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**Dimensions of the Near-Death Experience
Conference of the German NDE Network**

by Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino

The German NDE Network (Netzwerk Nahtoderfahrung—German Friends of IANDS) held a three-day conference March 2-4, 2007 in Freckenhorst, near Münster. The concept of the “Near-death experience as an experienced reality” constituted the focal point of the conference. The chairman, Alois Serwaty, and deputy chairman, Joachim Nicolay, PhD, offered the public a highly informative, inspiring, and well organised event.

The conference opened Friday evening with the lecture of orthopaedic surgeon Walter van Laack, author of numerous medical and philosophical publications, under the title, “**NDEs seen from the medical point of view: Front court to heaven or just a chimera?**” Professor van Laack defined and substantiated a point of view that NDEs are real experiences, constituting one of many evidences in a now long chain of data. They support his deep conviction, grown over many decades, that at the moment of physical death, consciousness lives on.

Saturday morning featured Swiss NDE researcher Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino, author of *Talking with Angel about Illness, Death and Survival; On the Other Side of Life*; and co-author with Kenneth Ring of *Lessons from the Light*. Her lecture was entitled “**Why NDEs Bring Comfort to the Ill and Bereaved.**” She maintains that the new perspectives NDEs open and the softer conception of physical death they suggest have a decisive relevancy for the ill and the bereaved. She hypothesized that the anxiety of dying holds three components: 1) loss: valediction of beloved ones, loss of life, abandonment of the world; 2) Fear of the moment of death: pain and fear of the unknown; 3) What, if anything, comes after? She argued forcefully that NDEs provide an answer for each and every of these components.

Sabine Mehne, independent physiotherapist and family therapist, member of the board of the German NDE Network, and author of the book *Winterfell*, discussed the effects of her NDE in a talk entitled “**Transformation and Reconciliation.**” She discussed both the “coronation of transformation” through her near-death experience. and the “de-glorification of NDEs,” demonstrating that transformation and reconciliation are possible anytime for everyone and can be deployed as a powerful potential to enrich our lives.

Five concurrent workshops in the afternoon session allowed attendees to choose from different yet coherent themes.

“**Survival after Bodily Death: How Can Modern Science Cope with This Concept?**” Stating that “The world is monolithic and mind survives matter,” Professor Walter van Laack brought natural sciences, religions and spiritual experiences implicitly and seamlessly together and invited the audience to look “over

the edge of the plates” of the different disciplines, arguing that the existence of God imposes itself simply for logical reasons. Professor van Laack believes that life and mind need no longer be seen as products of matter which occurred by accident and assumes that we only die bodily and that our consciousness lives on without alteration.

“OBEs – fiction or reality?” presented Martin Reichert, member of the board of the German NDE Network, a paramedic and training manager in a rescue organisation who has come across many individuals who experienced an OBE, with and without a life-threatening condition. But do scientific studies imply that OBEs and NDEs are merely biochemic hallucinations? Martin Reichert analysed the current state of research and advanced some arguments which seem to corroborate the transcendental origin of out-of-body experiences.

“NDE and the message of Jesus: comparison of texts.” Joachim Nicolay, PhD, deputy chairman of the German NDE Network, a psychologist, theologian, and philosopher, noted that during NDEs dominated by the light experience, NDErs often hold the impression of having encountered God. Thus we might question what relation these experiences have with the Christian and biblical representation of God. Nicolay addressed this issue on the basis of two texts, one of them the parable of the lost son symbolising Jesus’ message of unconditional love.

Next Nicolay opposed an example of a lost daughter. Nancy Clark describes in her book, *Hear His Voice*, how feelings of guilt can lead one to turn away from God. After an NDE years later, she realised that her conduct had not altered in any way the attitude of God on her behalf. Nicolay pointed out that the message of Jesus shines through the near-death experience: God loves us for ourselves, independently from our actions.

“Trust and Love--Only as a Near-Death Experience?” featured Mona-Elise Sy, psychotherapist, who now specializes in counselling individuals during spiritual crisis or after a near-death experience. Undeniably, says Sy, one of the most impressive features of the NDE is the encounter with the being of light, personifying unconditional love. She hoped the session would be “constructed as an impulse to lead a more authentic life.”

In **“Near-Death Experiences, Nearing-Death Awareness and After-Death Communications,”** Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino noted that though not identical, the phenomena of near-death experiences, nearing-death awareness, and after-death communication have similarities and might stem from the same source. She also presented an overview of the work of clinical psychologist Allan Botkin, who has induced after-death communications with his Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing technique (EMDR) as a therapy for grief and trauma. An **analysis of all these extrasensory perceptions**, Elsaesser-Valarino observes, **permits comparisons and might well provide the beginning of an holistic understanding.**

In the evening, kindergarten teacher Christine Stein described her NDE in a talk bearing the title of her book, *Like an Angel – einmal Himmel und zurück*. During heart surgery following a car accident at age 19, Stein was clinically dead for 23 minutes. Although short in our usual time conception, these 23 minutes changed her life.

Mona-Elise Sy opened the Sunday session with **“NDEs and Experiences During Meditation - A Comparative Study.”** Do NDEs point to the objective existence of a “spiritual world,” or is it all merely about cerebral emergency reactions in extreme situations? The comparison of NDEs and experiences of meditation in old traditions indicates a range of similar phenomena which might occur when an individual is in a state of deep immersion.

Joachim Nicolay closed the cycle of lectures with his talk **“Humanity as measure: Ethical impulses in the life review.”** During a life review, individuals may deal intensely with their lives in an atmosphere of total acceptance. During the life review, said Nicolay, love is “the measurement at which everything is assessed” (Lorimer). Individuals assert that all events—actions and attitudes—have a value and a significance of which they were unaware before and that, at the opposite, events which seemed of major importance to them are in fact irrelevant. In his view, life reviews reinforce the awareness of interconnectedness and can sensitize individuals in the way they interact with each other.

Conclusion

The blend of personal NDE testimonies, mixed with scientific presentations from different fields, contributed greatly to a successful and well balanced conference. The beautiful ancient conference centre, surrounded by mature trees, a park and a pond, was the perfect setting for stimulating conversation and invited participants to reflect upon spiritual issues.