nderf.org/bob_a%27s_nde.htm, case #124.
- (15) Http://www.nderf.org/hafur_nde.htm, case #1609.
- (16) Http://www.nderf.org/john_l%27s_nde.htm, case #172.
- (17) Http://www.nderf.org/bill_w%27s_nde.htm, case #180.

7. Incidental Findings

In addition to the content items specifically asked about on the IANDS questionnaire, other categories appear with enough consistency to warrant our attention. The following sections discuss some of the more interesting topics that are apparent reading NDE reports.

A. Communicating via Telepathy

People hear voices in their NDEs, but often this communication is a direct, mind-to-mind communication, and not a mechanical vibration of sound. Telepathy seems to be the preferred mode of communication in the spiritual realms. Those who report telepathic messages often note how precise the method is compared to the use of words. There is no confusion or doubt about the concept being conveyed.

Here is a typical example:

I didn't hear with my ears. Rather I heard in the middle of my head, close to the back of the frontal lobe. The presence on my right communicated telepathically to me. Communication is not with words as we know it. This being communicated a feeling with the gist of the meaning, "You can stay if you want, or you can go back. But if you go back, you have to do something." I knew that I had to go back for a reason. The reason was more like I was not done yet, not because I have to do something. This is hard to explain, but it is like if you are the boss, something has to be done, but who's going to do it? I elected to come back and finish a few tasks.

- NDERF, case #180 (1).

In this next case, it appears the process of thought is enough to ensure communication by telepathic means:

The peace was so overwhelming and so comforting. Then a voice spoke over my left shoulder, a voice so beautiful, full of love and so deep that I will never forget that sound. He said, "Your time is not now. You must go back to your children. They need you." I said, "I do not want to go back" several times over, and the voice said, "Your newborn baby needs a mother and your other two children need you." No words were spoken as it all happened telepathically. All I had to do was think about what I wanted to say.

- IANDS, There is More (2).

In this case the experiencer sees the benefits of communicating telepathically:

While in my spirit body, I remember communicating telepathically. This is how Jesus and I communicated in that heavenly garden. It was so easy. It required no effort. You thought the thoughts and they were communicated. Speaking through my physical mouth is so difficult and frustrating. Sometimes we're misunderstood; people get the wrong meaning of what you're trying to say. The phrase the world uses of being soul mates is referring to the communication between two souls, spirit-to-spirit communication. To communicate on a spiritual level is a very profound experience.

- IANDS, Spirit Communication (3).

Both the sending and receiving side of a communication are telepathic:

The Angel communicated that to me where we were going. He said no words - I just sort of heard him in my head and I spoke back to him in the same way. I know that sounds weird, but it was something like my mind speaking to his - with perfect understanding and in my head I heard the words.

- IANDS, Anonymous on Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:25 pm (4).

Telepathic speech appears to be the standard communication mechanism in the spiritual realms.

B. Sounds and Synesthesia

The IANDS survey did not ask about sounds occurring during the NDE, but we were able to look at the narrative descriptions of a sub-sample of 338 cases corresponding to the original sample. Analysis of sounds, unfortunately, runs immediately into troublesome semantic and philosophical difficulties. Many NDE episodes, for example, report telepathic communications. The person hears a voice, or at least interprets the communication as a verbal sound, but when pressed admits that it was a direct communication of ideas that perhaps was only perceived as sound. It's impossible to tell whether or not such a perception qualifies as sound in the material world, where it is defined as vibration carried through the medium of the atmosphere. Similarly, someone might report a buzzing sound, but there is no way to tell whether that was from nearby medical equipment, such as a ventilator, or whether it was part of the process of transitioning to the other-worldly realms.

Despite these difficulties, we can simply tabulate the incidence of sound and sound-like occurrences in the NDE reports. This is known in technical and scientific circles as a "head-in-the-sand" approach to analysis. With these caveats in mind, we find that among the 338 cases examined, 144, or 43%, report clear human speech, while 22% report telepathic communication. Other human sounds, such as laughing, crying, or shouting are reported by 19% of respondents. Nineteen percent also report no sounds at all. Respondents may report many different sounds, so these figures may add up to more than 100%.

Eighteen percent (18%) report a variety of natural and mechanical sounds, such as bangs, wind, or running water. Singing, chanting, or other musical sounds are reported by 9%. In 13 cases, just under 4%, there are reports of sounds combined, or incorporated with other senses, such as with light or with taste.

This mixing of senses is called synesthesia. " Synesthesia (Greek, *syn* = together + *aisthesis* = perception) is the involuntary physical experience of a cross-modal association" (5). An example of synesthesia follows:

There was a light that defies description. It was so beautiful and seemed to be in complete harmony with sound and other sensory input that also defy description. It was not of this world. I felt content and loved, but this feeling was not separate from the light or sound or floating. Everything was all one experience.

- NDERF, Case #1163 (6).

The following case describes the sense of smell across sensory modalities.

The grass was so green it hurt to look at it, and it felt so good! I could even taste the grass by feeling it, it tasted like watermelon. Walking on the grass was wonderful – it was an incredible feeling. The best way I can describe it was, “OH MY GOD! WOW!!!” The sense of smell was not with the nose. It was more like it permeated through my cheekbones under my eye, like smelling through the sinuses.

- NDERF, case #180 (1).

The next example of synesthesia seems to involve not just the physical senses, but the emotional environment as well:

As I focus on the mesmerizing beauty of the music, it flows through my body and I believe I hear it from within my whole self, not just my ears. I don't know how to describe this sense of hearing. It is different than normal hearing. It feels like wind flowing through me and seems to feel my emotion. I notice that the music began bursting forth with loudness and excitement, as I had felt upon first seeing Our Father, then the music became calm and tranquil as I listen and focus on the melody. Somehow this music became a dance between my thrilling excited emotion and a calming effect to bring me tranquility. It was so beautiful!

- IANDS, Out of Body Ecstasy (7).

It's not clear whether or not mixed mode communication is common on the spiritual realms and then the person reporting simply translates the impressions into the appropriate sense organs. In any case, even a single-sense perception often has related components in other sense organs.

C. The Cleansing Ritual

Information about the other-worldly landscape comes not just from near-death experiences, but also from meditation, spontaneous religious experiences, and even hypnotic regression. Michael Newton is a hypnotherapist who uses hypnotic regression to explore experiences between lifetimes. His research seems to parallel findings of NDE research. His work suggests that upon entering the spiritual abode that the soul goes through a cleansing process to remove the negative energy inherent in living on the material plane. He refers to this process as the "shower of healing:"

Dr N: Alright, let's talk about your energy drain after these endeavors. Why hasn't the shower of healing or some other restoration center returned you to normal?

S: (laughs) You call it a shower, I call this the car wash! It's an undulating tube which rubs you all over with positive energy, like the brushes of a car wash.

- Michael Newton, *Destiny of Souls* (8)

The concept of cleansing showers, or the removal of negative energy, does appear in some NDE accounts:

Then I was in a room and kneeling down. I was young again and perfect. I had no clothes but that was fine. It wasn't wrong. Then there was very pure water being poured over me to wash away every care, disappointment, and things I had done or didn't do. I experienced such peace of mind and perfect love, unconditional love. I cannot describe it with mere words.

