



STATEMENT DT-082-1

## **THE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE (Part One): The New Age Connection**

**by J. Isamu Yamamoto**

Dan was a warm, gentle, talented, outgoing young man. One would therefore think he would be popular. But there were in fact many who hated him — because of his lifestyle. Eventually he left his Midwestern hometown and moved to San Francisco to join a community of homosexual professionals.

Because he led a very active homosexual life in that community, Dan contracted gonorrhea. His physician offered him two choices: either receive antibiotics daily for ten days or one massive dose by injection. Dan selected the injection. After receiving it he immediately had difficulty breathing. Soon he went into anaphylactic shock and died. He had no pulse or heartbeat. His electrocardiogram was flat.

After everything went black, Dan saw himself lying on the floor while doctors and nurses tried desperately to bring him back to life. He then saw a long, dark tunnel to which he felt drawn. Before entering it, his entire life passed before his eyes. His deceased grandparents, who had raised him, appeared at this time and approached him, expressing their love for him.

After being in the dark tunnel for a while, Dan saw a light that became brighter as he drew closer to it. Finally he left the tunnel and found himself in a beautiful garden, where a fence barred him from going any further. Meanwhile, a brilliant light radiated warmth, love, and peace from the other side of the fence. Dan knew that the source of this light was Jesus Christ.

He wanted to go to the light but the fence prevented him. He then heard a voice come from that light, which said, "It is not time to come into my Father's kingdom. You have not lived as I intended. Go back and glorify me."

At that moment Dan awoke, back in his body, no longer a man living for himself, but now a believer in Christ. From then on, he left his homosexual lifestyle and joined a strong, supportive Christian community. To this day, Dan thanks God for giving him a new chance to live according to His plan and not according to physical desires.

When this story first came across my desk in 1990, I was skeptical about the extent to which Christ was really involved in Dan's life. As book editor at *Christianity Today*, I was responsible for the content of the books they were publishing that year. Dan's experiences were part of a manuscript that a Christian proctologist (an expert on the physiology and pathology of the rectum and anus) had submitted for one of our chapters in a book on homosexuality. Furthermore, the ten years I had previously spent on staff at the Spiritual Counterfeits Project (SCP) caused alarms to go off in my head while reading his story, telling me that this account sounded New Age.

When I checked the sources behind Dan's story and discovered that his testimony was reliable, I had to rethink my previous assumptions about the issue of near-death experience (NDE). I realized then that my views on this subject were shallow and not carefully thought out. Since many advocates of New Age ideas had openly supported the validity of NDEs, I had reasoned that they were part of the New Age arsenal that was currently bombarding our society. Moreover, because NDEs had not been in my area of responsibility at SCP, I dismissed them as an insignificant phenomenon.

Dan's story, however, forced me to reassess my casual response to NDEs. Many questions emerged in my mind about Dan's conversion experience, but the most disturbing were: "Why would Christ allow an evil spirit to imitate

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Him for the purpose of bringing Dan into His kingdom? Why would an evil spirit want to do this? Might the spirit who spoke to Dan from the light actually have been Jesus Christ?"

I could not really answer these questions without deliberate research into NDEs, which the Christian Research Institute has given me the opportunity to do. The following is what I have discovered from my research.

### **BACK FROM THE TWILIGHT ZONE?**

Christians are not the only ones wary of those who claim to have had near-death experiences. For many in the medical and scientific communities, their stories are as strange as those tales seen on Rod Serling's "The Twilight Zone." In fact these scientists maintain that either drugs, lack of oxygen, severe psychological stress, or some other explainable disorder causes people to dream or hallucinate, believing they are experiencing an NDE.

Perhaps their Western rational minds have predisposed these scientists against NDEs because they seem too weird — like the stories of those who insist they have traveled with alien beings in UFOs. Or perhaps the subject of death has become a forbidden topic for the Westerner, and thus anyone who has had a brush with it is ignored out of fear and ignorance. Whatever causes some to avoid this mysterious subject, NDE is still a phenomenon that Christians particularly must understand if they are to share the gospel effectively with those who have experienced or been influenced by it.

