



Near-Death Experience Research

History and perspectives

Robert Mays and Suzanne Mays

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What is a near-death experience (NDE)?

Typical elements of an NDE

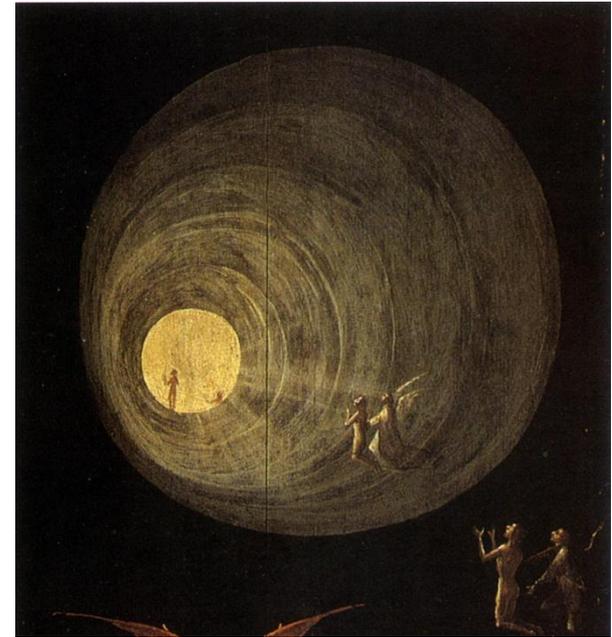
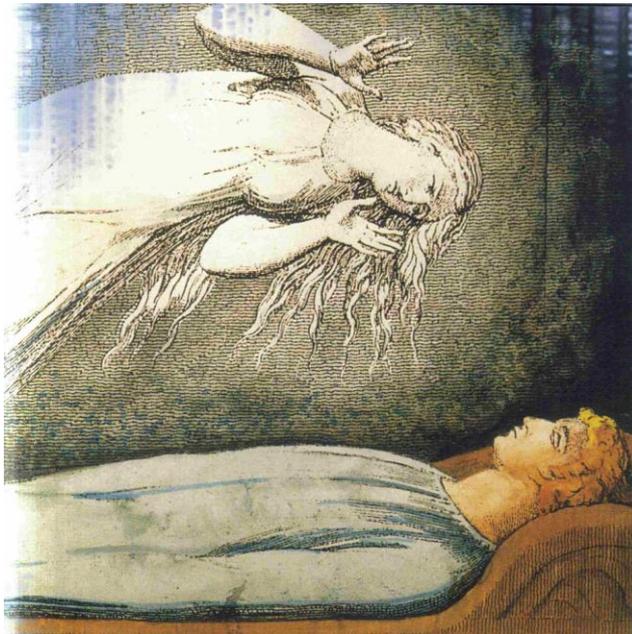
Coming close to death

Sense of peace

Feeling separated from the body

Hovering nearby and seeing your body

William Blake, *The soul hovering over the body*.

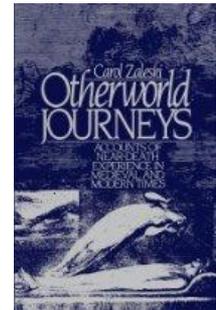


Hieronymus Bosch, *Ascent of the blessed* (detail).

- Traveling through a tunnel toward a light
- Meeting deceased relatives or friends
- Encountering a Being of Light or religious figure
- Having a “life review”, sometimes a “preview”
- Being told or choosing to return

Historical overview of NDE accounts

- Plato's legend of Er (*The Republic*, book X)
 - "Died" in battle, revived on funeral pyre 10 days later
 - In Hades, souls were judged and sent up to a heavenly realm or down into the earth for punishment
 - After some time, souls returned and drew lots to choose their next life
 - Before returning to earth the soul had to drink from the River of Forgetfulness
 - Er was sent back to serve as a messenger to humanity
- Ancient Roman accounts
 - Similar phenomenal content, different terms
 - "Mistake" cases
- Medieval accounts
 - Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys* (1987)
- Numerous accounts in medical and parapsychological literature (19th and early 20th centuries)