- IANDS, Perfect Love (9).

The point is, in the spiritual realms, we are often much more care-free.

D. Cluster Groups

Newton's research also suggests that souls tend to incarnate at the same time with friends from the spirit abodes. He calls these companions cluster groups. These pre-existing bonds are recognized on the material plane as soul-mates:

Our primary soulmate is our eternal partner but we have other souls in our primary cluster group who can be called soulmates. Essentially, they are our soul companions. These souls have differences in character and a variety of talents which complement each other, as my case histories illustrate. Within the cluster group there is usually an inner circle of souls who are especially close to us, and they play important support roles in our lives and we do the same thing for them. This number varies but the average client has from three to five souls in their inner circle.

- Michael Newton, *Destiny of Souls* (8).

As with cleansing showers, the idea of cluster groups is also reflected in many NDEs. The following case is an example:

I remembered three sisters or spirits, three others with whom I'd spend a great deal of time.

- IANDS, All is Everything (10).

Here is another hint at cluster groups:

I was aware that behind me were other energy beings, people whom I knew so well, like I had really come home. I felt so happy and wanted to turn around to greet them, but I got the message -- there were no words or touch -- that no, now is not the right time. I felt them gently guiding me back.

- IANDS, Lost Connection with the Physical Plane (11).

The cluster entities may appear as energy, rather than in human form:

There were seven or eight other balls of light in a row along the upper part of the room not quite to the ceiling. They were like me. They emanated pure love and acceptance of me, unlike anything I had ever experienced. It was as if I was in my natural state and that my earthly self was not my natural state. I had instant understanding of this. There were no words between us as they were unnecessary; we understood everything in thought with no language.

- IANDS, A Ball of Light (12).

The cluster group companions are often there to greet the soul as they make the transition:

There were quite a few souls, like myself, coming from the earth plane. All of these souls were being met by groups of souls who had come from the white tunnel. It was like each soul had its own entourage of souls from the other side to meet them. Some were being welcomed with open arms and carefully guided through the transition point and into the wonderful light of the white tunnel; some were being greeted with discussions; and some were being turned back toward the earth plane. . . . When I met by my own entourage of souls, I could clearly see that they were human, but in this existence were beings of light. They seemed to be the same colour as the electric blue in the first tunnel. I was greeted with a great love and urgency. I was held, and knowledge was imbued into me. I was told, this is not my time, but this was meant to happen. It was the only way my life could change onto the right path. . . . It is hard to describe the feeling of home that these souls brought with them. I knew them all, but am unsure how as my time there was limited.

- IANDS, Our True Home (13).

It seems the initial greeting on the other side can be family members or cluster group member, and sometimes these labels overlap.

E. The Council of Elders

As part of the life review process, the soul may find itself in front of a panel of wise and loving "elders." These spirit beings appear to give advice on the lessons learned, or missed, on the earth plane. Newton's research describes this process in *Destiny of Souls*:

The spirit world is a place of order and the Council of Elders exemplifies justice. They are not the ultimate source of divine authority, but they appear to represent the last station of beings responsible for souls still incarnating on earth. These wise beings have great compassion for human weakness and they demonstrate infinite patience with our faults.

- Michael Newton, *Destiny of Souls* (8).

The council will sometimes have a leader or chairman:

Next thing I knew, I was standing in front of a council of 13 beings with the One in the middle twice as big as the 6 on either side of him. They were all sitting in chairs, big chairs at a sizeable distance in front of me.

- IANDS, Debra J (14).

The elders are often present during the life review. They sometimes have a say in the decision to return to earth:

I was led to a room, which was exquisitely built and appointed. I entered and saw a group of men seated around the long side of a kidney-shaped table. I was led to stand in front of them within the indented portion of the table. . . . The men radiated love for me, and I felt instantly at peace with them. They leaned together to consult with each other. Then one of them spoke to me. He said that I had died prematurely and must return to earth.

- Betty Eadie, *Embraced by the Light* (15).

The elders in the Betty Eadie book then go on to oversee her life review. They appear to be non-judgmental.

F. Meeting Jesus

One of the surprising findings of NDE research is how often the figure of Jesus Christ appears. The sample from IANDS was not so broad culturally as to make a valid assessment of whether or not key figures from other religions make such an appearance. Many reports describe a spiritual being, a figure in robes, a person whose face shines and exudes unbounded love, but that figure is not always identified as Jesus Christ.

The following description is typical:

When Jesus and I talked it wasn't with our mouths, but I knew we were communicating. His countenance fairly shone, and how he felt about me shone forth about him. He simply exuded love and concern and caring for me, just by standing there. The feeling of peace I felt was indescribable.

- IANDS, Spirit Communication (3).

Jesus is often described in roles outside of traditional religion, such as in the following case:

I know I felt like he was a father, a god, a brother, a friend, a teacher and most of all, an extremely superior entity that had total care for me, but seemed very strict with me at the same time, as if I was a child that he just caught running away with a cookie jar (that's just a metaphor). He was not disappointed with me, but in essence communicated to me that I was not fully developed in my position spiritually.

- IANDS, Gargantuan Energy Source (16).

Jesus is often described as a being of light, but on occasion, more physical details are presented:

The man was tall, with the brightest blue eyes, a strong jaw, and a very neatly trimmed beard with long and tidy hair. He

held his arms out and the sleeves met with the bottom of his tunic of amber. I could see it was our Lord. He said to me I could travel on or I could go back. It was my choice. Bless you my child he said, "Only you can make this decision." Things have been very hard for you over these past years. You have had so much to bear, more than many. He came toward me and put his hands on my forehead, and then bent and kissed my forehead.

- IANDS, Image (17).

The next case shows the heart-felt connection with Jesus:

I felt he knew me perfectly. He already could see my past, present and future. He knew it all in one moment, and so in saying this, he had no illusions about me; he saw my warts and all. Yet, I felt this most profound unconditional love beyond comprehension. It was a relief to be so totally known and loved at the same time. It is hard to put into words. Somehow, I "knew" that this being was loving me at that moment, as if it were all the moments of my existence, past, present and future. He loved me as if I was the most loved human from the beginning of human history to the end of human history. I felt loved as if I were the only human being that ever existed. Yet, I knew that this being loved everyone exactly the same way, and that was no contradiction. At the same time, I knew this being of light awakened some part of me somewhere deep inside, a reserved place made for him and him alone, a part that had some direct knowledge of him that seemed as if it had been dormant and now awakened. I could truthfully say I knew him even as what and who he was beyond my finite knowing. And so he was like meeting my very best friend, the best friend I had longed to meet all my life.

- IANDS, The Question and Answer: Love (18).

