

Lessons from the Light

What we can learn from the near-death experience

by Kenneth Ring and Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino

Foreword by Caroline Myss

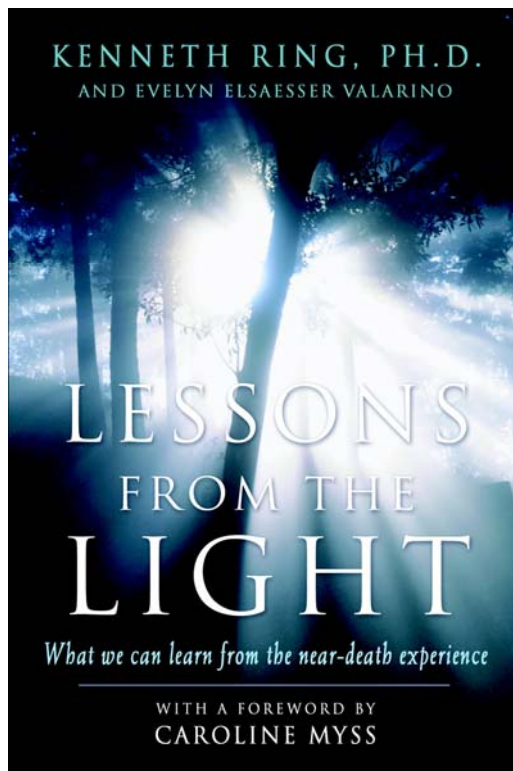
New edition

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Praise for “Lessons from the Light”

“Kenneth Ring is no stranger to the pages of this Journal” [Journal of Near-Death Studies]. As Bruce Greyson notes in his Preface to this capstone book, Ring more than any one person has been responsible for the near-death experience (NDE) growing into “a self-sustaining phenomenon.” Ring’s early work was the first to place the NDE under the spotlight of scientific and scholarly investigation, which evolved into what can only be called a near-death movement of popular and even global proportions.

“With these credentials firmly in place, the present work [*Lessons from the Light*] shifts ground and moves us to a new perspective on the near-death phenomenon. While the early work focused on analyzing, modeling, and authenticating the NDE, studying its powerful after effects and relationships to other transformative experiences, *Lessons*

from the Light takes on its spiritual meaning and soulmaking significance. . . . [Ring] tries to enable the reader who has never had a near-death experience to absorb its lessons and use them to catalyze personal growth ‘simply by reading and reflecting on the contents of this book.’

“ . . . *Lessons from the Light* is an introduction to a new genre of writing. It shows us how to use these remarkable narratives to trigger our own life-transforming, enlightening experiences.”

“A beautiful melding of research and compassionate, intuitive analysis.”

Caroline Myss, Ph.D.

“If any one person can claim to be an authority on near-death experiences without having had one, that person must surely be Kenneth Ring And more importantly, no other researcher has been able to transmit to the rest of us the true meaning and impact of near-death phenomena for the planet.”

Bruce Greyson, M.D., Past-President of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS)

“This book changes lives. My students love it. In one reading it dispels a lifetime of fear and misinformation about death and the universe we live in. Penetrating, beautifully written, the best single volume on NDE research.”

Chris Bache, Ph.D., Professor of Religious Studies, Youngstown State University; Author of *Dark Night, Early Dawn*

“In this remarkable book, Ring presents evidence that merely learning about the near-death experience has similar positive effects to those reported by people who actually have had near-death experiences. Kenneth Ring is one of the few authors whose gifts include the capacity to transform their readers’ lives.”

Stanley Krippner, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, Saybrook Graduate School, San Francisco; Coauthor of *The Mythic Path*

“*Lessons from the Light* is the culmination of Kenneth Ring’s rich and extensive career as the foremost researcher of the NDE. One of the very best books on the subject to date, it is a must read for anyone interested in life’s possibilities.”

Sukie Miller, Ph.D., Director of the Institute for the Study of the Afterdeath; Author of *After Death*

“*Lessons from the Light* is the best and most complete book on the near-death experience I’ve ever read, and I believe it will help you overcome your fears of dying.”

Seymour Boorstein, M.D., Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine; Author of *Clinical Studies in Transpersonal Psychotherapy*

“A major contribution that offers a wealth of fresh case materials together with balanced and insightful commentary.”

