



The possibility of Near-Death Experience: Discussions in the contemporary philosophical discourse

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Abstract: Death is a brute fact which we can't deny and surprisingly without any prior experience we accept that death is obvious. There are some reports of various peculiar experiences when the person concern is near to death. Such experiences may encompass a variety of sensations including detachment from the body, feelings of levitation, total serenity, security, warmth, joy, the experience of absolute dissolution, review of major life events, the presence of a light, and seeing dead relatives. When negative, such experiences may include sensations of anguish, distress, a void, devastation, vast emptiness, and seeing hellish places.

But why these mysterious experiences happen? Search for the answer can be approach from two perspectives - psychological and physical. In the first part of my paper, focus on physical explanation-like heart or brain functional problem which can cause according to medical science this type of experiences. In the second part of my paper, I focus on some psychological theories and Raymond Moody's discussion about near death experience.

Key words: Death, Near-death- Experience, psychological, physical, Raymond Moody.

I. INTRODUCTION



Near – Death experience

In this article I try to focus about that is there any reasonable explanation of the near – death experience. Some people who have survived a life-threatening crisis report an extraordinary experience. Near-death experiences (NDE) happen with growing frequency for the reason that of improved survival rates resulting from modern techniques of recovery. The experience of NDE and the effects on people seem similar worldwide. The particular

nature and absence of a frame of reference for this experience lead to individual, cultural, and religious issues defining the language used to describe and interpret the experience. Moreover, there have similar experience between near – death experience and fear-death experiences, are primarily informed after conditions in which death like serious traffic or mountaineering accidents.

What is near death experience? There has no exact definition about it but according to Bruce Grayson the definition of near – death – experience is 'Near-death experiences are profound psychological events with transcendental and mystical elements, typically occurring to individuals close to death or in situations of intense physical or emotional danger.'¹ Here I discuss two perspectives about near – death- experience.

II. PHYSICAL PERSPECTIVE

Some possible way out has been given in medical science based on various studies one of them is to know the situation of heart. If the ECG result is a flatline then near-death experience occurs during or just after. But here the concept of time becomes subjective. Duration of time in most dreams cannot be measure in an objective way. It may be the case that a person was in dream for sake fifteen minutes but in her dream a few decades have passed. The converse may also happen. In the same way a person experiences time in a subjective manner in cases of Near-Death Experiences. That is, when a person experiences a dream during sleep, it can be seen that the dream lasted for a very short period of time, that is, the person has the same experience, but the time interval was longer than the experience, or the opposite happens in the same way. A person experiences time in the same way as in a near-death experience. Again, many times it has been observed that the person witnesses this type of experience just before the person becomes unconscious.

¹P-21, *consciousness beyond life*



According to neuroscientist Olaf Blanke², near-death experiences can have two causes and depending on them, near-death experiences can also be of two types. Firstly, if there is Neural Disinhibition in the South Hemisphere and secondly if there is Neural Disinhibition in the Left Hemisphere. When the nerve cells are stimulated and transmit the sensation, if there is a block for some reason then the effect on the transmission of the sensation is called Neural Disinhibition. The brain is the source of most of the energy in the human body. If oxygen is cut off in the body, many organs stop functioning, but there are some cells that can function without oxygen. Neurons lose their efficiency because glucose, their main source of energy, cannot be produced without access to oxygen. Brain performance is also affected because the brain does not store glucose as glycogen beforehand. Due to the lack of glycogen, the connection between the brain stem and the cerebral cortex becomes chaotic. In addition, the function of synapses is also disturbed. But in such a situation, MRI has shown that the presence of consciousness at this junction fulfills the necessary condition. This phenomenon called the near-death experience. If blood flow to the brain is cut off, the flow of glucose and oxygen is cut off, so the neurons will also stop working. But this will only happen if the flow is permanently stopped. However, if it is temporary, the neuron's performance is still present even if it is deprived of oxygen for a while. SPECT scan is a method by which the amount of oxygen in the heart can be determined. If the flow of oxygen is stopped, then the performance of the heart muscles decreases. As soon as oxygen flow resumes, function resumes normally. But if the oxygen flow is stopped for a long time, then the function of the heart is permanently stopped, which is called myocardial infarction. After that, brain function is gradually lost permanently. All neurons and cells begin to die. As in the case of TIA (transient ischemic attack), the same happens even if the oxygen supply to the body is stopped for a while. In TIA (transient ischemic attack), blood clots in one side of the brain where there is no blood flow, one side of the person becomes numb for a while but it is temporary.