In this case, the communication reflects verses in the bible:

Then something very strange happened. I must have ceased having vocalized thoughts and my mind seemed to go blank and in front of me I saw a person, a giant huge person. He was seated right at the spot of the altar but his head was touching the ceiling of the church. I instantly recognize him as Jesus though I had never seen an image of Jesus seated. He was robed and his hand was raised up making a gesture that I would now call a blessing gesture but at the time I didn't recognize it. I moved toward him though my body didn't move at all out of the pew. I was either pulled toward him or went toward him. I can't really say which. As I got closer I was really able to see how absolutely huge he was. I was at the bottom of his feet but my movement didn't stop there. I began to move up through the air toward his face.

When I had risen to the level of his face he said something but his lips didn't move. I just heard the word inside me, but not as an audible sound, more as a knowing. He said, "I am the way, follow me."

- IANDS, Burst of Consciousness (19).

Most of the IANDS cases come from people with a Christian background, so it seems logical that Jesus is mentioned in many cases.

G. Judgment

Judgment and the life review seem to go hand-in-hand in many NDE reports. A theme in the life review is not that we are judged, but rather that we judge our own behavior. A curious occurrence in the life review is the ability to feel the effects of our actions on other people, and this seems to be the cornerstone of the judgment.

Here we see a woman who played a cruel trick on a friend, and how it played out during the life review:

I saw my entry into the world, one childhood memory after another as distinct and as clear as if each were really happening. . . . Most things were pleasant to see, some things made me very embarrassed. In fact, revolution (sic; probably meant revulsion) and guilt took away any good feelings, making me so very sorry for certain things I had said or done. I hadn't just seen what I had done, but I felt and knew the repercussions of my actions. I felt the injury or pain of those who suffered because of my selfish or inappropriate behavior.

She goes on to relate an incident where she played a cruel trick on a young man.

I never gave this incident a moment of thought after it had happened. But, during the review of my life, I was grieved to see how totally selfish, thoughtless and downright cruel I had been. I felt his complete panic and fear, and his change as he became less trusting. I was sickened. I had such total guilt that I tried to pull my view away. I was being pounded with the fears, pain, injuries, and anger I had caused in others, and the repercussions that had been passed on and on.

- IANDS, All is Everything (10).

This case illustrates another judgment based on the life review:

The light responded: "The question is not who am I, but who are YOU?" Before I could reply, a series of images and experiences flashed across my vision. This was (by analogy) like a projector displaying images on a flat screen. There were two distinct differences, however. The first difference was that the images were non-sequential (e.g. they were not in any specific order). The second difference was that I could feel, think, see, hear and experience the emotions, thoughts, feelings and experiences of everyone I had ever come in either direct or non-direct contact with.

If you can imagine a series of Dominos cascading downward like water down staggered steps, then this was the experience of being other people and experiencing both the intended and unintended effects of my contact with them. This was not in any way, shape or form a pleasant experience. I saw a multitude of opportunities to help people and be loving and kind, but in most instances I chose to ignore these opportunities and instead focus solely on myself. This was very unsettling to say the least.

All throughout this review process, however, the only entity which judged me was myself. The light did not interject any judgment for or against my earthly actions (or inactions). The only thing the light did was to pause some scenes and ask me what I thought about my actions.

According to the light, the most extraordinary moments of life are not framed by money, work, drugs, alcohol, possessions or self-gratifying behaviors. Indeed, what we consider trivial actions are highlighted as the most significant of our lives.

- IANDS, Unborn (20).

One of the most striking accounts comes from a bully who abused other students:

“The first thing I saw was my angry childhood. I saw myself torturing other children, stealing their bicycles or making them miserable at school. One of the most vivid scenes was of the time I picked on a child at grade school because he had a goiter that protruded from his neck. The other kids in the class picked on him too, but I was the worst. At the time I thought I was funny. But now, as I relived this incident, I found myself in his body, living with the pain that I was causing. This perspective continued through every negative incident in my childhood, a substantial number to be sure. From fifth to twelfth grade, I estimate I had at least six thousand fistfights. Now, as I reviewed my life in the bosom of the Being, I relived each of those altercations, but with one major difference: I was the receiver.”

– Dannion Brinkley, *Saved by the Light* (21).

It's clear that our actions influence those we interact with, but the effects are often positive as well. In the Betty Eadie case, the negative acts exposed in her life review were causing her grief when Jesus intervened:

"You're being too harsh on yourself," he said. Then he showed me the reverse side of the ripple effect. I saw myself perform an act of kindness, just a simple act of unselfishness, and I saw the ripples go out again. The friend I had been kind to was kind in turn to one of her friends, and the chain repeated itself. I saw love and happiness increase in others' lives because of that one simple act on my part. I saw their happiness grow and affect their lives in positive ways, some significantly. I felt the love they felt, and I felt their joy.

- Betty Eadie, *Embraced by the Light* (15).

What is justice then, but to feel the effects of those we have touched?

H. A Sense of Unity

The interconnectedness illustrated by the examples in the previous section (Judgment), suggests somehow we are all part of each other. If one finger attacks another, doesn't the whole hand suffer? If one branch flourishes, doesn't the whole tree benefit? This sense of being a part of all creation seems to be one of the lessons learned from the NDE. The sense of unity is apparent in this example:

Then came an extended period of bliss where I was aware of the oneness of everything. I would amuse myself whilst hanging out the washing, knowing that everything is God; the cloth, the pegs, and the washing line itself. Wild birds would perch on my head as I sat in the garden and I hand fed a wild pigeon. At this time, there was no fear in me at all. One day a blackbird flew out of the hedge near my ankle and soared into the air. I felt as if I was flying with her for a time and felt exuberant.

- IANDS, Oneness is Reality (22).

In this next example, our individual lives are compared to the drops of water in a river:

The wall beyond my gurney became transparent and I was shown what appeared to be a flowing river. It was silver and shimmering as it flowed. The drops in the river were each a different color yet all flowed together as one body of water. Nothing gave me the impression this was actually water or a river but this is the best descriptive example that can be given of something I witnessed for which there are no words.

The main body of the flow was silvery shimmering lights with different colored drops on the flow. I understood (I use this term because I did not actually hear) the colored drops were the experiences of all who had lived. The experiences existed as separate items yet belonged to the whole. The whole was the collective knowledge of all. I understood there was no

individual, just one, yet each experience was individual making up the whole. This concept of ONE is so foreign to any description I can give, there seems to be no way now of describing it.

My previous understanding of one was a single uniqueness. In this case one is something else. Many being one and one being many, both existing simultaneously in the same time and space. I further understood that the collective experiences are omniscient knowledge. Everything that has been spoken, heard, and experienced. These colored drops contained each experience down to the memory of every cell division, every thought.

- IANDS, Shimmering River of Life (23).