Raymond A. Moody, Ph.D., Author of *Life After Life*

“Arguably, the best book yet on the near-death experience.”

Michael Grosso, Ph.D., Author of *Experiencing the Next World Now* and *Soulmaking*

“A magnificent achievement! For while Ring is indeed one of the leading scholars in the field, he now brings in his heart and shows those of us who haven’t had an NDE how to use the inspiration of NDEs to change our lives.”

Charles T. Tart, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Psychology, University of California, Davis; Author of *Altered States of Consciousness* and *Waking Up*

“Unquestionably the most important book on the subject of near-death experience since Moody’s *Life After Life*.”

Ian Wilson, Author of *The After Death Experience*

“The capstone of Kenneth Ring’s career, this book is the distillation of all that death can teach the living. Ring’s loving voice turns harrowing and resplendent near-death stories never published before into a practical guide that motivates through its sheer heart-gripping beauty . . . No reader will ever be able to think of life in the same way again after reading this book!”

Jenny Wade, Ph.D., Author of *Changes of Mind: A Holonomic Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness*

“*Lesson from the Light* opens the last door each of us will face in our lifetime. With clarity, wit, and crisp prose, it brings us to the cutting edge of what promises to be the most important discovery ever made in psychobiology—what truly happens after death.”

Fred Alan Wolf, Ph.D., Author of *The Spiritual Universe* and *Taking the Quantum Leap*

“Inspiring and moving! An important, easy-to-read summation of the life-altering impact of NDEs on those who have had or heard from them.”

Marilyn Webb, Former Editor-in-Chief of *Psychology Today*; Author of *The Good Death: The New American Search to Reshape the End of Life*

“An extraordinary book in many ways—it is profoundly wise, filled with insight into the deepest aspects of human nature and the cosmos, it is beautifully written, making it a pleasure to read, and it is eminently practical for people who seek personal growth by offering the benefits of a near-death experience to readers who have not had an NDE.”

John White, M.A.T., Former Director of Education, The Institute of Noetic Science; Editor of *What is Enlightenment?*

Network – Scientific and Medical Network

December 1998, no 68

Reviewed by David Lorimer

The Informing Light

These books (*Lessons from the Light*, by Kenneth Ring and Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino and *On the Other Side of Life* by Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino) mark a new stage of maturity in the field of near-death studies in the breadth of their scope and the significance of their conclusions for the general reader.

Evelyn’s book is a philosophical exploration of the phenomenon of the near-death experience that covers a great deal of ground. It also helps fill an important gap for English speaking readers by introducing the thinking of a number of important French

speaking researchers. IANDS France has sponsored and supported a good deal of research that has previously been inaccessible in English.

Evelyn's first chapter provides an excellent overview, with case quotations, of the major features of the NDE. She then moves on to two detailed testimonies, one from a doctor, followed by dialogues with a variety of individuals representing psychology, physics, neuroscience, biology, theology and philosophy. The longest interview is with Kenneth Ring, and forms a bridge to his own book. Regis and Brigitte Dutheil introduce their superluminal hypothesis of the NDE, which links it to work done in Belgium on tachyons and proposes that the NDE tunnel represents the passage from a subluminal to a superluminal realm. There is no parallel to this interesting hypothesis among English speaking researches. Paul Chauchard is challenged on his materialistic view but admits that he has no scientific means of providing that everything is destroyed at death. Consciousness, he states, manifests itself materially to science as a cerebral integration, leading him to the Aristotelean view that the soul is the form of the body and to a consideration of the nature of the immanence of the transcendent. Monsignor Jean Vernet presents a lucid account of the Catholic doctrine of life and death, warning of the dangers of confusing eternal life with an altered state of consciousness. He provides a reflective interface with orthodox theology. The reader will find the interviews probing, reflecting as they do many of the questions that would occur to an interested enquirer.

Kenneth Ring's book, in which Evelyn was also closely involved, is the culmination of his twenty years research in this area; readers may well be familiar with his previous work and this book is essentially a sequel to his *Heading Toward Omega* (1984). It is subtitled "what we can learn from the near-death experience" and addresses itself to the most profound implications for our understanding of the nature of human beings and life. In his myth of Er, Plato refers to the river of forgetfulness through which we all pass on coming into the world. It is Ken's conviction, which I share, that the deeper aspects of the NDE can serve as a reminder of what we intrinsically know about life but have forgotten, namely that its most important features are the embodiment or manifestation of love and the pursuit of wisdom.

