

# EXCEPTIONAL DEATH-RELATED EXPERIENCES

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Abstracts of  
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# IRANIAN NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES (NDEs): CONTENT AND AFTEREFFECTS

**N**ear-death experiences (NDEs) can be described as profoundly life-changing, subjective events that typically manifest during a life-threatening event often severe enough to include loss of consciousness. Over the past four decades, the majority of NDE research has been conducted in Western cultural contexts, with few studies in non-Western cultures. Thus, it has been difficult to determine the possible role that culture may play with regard to NDE content and aftereffects. The focus of my presentation is to describe the phenomenology of NDEs—both self-reported content and aftereffects—among Iranian Shia Muslims.

Seventeen participants took part in in-depth semi-structured interviews in Farsi. Using transcriptions translated to English, we used thematic analysis to identify recurring or otherwise seemingly important themes.

The findings of this study showed predominant similarity between themes regarding the content and aftereffects of Iranian participants' NDEs and themes typically reported in Western NDEs, with some culturally-specific features among NDEs from both cultural settings. These results provide further evidence supporting the notion that NDEs may be culturally influenced or interpreted, but may also incorporate elements independent of culture.

My presentation also will cover:

- a. How our activities and research changed the situation with regard to openness and awareness of NDEs among Iranians
- b. How different Iranian social groups including traditional religious establishments and students look at NDEs
- c. Our concerns, current activities and future plans



**Ali Ghasemian** has obtained PhD in Psychology from Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran. Ghasemian has worked in the counseling center as a psychologist and imago therapist since 2014. He received his MA in psychology from Isfahan University, Iran. In addition to counseling, Ghasemian is an NDE researcher and he published papers focusing on especially Shia Muslim Iranian NDEs. He is also the leader of the IANDS affiliation group in Iran. He currently resides in Isfahan, Iran.

# END-OF-LIFE EXPERIENCES IN A HOSPITAL FOR ANTHROPOSOPHICALLY EXTENDED MEDICINE

**Background:** The perceptions of dying persons during the last weeks and days of their lives have rarely been investigated. It is known that spirituality becomes more important towards the end of life. In Anthroposophy, it is assumed that during the process of dying, the soul and spirit are detached from the physical body and enter the spiritual world.

**Method:** We conducted a retrospective survey among physicians and nurses working at the Klinik Arlesheim. The written questionnaire consisted of 60 closed and 5 open questions on observations and perceptions of end-of-life experiences.

**Results:** The response rate was 18% (21 questionnaires). The phenomena observed most frequently in patients during their last weeks of life were as follows:

patients suddenly possessed much confidence and energy; burdensome emotions were increased; patients commuted back and forth between different realities. The respondents described end-of-life experiences as a source of spiritual comfort for the dying as well as the relatives.

**Conclusion:** Physicians and nurses working in a hospital for anthroposophically extended medicine in Switzerland reported end-of-life experiences of their patients similar to those reported in studies conducted in England. Physicians and nurses wished for more information during their education in order to feel more confident when dealing with end-of-life experiences.



**Daniel Bernd Krüerke** - PhD in physical chemistry in the field of “liquid crystals” at the Technical University of Berlin. Postdoctoral researcher at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg (Sweden). Between 2000 and 2007 principal liquid crystal engineer and head of the Liquid Crystal R&D group at Forth Dimension Displays in Dalgety Bay (Scotland). Since 2007 senior research officer and head of the research department at the Clinic Arlesheim in Switzerland.

# EVIDENCE FOR THE PRIMACY OF CONSCIOUSNESS: PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCES DURING AFTER-DEATH COMMUNICATION

**A**s early as 1886, Gurney and colleagues, in their exploration of the nature of consciousness and whether it may survive death, recorded over 100 cases of people's encounters with the deceased, noting that within a given sensory modality, such as vision, an after death communication (ADC) could range from a purely internal representation as is seen by the "mind's eye," to an actual percept that seems to take place in the physical world and is mediated by the senses. Since this original detailed study research quantifying the nature of the sensory experience has not been as prevalent and within the scientific community, there is no consensus about the origin of ADCs, or their sensory-perceptual phenomenology.