To better understand what a near-death experience is, we must go back 17 years to the publication of a book that catapulted this subject into the national limelight — Raymond Moody's *Life After Life*. In this small but fascinating book, Moody compiled a massive number of accounts of NDEs and discovered 15 separate elements that are common in these experiences.

(1) *Ineffability*. Many of those who have experienced an NDE say that no words can adequately or truly describe what happened to them. Their experience, for them, is inexpressible.

(2) *Hearing the News*. Many of them relate hearing a medical person pronounce them dead. To those around them, all their bodily signs indicated that they had expired, but during that moment, they consciously knew they were still alive.

(3) *Feelings of Peace and Quiet*. Many people recall feeling sensations of extreme pleasure. Although severe pain normally accompanies a life-threatening injury or disease, they remember feeling only a deep peace and quietness during the NDE.

(4) *The Noise*. Many relate hearing a distinct sound that occurs either at or near death. In some cases, this noise can be quite pleasant, like rapturous music. In other cases, the noise can be harsh and disturbing, like continuous buzzing or banging.

(5) *The Dark Tunnel*. Many recollect being jerked through some dark passageway, frequently while hearing the noise. This dark tunnel has been variously described as a cave, sewer, trough, valley, and so on.

(6) *Out of the Body*. Many remember seeing their physical bodies apart from themselves as though they were "spectators" observing their bodies. Surprise, panic, and a desire to return to their bodies often accompanied the realization that they were separate from their physical form.

(7) *Meeting Others*. In many cases they encountered spiritual entities who were present to help them through the experience. These beings variously appeared as loved ones who had recently passed away, strangers who had died, or some other spirits who were acting as their guardians.

(8) *The Being of Light*. Quite a few speak of beholding a brilliant light that, despite its brilliance, did not hurt their eyes. To them, this radiant light is a personal being who emanates irresistible love and warmth and who communicates with them — through thoughts and not speech — about the meaning of their lives.

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(9) *The Review*. A number of them recall an instant moment of time during their experience in which they witnessed a vivid review of their lives. These panoramic images provoked in them the importance of loving people and understanding the meaning of life.

(10) *The Border or Limit*. Some recount being obstructed by some form that often prevents them from going any further in their journey or from reaching that being of light. It can be a fence, a door, a body of water, or even an imaginary line.

(11) *Coming Back*. All of them obviously returned from their near-death experience, but how they felt about coming back varies considerably. Some wanted to stay with the being of light. Others felt obliged to return to complete unfinished tasks. Some chose to return. Others were told to come back. In any case, the return is often instantaneous — back through the dark tunnel.

(12) *Telling Others*. Those who have had NDEs regard their experience as a real event rather than a dream. But since they believe that it was extraordinarily unique and that others would be skeptical, they are quite reticent about disclosing their experience, which they feel is inexpressible anyway.

(13) *Effects on Lives*. As profound as the effects of their NDEs were on them, none feel that the experience has perfected them, and few have tried to gain public attention because of it. Instead, the effects have been more in the way they now view life and regard others. As was mentioned earlier, caring for other people and gaining a better understanding of the meaning of life emerged as high priorities after their experience.

(14) *New Views of Death*. Most of them no longer fear physical death, but at the same time they do not seek it. Rather, they view death as a transitional state to another form of life. Entrance into this new life involves neither judgment nor the dispensing of rewards and punishments.

(15) *Corroboration*. Remarkably there are independent testimonies of people who have corroborated some of the details in NDE accounts; that is, specific incidents (e.g., in the hospital operating room) witnessed by those who were supposedly dead. Although their testimonies do not constitute proof of life after death, they are significant considerations in the study of NDEs.

A close look at Moody's description of near-death experiences might lead one to discount Dan's experience as a genuine NDE since his account does not include all of Moody's elements. For instance, Dan did not relate that he had heard a distinct *noise*. In *Life After Life*, however, Moody points out that he came across no person who experienced *all* 15 elements, though many described quite a few of them like Dan did. In addition, no two stories were identical, despite striking similarities in details.