An ancient Roman account

Cleodemus had a fever:

“I woke up to find a handsome young man standing at my side, in a white cloak. He raised me up from the bed, and conducted me through a sort of chasm into Hades... I came to the Judgment-hall, and there were Aeacus and Charon and the Fates and the Furies. One person of a majestic appearance – Pluto, I suppose it was – sat reading out the names of those who were due to die, their term of life having lapsed. [I was set before Pluto, but he] flew into a rage: ‘Away with him...his thread is not yet out; go and fetch Demylus the smith; he has had his spindleful and more.’ I ran off home ... My fever had now disappeared, and I told everybody that Demylus was as good as dead.”

Demylus had some illness and was soon dead.

--Lucian (c. 170 CE).

Aeacus – one of the three judges in Hades

Charon – ferryman of Hades

Pluto – ruler of Hades

from M. Nahm (2009). *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 27(4), 211–222.

Research “pre-Moody”

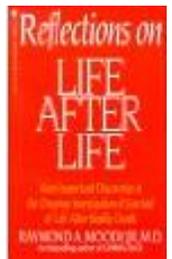
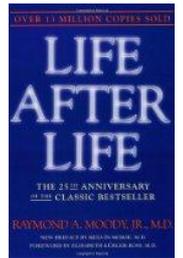
- Albert von St. Gallen Heim
 - Remarks on fatal falls, *Jahrbuch des Schweitzer Alpenclub* (1892)
- Accounts by parapsychology researchers
 - F.W.H. Myers “Now and then we find a case where vivid consciousness has existed during a state of apparent coma” (1891)
 - Studies of deathbed visions, apparitions at the time of death, out-of-body experiences
- Russell Noyes (early 1970s)
 - Depersonalization in the face of life-threatening danger, including hyperalertness and mystical consciousness



Raymond Moody



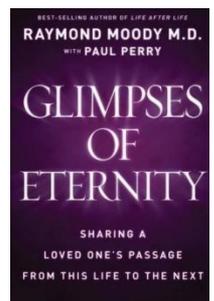
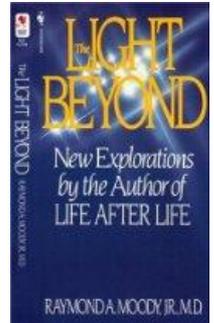
- Ph.D. in Philosophy, M.D. in psychiatry
- Father of Near-Death Experience
 - Influenced by initial stories (especially George Ritchie's), started gathering additional stories
 - *Life After Life* (1975) based on 150 cases
 - Book was widely accepted, flood of additional cases, followed by *Reflections on Life After Life* (1977)
- Method of study: phenomenology
 - Sensitive to the phenomenological elements
 - 14 main elements for the NDE, later added: vision of knowledge, Cities of Light, realm of bewildered spirits, supernatural rescues (from the jaws of death)



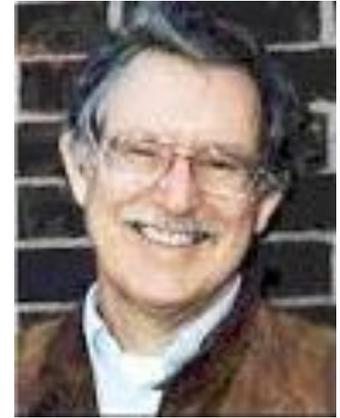
Raymond Moody...

