

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES:
A RITE OF PASSAGE INTO PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

A dissertation submitted

by

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ABSTRACT

Near-death Experiences as a Rite of Passage into

Personal Transformation

by

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The purpose of this study was to demonstrate that the stages in near-death experiences could parallel those of a rite of passage, resulting in the transformation of the individual to a higher level of behavioral and attitudinal functioning. A higher level of functioning, as described here, is an experience of improving interpersonal relationships, an increased openness and acceptance of others, an increased desire to be of service to others, and a loss of the fear of death. The study illustrated that near-death experiences could have a profound effect on the attitudinal and behavioral functioning of an individual.

Eight subjects from around the United States were engaged in an in-depth interview to describe their near-death experiences and their life circumstances before and after the event. Six interviews were tape-recorded and two were recorded by written notes. The tapes were transcribed, the cases were studied extensively, and data was analyzed using a phenomenological approach.

The findings illustrate that the three stages of a rite of passage may be clearly seen within the near-death experience. The results also conclude that when an individual has experienced an NDE as a rite of passage for spiritual maturity, they are profoundly affected as demonstrated through changes in their behaviors and attitudes. The findings also reveal the NDE as a catalyst for change in the experiencer's life, similar to that of a bottoming out experience. The analysis also provided evidence that the presence of a life review during the NDE had a profound effect on the experiencer's interpretation of God as benevolent.

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This dissertation complies with the writing style set forth in Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, (1992). (3rd ed.).