Another criticism of Dan's narrative might be its chronology, which doesn't match up with Moody's outline. For example, Dan said he journeyed through a tunnel after he reviewed his life and encountered the spirits of his grandparents, while Moody listed those elements in reverse order. Again, however, Moody describes variation among the reports he studied, stating that his order is typical but not universal.

Moody also says no one element occurred in every account, and no one element occurred only once. How many NDE elements a person experiences seems to depend on how deep and how long he or she was apparently dead. In Dan's case, he was believed to be clinically dead for almost ten minutes, which might explain why he experienced so many of Moody's NDE elements.

In the introduction to *Life After Life*, Raymond Moody says, "My hope for this book is that it will draw attention to a phenomenon which is at once very widespread and very well-hidden, and, at the same time, help create a more receptive public attitude toward it."<sup>1</sup> This statement raises several questions: first, what does he mean by "it"? Is he speaking of NDEs in general, or is he speaking of his interpretation and elaboration of them? In other words, does he want people like Dan to be more open about their experiences and others to be more understanding, or does he want his world view based on his presumed insights into NDE to take a prominent role in the global marketplace of ideas and beliefs?

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Elsewhere in his book Moody insists that he is not trying to prove that life exists after death or that he is conducting a scientific study of the claims of the people he interviewed. Nevertheless, although he tries to be objective and straightforward, he admits that his "background, opinions and prejudices" are reflected in his book.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in answering the first question, Moody would like "it" to be NDEs in general. He would be thrilled if people became more sensitive to those who have experienced NDEs and more open to the study of this phenomenon. But, a subtle agenda does emerge from his book that inclines the unwary reader toward a particular world view. And so, a second set of questions must be posed: What points is Moody trying to make in his book, and to what conclusions do those points take the reader? In order to answer these questions, one must have some knowledge of Moody's background, opinions, and prejudices.

### VEILED AGENDA

Raymond A. Moody, Jr., attended a Presbyterian church in his youth, though his parents never insisted that he embrace the Christian faith. Instead, they encouraged and supported any interest that influenced and formed his philosophy of life. As an adult he became a member of the Methodist church. Nevertheless, he states in *Life After Life*: "I believe that all the great religions of man have many truths to tell us, and I believe that no one of us has all the answers to the deep and fundamental truths with which religion deals."<sup>3</sup>

In 1969, Moody earned a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Virginia. After teaching philosophy at the university level for three years, he altered the direction of his professional career: he entered medical school with the purpose of becoming a psychiatrist teaching the philosophy of medicine. During the late seventies and early eighties, however, he spent much of his time on the lecture circuit sharing his thoughts about NDEs. In this he was often accompanied by the most famous luminary in the field of thanatology (the study of concerns related to death and dying), Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, author of *On Death and Dying*.

Moody's religious views are veiled in his best-selling book, *Life After Life*, in such a way that they do not appear to take center stage in his studies of NDE. But, in fact, they play a significant role behind the scenes.

At first glance Moody seems to be observing and making comments about NDEs as a Christian. After all, he divulges his early Christian training and later membership in a Protestant church. He confesses that his background cannot help but intrude into his observations. Indeed, there are numerous references to the being of light as Jesus Christ. He even tries to show that such passages in the Bible as Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus resemble NDEs.<sup>4</sup> And yet he slips in other remarks and issues that reveal he is a man who embraces the beliefs of more than one religion.

As was mentioned earlier, in one of his 15 elements of an NDE (*New Views of Death*) Moody describes the afterlife as a place full of love and acceptance — devoid of a supreme being who makes any judgment about people's lives or character. In his words, what is absent in this place beyond death are "harp-playing angels" and "demons with pitchforks."<sup>5</sup> The "mythological" picture of an afterlife with rewards and punishment is replaced with a being of light who responds, not with righteous indignation against sin, but with understanding and even humor at our shortcomings. Thus, the character of a supreme being that Moody presents from his observations of NDEs is quite different from the character of the infinitely just *and* merciful (offering complete forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ) God portrayed in the Bible (whose heaven, by the way, is also different from Moody's cartoon portrait).