Subsequent books

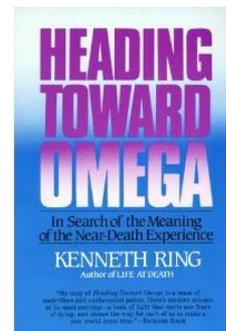
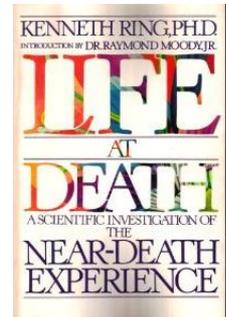
- *The Light Beyond* (1988) – further explorations, an excellent resource of additional phenomenological details
- *Coming Back* (1990) – past life hypnotic regression
- *Reunions* (1993) – visions of departed relatives and friends, apparitions, “psychomanteum”
- *The Last Laugh* (1999) – satirical treatment of parapsychologists, skeptics and Christian fundamentalists – NDE as entertainment
- *Glimpses of Eternity* (2010) – shared death experiences, the empathic experience with someone who is dying



Kenneth Ring

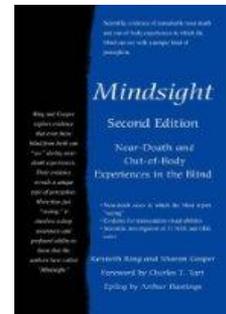
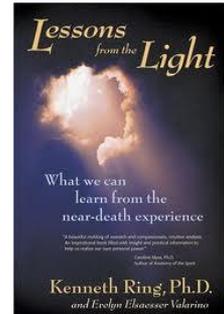


- Psychology professor
- Initial broad analysis of NDE – five stages
- Weighted core experience index (WCEI)
 - Objective measure of NDE, but implicit stages
 - Concept of “depth” of NDE
- *Life at Death* (1980) – Connecticut study
 - First systematic study: found no correlation of NDE with a number of factors
- “Near-death hotel”
 - Extensive informal discussions with NDErs
- *Heading Toward Omega* (1984)
 - NDEs are indicative of humanity’s evolutionary change to higher levels of consciousness
 - Later *The Omega Project: NDEs, UFO encounters and mind at large*



Kenneth Ring...

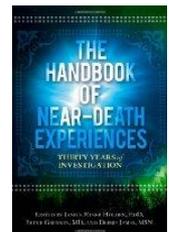
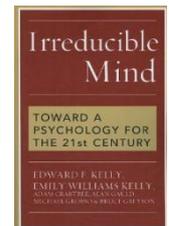
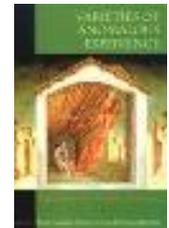
- *Lessons from the Light*, with Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino (1998)
 - What can we learn from NDEs without having one?
 - Living in the Light
 - Lessons from the life review
 - It's all about Love
- *Mindsight*, with Sharon Cooper (1999)
 - Significant research in cases of blind NDErs who can see during the NDE
 - Veridical perceptions even in people blind from birth (Vicki Noratuk)
 - Unusual quality of vision in NDE: 360 degree, wrap-around, perspective changes where you choose – “mindsight”



Bruce Greyson



- Professor of psychiatry, Director of the Division of Perceptual Studies at U.Va.
- “Father of NDE research”
 - Meticulous research in nearly every facet of the field
 - “Greyson NDE scale” for evaluating NDEs – systematically developed and validated; preferred
 - Long-time editor of *Journal of Near-Death Studies*
 - Largest contributor to near-death studies research
- Significant overall summaries of NDE research
 - NDE chapter in *Varieties of Anomalous Experience* (2000)
 - Co-author of *Irreducible Mind* (2007)
 - Co-author of *Handbook of Near-Death Experiences* (2009)



Michael Sabom

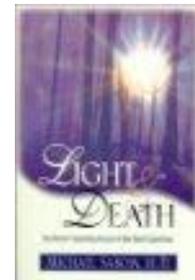


- Cardiologist, initially very skeptical
- Conducted first clinical prospective study, *Recollections of Death* (1982)
 - Excellent study, 116 patients
 - Veridical perceptions of their resuscitation
 - Compared to controls – much more accurate descriptions of what actually occurred
- *Light and Death* (1998)
 - Reported Pam Reynolds' NDE – key aspects misinterpreted/misreported but later corrected
 - Religious issues: faith, healing, intercessory prayer, reincarnation, suicide attempts and hellish NDEs
 - Biblically-backed interpretation

Recollections of Death A Medical Investigation

Striking new clinical evidence, having crucial implications for our understanding of the near-death experience, presented by a noted cardiologist and professor of medicine

Michael H. Sabom, M.D.