The purpose of this study was to create a detailed characterization of the nature of the sensory perceptions associated with ADCs. The study included a quan-

titative analysis and qualitative first-person narrative description of part of the data set from a detailed questionnaire study (991 viable cases) investigating the phenomenology of spontaneous ADCs. We examined the extent to which data supported one or more of three hypotheses concerning the primacy of consciousness. These included the extent to which: 1) perceptions appeared to be occurring only internally, as a result of hallucinations or day-today thoughts about the deceased (opposing primacy), 2) they are subjective phenomena reflecting the extrasensory perception of remote events or communications from the deceased, received telepathically through the mind (supporting primacy), or 3) they constitute objective phenomena concerning the deceased perceived as being sensed externally through the senses or through extra-sensory means (supporting primacy).



**Marjorie Woollacott, Ph.D.**, was Professor, and chair of the Dept. of Human Physiology, and member of the Inst. of Neuroscience, at the U. of Oregon for 35 yrs. She is President of the Academy for the Advancement of Post-Materialist Sciences (AAPS) and Research Director for the Intl. Assoc. of Near-Death Studies (IANDS). She has received over 7.2 million dollars in research funding and published more than 200 scientific articles on her research in medicine, meditation and spiritual awakening.



In order to explore the relative validity of these hypotheses, the questionnaire asked specifically about the level of consistency of the deceased's visual appearance, from a foggy silhouette, to semi-transparent to what seemed like a solid living human being. Interestingly, while 12% of perceptions were semi-transparent and 11% were of a foggy silhouette, almost two thirds of respondents (62%) perceived a solid living being. Respondents often reported that visual perceptions of the deceased seemed more real than a day-to-day interaction.

One way to examine the extent to which the ADC was perceived as "real" is to ask the extent to which the perception was similar to or different from a thought (hypothesis 1). The vast majority of respondents (87%) felt that the auditory communications were different from thoughts; 48% perceived ADCs as being external, while 57% noted that they could also be telepathic in some instances. Likewise, with perceptions of touch, the extent to which it felt like a physical perception was probed by asking if the respondent felt resistance when they touched the deceased; 43% of respondents felt resistance to their touch and noted in their descriptions that the skin, hair or clothing felt like it had in the person's physical life. This is additional evidence contributing to the support of hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 1 proposes that the sensory phenomena associated with ADCs are hallucinations. However, evidence has been published over the last decades in ADC research showing accounts of verified awareness of physical events or reception of information through other than the five senses. Our collection also includes cases in which percipients received information during an ADC that no one else had prior knowledge of. This ADC information allowed the solution of specific problems, e.g., allowing lost objects to be found. For example, one respondent shared,

My deceased friend came through with a message for his wife. It started with "tell Beverley the key is" and we all assumed it would be love or something similar. Instead, he went on to tell us where a particular key was in his former home.... His daughter ...is a very close friend... She rang her mother who said "I have been looking for that key

all weekend!" It was the key to the gun cupboard and she wanted a friend to take the gun away. This proved to me that the message was real, not my imagination as I had no idea they had a gun or a key or a gun cupboard!

In conclusion, the current study aimed to broaden our understanding of the nature of ADCs by exploring the scientific validity of these phenomena. Results indicate that ADCs are experienced across a range of modalities and often are perceived as external and having properties of the material world (e.g., solidity, tactile qualities). These results give support for the theory of the primacy of consciousness, as they are more compatible with hypotheses 2 and 3, than hypothesis 1.

# DISCARNATE PERCEPTION AND AGENCY DURING THE REINCARNATION INTERMISSION PERIOD

Studies have found that in about 20% of reincarnation cases, in addition to memories of previous lives, there are memories of the intermission between lives. The structure of purported intermission experiences (IEs) is similar to near-death experiences (NDEs), with the important difference that rather than return to the same body, there is an association with a new body in the end.

