

Letters to the Editor

Near-Death Experiences and *Homo noeticus*

To the Editor:

I want to offer a brief comment on the meaning of near-death experiences (NDEs), because my concept of *Homo noeticus* is sometimes invoked in that regard.

In the Winter 1988 issue of the *Journal*, Nancy Evans Bush's (1988) review of Phyllis Atwater's *Coming Back to Life* (1988) provided an excellent balance to Rosalie Newsome's (1988) case studies of ego, moral, and faith development in NDErs. Bush and Atwater rightly emphasized that living in accord with the spiritual guidance obtained during an NDE is hard work, requiring profound personal change. It takes time, patience, commitment, and, as Newsome noted, courage to integrate the experience. Moreover, the experience itself is not ultimate; just read Da Free John's *Easy Death* (1983) for a helpful and healthful critique of the NDE.

Nearly dying can be a crash course in spirituality (no pun intended), but it's only one course, not grad school. NDEs are enlightening, but not enlightenment. In terms of Patanjali's yogic model of consciousness, an NDE is equivalent to *savikalpa samadhi*, or *samadhi*-with-form, that is, a visionary experience involving the subtle plane in which the experiencer still has a separate sense of self. Beyond that, however, is *nirvikalpa samadhi*, or formless *samadhi*, a causal plane experience of self-as-cosmos in which there is no separation.

But even that experience is not ultimate. Beyond that, according to Da Free John, is the state he calls "open eyes enlightenment" or *sahai samadhi*, "easy" *samadhi*, in which all that arises within one's awareness is seen as simply a modification of the Radiant Transcendental Being, the One-in-all-and-all-in-One. I discussed this in detail in my book (White, 1985), *What Is Enlightenment?*

In terms of the mystery school tradition, an NDE is equivalent to the first initiation, and the disorienting aftereffects that NDErs experience is due in part to their lack of preparation for initiation. There are higher initiations, however, and they go beyond the form of the NDE

into the formless. Adeptship, the culmination of mystery schooling, is far beyond the first initiation.

It is adepts whom I have in mind as models of *Homo noeticus*: the Jesuses, the Gautamas, and other enlightened men and women of history who delineate the characteristics of what I see as the coming race. Beyond them, it seems to me, are the beings of light met during NDEs; they are enlightened to a still higher degree, that of actually *being* light, and likewise exemplify a still further stage of our future evolution.

Homo noeticus is such not simply because he or she has awakened at the heart, a quality wonderfully exemplified by NDErs. *Homo noeticus* also has awakened the wisdom-eye. The love of Christ, the compassion of Buddha, is balanced by wisdom. Without wisdom, transpersonal love can become "sloppy *agape*," mere emotionalism or foolish, platitudinous behavior that turns people off to what NDErs want to share with them.

NDErs have a distinct calling to live in accordance with the ideals they experience during near-death, and that is fine. But they are returned to life and the Earth to make the ideal *real*, to ground it in the material plane. To *realize* who we are means living from the wisdom-eye as well as the heart.

So it is no wonder that Newsome's three cases don't measure extraordinarily well on the conventional instruments she used. While those instruments may be less than suitable for measuring the Divine, NDErs themselves are less than fully realized divinity. The ultimate yardstick was stated simply two millennia ago: "By their fruits ye shall know them."

By that I do not imply any criticism of Newsome's three subjects, or of NDErs in general. I merely mean that we all have a long way to go, and the spiritual journey proceeds at perhaps a slower pace that we'd like to think after coming back from an NDE. But the timing is God's, not ours, and the amount of frustration, impatience, and anger we feel with others for not understanding our reorientation to life or "getting with the program" is a direct measure of the amount of ego left in us.

References

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Prophetic visions and the "Inner Self Helper"

To the Editor:

In the Fall 1988 issue of the *Journal*, Kenneth Ring (1988) discussed reasons why prophetic visions may not be accurate. I believe I can supply information that shows why prophetic visions may be incorrect; this explanation also relates to Michael Grosso's (1985) concept of Mind-at-Large as described in the book review by Gordon Green (1988) in the same issue. In addition, my explanation also ponders a possible evolutionary path alluded to by Ring and Grosso.

My explanation is primarily a spiritual one, which speculates on the nature of a spirit form that inhabits the physical body and departs at death, or that is joined at death. Some preliminary information is a presentation of the concepts of Max Freedom Long (1948), who studied the "magic" of the *kahunas* among the native Polynesians in Hawaii. Long believed he discerned how the *kahunas* were able to perform their magic by understanding the tripartite spiritual nature of man. The Hawaiian names for these three spirits are *Unihipili*, *Uhane*, and *Aumakua*, but he called them simply low self, middle self, and high self.

Long believed the low self spirit had roughly the same size and shape as the physical body and resided in it. The middle self spirit was focused in the head/brain, while the high self spirit had a connecting cord to the physical body but did not penetrate it. The middle self, or normal waking consciousness, does not contact the high self, or super-consciousness, except through the low self, or nonrational sub-conscious; and even that contact is rare during waking consciousness without training in the manner of the *kahunas*.

Many of the phenomena encountered in the transcendental realm of a near-death experience (NDE) can be accounted for by speculating that the NDEr makes contact with the high self. According to Long, the high self, when properly requested, could perform miraculous heal-