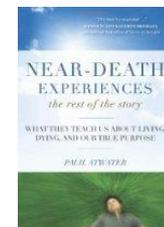
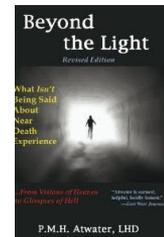
IANDS – International Association for Near-Death Studies

- Founders (started 1978, incorporated 1981)
 - Moody, Ring, Greyson, Sabom, John Audette
- Early participants in IANDS
 - Nancy Bush, P. M. H. Atwater, Diane Corcoran
- Resources for NDE researchers
 - Peer-reviewed quarterly *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, the only scholarly journal devoted to NDE research
 - Annual North American conference
 - Index to periodical NDE-related literature through 2005
 - Data base of ~900 NDE accounts
 - Professional member directory



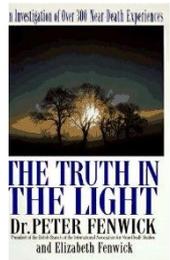
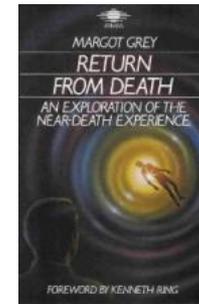
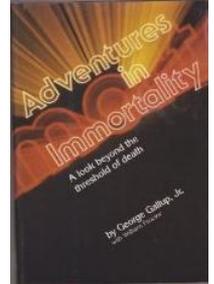
P. M. H. Atwater

- Three-time NDEr and NDE researcher
 - Unique approach to collecting NDE data
 - “P. M. H.” was given to her in a vision
 - Author of 13 books
- *Beyond the Light* (1994)
 - Types of NDEs, pleasant, distressing, transcendent
 - Aftereffects: psychological, physiological, spiritual
- *The Big Book of Near-Death Experiences* (2007)
 - Comprehensive, very readable overview of NDEs, a great introduction and reference
- *Near-Death Experiences, the rest of the story* (2011)
 - A new model of NDE
 - Children, NDEs, aftereffects, shifts in perception
 - “Brain shift”, “spirit shift”
 - Unusual elements in NDEs



Some other researchers

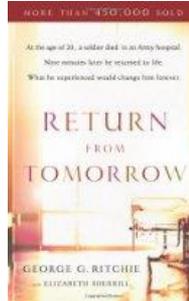
- George Gallup, Jr., *Adventures in Immortality* (1982)
 - Poll of U.S. adults on immortality, special focus on NDE
 - About 5% of U.S. have had NDE: 15 million people, may be high
- Margot Grey, *Return from Death* (1985)
 - Groundbreaking NDE study
 - “Negative” NDEs, aftereffects of NDEs
- Arvin Gibson (1990s) – 5 books
 - Numerous Mormon accounts from 19th and 20th centuries
- Peter & Elizabeth Fenwick, *The Truth in the Light* (1995)
 - Neuropsychiatrist
 - U.K. study of over 300 NDEs, excellent analysis
- Craig Lundahl & Harold Widdison, *The Eternal Journey* (1997)
 - “Map” of the spiritual realms: City of Light, angels, realm of bewildered spirits
 - Purpose of pre-earthly, earthly, post-earthly life



Notable NDE accounts

- George Ritchie, *Return from Tomorrow* (1978)

- Moody connection, extensive veridical OBE
- Christ as Being of Light
- Tour of spiritual realities (hellish, earthly, heavenly)



- George Rodonaia

- Dead and in a morgue 3 days, awoke at start of autopsy
- Veridical perceptions: baby's ailment, "merging" with wife's head