This next case illustrates that the light is actually part of ourselves, not just a separate or external identity. Emphasis is from the person undergoing the experience:

I am in the Light! Oh God, I am actually in the Light. I am the Light! I see the Light and now it appears to have a human-like form. I've never seen it before, but, somehow, I recognize it. The Light speaks to me. The Light says, "*Andy, do not be afraid.*" Then the light says, "*Andy, I love you. Andy, we love you.*" **Oh God, It knows me! The Light knows my name! I can't believe it! The Light actually knows me! The Light called me "Andy!"**

I am in the Light. The Light is in me. I can see me in the unending Light. Nevertheless, I am still Andy. I'm everywhere and I am here. I can see me as a person and I can see me in the infinite, warm, and loving Light. I become the Light. The Light is a form that I have never seen, but it is not new to me, somehow I know it. The Light has a voice that I have never heard, but it is not strange to me. The Light has a smile that is indescribable beautiful, and I recognize it. The Light has an infectious laugh, and we laugh together. The Light has all of the answers in the universe ... and I don't have any questions, because I know everything that the Light knows.

- IANDS, *Vital Signs* article (24).

The topics listed above are just a few of the themes that become apparent in studying near-death experiences. There are numerous similar themes that other researchers have focused on, such as prophecy, NDEs in children, and counseling. For further reading I would suggest the IANDS recommended reading list at:
<http://www.iands.org/bib.html> (25).

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8. After-Effects

A. After-Effects Overview

The NDE often creates profound and long-lasting after-effects. These changes are a distinguishing feature of the NDE. Researchers who attempt to duplicate the experience with pharmaceuticals generally discover the drugs do not precipitate quite the same level of insight, nor the life-altering after-effects found in a genuine NDE. Table 11 shows that more than half of respondents checked six out of eight of the listed after-effects. This represents pervasive and deep-seated transformation. The magnitude of this change life-altering.

Q7. Changes resulting from the experience?

(Q7. Have you experienced changes in any of the following resulting from the experience?)

The vast majority of respondents report changed feelings about death after their NDE. Most respondents report multiple changes, averaging 4.9 items out of 8 possible choices. The biggest change is in their feelings about death, followed by life purpose, their belief system, and an increase in psychic abilities. It's apparent that most NDE experiences precipitate

multiple changes in perceptions and behaviors. Age and gender seem to be a big factors in such changes, as the highest rates of reported change tend to be women, and people in their 30s and 40s.

Table 11. Resulting changes*

Experienced changes:	Count	Percentage
Feelings about death	631	83.0
Sense of life purpose	573	75.4
Belief system	526	69.2
Healing, psychic abilities	517	68.0
Personal relationships	512	67.4
Feelings about friends, society	493	64.9
Changes in job or studies	355	46.7
Physical after-effects	253	33.3
None of these	12	1.6
Total	760	100.0

* Percentages add to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

Significant cross-tab findings:

- Changes in feelings about death are reported highest for those who also report a wonderful experience, 86.5% versus 75.4% for those with a frightening experience. It was also highest for those who reported clinical death, 87.8% compared to 83.0% for the whole sample.
- Change in a sense of life purpose is relatively consistent across all subgroups. It is highest among those who also report positive NDE after-effects.
- Change in belief systems is highest in the middle age groups. Some 69.2% of all respondents report belief changes, but this is highest in the 20 to 29 age group (74.6%), and lowest in the 50 and over group (54.8%). It is also relatively high among those who describe their experience as wonderful, 72.7%, versus 55.4% for those with a frightening experience.
- The development of healing and psychic abilities is significantly higher among women, 71.4%, compared to men, 60.7%. Such abilities occur most often for those who report clinical death, 75.5%, compared to 61.9% for those with a non-life threatening experience.
- Feelings about friends and society show the biggest change for those respondents in the 30 to 39 age group, 72.3%. This change is also high for those who report clinical death, 69.8%. Changes in job or studies is lowest for those who report a non-life threatening experience, 38.3%,

compared to 52.9% for those who report clinical death, and 48.8% who report a serious condition.

- Physical after-effects occur more among women, 37.4%, than among men, 30.0%. They are also more common among those who report poor to fair health at the time, 38.3%, compared to 28.8% for those in good or excellent health.

B. Changed Feelings About Death

Those who have undergone a near-death experience frequently come back with a different attitude about death. They no longer fear death when they see it as a transition, as opposed to oblivion. This next case is a good example:

I felt no fear looking at myself lying there. I remember clearly saying if this is death, it's wonderful. I recall some kind of people surrounding me in a circle-like form, but I couldn't make them out. I felt comfortable with them. There was a light behind them in the distance. I remember saying this is wonderful and then being told that I couldn't stay.

- IANDS, If this is Death, It's Wonderful (1).

This case shows a similar change in attitude:

After the whole experience, I thought, even though I still was a child: If this is what it means to go to Heaven, then that is wonderful!! I now know that we don't need to be scared to die, because there is a life after this one (in God's spirit world).

- IANDS, Anonymous, Sunday, July 25, 11:57 AM (2).

This change in attitude about death is the most universal outcome of an NDE.

C. A Renewed Sense of Life Purpose

People return from an NDE with a new perspective on their purpose in life. Sometimes, this is just an attitude change, but more often it involves a change in career or volunteer work, as seen in this first example:

After my healing, I knew that my mission was to work with children. I knew I needed to open another Dungeons and Dragons den. In June, 2002, I felt touched. I had had enough of the family gathering and went to get pizza from a place I had never been to. What I saw was the empty store across from the pizza place. I said no way. My rational mind was saying that the town was too small and could not support a den. But, here it was. There were at least 40 children on the right, and 30 children on the left of the empty store. I knew this was where I would build the den that was part of my reason for coming back to earth. The next day, I rented the space and on June 22, 2002 (on the summer solstice), Cody's Castle was opened.

- IANDS, Bill W (3).

It's not just a life purpose, but a renewed enthusiasm for living that results from the NDE:

I was disappointed that I couldn't go to the light. I had been depressed as a teenager because my friend for 8 years had turned against me. My parents wanted to immigrate to the USA and I didn't want to. I had more to do and I knew in my heart it was the truth. My life was difficult. I was devastated but knowing I was 'special' made me want to live.

I was SO special that God had told me I had more to do. What else is better than that to make an awkward 13yo feel important? Nothing else mattered what people thought. God loved me enough to send me back here because what I was going to do was sooo important. I now teach nursing, I teach others how to care for others and how to make a difference in another persons' life.

- NDERF, Carole NDE (4).

Life-purpose changes, though, are often related to attitudes as much as outward physical changes.

D. Changes in Belief System

A change in belief systems is difficult to define. It may involve a person's attitudes about life as much as his or her religious beliefs. This NDE report delves into the changes in personality, attitude, and day-to-day living decisions that are influenced by the event:

Now I do not fear death or the fact that we have to go to other planes of existence. And I agreed with others with similar experience on saying that you live with the sensation that someone is with you in the form of thoughts. I call that presence One. Because from that experience I learned that all humans are One, connected to the principal One, the "High Divinity or Higher Force." Sometimes I feel alone because many people say that I am crazy when I tell them my story. Others find it interesting and believe that maybe after all NDE is happening.

I receive so much data from One my companion from the other dimension that I feel like a torrent of energy greater than the capacity of my small body to handle. I sense that the High Force is so close to me that I begin to cry and then my body is drawn to a state of sedation where I just fall asleep. For me being in that state is like feeling taken to places that later I cannot remember very well. Now I am more used to the presence of this Higher Force and I know when ONE sends for me.