According to Moody, the identification of the being of light varied according to the religious background of the person he interviewed. So, although some people believed that the being was Jesus Christ, others claimed the being was another holy personage, an angel, or simply just a being of light.<sup>6</sup> The point is that the afterlife, in Moody's view, is not restricted to the singular lordship of Jesus Christ.

Of course, Moody would argue that he is only disclosing details given to him by others. Moreover, that some people believe they have had such experiences as Moody recounts cannot be disputed. Nevertheless, since Moody's system of selection remains in *his* ballpark, his additional comments on these reported experiences are suspect of being biased toward his particular world view — especially when he tries to tie in parallels with other materials (e.g., the Bible and occultic writings).

After Moody tried to demonstrate similarities between Paul's experience on the road to Damascus and NDEs, he moved on to more fertile ground. Most notably he cites the eighth-century Eastern occult work, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and the eighteenth-century writings of the Swedish mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg.<sup>7</sup> Although Moody refrained from drawing any conclusions about the parallels between NDEs and these writings, he does pose carefully worded questions that would compel many readers to nod in agreement that NDEs follow an ancient tradition, one that espouses an occult/mystical view of spiritual reality.

Moody, however, denies being qualified to discuss NDEs as an expert on the occult. In the introduction to *Life After Death* he maintains, "I write as a person who is not broadly familiar with the vast literature on paranormal and occult phenomena."<sup>8</sup> His statement can be defended or criticized depending upon what is understood by "familiar." But to the casual reader, it would suggest that Moody has no vested interest in linking NDEs with the occult. For this reason, and because he has presented himself as a detached researcher, when he does inject occult interpretations subtly throughout his book and overtly at the end, many readers would be inclined to swallow his opinions as true insights into spiritual reality.

Moody's interest in the paranormal and occult, however veiled in his book, can be traced as far back as his undergraduate days at the University of Virginia in the mid sixties. Tal Brooke, currently the executive director of the Spiritual Counterfeits Project and formerly Moody's friend and fellow student at the University of Virginia, relates that "Moody claimed that he regularly conversed with a spirit being." Brooke further recalls that his and Moody's common interest in "esoteric philosophies, whether Eastern-religious, occult or psychic" was "the major basis for their companionship."<sup>9</sup> Brooke's description of Moody's involvement in the occult offers a far different understanding of Moody's use of the word *familiar* than what his book suggests.

Even more revealing is his association with Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who wrote the Foreword to *Life After Life*, praising Moody's research and contribution to the field of thanatology. They worked closely together, with Moody even filling in for Kubler-Ross on numerous occasions when she was unable to appear for speaking engagements. Kubler-Ross has been widely acclaimed for her work in the treatment of emotional problems experienced by terminal patients. Her research and claims regarding mediumship (divination by contact with the dead, especially through the agency of familiar spirits), however, have met with mixed reactions. Some ridicule her contentions; some condemn them; but many others have been enthralled by them. In any case, she is the most noteworthy guru in the field of thanatology.

In September 1976, Kubler-Ross revealed to her audience that she had acquired her own personal spirit guide, called Salem.<sup>10</sup> This announcement confirmed for her followers that her out-of-body experiences (OBE) had attained an even higher level of transcendence. For Christians it confirmed that her involvement with spiritistic practices had reached the lower depths of necromancy (concourse with forbidden spirits). Although both Kubler-Ross and Moody preach love, peace, understanding, and world unity, they also speak of our spirits traveling outside our physical bodies and communicating with other spirits, (Kubler-Ross and OBEs), and of gaining new insights into the mysteries of life from contact with the being of light during a deathlike state (Moody and NDEs).

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and Raymond Moody were trailblazers in the research of death and dying. Unfortunately, their research also included spiritism, religious universalism, and a denial of sin, judgment, and the need for repentance and grace. During the past two decades, their paths have been followed by others. These have not only expanded their studies in near-death experiences, but have also broadened the influence of New Age ideas in our society.