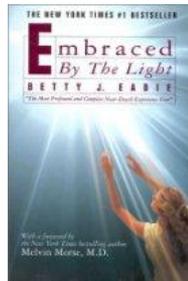


- Mellen-Thomas Benedict

- Revived with miraculous healing, extensive spiritual knowledge

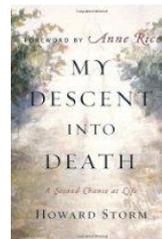
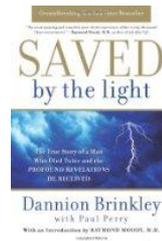
- Betty Eadie, *Embraced by the Light* (1992)

- Apparent Mormon/Native American connection
- Amazing account of adoptive daughter-to-be
- Best-seller



Notable NDE accounts...

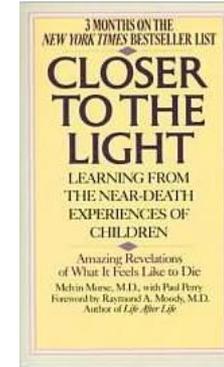
- Dannon Brinkley, *Saved by the Light* (1994)
 - Two NDEs, two life reviews
 - Less than nice person, turned life around dramatically
- Howard Storm, *My Descent into Death* (2000)
 - Initially a hellish experience
 - Attacked, tortured by other discarnates
 - Turned to Christ, healed, tour of higher realms
 - Atheist turned minister
- Matthew Dovel, *My Last Breath* (2003)
 - Childhood drowning NDE, turned to drugs
 - Suicide led to second, hellish NDE
 - “Scared straight”



Childhood NDEs

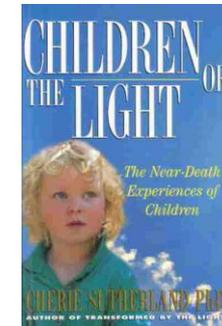
- Melvin Morse

- *Closer to the Light* (1990)
- First cases of children NDEs, 12 in Seattle study (126 controls)
- Similar to but simpler than adult NDEs
- Simpler language used, life reviews rare



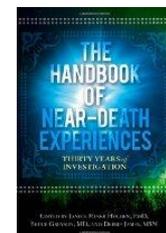
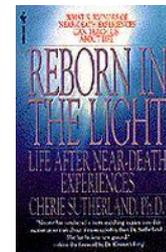
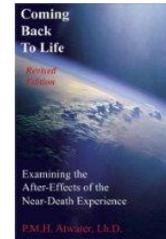
- Cherie Sutherland

- *Children of the Light* (1995)
- Study of 26 children NDEs
- Reports of the NDEs of very young, prelinguistic children are quite complex when they were later reported



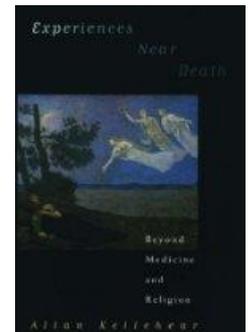
Aftereffects

- P. M. H. Atwater, *Coming Back to Life* (1988)
 - Major aftereffects of NDEs
 - Psychological, physiological
 - Spiritual implications
 - “Brain shift”: enhanced abilities
 - How to help NDErs
- Cherie Sutherland, *Reborn in the Light* (1992)
 - Changes in attitude to death
 - Changes in religious beliefs, attitudes, practices
 - Psychic phenomena
 - Changes in life direction
- Russell Noyes et al. (2009)
 - Summary of aftereffects research
 - Statistical tabulations



Cross-cultural research

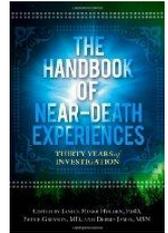
- NDE cases from India
 - Yamaraja – Lord of Death
 - “Mistake” NDEs (compare with ancient Roman NDE)
- Allan Kellehear, *Experiences Near Death* (1996)
 - Includes analysis of cross-cultural differences: China, India, Pacific islands, Native American, Australian and New Zealand aboriginal
 - Elements present: OBE, other beings, other world
 - Elements missing:
 - Tunnels versus dark regions versus rivers, etc.
 - Life reviews (mixed – yes and no)
- Culturally specific elements or not?
 - Religious figures typically from one’s culture (a matter of one’s interpretation?)
 - Jeffrey Long (2010) – no difference Western vs. non-Western
 - Tunnels and life reviews
 - Internet based NDE reports
 - Modern (Western) influence present or absent?