- IANDS, Anon., Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:37 pm (5).

On the other hand, the NDE may specifically alter a person's perception of their religious affiliation:

Consumed with an Atheistic belief system and great dislike of life in general, I began experimenting with drugs, particularly LSD, in an attempt to explain this meaningless existence. My friends and I would go out to clubs and use large amounts of drugs while "partying"; but it was never about partying for me, it was about learning. . . .

I began to research all religions. I became prideful and had absolutely no fear of God or death. I then tried to reproduce the experience with the same dosage on another party night. This time was not as wonderful. Close to my peak in the trip (poisoning), I felt a pop in my chest. This is when the room began to fill up with demonic beings (individuals). I was extremely frightened and the beings were laughing at me. This continued for hours, nearly landing me in a Psych ward. The next day I picked up a bible and while reading Matthew I read a passage (do unto others) which coincided with my experiences. I said inside my head "I want to serve Christ (God) and a loud bell (gong) went off. At that moment I converted to Christianity. My life since then has been incredibly beautifully. I now have a beautiful baby girl and Wife. Although I no longer fear death I do fear God. I owe the state of my life today to that experience and I will never forget. The way I got there was very risky and I am very lucky to be able to live a normal life. I would not recommend trying this to anyone.

- IANDS, Anon., Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:27 pm (6).

Again, the term "beliefs" is not well defined in this question, but it is apparent the NDE is a life-changing event.

E. Acquiring Healing and Psychic Abilities

Developing psychic and healing abilities is a common outgrowth of an NDE event. The NDERF websites asks specifically about this:

Did you have any psychic, paranormal or other special gifts following the experience you did not have prior to the experience?

Yes. Many. Among them: Super-lucid dreams, premonitions, intuitive perceptions of the thoughts of other people, voluntary and involuntary out of body experiences and 5 times I have experienced being in more than one place at a time, etc.

- NDERF, Hafur NDE (7).

Prophecy is a common element of the psychic abilities resulting from an NDE:

Sometimes I say things that haven't occurred yet - this is where the escalation of psychic abilities has come up. Also, when I awoke, an uncle who died about 25 years prior came to me in a vision. I later saw a photograph which was the same way he came to me (riding on a motorcycle with his hair done like James Dean and a pack of cigarettes rolled up his t-shirt sleeve - he told me "it wasn't your time yet kid"). I didn't know this uncle but knew who it was and when I saw the photo and said oh, this is uncle Johnny, my aunt was shocked I could ID him.

- NDERF, Joann M NDE (8).

This next example shows some of the many psychic gifts resulting from the NDE:

My enhanced psychic ability started about eight months after operation. I was in the living room. I suddenly grabbed my left leg and started rubbing my knee. My son came in because

he hurt himself falling off a scooter. My son had scraped his leg, and was holding the leg (same side) and knee the same way that I was holding mine. This bond between me and my son has positively affected his mental well-being. When he is in the room, I can feel him. When one of us talks, the other finishes the sentence. . . .

I see ghosts. One time I was eating pizza and looking at this house that looked like the the one on the old Adam's family sitcom. I met the owner and he invited me over for a tour. I saw a woman who used to live there. She was a trapped spirit. She came back because she wanted her doilies and a picture of her husband. I told the owner this. The woman told me that she used to make doilies and sell them 10 for a penny. She told me that down in the cellar I would find the picture she was looking for. Sure enough, down in cellar a 4" x 8" lithograph was found of a soldier with a gun in his hand. She also told me that her room was warm and was right next to a chimney. The owner denied this since there wasn't any chimneys in the house. However, upon restoration, he called me up and told me that he found the chimney and her room. Apparently, family legends were wrong and she really was sleeping up in the servant's quarters. The chimney had three bricks taken out of it to allow the heat into her room.

- IANDS, Bill W (3).

As a caution, note that psychic phenomenon are often qualitative, and we must rely on the assessment of those who are reporting the events.

F. Changes in Personal Relationships

Personal relationships, like beliefs, are hard to gauge. Many of us make changes in relationships with or without something as dynamic as an NDE occurring in our life. There are instances, however, where the connection between the NDE and the changes in relationships is apparent.

In this example, the respondent found a spouse:

During the NDE, God told me he would send someone and that my children would not starve. I had been praying that god would send someone to help me raise my children or that he would change my ex so that he would help raise the children. I was 42 at the time and went to a church healing at Holy Child. Eyewitness news was doing a taping there. If the priest touches you and you go down, your prayer will be granted. He touched me and I didn't go down. He told everyone he wasn't going to come back. I wrote to him and he did come back. At the prayer meeting he said, "I'm not here for the sick or dying. I'm here for someone who needs me." He called everyone forward who needed him, and I went up. That time, I fell down and saw bright lights. When I came to, I saw my daughter with a halo over her head. A few days later, I met my current husband.

- NDERF, Mary Ann NDE (9).

Another NDE saves a marriage:

Had I not had a NDE, my marriage would have failed. When I came back, I started going to bible study and that is what saved my marriage. I do my best to make sure my children are raised properly. Jesus, the Bible, and prayer are a big part of everything I do in my life.

- NDERF, Bob A NDE (10).

Commonly, the NDE affects a persons' attitude about all people, not just specific relationships:

I'm a lot more tolerant of differences I encounter with people. I'm also more selective. I tend to feel a purpose sometimes when I meet people and know to hang in there with them because there's a lesson. If something isn't working I seem to be able to identify that and move on.

My daily life is more meditative, more reflective, more time talking to God, more spiritual. I feel more connected to all kinds of things. I remember after my experience I sat and stared at things like I never saw them before, and in awe. I felt like I was connected to what I used to think were inanimate objects. I felt everything had some kind of soul purpose, from a rock to a tree to a bug, etc. I marveled at passing clouds, and here's a funny one, at how the tires on a car went around, it the street and moved the car forward. I become much more in tune.

I searched for some kind of organized religious practice that I felt comfortable in to become part of. I haven't found one yet. I became a Reiki Master which further awakened my experience in me.

- NDERF, Joann M NDE (8).

An occasional but interesting side effect of the NDE is that the experiencer learns to love all people in the same way, not just those close to him or her. In this case, a young woman has to deal with the challenges of being attractive to everyone:

I have always had a different view of love and life than anyone I have ever met. I don't love like most people. To me it is not so individual specific so much as universal. Most people who wish to be close to me do not understand it and perceive it as a coldness or worse. If they do understand how I feel and think, they can't believe it really. They say I have mother Theresa or Joan of Arc complex or I'm not real or something along those lines. But, I do not think love is something that can be limited

to only one person or just a few. It does not end; it will not go out. The more love you give the more you have to give, the more there is... and to me that is THE truth.

- IANDS, Anonymous, Friday, August 20, 2004 - 08:20 pm (11).

This effect is common. Experiencers often relate that they don't love their spouse any less, but love all mankind a bit more, or equally with close family members.