Clinical death usually means loss of brain function in medicine. Loss of brain function necessarily means loss of heart function because the heart is usually the first to stop getting oxygen. Studies have shown that putting pressure on the

heart does not restore enough blood flow to the brain. External pressure alone can never bring the heart back to normal. But it can be done by electric shock. Again, if it is possible to restore the function of the heart, then it is possible to gradually restore the function of the brain. But during this time, five percent less oxygen reaches the brain than normal. This is because the shock applied to bring the person back to consciousness has a blood pressure of 30-40 mmHg which does not allow enough oxygen and glucose to reach the brain. Although various medicines are tried to normalize it, it is not stable. Without enough oxygen for a long time, the brain cells start to swell and the pressure inside the brain increases. Gradually, the amount of carbon dioxide increases in the brain, from which it is not possible to return to the previous state. This can cause the person to suffer from hypoxia from which the person can experience various adverse reactions. Therefore, if more oxygen than normal does not reach the brain, it does not return to normal. At that time electric shock is required. Otherwise, slow death may occur. During this period, it is possible to remain conscious to some extent, which is medically called coma. So, coma does not mean death.

But the main question here is how is the presence of consciousness possible at the level of clinical death?

There are several opinions about the origin of consciousness. It cannot be accepted that consciousness originates from all parts of the brain. According to some neurosurgeons, consciousness originates mainly from the surface of the brain, i.e., the thalamus and the midbrain. When a person is conscious of something, it means that the brain stem is connected to a specific part of the cerebral cortex. That is, consciousness originates from the thalamus and midbrain, but after that the rest of the brain must play a role.

On the other hand, some neuroscientists opine that, consciousness originates from the reticular formation of the brain, because it has been shown that when this part is damaged, the person becomes unconscious. This part is active when the person is conscious, but when this part is inactive the person is unconscious. A person is said to be conscious only when the reticular formation is associated with the person's activity. But the reticular formation is not active during sleep. So many people do not accept this opinion.

According to many philosophers the consciousness of the individual is bounded by the language of the individual. It is this language that has made man superior to other animals. This

²Blanke, *Leaving body and life behind*, out-of-body and Near-Death-Experience



language originates mainly from the left side of the brain i.e. Broca's area. The left hemisphere of the brain may assume a major role in the origin of consciousness.

But if this condition of the individual is explained by a physiological explanation, many questions will remain unanswered. For example, Suzanne Blackmore published a research paper on near-death experiences. In which she discusses the comparison of near-death experiences between Eastern and Western people. In this discussion, the information she gave based on her research shows that there are differences in the experience of certain things between Eastern and Western people. It is notable that Eastern people have experienced certain Indian gods, Yamaraj, which Western people have never experienced. Physiological cause cannot be the sole cause of NDE. So, physiological aspects alone cannot account for all types of NDE. There is a need to discuss the psychological aspects of various such interpretations.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Near - death experiences are not only explained by physiological discussions, but there are also some psychological discussions about this. According to many psychologists, the reason for this experience is not only physical, but there are also some mental reasons. A person's personality structure is often identified as the cause of this experience. Limited research has shown that individuals who are easily hypnotized, easily recall dreams during sleep, and readily daydream are more likely to witness near-death experiences. Individuals who live in isolation are also more likely to witness this experience.

When a person witnesses this experience, his first experience is that his consciousness is separating from the body but the consciousness continues to exist. A variety of emotions may be active in the person during this time. The individual fails to convey this formless existence of his to any other person, but he can perceive all, receive sound.

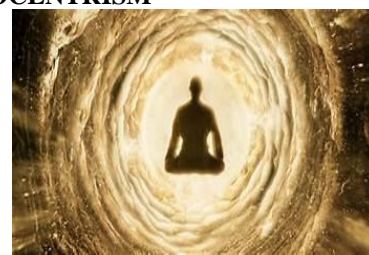
But the question is, if the experience is of the person with the body, then what can be called the out-of-body experience? Two theories can be mentioned in possible support of this context.

3.1. IDEALISTIC PANPSYCHISM



First, the theory of idealistic Panpsychism literally means mind is omnipresent. However, it is currently given various definitions and is explained by different terms accordingly. A particular form of this theory is Pan experientialism, which asserts that conscious experience is fundamental and all-pervading. Another variant is Pan cognitivism which states that thought is fundamental and all-pervading. If the theory of Pan experientialism is accepted then it can be said that the basic truth of this world is not substance, it is conscious experience and this basic experience is omnipresent which does not need to depend on any substance for its origin. Apart from contemporary philosopher some Greek thinkers are associated with panpsychism they are Anaxagoras (who saw the unifying principle or arche as nous or mind), Anaximenes (who saw arche as pneuma or soul), and Heraclitus (who said "thought is omnipresent"). I am trying to take this theory as a possible argument because if consciousness or inanimate matter is omnipresent then this could be a possible solution to out-of-body experiences.