Distressing NDEs

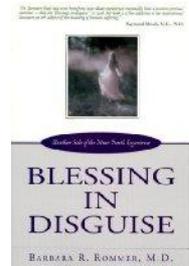
- Nancy Evans Bush (papers in 1983, 1992, 2002, 2009)

- 3 different types of distressing NDEs
- Making sense of distressing NDEs:
 - There is always something to be learned
 - Not related to the kind of person you are or the life you led
- New book to be printed: *Dancing Past the Dark* and blog dancingpastthedark.wordpress.com



- Barbara Rommer, *Blessing in Disguise* (2000)

- 18% of 300 NDErs had “less than positive” (LTP) NDE
- 4th type of distressing NDE
- Not all suicides have distressing NDEs; those who do: most experience the void, fewer are hellish

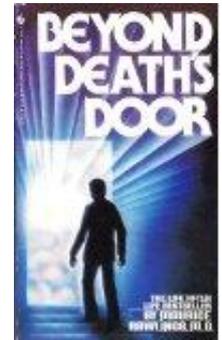


- 4 types of distressing NDEs

- Inverted NDE: common NDE elements, but felt as frightening (33%)
- The eternal, featureless void (30%)
- Graphic hellish experience: threatening demons, dark pit, does not convert to positive (20%)
- Frightening life review: felt being judged (e.g. a tribunal)

Religious interpretations and controversy

- Interpretations of NDE content
 - NDEs are the Devil's work
 - Fundamentalist interpretations:
 - Hellish NDEs => Hell
 - NDEs confirm Christian beliefs
- Maurice Rawlings, *Beyond Death's Door* (1987)
 - Hellish experiences support Christian notions of hell and damnation for the “unsaved”
 - Suicides always lead to hellish NDEs
- Controversy among researchers (2000)
 - Michael Sabom and Kenneth Ring
 - The “religious wars”
 - NDE accounts don't support either religious interpretation



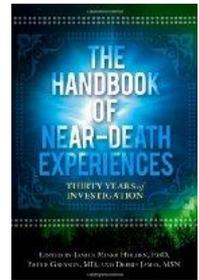
Prospective studies

- Follow up all cases of cardiac arrest in one or more hospital units
 - Data on NDE incidence, relationship to medical condition, veridical perceptions, accuracy of memory of NDE later
- Michael Sabom (1982)
 - Atlanta study – 116 patients, 53% with OBE perceptions
 - Comparison of description of resuscitation versus controls
- Pim van Lommel et al. – Dutch study (2001)
 - 344 cardiac arrest cases, 62 with NDE, follow up after 2 years and 8 years
 - Recall of NDE still accurate even after 8 years
 - Published in *The Lancet*
 - Led to greater awareness of NDE in scientific community and somewhat greater acceptance
- Sam Parnia et al. (2001)
 - Cardiac arrest, 63 cases, 4 NDEs, no apparent veridical perceptions



Apparent veridical perceptions (AVP)

- NDEr can “see” immediate surroundings during OBE phase, perceptions are later verified
- Janice Holden study of AVP cases (2009)
 - Scoured the NDE literature
 - Of 93 cases of AVP:
 - 92% were verified and completely correct
 - 6% had some erroneous elements
 - <1% were completely erroneous
- Need purely visual perceptions out of patient’s line of sight, verified independently