G. Changed Feelings About Friends, Society

The NDE will often change a person's feelings about institutions and groups. This report shows a person becoming disillusioned by organized religion:

I became convinced that "Organized Religions are a Huge Fraud" perpetrating a hoax on humanity. I have so much anger towards organized religions. I was raised a devout Catholic, but after my NDE, I am very disillusioned. I lost one of my best friends, a pastor who was like my little brother, because I couldn't stand the BS he was telling people.

- IANDS, Bill W (3).

This next case shows how the joy of loving everyone can lead to misunderstanding about sexuality:

I went through a really tough time as a teen, nothing made sense to me at all. Relationships on most levels have been difficult for me. A lot of people are attracted to me on a sexual level. According to my boyfriend of many years, I have this natural sexiness that seems to exude from me. I have learned to curb some of that out of self-defense, but it took a long time to even understand what IT was. It seems that people misunderstand empathy and joy, a feeling of peace and love as a desire to have sex. I sparkle in the words of another friend and that is a turn on to a lot of people. It took a long time to be able to deal with that. I am still learning about relationships, but I am making progress I think.

- IANDS, Anonymous, Friday, August 20, 2004 - 08:20 pm (11).

Of course, relationships change all the time, and we cannot always attribute the cause of such changes to the NDE.

H. Changes in Job or Studies

On occasion, work changes as a result of the NDE. In this case, the specific work task doesn't seem to matter at all:

I am more easy-going at work and feel wherever I land is where I am needed. I've learned some really cool lessons in this vein.

- NDERF, Joann M NDE (8).

More often, the NDE motivates a person to take a new direction in life:

I was sure I had seen heaven and hell, and the rest of my life would be an epilog. I was an Atheist before the experience and a Theist after, although with no religious affiliation.

The experience motivated me to go to university and study General Relativity, which I felt was full of theological significance. It depicts space-time as a hyper-surface, and particles of matter as creases in the surface, and gravity as curvature of the surface. Which idea I still feel is correct, but I also believe its purpose is like that of a spider web, but what it catches are lost souls.

- IANDS, Anonymous, Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:27 pm (12).

Again, job changes occur all the time, and we cannot always attribute the cause to the NDE.

I. Physical After-Effects

Physical after-effects refer to changes in the person's body or physiology after an NDE. They occur more among women, 37.4%, than among men, 30.0%. Increased sensitivity is a common after-effect as seen in this first example:

I am extremely sensitive to lights and noises. However I love loud rock music. I am also very sensitive to chemicals, and drugs do not have the same affect on me as they do on most people. I take child's doses of many and some do the opposite of what they are supposed to and some do nothing at all. I crave sunshine and water. The best I ever feel is when I have been able to be in the sun and either been in, on or next to some water.

- IANDS, Anonymous, Friday, August 20, 2004 - 08:20 pm (11).

Sometimes the after-effects are seen as curses as much as blessings:

I have an affinity for Cliff Robertson in Flowers for Algernon (Charly). I was given patience and the ability to see behind people's conscious and unconscious masks. I was given the power to leave my body, the power to limited healing, to slow my heart rate, to reach the theta state. I was given more power to love, but still feel smaller than a candle being held out to the sun. You see, the all-encompassing love in the heavens defies description and has no match anywhere else.

The curses are the alienation it brings, especially at such a young age. The power to blow out light bulbs, several streetlights in a row, transformers, billboard lights, the power to stop an interviewer's tape recorder, the power to start broken battery operated toys. The power of not merely mind reading, but pure telepathy.

- NDERF, Cougar NDE (13).

The cases cited here have not been medically verified.

J. After-Effect Evaluation

Q8. Have these changes been: Positive, Mixed, Disturbing

Less than 3% of respondents found after-effects of the experience disturbing; one third report mixed feelings but the majority report a positive perception of after-effects (Table 12).

Table 12. After-effect changes positive or negative.

These changes were:	Count	Percentage
Positive	477	62.7
Mixed	263	34.6
Disturbing	21	2.8
Total	761	100.0

Significant cross-tab findings:

- This question is highly correlated with the question of whether or not the experience was wonderful, mixed, or frightening.
- The highest positive ratings are given by those 50 years of age or older, 68.8%.

The after-effects can be disturbing, as in this case:

A few years later, Hell broke loose and the night terrors began. I began to have terrible nightmares involving evil creatures and humanoid-looking evil beings. I was tormented almost nightly by these things forcing me to watch human dismemberments, sickening "religious" rituals while I was held captive. I soon learned to sometimes take power over these evil dreams by the power of God. These dreams tortured me until I was probably in my mid twenties. Sometimes I would win; sometimes the devils would win and they would keep me as their plaything for hours. I once saw a green colored spirit hover over my body while I was out of it.

- IANDS, Anon., Sunday, July 25, 2004 - 11:59 am (14).

Most of the time, however, the after-effects are benign:

Since my experience, I have had a couple episodes where I have seen a spirit of someone that had previously died. One time the spirit I saw was sitting in a chair in my children's bedroom and the other time was a spirit watching over my husband as he slept in a chair. I have also heard the voice of my guardian angel speak to me over my shoulder. These experiences are peaceful and I am never afraid.

- IANDS, Anonymous, Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:35 pm (15).

The after-effects have a strong influence on the life of the experiencer:

The emotional after effect was great, as I was in a state of bliss and of love for all people of any circumstance or state, all animals and plants or in short any thing living. I know now that all living things are connected, have great spirituality where I had none before. I understand that sorrow and love are like day and night. Sorrow is not bad as you must have it to appreciate the beauty of love. In other words, if we didn't have sorrow, love would be meaningless. Before my experience, these thoughts would have never crossed my mind. I am an avid outdoorsman and like hunting but since this experience, I can't take the life of any animal. I just like to watch them in the woods. Also, I have absolutely NO fear of dying. There have been other significant changes in me, too many to write about but simply said, I am a very different person now. My family knows this and so do my close friends. I haven't told many people of this for fear of ridicule. My wife and kids know and that is all. I wish everyone could have a similar experience.

- IANDS, Anon., Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:33 pm (16).

Even with the blessings, there can be a sense of not being in the world. In this case, there is a mixture of positive and negative effects:

I recall feeling somewhat misplaced for a long time afterward. It wasn't like I didn't belong here, but more like I wasn't really here. I still feel that way on one hand, but at the same time, like there is a reason for it all. I can certainly see that I am needed in this place we call Planet Earth. I am very empathetic; I tend to literally feel the pain that others experience in everyday life. Signs of moral corruption leave me with an undeniable need to pray for people, both the corrupt and victims of such. I have experienced religiously oriented nightmares, as well as vivid dreams that soon after proved to have been foretelling.

- IANDS, Anon., Thursday, July 8, 2004 - 09:15 pm (17).

Some of it sounds like post-traumatic stress disorder!

K. Life Changes

Q9. Has your life changed specifically as a result of your experience?

Only a small number of people, 17%, report no life change as a result of their experience (Table 13).

Table 13. Life changed as a result.

Life changed	Count	Percentage
Yes	622	83.0
No	127	17.0
Total	749	100.0

Significant cross-tab findings:

- Some 83.0% of respondents report life changes as a result of their NDE. This is highest for those who report clinical death triggered their experience (87.8%) and for those in the 30 to 39 age group (91.2%).