3.2. BIOCENTRISM



Second, the interpretation of the spiritual consciousness in the light of quantum physics has been presented by several prominent doctors, scientists, researchers such as Dr. Jim Tucker, D Robert Lanza, Amit Goswami etc. They claim that consciousness determines the form and nature of the material world at the subtle level. If consciousness determines the form and nature of this material world, then its existence does not depend on this world. Based on this the contemporary theory of biocentrism originates. The basic statement of this theory is that consciousness is the basic material of the world. Consciousness is not dependent on any



material object, it is omnipresent. life and consciousness are absolutely fundamental to our understanding of the universe. We call this new perspective 'biocentrism.' The intention is to take this as a possible argument, It may give a plausible explanation of the feelings claimed to occur in near-death experiences, especially out-of-body experiences.

Some of the possible explanations for the discussion of near-death experiences in psychological discourse are: Firstly, **Depersonalization** – the root point of this theory is that in response to the event called death, people remove their personality from the situation and create a story in the colors of their imagination. But there are considerable problems in accepting this theory. Those who have this experience do not have a fantasy story, but think it is real. As a result, there is a difference in feelings with personality, but there is no change in the concept of personality.

Second, **Birth canal memory** – the dark tunnel followed by a light at the end may be interpreted experienced in the near-death experience as birth canal memory. That is, the memory and light of man's birth is the light of the moment he is born. But the problem is whether the memory of that time is possible? Because the newborn's vision is so vague at birth that the experiences at that time are too vague to be permanently stored in the brain.

Following Moody, the twelve elements of near-death experience are-

1. Out of body experience



Out of body experience refers to witnessing the body from outside the body without consciousness. Just as a person sheds his old clothes and sees him, at some point one sees the body in the same way. But still the individual can perceive himself as identical with the previous 'I' through the emotions, feelings or good consciousness that resides in him.

When a person witnesses this experience, his first experience is that his consciousness is separating from the body but the consciousness continues to exist. A variety of emotions may be active in the person during this time. Just as one can be afraid, one can also feel free. The person tries to return to his body again. Man tries to channel his formless existence into a tangible object such as a wall or a door. He fails to make his presence known

to any other person, but he can see everyone, even receive words. His direct power increases manifold from that of the embodied person.

2) Heightened senses



According to Moody this feeling cannot be explained by language. Because this kind of experience does not happen to a person while staying on earth. It may seem that the EA experience is more vivid than any other experience in life. According to many persons who witness this experience, there is no such vivid experience in the worldly position. to see.

3. Intense and Generally Positive Emotions or Feelings

This experience is of a kind that is indescribable to those who have had it. A positive feeling, a feeling of joy that is indescribable. Peace, love, joy all together in one sense of infinite joy. At this time there is no feeling of sorrow, fear, pain, suffering, the feeling of joy that one feels at that time seems infinite to him. According to many people who have had a near-death experience, this joy or peace is impossible to experience without experiencing it.

4. Passing into or Through a Tunnel



Most people who have observed death up close have had an experience where they feel as if they are traveling through a tunnel where multiple colors and lights merge into one point. Where there is warmth but cannot be touched. Different people have interpreted such tunnels differently. The tunnel seems to lead from earth to death.

5. Encountering a Mystical or Brilliant Light

A light is experienced at the end of this tunnel at the end of which the light and self are perceived as



identical. At first, the light has a blue tint, gradually it turns into a bright white color. But that brilliance was never experienced in the waking state. Gradually one's soul merges with that center of light which is unmanifest.

6. Encountering Other Beings, Either Mystical Beings or Deceased Relatives or Friends

Many people who have had a near-death experience have also had the experience of being surrounded by relatives or acquaintances of that person, that is, relatives who have recently passed away. One's relationship with all those relatives, friends, is seen as permanent, eternal. After a long time, the feeling of meeting one's own relatives started. Infinite joy, happiness is experienced which is indescribable.

7. A Sense of Alteration of Time or Space

At this time the gap between present, past and future is not felt. Similarly, the distance is not precisely determined. It is not possible to clearly indicate near-far.

8. The Panoramic Life Review

When a person sees the light of various colors in this state, he sees past life actions, conversations, even his own thoughts through him, and he realizes that every action or thought that he is witnessing is a force through which he feels himself and his. Nearby people are also affected. A series of events occur very quickly after birth, the effects of which begin to fall on the individual. He judges his every action by himself. All things and all persons are presented in relation together.