Famous cases of AVP

- Maria's shoe (Kim Clark Sharp, Kenneth Ring)
 - Saw tennis shoe on outside window ledge
- Pam Reynolds (Michael Sabom, others – “standstill operation”)
 - Saw bone “drill”, heard doctors’ specific conversation, heard “Hotel California” on return to body
- Missing dentures (Pim van Lommel, Rudolf Smit, Titus Rivas)
 - Recognized male nurse, crash cart where dentures were placed
- Al Sullivan: surgeon flapping his arms (Cook, Greyson & Stevenson)
 - Saw surgeon’s idiosyncratic movements
- Nurse peeking nervously around curtain (Penny Sartori)
- 3 cases (Kenneth Ring, Madelaine Lawrence)
 - NDEr saw a red shoe on hospital roof, later retrieved
 - NDEr saw nurse wearing plaid shoelaces, later confirmed
 - NDEr saw nurse wearing a yellow smock, later confirmed
- Penny on the cabinet top (Morris & Knafel) – confirmed
- Nurse making an error (Raymond Moody)
 - In another room, NDEr saw nurse open vial without protection from glass

Experiments to verify AVPs

- Use of visual targets in hospital settings
 - Generally cardiac arrest patients
 - Various kinds of targets have been tried
 - Follow-up interviews
- Janice Holden (1990)
 - 1 year, no NDEs
- Madelaine Lawrence (1996)
 - 1 year, no full NDEs, 3 in early stage OBE
- Penny Sartori (2004)
 - 5 years, several NDEs, 3 AVPs but none of the target
 - Patient left without looking, was looking in wrong direction, did not rise high enough
- Bruce Greyson (2006)
 - 1 year, induced cardiac arrest for embedding pacemakers, no NDEs



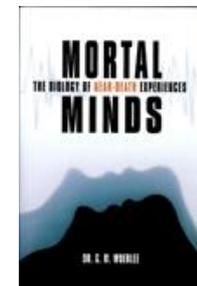
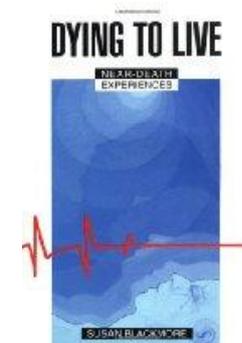
Experiments to verify AVPs...

- Sam Parnia: AWARE study (2008–present)
 - AWAreness during REsuscitation
 - Target on shelf above bed, changed regularly
 - Also, patients' brain oxygen level is measured during resuscitation using a cerebral oximeter
 - Expecting at least 1,500 cardiac arrest survivors
 - Perhaps 30 to 60 patients will also report an OBE with perceptions of the physical surroundings
- Current status
 - 25+ hospitals (U.K., U.S., Canada, Austria, Brazil, possibly other countries)
 - 1,000 patients so far with cardiac arrest – in process of interviewing them



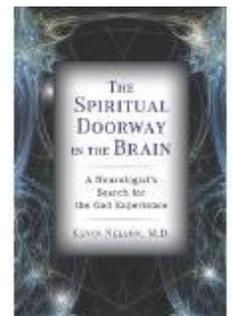
Skeptics and dogmatism

- Susan Blackmore (U.K.)
 - Ph.D. in Parapsychology, but renounced parapsychology
 - *Dying to Live* (1993)
 - Multiple factor “dying brain” theory
- Keith Augustine (U.S.)
 - M.A. in Philosophy (2001)
 - *Hallucinatory NDEs* (2003/2008)
- Gerald Woerlee (Holland)
 - Anesthesiologist
 - *Mortal Minds* (2005)
 - *Unholy Legacy of Abraham* (2008)
 - All the elements can be explained physiologically
- These things *can't* happen so any purported facts are irrelevant



Alternate explanations

- Altered blood gas levels
 - Hypoxia, hypercarbia
- Neurochemical factors
 - Endorphins, ketamine-like chemicals
- Temporal lobe seizure / abnormal electrical activity in specific brain regions
 - Electrical/magnetic temporal lobe stimulation
- Induced out-of-body experiences (OBEs)
 - Olaf Blanke studies
 - Electrical stimulation in the region of the temporo-parietal junction (TPJ)
- Rapid eye movement (REM) intrusion
 - Kevin Nelson *The Spiritual Doorway in the Brain* (2010)
 - Intrusion of REM-like states while awake



Alternate explanations...

