

Near Death Experiences

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | February 6, 2009



I am very excited as I recently purchased a book on changing the brain and depression.

My question is about 'near death experiences'. What does the Bible say about them?

I personally do not believe they are of God as they do not encourage us to have a relationship with Him, but feel relaxed that we are all going to heaven. Thank you in advance for the opportunity to ask this question.

Love in Christ, J

Thanks for a great question. To some people Near Death Experiences (NDE) are very real events, which are believed to be a preview of what happens when a person dies. Most NDEs have a common theme, a narrow corridor or narrowing of the world, an approaching bright light, a person representing someone from the "other side" and a line, from which there is no return, if crossed. These events are typically described as peaceful, transcendent, beautiful, and euphoric. Reports of NDE experiences go back almost 2000 years and are reported by approximately 20% of people who suffer a heart attack and are

revived.

Interestingly, however, a person does not have to be near death to experience a NDE. A 1990 study at the University of Virginia Health Sciences Center in Charlottesville of 58 people who had experienced NDEs found that half would have survived without medical care. Something as innocuous as fainting can produce an NDE.

There are many theories about the cause of NDEs to include hypoxia (lack of oxygen to the brain), which could trigger seizures in the temporal lobes and cause the symptoms of NDE, hypotension (loss of blood pressure to the brain), release of endorphin and enkephalin (brain produced mood elevators and pain killers) in the brain, drugs injected during resuscitation, low blood sugar, and other metabolic processes.

Recently, Kevin Nelson, a neuropsychologist at the University of Kentucky, has done research into NDEs and offered a most reasonable explanation. NDEs are actually a form of sleep disorder called REM intrusion in which dreams occur in a non-sleep state. During this time a person is awake but paralyzed, may experience the sensation of floating, will have vivid dreams that would be experienced more like a hallucination, and have out-of-body experiences. All of this will be remembered quite vividly after the event is over with a sense of conviction to the veracity of the experience.

A study published in 1994 by Thomas Lempert, then at the Rudolph Virchow Clinic in Berlin, Germany, documented how volunteers made themselves faint through a combination of hyperventilating while seated, then standing and holding their breath. Many of them experienced euphoric NDE-like sensations such as floating out of their body, entering another world, or encountering supernatural beings. This is thought to be due to activating the vagus nerve which stimulates the brainstem to cause these NDEs. This would explain the high occurrence of NDE in people being resuscitated from a heart attack as vagal nerve stimulation occurs during this process.

The Bible is silent on near death experiences. In fact the Bible record tells us the dead know nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6). Jesus said that His friend Lazarus was "asleep" and He was going to wake him up (John 11:11). Once Jesus resurrected Lazarus, after four days in the grave, the Bible provides no report that Lazarus had anything to tell about what happened to him while he was dead. In fact, in 100% of the cases in the Bible where a person died and was resurrected the Bible records nothing from them of their experience while dead. Therefore, given the Biblical and scientific evidence, I would conclude that NDEs are not spiritual experiences of someone crossing over to the "other side," but physiological experiences of a stressed and near failing brain.