Definition: near death experience (NDE) from *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*

Subjective experiences reported by individuals who have suffered life-threatening incidents. Among the perceptions and emotions often reported are a cloudy calmness, a sense of separation from the physical and an experience of light. Some regard these as evidence of life after death; others as the manifestation of neurological processes associated with the physiological changes brought about by the episode. The empirical data support the latter.

Summary Article: near-death experience
From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

phenomenon reported by some people who have been clinically dead, then returned to life. Descriptions of the experience differ slightly in detail from person to person, but usually share some basic elements: a feeling of being outside one's body, a sensation of sliding down a long tunnel, and the appearance of a bright light at the end of that tunnel. The light is sometimes described as a benevolent "being of light" who directs the person in a review of his or her life so far and ultimately prevents the person from crossing some sort of boundary that signifies death. Most people who have had a near-death experience report that it strongly influences their subsequent lives, relieving anxiety about death and increasing their sense of purpose and their sensitivity to others.

Research into the near-death experience was pioneered by Raymond Moody, who published *Life After Life* in 1975 after studying 150 people who had had such experiences. He and other scientists, such as cardiologist Michael Sabom, found that possible physiological and psychological causes for the phenomenon, including lack of oxygen to the brain, the influence of anesthetics, disruptions in neurotransmitter release, and prior expectations, could not sufficiently account for the experiences these people described. Their findings and a belief in a spiritual explanation for the phenomenon have been supported by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who pioneered the study of death and dying in the United States beginning in the late 1960s.

Near-death experience is an emotional issue, believed to be a profound spiritual experience by some and criticized as wish fulfillment by others. Many skeptical scientists believe that it is a simple physiological event misconstrued by people who have a compelling psychological need or who are comforted by interpreting the experience in terms of their religious or spiritual beliefs.

Bibliography

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