

Coming Back...

Information for the person who has nearly died or who "died" briefly and was brought back.

People who have come very close to death may later tell of an experience which they say happened while they were on the threshold of death. If you have had this "near-death experience," or if you know someone who has, the information in this pamphlet may help you understand it better.



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Coming Back...

Joe F. said he knew he was dying when the bleeding wouldn't stop. "I knew I was going, but suddenly I felt totally at peace. Then there was a golden kind of light, the brightest light you ever saw, but it didn't hurt my eyes." Joe said he wanted to stay with the light, but something told him, "It isn't your time. You must go back and finish what you have to do in your life." The next thing he knew, he was on his bed with the doctors busy around him. The pain was back.

It was a bad heart attack for Mary G. She was in the Emergency Room when all at once the pain disappeared. "I seemed to be floating in a corner of the room," Mary said. "I was looking down at the doctors working on somebody when I realized it was my body they were working on, but I wasn't in it. It didn't seem strange at all, at the time. I wanted to tell the doctors they didn't need to work so hard. My husband and kids were waiting down the hall. I went and tried to tell them I was fine, but they couldn't hear me. I wanted to tell them not to worry."

Willy M.'s car hit a wall, throwing him onto the road. "I was up in a tree, like," said Willy. "The cops were standing around my body down on the road, talking about how this guy wasn't going to make it. But I never felt better. Then I was going through someplace, like being in a tunnel. At the end there was this light that came around me. Most beautiful thing you can imagine. It was like love all around. I never went to church or nothing, but it was like that, sort of. I saw things from my life, that I did. My kid brother came to me—he died in 'Nam—and said I had to go back and finish my life, that it wasn't time yet. I'm not afraid of dying any more, but it's real important to me to be alive. Now I know the most important thing is to be right with people, to care about them. Not so much fighting, you know, and worrying about making it big? I work in a youth club now, evenings. It means a lot."

What Joe, Mary and Willy have shared is called a near-death experience. It has happened for centuries, but few people talked about it until very recently.

What is A Near-Death Experience (NDE)?

Most people who have come close to death say they remember nothing. Roughly a third may say that "something happened." That "something" might be a near-death experience, an NDE.

No two NDEs are exactly alike, but there is a pattern to them. An NDE includes *one or more* of these things:

1. Feeling that the "self" has left the body. Often the "self" moves overhead and "watches" efforts to revive the physical body. The person may later be able to describe who was there and what happened, sometimes in detail.
2. Moving through a dark space or "tunnel."
3. Encountering a radiant light. It is usually described as golden or white, and as being magnetic or loving.
4. Feeling at one with the universe; having a sense of understanding everything, of knowing "how the world works."
5. Meeting others, possibly deceased family and friends.
6. Having a life review, "seeing my life pass in front of me."
7. Reaching a boundary—a cliff, water, some kind of barrier that may not be crossed if one is to return to life.
8. In rare cases, entering a landscape or city.
9. Returning to the body.

Without exception, people who have had this experience say it cannot be put into words afterwards. It is indescribable.

Almost always, the NDE is described as being peaceful, and life-changing. Many people say it was "like going home."

For some people, an NDE may be frightening. The events they describe may not fit the usual pattern, but are felt as destructive and terrifying. There is some evidence that a frightening NDE may develop into the peaceful type if it is not interrupted, or if the person has been able to "push past" the fear.

If you have questions about a frightening NDE, call or write to IANDS (see back cover) for more information.

Questions People Ask About the NDE

How many people have had these experiences?

In 1981 pollster George Gallup, Jr., estimated that there were probably about eight million near-death experiencers. Today, as the result of advances in medical technology, millions more have reported NDEs. The research shows that about 35% of people who come close to death later report the experience. Many more people may have it but not talk about it.

Why doesn't everybody have one?

No one knows why some people report an NDE and others do not.

What causes an NDE?

Scientists do not agree on what an NDE is or why it happens. No one theory fits all cases.

This is the nuttiest thing I ever heard. Isn't it crazy?

When we can't explain something we probably say, "That's crazy," or, "I must be losing my mind." The NDE is an experience that happens but that cannot yet be explained. The NDE occurs to sane and normal people of all races, religions, backgrounds, and ages, including very small children.

How do people feel about having a near-death experience?

A person who has had the experience has very mixed feelings. He or she may be very angry at coming back to physical pain and suffering, and at having "lost the light." There may be fear of insanity because something has happened that seems impossible. Very often people have a deep fear of being ridiculed. Not all NDEs are remembered immediately, and bits and pieces of the experience may be remembered over quite a long period of time. In this case, the person may wonder what is happening.

On the other hand, most experiencers are no longer afraid of death. They are also typically sure that their lives have a purpose and meaning. An experiencer may feel special, or "chosen."

Do NDEs happen only to people who are religious or good?

People who have had NDEs are usually average people, no better and no worse than anyone else. An NDE happens to people of many religious backgrounds. The experience seems to have more to do with people's lives *after* the NDE than before.

What does it mean, that the NDE has more to do with a person's life after the experience than before?

Just about every person who has an NDE seems to have a changed understanding of what life is all about. This usually goes very deep and is often impossible for the person to explain.

Almost always, the person's values change. Besides losing all fear of death, the person may also have lost interest in financial or career success. "Getting ahead" may seem like an odd game, one that the person chooses not to "play" even if it means giving up friendships.