## THE PSYCHOLOGIST AND THE PHYSICIAN

In the wake of Moody's *Life After Life*, many no longer view near-death experiences as utterly strange and unusual. More and more people are stepping forward and sharing their own experiences. The print and broadcast news media have been more sympathetic in their inquiries into NDEs. We can even go to the cinema or turn on the VCR and see serious treatments of the subject, such as the movie *Flatliners*.

Included among those who have more recently taken up the banner of NDEs are both Christians (who will be the subject of Part Two of this article) and New Agers, whose ubiquitous slogans dot the landscape of our spiritually bankrupt society. Among the legion of researchers in the field of NDEs, two stand out: one is a psychologist,

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Kenneth Ring, and the other is a physician, Melvin Morse.

In 1981, *Life at Death: A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience* achieved national exposure. This book propelled Kenneth Ring to the forefront of professional researchers who were examining near-death experiences. Eight years earlier Ring had become intrigued with NDEs when he first heard of them. After shifting his academic studies from social psychology to the psychology of consciousness, Ring commenced his scientific research of the NDE phenomena in 1977 as a professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut. The first significant fruit of his labor was the publication of *Life at Death* two years later.

In *Life at Death* Ring tried to measure the experiences of a number of people who claimed to have undergone NDEs. After he delineated their experiences into components quite similar to Moody's 15 elements, he assigned values to each component. His goal was to determine whether a single pattern could be constructed from their accounts. He found that certain feelings, perceptions, and experiences were common among the people he interviewed.

*Life at Death* sparked renewed interest in NDEs, so much so that the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) was established in Storrs, Connecticut. Ring cofounded and once served as president of IANDS, which is internationally branched. Many of IANDS's most prolific writers and speakers do not hesitate to support their New Age world views with the accounts of NDEs.

When interviewed by the news and print media about his NDE research, Ring himself is much more cautious in publicizing his metaphysical views. His policy is certainly understandable since the scientific community, of which he is a respected member, is one of the most vocal and ardent critics of such people as Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and Raymond Moody. In fact, when Kubler-Ross announced that near-death experiences indicate there is life after death, she was vilified by the scientific establishment. And so, Ring is guarded in his remarks.

For instance, when John White of *Science of Mind* asked him about "the being of light," Ring at first replied, "That being or that light which the individual encounters is so loving that even though the individual may have done many bad things, somehow he still knows that he as an individual is okay. His acts may have been wrong, but he himself is okay."<sup>11</sup> Ring goes on to cover himself, however, by saying: "I can't recall any case of someone reporting being judged by God."<sup>12</sup> In other words, he is only presenting a particular character description of that being of light — which other people have reported to him.

In that same interview, when White specifically asked him how his research has affected his religious views, Ring offered an answer that can be swallowed like honey: "I'm much more aware of the importance of unconditional love. I now understand that to be not only the supreme principle of life itself, but also the core of all religions. I think this is what all religions are trying to show us."<sup>13</sup>

At first glance, his statement appears benign, but it really is no different from the religious universalism espoused by Kubler-Ross, Moody, and most New Agers. It also indicates that he puts more stock in a "being of light" who is totally accepting and nonjudgmental than he lets on. Ring said he doesn't have "any particular religious affiliation,"<sup>14</sup> but one doesn't need an affiliation to carry a world view banner.

While holding up such a banner, Kenneth Ring has lectured widely on the near-death experience. He has conducted numerous seminars and workshops for professional organizations and lay audiences. He has also been a guest on many television and radio programs. But it is in his book, *Life at Death*, where a statement can be found that discloses the most disturbing feature of his message: The "light" is "actually a reflection of one's own inherent divine nature and symbolizes the higher self. The light one sees, then, is one's own....If one can accept the idea of a higher self, it is not difficult to assume that that self — as well as the individual self — is actually an aspect of God, or the Creator."<sup>15</sup>

Anyone familiar with New Age doctrine will recognize Ring's reference to "the higher self." For many New Agers, every individual has a higher, larger, wiser, and more real self which needs to be tapped into and then manifested. This will hasten one's self-realization, when a person realizes that he or she is god. This is the most prominent statement etched in the cornerstone of the New Age movement and it happens to be the slogan written on Kenneth Ring's banner.

