

What Are “Related Experiences”?

IANDS’s articles of incorporation indicate that our organization’s focus is “near-death and similar experiences.” Throughout our website, we also refer to “near-death and related experiences.” Although IANDS’s primary focus has been and continues to be near-death experiences (NDEs), the questions arise: What are these similar and related experiences, under what circumstances do they occur, and how do they relate to the term “spiritually transformative experiences” (STEs)? We begin with a list of three categories of “related and similar” experiences that is inclusive, though not exhaustive.

One category is experiences that can occur *during* NDEs and also outside the context of a close brush with death (Atwater, 2021; Holden et al., 2009). These include, but are not limited to:

- Out-of-body experience (OBE) – in which a person experiences their consciousness located and functioning outside their physical body (Tart, 2009),
- Telepathy – in which a person encounters and communicates “mind-to-mind” with another living or trans-material being (Tart, 2009; Watt & Tierney, 2014),
- After-death communication (ADC) – in which a living person experiences the presence of a physically deceased person or animal (Holden, 2017),
- Past-life memory – in which a person recalls a previous lifetime as a different person or other entity (Mills & Tucker, 2014),
- Precognition – in which a person perceives a future event in the absence of any normal way of predicting it (Tart, 2009; Watt & Tierney, 2014),
- Remote viewing – in which a person visualizes physical events outside the normal range of perception in the absence of any normal way of perceiving them (Tart, 2009),
- Mystical experience – which “diverges in fundamental ways from ordinary conscious awareness and leaves a strong impression of having encountered a reality radically different from the sensory-based world of everyday experience . . . often stand[ing] out as joyous, defining moments in [experiencers’] lives” (Wulff, 2014, p. 370), and
- Anomalous healing of self – in which a person is healed in ways that transcend normal healing processes (Tart, 2009).

A second category is experiences that can occur *after* NDEs—as well as in other circumstances apart from NDEs (Atwater, 2021; Holden et al., 2009). These can include the above-listed experiences as well as:

- Anomalous healing of others – in which a person perceives the ability to promote healing in others through other-than-normal means (Krippner & Achterberg, 2014; Tart, 2009),
- Aura viewing – Perceiving white or colored light emanating from people and/or objects,
- Encounter with non-material entities – in which a person perceives the presence of and communication with one or more entities not of the material world, perhaps originally encountered during an NDE, such as light beings and orbs,
- Encounter with extraterrestrial beings – in which a person encounters beings from other worlds or dimensions (Appelle et al., 2014; Ring, 1993),

- Environmental sensitivity – in which a person is unusually sensitive to aspects of the environment such as chemicals and/or electrical fields (Blalock et al., 2015),
- Exceptional talent – in which a person becomes unusually interested and capable in a skill that previously was of little interest, such as playing and composing music,
- Kundalini awakening – in which a person experiences rushes of energy up the spine along with increased physical heat and perceptions of light, associated with spiritual development (Edwards, 2013),
- Lucid dreaming – in which one is conscious that one is dreaming while one is dreaming (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1991),
- Mediumship – in which a person serves as a medium of communication between a physically deceased person and a living person (Holden et al., 2014; Windbridge Research Center, 2021),
- Psychokinesis – in which a person moves an object or otherwise influences the environment, either intentionally or unintentionally, without the use of physical force (Tart, 2009); this category includes electromagnetic aftereffects whereby electronic devices in an NDEr's vicinity malfunction (Blalock et al., 2015), and
- Shared-death experience – in which a living person shares in a dying person's transition to the initial stages of an afterlife (Moody, 2010; Shared Crossing Research Initiative, 2021),
- Synesthesia – in which “an inducing stimulus produces, at the same time, two kinds of experience: a primary experience (sensory, perceptual, conceptual, affective) normally associate with that stimulus and an anomalous secondary experience in the same or another domain” (Marks, 2014, p. 81), such as having a particular sound also evoke an image of a particular color.

A third category is phenomena that do not typically occur either during or after NDEs but that, similar to NDEs, have implications for an understanding of consciousness, the mind-brain relationship, and a possible afterlife. These include:

- Nearing-death awareness – in which people with terminal illness have experiences such as impactful dreams and visions in the period just prior to their physical death (Callanan & Kelley, 1993; Kerr, 2020),
- Personality changes following heart transplant – in which heart transplant recipients manifest personality characteristics of their unknown donors (Leister, 2020), and
- Terminal lucidity – in which people with terminal illness who have organic brain impairment somehow have a period of lucid communication in the days prior to their physical death (Batthyány, 2023; Nahm, 2009).

It is noteworthy that the above experiences can occur under a variety of circumstances. They can occur *spontaneously* in various contexts, including a close brush with death due to illness or to accidental or self-inflicted injury, but also during other extreme circumstances such as intense emotional arousal or extreme physical exertion – or for no apparent reason. They also can be *facilitated* by practices such as meditation, by the ingestion of entheogens such as psilocybin or ayahuasca, and by clinical psychotherapeutic procedures such as hypnosis, past life therapy, or Induced After-Death Communication (Foster & Holden, 2017).

How do these experiences relate to the term *spiritually transformative experience* (STE)? That term was coined by psychiatrist Yvonne Kason (1994; 2008; 2019). Although she did not offer a definition of the term, she specified that STEs include mystical experiences, NDEs, psychic experiences, spontaneous inspired creativity, and spiritual energy/kundalini episodes. Thus, as regards the above list of experiences similar and related to NDEs,

the term STE is problematic in at least three ways. First, Kason’s list of STEs is incomplete, representing only some, but not all, experiences similar and related to NDEs. Second, even Kason acknowledged correctly that some people who have such experiences do not then transform spiritually—thus contradicting the term “spiritually transformative experience.” In addition, some people do not consider their experiences of these types to be “spiritual,” per se—and may react negatively to that term being imposed on their experience in contradiction to their own subjective view.

A more accurate, objective, and inclusive term might be helpful. One possibility is **transpersonal** experiences, because in NDEs and each of the related and similar experiences listed above, the experiencer in some way(s) **transcends** the usual **personal** limits of space, time, identity, and/or influence. For example, in precognition and past life memories, the person has transcended the usual personal limits of time—knowing future or past events not usually known to them. In out-of-body experiences and remote viewing, the person has transcended the usual personal limits of space—perceiving the world from perspectives and locations not usually available to them. In mystical experience, a person transcends their usual sense of identity by feeling one with humanity, nature, or the entire cosmos. And in psychokinesis, a person can affect a physical object or process with their mind alone, transcending their usual limits of physical influence.

Transpersonal experiencers are free to label their experiences “spiritual”—or not, as they wish. And such experiences may or may not result in transformation that might be considered spiritual, that is, movement in the direction of greater love, peace, and sense of connectedness to self, others, the world, and/or a domain and entities beyond the physical world.

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