

Death Isn't Scary (If you've had a near-death experience)

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At some stage, you will die. You may not know the time, date or circumstance of your death, but you do know it's inevitable. Contemplating this fact can be uncomfortable. It evokes anxiety and fear in most people.

But not those people who have had a near-death experience (NDE). NDEs are extraordinarily profound mystical or transcendental occurrences, during which the boundaries between space, time and normal perceptual awareness become blurred.

They can include elements such as travel through a tunnel, seeing a bright light, an out-of-body experience, and meeting deceased others and spiritual beings.

They are typically reported by people who have had a close brush with death, or have died and been resuscitated. Recent research suggests they occur during the time period when physical functioning is severely compromised or non-existent.

Not all people who have a close brush with death or who are resuscitated have an NDE, nor do those people, on the whole, lose their fear of death. So, it is rather curious that people who have had an NDE typically report a complete loss of the fear of death.

Why is this so? Perhaps it is the paradoxically pleasant nature of the experience. Many people report feeling overwhelmingly positive emotions during their NDE, including peace, unconditional love and joy.

In many Western cultures, thinking of death can be so disturbing that unspoken taboos exist. We rarely talk about death, and keep it hidden within the far-reaches of the psyche.

Yet, some people who have had NDEs suggest the apparent experience of death is an altogether pleasant one that should not be feared. Others say they felt as though they were disembodied, and existed as a state of mere consciousness. Seeing one's body and resuscitation efforts, or other events occurring outside the vicinity of one's body, can also happen.

There is a widespread belief in Western cultures that death is the end, but many people who have had a NDE say this is not so – the feeling of having conscious awareness and existing outside of one's physical body suggests the self does not end. Controversially, NDEs indicate the self may continue, at least for a period of time, after the physical body stops functioning.



Movement through a tunnel, often at great speed, seeing a bright light, meeting deceased others, seeing beautiful otherworldly scenes, and coming to a border of no return, are commonly reported features of an NDE.

Combined, they can cement the belief that the NDE provided a glimpse of a world we move to when our physical bodies die. Another realm exists, these reports seem to suggest.

There is nobody judging your deeds when you die. Nobody, that is, except yourself. At least, that's what those who have had an NDE say.

Recent large-scale studies conducted across the US, UK, Austria and Belgium have provided credible findings to suggest NDEs may actually be real phenomena. But the debate about the "realness" of NDEs is likely to continue for many years, if not decades, to come.

Whether they are verifiably real occurrences that can be scientifically quantified or not is, in many ways, irrelevant. What is significant is that people who have had NDEs universally report a complete loss of the most existential of human fears – something even the most advanced psychotherapies cannot achieve.

People who have had a NDE don't wish for death. They want to live and fulfill their destiny. But when death finally calls, they will not be afraid. And that is quite extraordinary.

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Questions for "Death isn't Scary" Article

Directions: On a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions below. To receive credit, you must write complete, thoughtful sentences.

1. What are some of the common features during near-death experiences that people have reported?
2. After people have near-death experiences, why, according to Tassell-Matamua, do these people say they no longer fear death?
3. Tassell-Matamua says, "Controversially, NDEs indicate the self may continue, at least for a period of time, after the physical body stops functioning." Why might this idea be controversial? What two groups would argue about this idea?
4. The writer also suggests that one of the sources of the positive feelings during a NDE is that no one is "judging your deeds when you die. Nobody, that is, except yourself."



Is she right in assuming that one of the main things that make life miserable is other people's judgment of you? Explain your thoughts on this idea.

5. Look at the paragraph where Tassell-Matamua discusses "recent large-scale studies." What's missing from this section that would add more credibility to her argument?

6. According to the article, why might a near-death experience be more useful to a person than years of therapy with a psychologist?

7. If you could ask Tassell-Matamua a question about

her work, what would you ask?

8. Have you or anyone you've known had a near-death experience? If "yes," please tell the story.

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