In 1990 Ivy Books published Melvin Morse's *Closer to the Light: Learning from the Near-Death Experiences of Children*, with, by the way, a foreword by Raymond Moody. It was on the *New York Times Best Seller List* for three

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months. The *New York Tribune*, quoted on the back cover, called this book "compelling," and went on to say, "What a salute to Morse's moral courage and intellectual curiosity is his book. It deserves serious attention."

Melvin Morse and his book certainly do deserve serious attention. As a physician, he has made two significant contributions to the subject of near-death experiences. First, he has provided professional insights into NDEs from a medical perspective. And second, his research was mainly conducted with children. Because his studies and observations gave the whole subject of NDEs a needed boost for the early nineties, Morse has frequently appeared before the media spotlight. For this reason also, the banner he is waving should be examined as well.

Morse is a pediatrician who studied at the George Washington University School of Medicine, and whose private practice is in the suburbs of Seattle, Washington. He was introduced to NDEs when one of his young patients shared her experience with him after she awoke from a coma caused by a swimming accident. With the help of a major hospital in Seattle he began research projects that would examine this phenomenon scientifically. In 1983 his first article on the subject was published in the *American Journal of Diseases of Children*. Since then he has studied a number of people who claim to have had an NDE as a child.

In the November 1986 issue of the *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, Morse published a study in which he tried to demonstrate that drugs are not the source of NDEs. He went on to say that NDEs "are a natural psychological process associated with dying."<sup>16</sup> These medical observations, as well as others, have given NDE researchers the ammunition they needed to bring attention and respect to their work and claims.

The use of people who had NDEs as children in Morse's study is also significant. Unlike adult NDEs, children are too young to have absorbed adult views of death. In other words, there is far less likelihood for preconceived ideas about death to influence what they believe is happening to them during NDEs. Thus, the validity of an NDE could be more forcefully argued with the addition of Morse's findings with children.

Morse's comments about the medical profession, and particularly doctors who treat dying patients, also have elicited much interest — and praise. "For instance," he writes, "it is well documented that as patients get closer to death their doctors spend less time at their bedsides."<sup>17</sup> This criticism strikes a loud chord felt almost universally by Americans, who believe they wait at least a long hour to see a faceless physician for a few brief minutes at the cost of long hours of hard labor. Morse also says the role of comforter is often left to the nurse or to no one. What his colleagues need to do, he says, is "be able to answer questions about death just as we can about other aspects of normal development and life stages."<sup>18</sup> Rightly or wrongly, Morse's remarks have been well received.

How can doctors become more sensitive and caring toward their patients who are facing death? "Make the patient's spiritual needs a routine part of daily rounds," Morse says, "just as much a part of his medical chart as a detailed description of urine output."<sup>19</sup> But what does Morse mean by "spiritual needs?" "For me the answer is simple," he says. "NDEs are the way to join science and spiritualism....We will combine the essence of those ancient truths with scientific knowledge and create new rituals with which to heal our inner selves and society."<sup>20</sup> Although this declaration is still somewhat vague, it is at least becoming clearer where his metaphysical orientation lies.

