

Letter To The Editor

Hypnotic Induction of Experiences

To the Editor:

Is it possible to experience some of the characteristics of the near-death experience (NDE) without the trauma?

During the January 1989 Interim Period at Tarkio College, I designed and taught a course entitled "The Psychology of Personal Growth," part of which concentrated on near-death studies. Earlier in that course I had hypnotized the class, on a voluntary basis, for weight control, assistance in stopping smoking, and general relaxation. As the class progressed, the possibility of experiencing the good and the positive parts of the NDE, while in a hypnotic state, was discussed.

After no small amount of discussion and exploration, we decided to attempt it. One immediate fear was the possibility of a student "shutting down," or dying, during the process. However, after assessing the limitations of hypnosis and the existence of "voodoo death," we decided to attempt to get students as close to the light as possible without any negative consequences.

On the day that we set aside for this adventure, I invited and encouraged the students to bring guests. Throughout the entire course students frequently brought friends, but on this particular day part of the reason to have someone with them was an insurance factor. Their guests holding their hands and following the directions added additional support. At the appropriate time the friends were asked to squeeze their partners' hands gently at the point at which I began to call them back. In retrospect, I think all participants should have had a contact person who remained, while the participant went on ahead.

Before we started, we had joked about having the students make out their wills. This jesting not only helped them confront death directly but also helped relieve their anxiety.

This episode, like the first hypnosis session, was voluntary, and the students were welcomed to discontinue the process at any time. At one

particular point in the session they were again given the opportunity to stay and enjoy a particular scene, while the rest of the students went on.

Considerable thought was given to how to get the students to a point at which they could go on by themselves, and in particular how to induce this state of mind with a minimum of fear. I thought I needed to take them to the void, to the barrier, to the dark, and at that time they must individually accept, go into the absence, and make the journey by themselves, at least until they might possibly meet others on the "other side." My trust and wish was that they could continue with their "guides" or "spirits" perhaps all the way to the light. The problem was how to get them from the "here and now" to the void with a minimum of distress and how to call them back once they had journeyed on, all the while keeping everything as positive as possible.

I induced a hypnotic state in the students, and at the specified time invited them to go on. I always tell my hypnotic subjects in advance, as exactly as I can, what will or might happen, so there is a minimum of surprise and anxiety. Therefore, I did talk with the students prior to the hypnosis about what might happen during the session. Thus, they were aware of some of the characteristics typically reported in the NDE, and of course that prior awareness might have influenced what they actually experienced. I saw no way to be honest and direct about what might happen without that discussion possibly influencing the experience.

I proceeded with the hypnotic session and called them back after approximately 4 minutes; I had chosen a relatively short period of time in order to provide resuscitation if needed and to cancel negative experiences that might occur, realizing that time "on the other side" is not comparable to time here.

Immediately following this experience we took a break and, as it was the end of the time allocated for the class period, those students and guests that elected to leave were permitted to do so, while those who wished to remain could talk about the experience. Unfortunately, I did not record the interaction that followed the general session; there was sharing and tears of joy, love, and caring. In order to have a permanent record, I asked the students the following day to write exact descriptions of what happened, using whatever words came to them regardless of sentence structure or flow of meaning. That following day was a Friday, which for various reasons is always a smaller class; none of the guests or visitors from the previous day were present. I collected written descriptions from 26 students, about half the number of people present the day before. Below are a few of the more interesting responses, unaltered except minimal correction of spelling or syntax.

1. What happened is hard to explain or put into words. At the point that we were to go toward the star I felt motion; it seemed very rapid yet controlled. At the end of the movement I was in front of a barrier that looked solid and the blackest, darkest thing I could imagine. This barrier looked like it was impassable, yet I was able to go into it.

At this point, in what I would say happened in the blink of an eye, the darkness changed into a light gray fog. The change was so dramatic I thought I had lost touch; all of a sudden I felt a warmth come over me, almost a womb-like feeling of total warmth or love. This happened twice. The first time I heard a man's voice, not with my ears but telepathically; so much was said, but it all seemed to be beyond my understanding. However, one word came to mind: *understanding*. When the first contact was done, a second began with the voice of a woman, and her message was of *faith* in all, everything. At that time we were [told] to come back by you. I felt better that I ever remember feeling in my life.

2. After the star had disappeared I had this sensation of being pulled up into/toward the darkness. I was still on my back and it was as if there was a rope tied around my waist. The speed at which it seemed I was traveling increased an enormous amount. The closer I got, the faster I traveled. I thought I was just going to go right through the darkness and never stop. But the second I reached the darkness I stopped instantly. I was now in the darkness and I knew it. Everything was black, yet it seemed as though there was a dim gray light or mist in the air, allowing me to see a long, extremely large tunnel. I started moving in the direction I was facing and walked for what seemed to be an extremely long time. By now I could feel a tight feeling in my stomach and I guess it could be described as "butterflies."

