

Frontiers of Knowledge's Chapter 5 Highlight on Investigations of Near-Death Experiences

Types of Near-Death Experiences

In examining the large variations in NDEs, Atwater found four general types, or classes:¹

- *Initial experience* involves only a few of the more basic NDE elements or experiences; for example, a brief OBE and/or a simple, pleasant experience of a nondescript place. Atwater uses the terms “loving nothingness” and the “friendly dark” for this place.
- *Unpleasant and/or hell-like experience*. A significant percent of NDErs have frightening experiences: being in a hell-like place, a purgatory, or a frightening void. Some are even “haunted” by their past. These types of NDEs often include a life review.
- *Pleasant and/or heaven-like experience* are the types we often see or hear about in popular media accounts of NDEs, and they usually include some or all of the following elements: an OBE, meeting deceased relatives and friends in a nonphysical setting, meeting well-known, deceased religious figures or spiritual light beings, and receiving positive, life-affirming information in nonverbal conversations with them. These types of NDEs can also include a life review.
- *Transcendent experience* NDEs tend to be nonpersonal, expansive revelations of greater truths and experiences of alternative realities—otherworldly dimensions and scenes much beyond the individual's normal conceptual frames of reference. . . . Atwater reports, these NDErs sometimes receive collective previews of humanity's future and/or evolution.

Atwater provides sample NDE cases for each of these four types, and the cases expand on the generalities in the preceding descriptions. In this chapter, I focus on the last two types and provide sample cases representing each.

About all four types, Atwater writes, “From the beginning of my research, I noticed four distinctive types of near-death experiences and, interestingly, subtle personality predispositions that seemed to correlate with each.”² These predispositions or psychological states, which Atwater identified for each type, are the following:

- *Initial experience*. NDEr is ready for a gentle, mild “shake-up” or needs some indication that consciousness survives.
- *Unpleasant and/or hell-like experience*. NDEr has suppressed or repressed guilt, fear, or anger, and/or expects punishment for how they have lived.
- *Pleasant and/or heaven-like experience*. NDEr needs to know how loved they are and how important life is.
- *Transcendent experience*. NDEr is ready for a “mind stretching” challenge and/or ready to use the truths revealed to them to better themselves and mankind.

The factor determining whether one has a hell-like or a heaven-like NDE appears to be a function of what the individual believes will happen to them when they die. Also, a person's beliefs can determine whether a particular type of NDE is more appropriate for their spiritual growth; for example, having a hell-like NDE could give a person the opportunity to examine and change negative beliefs such as “I deserve to be punished.” In a similar manner, having a heaven-like NDE could help a person change limiting beliefs about their values and capabilities.

Atwater's NDE information covers both adults and children, and she provides estimates of the NDE “incident” rates for children and adults who comprise the four NDE types. Not surprisingly, most children (76 percent) had the less intense “initial experience” type of NDE. Almost half of adults (47 percent) experienced the pleasant and/or heaven-like experience, with the remaining NDEs almost equally distributed across the other three types.

Highlights and Importance of NDE Findings

For me, obtaining scientific information on human consciousness as a non-physical reality is one of the most exciting developments of our age. I and many others consider this and other NDE research findings of the last 40 years to be a breakthrough development in consciousness research. They invalidate one of the basic premises of mainstream medical and psychological research: that consciousness is a product of the evolutionary development of the physical brain.³ Emily

Kelly writes, “In our opinion, no future scientific or philosophical discussion of the mind-brain problem can be fully responsible, intellectually, without taking these challenging data into account.”⁴ Based on his research finding, van Lommel goes even further:

We reached the conclusion that the [mainstream] scientific approaches outlined so far fail to offer a satisfactory, irrefutable explanation for either the occurrence or the content of an NDE . . . Looking at the interaction between consciousness and the brain, we concluded that consciousness cannot be seen as the product of brain function.

Another significant experience found in many NDEs is the individual’s consciousness “journeying” to the spiritual realm, a place of nonphysical reality, and describing its experiences and observations of that realm. These accounts vary greatly; some have very deep and rich experiences and bring back fairly detailed information while others receive only glimpses. In some of these NDEs, the individual’s consciousness is given the choice of staying in the spiritual realm or returning to their life—supporting the concept that there is an entity, called the soul, which continues after death. This information provides input for answering the first existential question I posed in the introduction: “What happens to us when we die? Is there an eternal soul consciousness that continues on?” From his research, van Lommel writes, “It is hard to avoid the conclusion that our endless consciousness preceded birth and will survive death independently of the body and in a nonlocal space where time and place play no role.”

The next chapter continues the exploration of the soul with overviews of reincarnation investigations. These, too, support the idea that consciousness continues after the physical body dies.

Transcendent NDE Glimpses of an Expanded Reality

To me, one of the most exciting aspects of these four transcendent NDE cases (Goble, Karen, Price, and

Benedict, and other transcendent NDEs) is that they offer glimpses of an expanded, spiritual-based reality. Here is a summary from those we’ve just examined [in *Frontiers of Knowledge*]:

- Objects in the spiritual realm are much more vivid and vibrant than their earth counterparts (Goble, Karen, and Price).
- Spiritual-realm beings are “preparing” ideas and concepts for “broadcasting” to humans on earth and/or for use in their next earth incarnations (Goble and Price).
- Experiences in the spiritual realm are being created from one’s beliefs, and this includes the identities of light beings that NDErs tend to see as earth’s spiritual masters (Price and Benedict).
- Communication in the spiritual realm is telepathic—mind to mind (Goble, Karen, Price, and Benedict).
- Consciousness can experience or realize itself as part of an expanded consciousness—God or a high-level aspect of it (Goble, Price, and Benedict).
- Consciousness has access to greater, almost unlimited, knowledge, sometimes in a special place of knowledge, other times in transcendent experiences (Goble, Karen, Price, and Benedict).
- The human soul is a creation (and expression) of the higher self (Price and Benedict).
- The spiritual realm has different levels of energy density and awareness, and access is a function of the mind’s consciousness (Price).
- Higher selves of all humans are involved in the creation and maintenance of earth (Benedict).

Not all of these individuals experienced every one of these “glimpses” of an expanded spiritual reality; this is especially true for the last two, and these must be considered more speculative. I revisit many of these glimpses in chapter 8 using information gathered from between-lives spiritual regression sessions.

¹ Atwater, *The Big Book of Near-Death Experiences*, 26; and *Near-Death Experiences, The Rest of the Story*, 18–19.

² Atwater, *The Big Book of Near-Death Experiences*, 25–26. She also writes that these findings are based on 3,000 adult and 277 child near-death experiences.

³ See Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (Pantheon, 2010).

⁴ Emily W. Kelly et al., 421.