Some people regret having gone through an NDE event:

For years I was bitter. I raised my fist at God and cursed him for allowing me to go through this trial. I wanted to kill the drunk driver. But I couldn't see going to jail the rest of my life for getting revenge against what he got away with. I even had offers from others to do him in. But I knew that if I killed him, I would still have to one day answer for my actions. One day he will have to give an accounting. It just was not my place to do it.

- IANDS, Misty White Light (18).

Others are appreciative of their experience:

Have your religious beliefs/practices changed specifically as a result of your experience?

Yes. I have a totally different relationship with my best friend Jesus and our Daddy God. I am more free to have fun. I feel freedom in everything I do really. I rarely go to church. My oldest daughter finds that really odd since church was always one of my main activities. She and her husband pastor a church, but she has learned that Mama is different than before, still love Jesus, and will do things her own way. We have a fine relationship with it that way.

- IANDS, Linda K (19).

The rule of thumb seems to be that all NDE produce profound changes in their subjects. There are researchers who claim they can produce NDE-like events through the use of drugs or isolation therapy, but these clinically induced experiences do not have the profound after-effects typical of a genuine near-death experience.

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9. Related Phenomenon

The human experience is filled with paranormal events. Many of the odd phenomena and altered states of consciousness seen in near-death experiences have similar counterparts in seemingly unrelated walks of life. Religious experiences, transcendental meditation, and drug use can elicit NDE-like visions. A small but dedicated group of researchers feel that UFOs and alien encounters are related to the same spiritual landscape seen in the NDE.

In the following paragraphs, I will touch on some of the subjects that may be related to NDEs, including the widespread religious belief that the world is just an illusion. These topics open up doors to other lines of study. The subject matter is too broad to cover here, but some of the books referenced will help lead you to these other fields of inquiry.

A. Religious Experiences

In Chapter 3, I indicated that, ironically, you don't have to be near death to have a near-death experience. Many are triggered by emotional or religious conditions. Spiritual seekers use meditation, prayer, introspection, and even drugs to precipitate a glimpse into the spirit abodes. The IANDS web site, for instance, includes a separate section for near-death-like experience reports (1).

Near-death-like experience reports (NDLEs) can be found in all sorts of spiritual and religious circles. A popular book during America's flower-power era was the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, in which he describes one of his meditations:

"My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body but embraced the circumambient atoms. People on distant streets seemed to be moving gently over my own remote periphery. The roots of plants and trees appeared through a dim transparency of the soul: I discerned the inward flow of their sap. The whole vicinity lay bare before me. My ordinary frontal vision was now changed to a vast spherical sight, simultaneously all-perceptive. Through the back of my head I saw men strolling far down the Arai Ghat Lane, and noticed also a white cow that was leisurely approaching."

Elsewhere in the same book he reports:

"An ecstatic enlargement of consciousness followed. I could see clearly for several miles over the Ganges River to my left, and beyond the temple into the entire Dakshineswar precincts. The walls of all the buildings glimmered transparently: through them I observed people walking to and fro over distant acres."

- Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (2).

This ability to see the inner workings of plants, and to see through walls - what I call spiritual X-ray vision - is common in NDE reports. It is seen too in the study of what is called astral

projection, the cousin of the out-of-body experience. Those who are adept at this practice claim they can see the spiritual make-up of ordinary objects, such as plants and rocks. Theosophical literature abounds with examples:

First of all, the whole of the physical matter of the rock is seen, instead of a small part of it; secondly, the vibrations of its physical particles are perceptible; thirdly, it is seen to possess an astral counterpart composed of various grades of astral matter, whose particles are also in constant motion; fourthly, the Universal Divine Life is clearly to be seen working in it as it works in the whole creation, though naturally its manifestations differ greatly at successive stages of its descent into matter, and for the sake of convenience each stage has its own name.

- C. W. Leadbeater, *The Astral Plane* (3).

Nearly one quarter of all NDE reports come from people who were not close to death (See Chapter 3). These were generated mostly by emotional and religious experiences. There are even fields of study devoted to these experiences, such as trans-personal psychology (4), and transcendental meditation (5). There is also an abundance of religious experiences that have all the characteristics of NDEs (6).

Meditative experiences probably come closest to mimicking NDEs. I've had a few myself! I was reading a fascinating but difficult-to-understand book, *A Course in Miracles* (7). I was having difficulty with one of the precepts, (paraphrasing) that much of human experience is a man-made illusion, and that you can tell if something is real if it "lasts forever." I couldn't quite get my mind around that one. What on earth then is real?

At the same time, I met a very spiritual woman who claimed to have spirit guides helping her. The idea of having a personal guide was intriguing to me, so I set about finding a way to discover my own spirit guide. I found a web site that sold tapes on the subject (8). I listened to the music and soothing hypnotic suggestions on the tape. Suddenly I found myself in a different space. It was like a

party was going on - dozens of my best friends were celebrating something. I looked around, but I couldn't see them. All I could see was Jesus sitting on a couch. He looked nothing like I expected. Try to picture a dark-skinned Johnny Carson - clean shaven and casual attire. He saw me looking for my friends. I was puzzled, because I could feel their presence but I could not see them. I asked "Where are my friends?"

"Their thoughts are here," Jesus said. "All the loving thoughts you have for your friends, and their thoughts for you, are saved for you. They last forever. That is what Heaven is made of." The communication was telepathic, and actually carried several related messages - what you might call "harmonic meanings." These other messages included such ideas as "Didn't I say I go to prepare a place for you?" and "Didn't you believe me when I said the Father loves you?" and more stunning still, "Didn't I advise you to store up treasure in Heaven?"

I was shocked and overwhelmed with the loving kindness of his revelation. I could hardly think or move, but Jesus put his hand on my shoulder and was guiding me towards this path. I could see things, structures, way off on the path.

"Well, do you want to meet your guides now?" he asked. I could hear the loveliest music. I was so grateful for the loving thoughts of my friends, and that Jesus was saving them for me! Wait, did he say they last forever?

"What's that music?" I inquired.

"Oh, that's the sound of people praising God."

"I want to go there then. I don't care about the guides right now."

He led me to this huge, egg-shaped structure, like an arena. As I got closer I could see it was not really a stadium, but rather it consisted of hundreds circles of people, all holding hands and singing. I was led to "my" circle of friends. Whereas before I could not see my companions, now I could see their outlines in golden light, and I could feel the press of their hands in mine. There were circles of other groups above and below us. Some behind us in bigger circles, and some in front - all circles within circles, all singing and praising God. And from the top of this egg-shaped

arena there flowed a river of light. It seemed like it was a glittering stream of golden-white love, flowing over all of us in a tangible ocean of love. And, Oh! The music!

All I could think of was how grateful I was. Grateful for my friends. Grateful for their loving thoughts. Grateful that God was saving these for us. Praising God. Singing! That's it! That's all I want. I will stay here forever, and sing God's praises. I don't want anything else. Thank you! God. Thank you, Jesus!