None of these factors is adequate to explain NDE, because ...

1. The reported experiences bear only slight resemblance to NDE,
2. Many NDEs occur under conditions *without* the suggested physiological factor, and/or
3. In cases where the physiological factor is present, NDEs are *not reported* in even a large percent of cases.

Need for education on NDEs

- Attitudes from medical profession
 - Typically: discounting, devaluing or implying pathology
 - NDEr is likely to remain confused, isolated, and mute about what, typically, is the most profound experience of their life. This outcome is harmful.
- Treatment of returning military personnel
 - Military NDErs are especially likely to receive this dismissive response and to be reluctant to share their story
 - Also harmful outcome

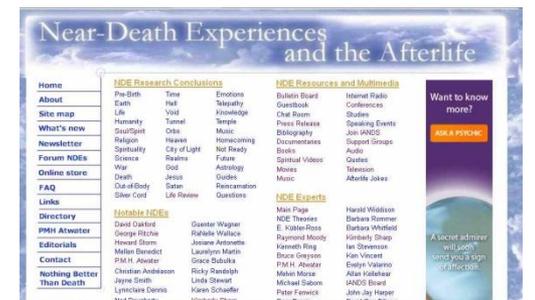
Recent developments

Internet data collection and dissemination

- IANDS web site (iands.org)
 - Archive of NDE accounts, submit your experience
 - Listed on the site and available for research
 - Extensive information for NDErs, families, caregivers

- NDE Research Foundation (nderf.org)
 - Extensive archive of NDE submitted accounts
 - Multilingual and multicultural NDEs
 - 24 languages
 - Basis of research studies

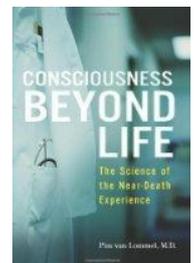
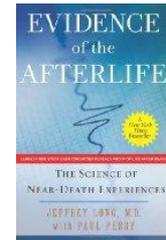
- Near-death.com
 - Extensive compilation of information
 - Web master: Kevin Williams
 - Author of *Nothing Better than Death*
 - Personal interpretations



Recent developments...

Evidence of the afterlife

- Jeff Long, *Evidence of the Afterlife* (2010)
 - 9 lines of evidence from NDE accounts: lucid consciousness, OBE AVPs, blind sight, conscious with anesthesia, life reviews, deceased relatives, child NDEs, worldwide consistency, aftereffects
- Chris Carter, *Science and the Near-Death Experience* (2010)
 - Consciousness doesn't depend on the brain and may survive death



NDE and theories of consciousness

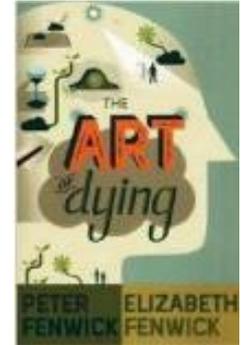
- Van Lommel, *Consciousness beyond life* (2010)
 - NDEs imply non-local, “never-ending” consciousness
- Robert and Suzanne Mays
 - Nonmaterial mind interacts with brain
 - Based on NDE and phantom limb phenomena



Recent developments...

Peter & Elizabeth Fenwick, *The Art of Dying* (2008)

- Integrating all phenomena surrounding death and near-death
 - Deathbed visions, light/mist/music at time of death, coincidences / apparitions at time of death, clocks stopping, after-death communications
- The search for the soul, dying related to consciousness, NDEs and consciousness



Raymond Moody, *Glimpses of Eternity* (2010)

- Shared death experiences
- Persons present at the death of a loved one themselves experience something – 7 elements
 - Room changes shape
 - Mystical light in the room
 - Music, musical sounds
 - Leaving their own body, rising up with loved one
 - Co-living the life review of their loved one
 - Traveling part-way toward the Light, “heavenly” realms
 - Mist rising from body at death
- Significant addition to near-death literature, more compelling case for the afterlife