The book begins with a few typical cases, some presented to Ken's undergraduate psychology class at the University of Connecticut. The next two chapters investigate in some detail veridical out of body experiences and NDEs in the blind (some of this data was presented at the 1997 Cambridge conference), which is the subject of his next book. He then reports on children's experiences and the major aftereffects of the experience. The core of the book is his analysis of the life review, from which he draws the same conclusion as I did in *Whole in One*, that it indicates the true nature and application of the Golden Rule. Because we share an underlying consciousness, what we do to others we are ultimately doing to ourselves. This view grounds ethics in a metaphysics of the oneness of the web of consciousness. If this sounds judgemental, Ken qualifies it by stressing that the greatest lesson of the NDE is the primacy of love: "what kills is judgment; what heals is love. The Light itself is only love, and it never judges; instead it gently nudges you towards your essential self" (p. 198). As love, it becomes clear that the light also heals. Such healing can extend to bereaved people, who can derive comfort from the NDE.

Ken extends his analysis into a consideration of after death communications (ADCs), illustrated with some intriguing cases that indicate genuine communication. The penultimate chapter gathers some of the most far-reaching experiences together and gives the reader a few hints on the ultimate nature of consciousness. From Mellon Thomas Benedict: "We are God's exploration of God through us. People are so busy trying to become God that they ought to realise that we are already God and God is becoming us. We are not everything, but we are that part of it that knows that it is" (p. 289). And Virginia Rivers: "God, a Light, a Beauty emitting from within, infinitely in all directions to touch every atom of being. Gold told me that there were only two things that we could bring back with us when we died... LOVE and KNOWLEDGE... so I was to learn as much about both as possible" (p. 296). *Lessons from the Light* is exactly what it says: it is a remarkable study of the NDE that ties its conclusions in with the perennial wisdom at the heart of our spiritual traditions.

Journal of consciousness studies

Vol. 6, no 10, October 1999

Review by Mark Seelig

In *Lessons from the Light*, Kenneth Ring and co-author Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino present a fine account of more recent advances in the field of near-death studies. This specific area of consciousness research, although very controversial, poses some fascinating questions as regards common threads of understanding human consciousness.

The first thing that strikes the reader's attention is that Ring is adamant about speaking of *the* near-death experience (NDE), saying that there is a "prototypical NDE pattern" which NDE experiencers (NDErs) go through (p. 104). In spite of the fact that the book elaborates on further case studies which have not yet been published, the main thrust is to make the information NDEs contain relevant to daily life, including to those who have not had an NDE:

The plan of the book is clearly laid out in the beginning, the writing is well organized into ingestible increments, there's an index, and the authors give ample reference to Internet sources, contact information, audio and video material, etc. In other words, those who do not want to bother reading the whole book can still take it as a quick to-go guide for further links.

The real challenge of Ring's life work, however, coming to a climax here, is in the deeper content of the book. After decades of amassing case studies, scrutinizing and screening them, arguing for the validity of people's reports, plus providing advice for hundreds of NDErs who had nowhere to turn to, Ring now steps forward to be explicit about something that Eastern traditions have taught all along: this life of ours, this incarnation is apparently only one more sojourn in a chain of continued reappearances in the bodily form. The teachings we can receive out of this insight are tantamount, and they not only deeply enrich our emotional lives but they also

fundamentally amplify, complement, and certainly also challenge Western scientific concepts.

Ring confronts or delights the reader – depending on the latter’s point of view – with such mind-boggling issues as the “seeing of congenitally blind people” (Ch. 3), the well-known experience of the “life-review” (Ch. 6), “encounters with light beings” or even with the one and absolute source of creation (Ch. 13), etc. No wonder that passages of the book read almost as if paraphrased from Eastern sacred scriptures such as the “Tibetan Book of the Dead.”