Becoming more loving is very important to most experiencers, although they may have difficulty explaining what they mean by that. They may become deeply interested in service, in helping others. They may become more outgoing.

After an NDE, beliefs often change. Religious observance may or may not increase, but belief in a "spiritual reality" is almost certain. A frequent comment is, "I thought this was so before my experience, but now I know."

After the experience some people find they have an increase in psychic abilities. No one knows why this happens, but many experiencers report it. If this becomes a problem for you or for someone you know, contact LANDS (back cover). The staff there will refer you to a reliable source for more information.

This sure doesn't sound very scientific.

What's going on?

In scientific thought, what is real is what can be observed with the physical senses, or tested and measured. Because an NDE can be reported only by the individual who had the experience, it cannot be observed and tested by anyone else. Some researchers thus believe that the NDE is not scientifically "real." Others believe the NDE to be as real, and as scientifically valid, as any other intense personal experience. The major difference may be that some scientists demand physical proof of reality, while others are less troubled by a lack of immediate terms, or by ambiguity.

Thousands of NDEs have been reported from all parts of the world. Something does seem to be happening, whether everyone agrees that it is scientifically real or not.

My doctor says my NDE was an hallucination. Is he right?

People who have experienced both say they are quite different. By calling an NDE an hallucina-

tion, your doctor may feel that he understands it better. The term may or may not be accurate. For the layperson, there is no reason to fear that the experiencer has been psychotic.

I had one of these experiences, but I don't think I was in any danger. Could I have been dying and not known it?

Probably not. Although the NDE has become well known lately, similar experiences may happen to people under other circumstances. The best known are the experiences of the religious mystics. Many people also experience something similar while meditating, sleeping lightly, or being in a light trance. They describe the state as one in which they know their consciousness is located outside their physical bodies. These are generally "out-of-the-body experiences," not NDEs.

In a similar vein, people who are actually dying often mention seeing a light; they may report talking with a friend or loved one who has previously died. Their deathbed visions sound identical to an NDE.

The NDE and psychedelic experiences are also quite similar, even though many NDEs happen with no drugs or medications involved.

If you have had an NDE

You are not alone, and you have not lost your mind. Countless other normal people have had similar experiences.

You may want to talk about it or you may not. If you do, choose a listener with whom you are comfortable, someone who knows how to listen. Some people have found it more helpful to write the experience down privately, or to tape record it. Others prefer to think about the experience, sometimes for a long time, before trying to share it.

If you want to talk with another experiencer, or to someone who will not need too many explanations, contact LANDS (back cover) for the name of someone reliable.

If Someone You Know Has Had An NDE

The best thing you can do is to *be with* the person. Just listen. It is as if the other person has just returned from a country you have never visited—only he or she can describe it.

You are not expected to know all about the experience, or to have answers or opinions.

Despite the common pattern in almost all NDEs, there are many differing interpretations of the pattern. Simply listening without being judgmental will be a help.

You may want to read some of the books listed, or to talk with someone who can help you understand the experience better. Other information is available from IANDS, at the address listed on the back page.

Looking for Help. . .

As with any other experience, some people adjust easily to having had an NDE, while others are deeply troubled. In either case, learning more about the experience can be helpful. The following books are recommended.

Life After Life by Raymond B. Moody, Jr., M.D., Ph.D. This is a short, very readable book describing a number of near-death experiences. It was the first book written on the subject and has been very popular all over the world. Other titles of interest by Moody are: *Reflections on Life after Life*, and *The Light Beyond*.

Life at Death by Kenneth Ring, Ph.D. This book contains more detail than the Moody book and examines the NDE more closely. *Heading Toward Omega* and *The Omega Project* are other books by Kenneth Ring that would be of interest.

Recollections of Death written by Michael B. Sabom, M.D., a cardiologist, describes a group of near-death experiences he studied. As a heart specialist, Dr. Sabom has written from the view-point of a medical professional who was skeptical of the NDE at first, but whose views changed as the study went on.

Adventures in Immortality, by George Gallup, Jr., the pollster. This book contains numerous accounts of near-death experiences and people's reactions to them, with much statistical backup.

Closer to the Light, by Melvin Morse, M.D., a pediatrician, reports on his study of NDEs in children and his views of what they mean.

Final Gifts by Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley. Written by two hospice nurses, this book is about what it is like to die. It would be helpful for anyone who wonders about dying or who is living with a dying person. The similarity between actual dying and the NDE is obvious.

For More Information. . . Write

International Association of Near-Death
Studies, Inc.

Incorporated in Connecticut as a non-profit
organization in 1981, IANDS has three pur-
poses:

1. To provide information about the near-death
and similar experiences;
2. To promote research in any aspect of near-
death studies;
3. To serve as a contact point for people who
have had a near-death experience, their
families, and interested professionals and
lay people.

IANDS maintains no "party line" on the near-
death or other experiences. Its purpose is to
support exploration of the experience, not to
offer any one explanation of it. The Association
is committed to the scientifically-grounded
investigation of the NDE and to providing
accurate information based on those findings.

In some areas of the United States, Friends of
IANDS support groups have formed to provide
more direct service to experiencers, their
families, and involved professionals. Contact
the IANDS office for more information about
these groups.

IANDS publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Vital
Signs*, and a quarterly journal, *The Journal of
Near-Death Studies*.