Sharma and Tucker identified a three-stage structure to Burmese IEs that was confirmed in a cross-cultural sample by Matlock and Giesler-Petersen: Following an initial stage of separation from the body at death, there is a relatively stable time of indefinite duration, then the selection of parents for the new life. Many IEs include two more stages, the intra-uterine period and birth, but because these last two stages concern a consciousness that is once again embodied, they are given little attention here. As with NDEs, not all IEs include all five stages (indeed, most have no more than one or two of the first three), yet this structure is common to all and helps to define the experience.

Matlock and Giesler-Petersen found veridical perceptions of the material world reported during all five stages of the IE, particularly the first three stages.

Sometimes there are reciprocal interactions, in which case subjects remember communicating with embodied persons who recall seeing them in dreams or as apparitions under similar circumstances. Sometimes case subjects recall having communicated through mediums. Sometimes there are actions on the material world that embodied persons remark as poltergeist activity. Additionally, there may be apparent influences on conception, including the overcoming of menopause, Fallopian tube ligations, and vasectomies that likewise suggest discarnate agency during the intermission.

Although veridical perceptions and agency appear in a minority of IEs, they are mentioned frequently enough that there can be no reasonable doubt that they can and do occur. They may be understood as exercises of clairvoyance, telepathy and psychokinesis by a discarnate consciousness and thus are not as surprising as they may seem at first. Similar perceptions and actions have been reported in relation to NDEs. That they appear during the reincarnation intermission period as well as during NDEs is consistent with the exteriorization model of the NDE and the conception of the NDE as a glimpse into life after death.



**James Matlock** received his PhD in Anthropology from Southern Illinois University (Carbondale) in 2002. His research interests center on phenomena bearing on postmortem survival and reincarnation. He has published widely on these topics and is a regular contributor to the online Psi Encyclopedia. He is co-author with Erlendur Haraldsson of *I Saw a Light and Came Here: Children's Experiences of Reincarnation* (2016) and author of *Signs of Reincarnation: Exploring Beliefs, Cases, and Theory* (2019).

# INTEGRATING EXCEPTIONAL DEATH-RELATED EXPERIENCES. WHAT CAN THEY TELL US ABOUT SURVIVAL?

In this online symposium, speakers will address exceptional death-related experiences such as near-death experiences (NDE), end-of life experiences (ELE), after-death communications (ADC), and experiences reported from the intermission between two lives in reincarnation cases (CORT). In this final presentation, I will introduce aspects of my work on these topics, presenting an integrated view and focusing on the question: What do these phenomena tell us about the possibility of human survival?

With regard to near-death experiences, I will argue that crucial elements of them, such as out-of-body experiences during states of profound lack of oxygen in the brain after cardiac arrest, are very probably experienced

in real time. At least, all empirical research results concerning out-of-body experiences obtained until today demonstrate that they occur in real time. Converging lines of evidence suggest that they don't constitute artificially reconstructed pseudo-experiences made when the brain recovered from a state of critical oxygen deprivation, as it is sometimes claimed by authors advancing physicalist explanations for NDE. Therefore, out-of-body experiences during critical NDE contribute to other evidence highlighting that the functioning of consciousness is not entirely dependent on the prevailing brain chemistry.

With regard to after-death communications, I will argue that meaningful apparitions perceived collectively




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by several people rank among the most convincing incidents, especially if these apparitions have been noticed first by animals that have also been present. I will present a few examples of such accounts.

With regard to reincarnation cases, I will address the crucial question head-on: Can they be explained better in physicalist terms than in terms of survival, or even in terms of psi among the living? Presenting arguments that have so far not been advanced in respective discussions, I explain why the survival model fits the observed and reported phenomenology of reincarnation cases best.

Finally, integrating the presented material, I maintain that there is solid evidence for the existence of a non-physical background reality of the world as we perceive it. Furthermore, experiences such as shared or collective (lucid) dreams tell us that joint experiences in a non-physical realm are possible. Such experiences, but also the cultural influences that manifest in ADC, NDE and even CORT, indicate that this non-physical background reality can be shaped by experiences made in the flesh, most likely on a subconscious level. Consequently, this background reality must be considered as evolving along with biological life on earth. Coming to a close, I argue that although it is presently impossible to know exact details about the possible modes of existence in this assumed non-physical realm, it is nevertheless likely that some form of survival after death is possible and even does occur.



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