But an annoying clicking sound now interrupting the music. It got louder, and I woke up and realized the tape recorder had come to an end. I was back! I had my answer now though. Loving thoughts last forever.

It was weeks later I found the passage that confirmed the vision:

I have saved all your kindnesses and every loving thought you ever had. I have purified them of the errors that hid their light, and kept them for you in their own perfect radiance. They are beyond destruction and beyond guilt. They came from the Holy Spirit within you, and we know what God creates is eternal.

- *A Course in Miracles*, Text, Chapter 5 (9).

I never did meet my guides. Maybe next time. I did, however, get the answers I was looking for.

B. UFO Phenomena

Do UFOs have a spiritual component? While some alien encounters are laced with fear, many others exhibit similarities to NDE reports. Some religious writers entertain the possibility that angels and aliens are somehow related. The relatively conservative Billy Graham once wrote a book suggesting such a connection:

Some Christian writers have speculated that UFOs could very well be part of God's angelic host who preside over the physical affairs of universal creation. While we cannot assert such a view with certainty, many people are now seeking some type of supernatural explanation for these phenomena.

- Billy Graham, *Angels: God's Secret Agents* (10).

Angel researcher Malcolm Godwin lists more than a dozen parallels between angels and UFO occupants. Among them:

They all have a message to deliver. If there is any particular tendency to be observed, then angels do seem more inclined to the individual transfer of information, while the ET has a more global message. However, both usually have specifically chosen the witness in order to impart the word.

- Malcolm Godwin, *Angels: An Endangered Species* (11).

Looking from the NDE report side, some extra-terrestrial clues are evident. In this case the respondent seems to be describing the "grays" as they are known in UFO literature:

I saw 12 beings that were not human, they had large heads and large eyes, they had no mouths that I saw, or ears. They were not scary, they were not demanding, or judgmental, they were there to help. Above them was a spirit that did communicate what things meant.

- NDERF, Brian K (12).

In one case, the subject specifically asked about UFOs:

I did recall some knowledge. Here are some for you to think about. God himself acknowledges that yes, UFO do co-exist with us and are not to be feared - HIS words. Man has space traveled before the 1960s, approximately 10.000 years ago. We did not build spaceships like we do today, we were picked up by UFOs willingly - we would go to a pick up point, a large hill overlooking a vast plain, there were images marked on the ground to be read from the sky. There "is" other life, beings, not microbes. They reside outside our solar system and into the next. Being in their spacecraft you are not subject to G forces, gravity or other limitations that ours are subject to. They can travel great distances in seconds; they can make their spaceships invisible at will.

- NDERF, Ron A (13).

Angels and the space connection are also discussed in an intriguing work called *The Urantia Book*:

"Also are these angels very much concerned with the means whereby man's spirit is released from the tabernacles of the flesh and his soul escorted to the mansions in heaven. Angels are the sure and heavenly guides of the soul of man during that uncharted and indefinite period of time which intervenes between the death of the flesh and the new life in the spirit abodes."

- Paper 167; The Visit to Philadelphia, 7. The Talk About Angels (14).

The Urantia Book is a three-part tome describing the make-up of the spiritual realms, the history of the Earth, and the life of Jesus.

C. Earth as Unreal

Many world religions teach that the earth plane is an illusion, or "maya." To escape this trap, the soul must give up attachments to material possessions, and particularly our identity as a material being.

Maya means "that which is not" (i.e. illusion). It refers to accepting the temporary as having lasting value, and looking for enduring happiness in this world. Through cultivating the quality of goodness the soul may rise to transcendence and escape the clutches of *maya*.

- [Http://hinduism.iskcon.com/concepts/105.htm](http://hinduism.iskcon.com/concepts/105.htm) (15).

This theme is found in *A Course in Miracles* as well:

Healing is the gift of those who are prepared to learn there is no world, and can accept the lesson now. Their readiness will bring the lesson to them in some form which they can understand and recognize. Some see it suddenly on point of death, and rise to teach it. Others find it in experience that is not of this world, which shows them that the world does not exist because what they behold must be the truth, and yet it clearly contradicts the world.

- *A Course in Miracles*, Lesson 132 (7).

When I was a kid, you could spend an entire Saturday afternoon at the movies. For 25 cents you could see two feature-length films, a half-dozen cartoons, and a newsreel. But even 25 cents was a lot for us poverty-stricken kids in Brooklyn. We devised a plan where one of us would pay for the admission ticket, and the others would wait by a side exit door for our partner in crime to sneak us in.

One Saturday, I was watching a particularly scary movie; it was filled with fear. At the height of the terror, some other kids opened an exit door to let their friends in just like we had done. But being younger and not as adept as us older movie-crashers, they had chosen an exit door right next to the front seats. The bright mid-day sun flooded the darkened theater, pretty much destroying the ambiance and alternate-reality of the horror film.

I was relieved! I had been so caught up in the "reality" of the movie, that I forgot it was just story. Now I wonder: Is life on this planet like sitting through a horror movie? Are all our nightmares just made-up transient visions? Are we just waiting for the light to break through and shine away all our fears?

The idea that the world is illusion is also found in some NDE accounts. They indicate the earth life is more like a dream:

I realized that earth is a dream and not reality and anything pertaining to it was contained, sort of not in reality but within it with borders. Sort of suspended. It wasn't able to mix with reality because it wasn't real but still was acknowledged by the reality where I was. . . . I was shown that the Earth is not 'real' out of the experience of it, much like a dream when we are on Earth.

- NDERF, Judith P (16).

Sometimes the experiencer is not sure which reference is reality:

During the first three months after my experience, I had to make up my mind which reality was the real place. The temptation to return was nearly overwhelming at first.

- NDERF, Arielera's NDE (17).

In this case, the respondent feels that the spiritual realm is our real home:

I don't know how long I was floating above my body, or how I was actually transferred to another dimension. I did know that I was now Home, my (our) Real home. The nature of this Reality is so completely different; there is no language adequate to express the emotions and surroundings. Time and language, as we know them, don't exist there. Love and compassion are the only words I can think of, and they barely scratch the surface of what I felt and perceived around me. The vibration feelings are so strong and yet totally incomprehensible at our physical (or perceptual) level. It was a perfectly normal feeling not to be in a physical body.

- NDERF, Filiesha 1 Probable NDE (18).

If life on earth is an illusion, does that mean then that what we call death is an escape from illusion? Or is death itself an illusion?

Death in that instance is a glorious moment; a wonderful experience. Now the soul can return to its natural form; its normal state. There is an incredible lightness; a sense of total freedom; a limitlessness. And an awareness of Oneness that is at once blissful and sublime.

- Neale Donald Walsh, *Conversations with God*, Book 3 (19).

The final word, in my humble opinion, comes from *A Course in Miracles*:

"And the last to be overcome is death." Of course! Without the idea of death there is no world. All dreams will end with this one. This is salvation's final goal; the end of all illusions.

- *A Course in Miracles*, Manual for Teachers; 27, What is Death? (7).

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Resources

The International Association for Near-Death Studies, Inc.

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