Why, then, should any consciousness researcher, anyone scientifically cautious and level-headed even bother reading the book? Because: “The doubts about the NDE-validity can be safely dispatched on purely scientific grounds” (p. 57); because: “NDE research is helping to shape new explanatory models in science” (p. 71); because: “More than thirteen million people in the US alone have reported NDEs (p. 212); because: “the insights gained from NDE research are of significant help in hospice work and the care for the terminally ill” (p. 255). For the consciousness researcher, specifically, the book is worth reading because it is another account advancing hard evidence that consciousness is non-local, non-linear, not “produced” by the brain, in fact non-causal altogether. In Ring’s words: “your illusory isolation as an individual in this world is revealed to be a sham” (p. 175). In our words: denying the scientific validity of Ring’s findings in general, and denying them significance within consciousness studies in particular, would not only mean questioning Ring’s sincerity as a scientist, but would also pronounce millions of people from all walks of life as having fallen prey to mere hallucination, if not worse. And this is only people living today in a Western society, not the overwhelming number of human beings down the history of this species, whose experiences would in one fit be pathologized, including their scriptures, philosophies and religious beliefs.

It should be hard to believe that anyone grappling with the mystery of consciousness would just pass by the chance of seeking a challenge to his or her current views. So take up Ring’s book, use it as a manual to guide you into your own experience, and come up with your individual conclusions. If we so use the book, we have come a long way for ourselves, and we have accepted Ring’s suggestion for the intention of the book.

Journal of Near-Death Studies

Winter 2000

“Ring’s past publications argue that the near-death experience (NDE) and related transformative experiences point to evolutionary potentials of human consciousness. In [*Lessons from the Light*], which continues the early work, he takes a more active stand toward the developmental potential of the NDE when he states that ‘it is clearly not enough to wait passively for this evolution to occur.’ . . . The stunning potentials of the near-death transformation experience are latent within us all. If so, it is

plausible that the words, images, and ideas that describe the NDE might serve to evoke and awake their slumbering unconscious counterparts in our own minds. On the other hand, Ring isn't selling a free ride to enlightenment; mere mouthing of ideas won't do the trick. It's only by actively applying the NDE lessons to everyday life that we hope to taste their magic."

Noetic Sciences Review

August-November 1999

Reviewed by Prof. Michael Grosso

Exploring the transformative potential of near-death experiences

Ring's past publications argue that the near-death experience (NDE) and related transformative experiences point to evolutionary potentials of human consciousness. In this book, which continues the earlier work, he takes a more active and stand toward the developmental potential of the NDE when he states that "it is clearly not enough to wait passively for this evolution to occur." He tries to enable the reader who has never had a near-death experience to absorb its lessons and use them to catalyze personal growth "simply by reading and reflecting on the contents of this book". Ring believes "we already have evidence that merely learning about the NDE has effects similar to those reported by NDErs."

This deep learning from the near-death illumination is likened to catching a "benign virus". In a comparable vein, according to some spiritual traditions, direct transmission of spiritual insight is possible by grace of darshan or charism. Psychical research speaks of receiving "telepathic impressions", and psychedelic aficionados of the "contact high". Or we might content ourselves with talking of imaginative or empathic or meditative reading. However we care to phrase it, the idea seems reasonable enough: the stunning potentials of the near-death transformation experience are latent within us all. If so, it is plausible that the words, images, and ideas that describe the NDE might serve to evoke and awaken their slumbering unconscious counterparts in our own minds.

On the other hand, Ring isn't selling a free ride to enlightenment; mere mouthing of ideas won't do the trick. It's only by actively applying the NDE lessons to everyday life that we can hope to taste their magic.

As far as the therapeutic, life-enhancing effects of the NDE go, the scruples of logic carry little weight. Still, as a matter of logic, the intensity of belief *per se* lends nothing to a belief's veracity; if it did, fanatics would have a monopoly on truth. In the long run, the attempt to answer the questions of life after death takes us in other directions, and Ring points toward one of these, referring to recent studies of apparitions of the dead. In fact, there is an extensive, old, and international literature on verifiable out-of-body experiences, deathbed visions (different from but related to NDEs), ghosts, hauntings, all sorts of apparitions, mediumship, possession, poltergeist, psychic photography, and electronic voice phenomena. There is also an

array of paranormal physical phenomena, which figure in the general picture of human potential, and therefore in the question of life after death.

Above and beyond the important question of rational evidence, the NDE offers something else to anyone curious about “the great after”. It offers models of states of consciousness we might emulate and recreate that could give us direct glimpses of the world beyond.