I came upon a figure in the tunnel of a young boy. When you told us that someone we knew would meet us and take us to the light, I immediately thought this was my little brother. But I didn't know; he looked like he was 13 or 14, which is how old he would have been, but he died when he was less than a year old. I didn't know whether the spirits continued to grow as bodies would have. Anyway, I took this figure as my little brother. He didn't talk, but we communicated through thought. He told me to stop and go back. He told me it wasn't my time, and that my time would come, but it wasn't now and that we would be together in time. I wanted to stay and go on

but I knew I couldn't. I wanted to know the little brother I used to have, but I couldn't yet.

By this time my heart was pounding and I could hear my breathing getting heavy and harder to get enough oxygen. I turned back, not wanting to leave this place, and when you were bringing us back I was always one or two steps behind you, prolonging this as much as possible. When I came out I was scared. I didn't know what to think, what to say. My legs were extremely warm, and even though I hadn't seen the light, I was able to accept my own death. I've never been afraid of dying, but of how it would happen.

3. I am going to try to explain what I felt and what I saw as best I can. While lying on the towel, looking at the star, I felt as though there were walls around me, four walls with no roof. As the star faded, the walls felt very protective; I guess I didn't feel so vulnerable to the openness of a beach in the dark. A door opened to the side of me, and my grandmother, who has passed away, was there motioning to me to come along. I stood up and she said, "Come with me; it's okay."

I followed her into the closet-type room, and on the right of me was her casket, empty. She opened another door and we walked out, her in front of me, me following. As she walked, there was some sort of light. It was very intense, but did not hurt you. It was sort of a spotlight, but it had no beginning. It ended in front of me, but shone on, almost through, my grandma. I continued to walk, and as I got into the light I could not move. I wanted to, but I couldn't, almost as if someone was holding me, but they weren't. My grandma turned and said, "It's okay; everything is okay."

As she was saying this, I heard this beep, beep, beep, like a monitor in a hospital when someone's heart has stopped. Then I heard two voices very familiar to me yelling, "My baby, don't go; please stay with me." It was my mom's voice. Next I heard my dad saying, while sobbing, "I'm so sorry, I am so sorry; it was an accident." I tried to turn around to tell them it was okay, but I couldn't! I tried but my body wouldn't move. Then my grandma said, "Everything will be fine; just be happy." It was almost as if she knew it wasn't my time, but she wanted to make everything okay. She turned to leave, and I was yelling, not through my mouth but out of my mind, "Please don't go!"

I had the warmest feeling, not from outside, but from the

inside out. I heard someone telling me to go back—you—and I was able to turn around and I saw my mom and dad in a hospital room, my mom in a chair by a bed and my dad sobbing with his hand on her shoulder. Then everything faded and I was on my back again, in the room, content, but very scared. I wanted to go back and talk to my grandma. My heart at first felt like it was beating in every part of my body, very hard and loud. When I stood to follow my grandma, it stopped; then afterwards, it was beating normally.

4. I have tried to write and tell that which I experienced, but find there are no words to adequately express the care. The star faded and there was total darkness, but yet it was like a gray blackness surrounding. At that moment there was the sensation of sulfur/ammonia or some such condition which burned my eyes. I remember thinking tears are actually running down my cheeks; this is the only connection I have to the physical [world]. I couldn't see anything; the closest I can describe what happened next—I can't.

There is this gray blackness, I know there is some one or thing above and a little to the right. There is also below me a special one reaching out. There is surrounding all of these lower ones and myself and others. I can't see them all; it's just a feel/thought kind of thing. We were all joined as one in unity, peace, and love. I cannot describe this. I have known love, what I have considered perfect love, not in the physical sense am I talking; I mean love that only your deepest heart of heart one experiences at peak times. I have experienced being loved; I mean I know the feeling that being loved totally brings.

I have experienced the whole realm of love's emotions. But if you would take each of these and multiply them by one hundred thousand thousand, and then put them all together and multiply them again by one hundred thousand thousand, you wouldn't even come close to the feeling I felt. I had to leave when I was called back. There are a lot more words I could attempt to put into this, but they would all be futile.

I invite readers to judge for themselves the extent and significance of these experiences. A few of the questions I have are: How much was "programmed" and how much was spontaneous? If one can "make contact" in this fashion, can one do it in some other way? Is this easily duplicated, and if so, what might be the gains and what might be the

risks? How does one minimize the risk and maximize the gains? Are we experimenting with something that should be left alone? Or is this a dimension of the human being that should be explored and developed?

I am anxious to hear from fellow interested colleagues to discuss this process.

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