9. Encountering Unworldly ("Heavenly") Realms

Where the tunnel experience ends is where the otherworldly location or sense of heaven begins – so many have claimed. A strange combination of peace and love that cannot be imagined in the worldly state. Natural things like river, sky, mountains, trees, flowers all together create a strange beautiful feeling.

10. Encountering or Learning Special Knowledge

It is at this time that a person feels that he has gained special knowledge about how and why all the events of this nature, this world are happening. He has acquired all knowledge about himself and about relatives or friends.

11. Encountering a Boundary or Barrier

A feeling is created as if one is crossing all barriers and boundaries into infinity. Freed from finite life, he finds at his destination a door within which only the song of joy is known to man. Then the person experiences a feeling where the person has to

choose whether to go back to the previous life or accept death.

12. A return to the body, either voluntary or involuntary

At the end of the tunnel when the person descends between life and death, he experiences a force by which he returns to his body. Consciousness returns first to the brain and then to the whole body. Then all the physical pains, feelings of suffering come back again. During this time the person remains somewhat sedated and silent, which may last for several years, medically known as a coma.

Several physiological causes of near-death experiences have been discussed previously. But the question is that if physiological causes are the cause of near-death experiences, then it can be logically claimed that whenever such a physiological state occurs, there will be a near-death experience, and whenever there is a near-death experience, such a physiological state will occur. It has been recognized in the previous discussion that this type of experience occurs when the brain is low in oxygen and high in carbon dioxide. But there have been many cases where the oxygen content of the person's body has decreased and the carbon-dioxide content has increased resulting in a near-death experience that the person witnessed. In this regard, the story of a pilot described by neurologist Dr. Peter Fenwick is particularly noteworthy. Again, referring to hormones called endorphins refers to near-death experiences.

But this theory is also not acceptable because if endorphins are the cause of the near-death experience, then endorphins are artificial but several contrasts exist. For example, Indians report several experiences in their near-death experiences that are of a different nature than Americans. As Indians say they have had the experience of seeing Yamaraj or Yamaduta claiming to come and take him. Besides, Indians have claimed the sight of gods and goddesses who are worshiped by Indians. No evidence of such experiences has been found among Americans, but many of them have claimed apparitions of the Lord Jesus. From this it can be claimed that the conscious experience of the near-death experience of the human psyche has a special role in this case.

First, the physiological explanation recognizes that the body experiences near-death experiences due to changes in various hormones or oxygen levels or the effects of certain drugs. But there are many areas of immediate experience where these factors are absent. According to Osis and Haraldsson – they apparently did not generate deathbed phenomena suggestive of an afterlife.



There is no conclusive evidence that the drug can cause such an experience. It is also not proven that hypoxia or anoxia causes such experiences.

Second, various experiments by Moody, Sabom, Ring³, etc., who have long researched near-death experiences, claim that there are many cases where there is no drug, or physical deterioration, but the person has had such an experience. This claim is baseless if a drug is necessarily used by a person to experience this. A lack of oxygen to the brain leads to this type of experience – Moody completely denies this. He says studies have shown that blood flow to the brain is normal when a person is having this type of experience. But if or when it is found that the person experiences such things during hypoxia, it is not possible to provide an adequate explanation that hypoxia is the cause.

Third, when the temporal lobe of the brain is damaged, the individual experiences a variety of unusual experiences. According to many, this experience is a near-death experience. But the experience that a person has at this time is not the experience of near death. A person's experience with temporal lobe damage is similar, but not identical, to that experienced by a person in a near-death experience. So according to Sabom, there is no near-death experience when the temporal lobe is damaged. So according to Sabom, there is no near-death experience when the temporal lobe is damaged.

Fourth, the experience of near death and the experience of immaterial directness are not identical. So, the causes of immaterial directness are not the causes of near-death experiences. Physical conditions may be the cause of the unreal vision, but near-death experiences are not due to physical conditions. So of course, psychological reasons are also plausible.

IV. CONCLUSION

So, it is possible to accept this experience as a real proof of immanent consciousness and various researches in this regard are currently going on. Cognition and other experiences are not possible without immanent consciousness. Physiological consciousness is only represented objective consciousness. They cannot explain consciousness which is immanent in each physiological system. Even if physiology or bodily mechanism are responsible for certain type of experiences without the consciousness itself this mechanism cannot work. We can also conclude that this is only

subjective experience, so the type of experiences differs from person to person.

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