Ring’s concluding message is that we ought not to waste the gift of the near-death experience – which above all, is the gift of spiritual light. The good news is that we have a new paradigm of death – which, in effect, means a map of new possibilities.

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“Having had an NDE recently, I was in a unique position to appreciate this well-thought-out, carefully compiled collection of case studies; it will certainly help further understanding of the transformative nature of an NDE. . . . The authors present findings on not only the complete behavioral and psychological changes resulting from an NDE, but also preliminary evidence of tangible physiological and neurological changes. A wide variety of cases are studied, including children and those who have had multiple NDEs. The compassion and genuine desire of the authors to help those of us who have had and NDE as well as our loved ones is very touching. Since fear of death is so rampant in our culture, more exposure to this phenomenon is a step in the right direction to helping all of us to live fuller lives by addressing that fear.”

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September/October 2000

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Journal of Consciousness Studies

Vol 16, No 10, 1999

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Caroline Myss, Ph.D., author of *Anatomy of the Spirit*

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“In this remarkable book, Ring presents evidence that merely learning about the near-death experience has similar positive effects to those reported by people who actually have had near-death experiences. Kenneth Ring is one of the few authors whose gifts include the capacity to transform their readers’ lives.”

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“LESSONS FROM THE LIGHT is the culmination of Kenneth Ring’s rich and extensive carrer as the foremost researcher of the NDE. One of the very best books on the subject to date, it is a must read.”
Sukie Miller, Author of *After Death: Mapping the Journey*.

“Gripping, exciting and at the same time filled with hope and heart.”
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Ian Wilson, Author, *The After Death Experience*.

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Michael Grosso, Author, *The Millennium Myth*, and *Soulmaking: Uncommon Paths to the Self-Understanding*.

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September 2000

Having had an NDE recently, I was in a unique position to appreciate this well-thought out and thoroughly compiled collection of case studies; it certainly helps further understanding of the transformative effects of an NDE. I found great comfort, particularly in the discussion of the aftereffects, which was completely consistent with my own experience. The authors present findings on not only the behavioural and psychological changes resulting from an NDE but also preliminary evidence of tangible physiological and psychological changes. A wide variety of cases are studied, including in children and those who have had multiple NDEs. The compassion and genuine desire of the authors to help those of us who have had an NDE as well as our loved ones is very touching. Since fear of death is so rampant in our culture, more exposure to this phenomenon is a step in the right direction to helping all of us to live fuller lives by addressing that fear.

Publishers Weekly 2000

Even if you never have a near-death experience (NDE) on the surgeon’s table, in a car accident or during a heart attack, you can reap the spiritual benefits claimed by NDErs. Through meditation, study and mental exercises, you can tap into the healing energy of the loving, nonjudgmental Being of Light glimpsed by many at death’s door.

You can simulate a panoramic life-review of your entire existence, catapulting your values away from competitive materialism and toward love, service, cooperation; and you can integrate the insights commonly reported by NDErs into daily practical living. That's the message of this manual that, notwithstanding its aim of reaching out beyond the lucky privileged NDErs to the masses, mostly preaches to the converted. Veteran NDE researcher Ring (The Omega Project), here writing with Swiss NDE investigator Elsaesser-Valarino, includes many previously unpublished NDE cases and distills techniques he has taught at workshops and university courses. In a book that reads like a New Age seminar, Ring presents intriguing evidence to support his belief that NDEs represent an authentic, objective experience, not a self-protective hallucination or a neurological artifact of a dying brain. This material includes reports of out-of-body experiences, children's NDEs, blind people gaining sight during NDE episodes, and NDErs whose brush with death apparently unleashed paranormal or healing abilities.

Product description

While providing many accounts of near-death experiences (NDEs) from men, women, and children of all ages and backgrounds, *Lessons from the Light* is more than just an inspiring collection of NDEs. In what many consider his strongest book, Kenneth Ring extracts the pure gold of the NDE and with a beautiful balance of science and human insight reveals the practical wisdom held within these experiences. *Lessons from the Light* will help you to live your life with greater self-awareness, self-compassion, and concern for others. It will also extinguish your fears of death and dying. Reading *Lessons from the Light* is an altogether transforming experience.

Spiritnetwork.com

November 2001

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