In *Closer to the Light* Morse does what Moody and Ring did in their books — he compares NDEs with the experiences found in different world religions, including Christianity. Morse even says Saint Paul claimed to have experienced astral travel. He then speaks of Paramahansa Yogananda's spiritual experiences as described in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, a book that opened the minds of countless Westerners to Eastern mysticism. He tries to tie the experiences of both Yogananda and St. Paul — along with those of Native American spiritual leader Black Elk and Calvinist theologian Jonathan Edwards — into elements of NDEs.<sup>21</sup> He is even more deliberate when he draws similarities between NDEs and *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.<sup>22</sup>

Morse's spiritual inclinations are most evident when he discusses the being of light, or "The Divine Light," as he calls it. "The Light," he says, "is the key element of the NDE."<sup>23</sup> He goes on to explain: "I think the Light seen during NDEs and the mystical light seen by those having spiritual experiences are the same light. Both fuel religious awe and both have the power to transform."<sup>24</sup> But who is this light who is doing the transforming? Is it Jesus Christ? Is it the spirit of Osiris, the Egyptian god? After Morse describes the rituals of ancient Egypt he states: "Just as children that I interviewed often perceived the light that they saw as the light of Jesus, these king-initiates would perceive that same light as the spirit of Osiris."<sup>25</sup> Morse is not claiming that the being of light is necessarily the spirit of Osiris, but he is inferring that this being can be the spirit of *any* god or holy personage that people have worshiped, past and present.

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Morse would be appalled to hear conservative Christians declare that his message is demonic, just as Moody explained he was in his sequel, *Reflections on Life After Death*. This would be a hard judgment to make since Morse is obviously a very caring and sensitive person. But his message is never so clear as in the story he tells at the end of *Closer to the Light*. It is a moving account of a boy who had cerebral palsy. When he was six months old his mother had a vision of her son happy, beautiful, and healthy. Ten years later he died, still a cripple. "It was then that she realized the meaning of her vision: He was free of a body crippled by Cerebral Palsy."<sup>26</sup> In the context of Jesus Christ one could only praise God for her faith. But Morse says he doesn't understand her premonition just as he doesn't know what the light is in NDEs. Both are beautiful and wonderful, but neither are defined, except that there is no room for sin, judgment, repentance, grace, and, most importantly, for the primacy of Jesus Christ.

These are the trademarks of the New Age message: to present their thoughts sincerely and graciously, to speak of unconditional love and acceptance, but to deny that salvation for a person can come only through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, the banner of Melvin Morse has such a message.

### EIGHT MILLION STRONG AND GROWING?

To dismiss near-death experiences simply because the most prominent researchers in the field have interpreted NDEs from a New Age perspective would not be wise. NDEs touch the lives of too many people, demanding that Christians explore this phenomenon more thoroughly and objectively.

In 1982 George Gallup, Jr., published *Adventures in Immortality*, which presented a number of surveys relating to NDEs. A frequent resource and contributor to such evangelical publishers as *Christianity Today*, Gallup found that the number of people who have claimed an NDE is considerable. In a 1981 poll, he conducted a scientific survey of 1,500 adults who experienced brushes with death. One-third of them admitted to a near-death experience. Using that ratio for the entire U.S. population of those believed to have come close to death, Gallup estimated that as many as 8 million could have had NDEs.

Furthermore, the resuscitation technology in the medical field has advanced greatly. More and more people who have apparently died from a cardiac arrest or other conditions are now being revived. And, as the subject of NDEs becomes increasingly accepted as a normal phenomenon, people are becoming more open about describing their NDEs. This includes people like Dan, who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior *because of* their near-death experiences.

In Part Two we will evaluate alternative explanations for NDEs to those supplied by the New Age movement, from both secular and Christian sources. And we will examine biblical texts which are used to validate this phenomenon.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Life After Life* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1976), 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-82.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-89.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Albrecht and Brooks Alexander, "Thanatology: Death and Dying," *SCP Journal*, April 1977, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Lennie Kronisch, "Elizabeth Kubler-Ross: Messenger of Love," *Yoga Journal*, November-December 1976, 20.

<sup>11</sup> John White, "Beyond the Body: An Interview with Kenneth Ring," *Science of Mind*, November 1982, 88.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Ring, *Life at Death: A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980), 240-41.



<sup>16</sup> Melvin Morse with Paul Perry, *Closer to the Light: Learning from the Near-Death Experiences of Children* (New York: Ivy Books, 1990), 49.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 98, 105.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 125, 142-43.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-92.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.