

BOOK REVIEW

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The Near-Death Experience, by Calvert Roszell. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1992, 91pp, \$10.95.

Calvert Roszell's 91-page book *The Near-Death Experience* can easily serve as an in-depth introduction for anyone seeking a better understanding of both the physical and spiritual realities underlying near-death experiences (NDEs). It presents an easily readable and culpable synthesis of present day scientific information now available about NDEs. Even referring to the founding meeting of the International Association for Near-Death Studies organized by Raymond Moody in 1977, this book clearly and simply explores the relevance to NDEs of concepts such as temporal lobe seizures, the Sylvian fissure, hypoxia, hypercarbia, endorphins, enkephalins, ischemia, and autoscopia.

However, the true value of this brief book does not lie in its simple explanations of contemporary scientific research. Such explanations are at best intermediary to the student of near-death studies who asks the question of "why?" and not just "how?" Since traditional science can at best explore the material "how?" question of NDEs, Roszell's book turns to the works of Rudolf Steiner and others for an explanation of the spiritual "why?"

Though Steiner wrote a mere dozen or so books, he delivered a series of 6,000 lectures that were recorded and translated into many languages. It is with a thorough understanding of Steiner's books and lectures that Roszell explains the 9-minute near-death journey of

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George Ritchie. Much of what Steiner wrote and lectured upon at the turn of the century is brought to life and made clearer by Roszell's explanation of Ritchie's NDE: the "life review" or "etheric tableau," the "guardian of the threshold," "kamaloca," "devachan," and other such experiences discussed by Steiner are validated by Roszell's commentary on Ritchie's experience. Ritchie's NDE was in fact so consistent with Steiner's teachings that Roszell felt compelled to document that "In a personal letter to me, Ritchie confirmed that he had never before heard of Rudolf Steiner" (p. 69).

So what is an NDE to Roszell? As experienced by Ritchie, it is simply a separation of the four aspects of every human being: the physical, the etheric, the astral, and the ego. When the physical aspect is removed from the other three by death or a near-death experience, devachan occurs. It lasts two to three days, the length of time a person might normally be able to stay awake, or the same period of time considered proper by most cultures prior to burial or cremation of the body. Then separation of the astral aspect follows, which is sometimes called purgatory or kamaloca and lasts about one-third of that person's life, the relative period of time most persons spend in sleep. Roszell discusses these explanations but does not attempt to prove them, because "as Rudolf Steiner explained, spiritual truths cannot be proven once and for all; they can only be experienced" (p. 70).

In addition to drawing upon Steiner's teachings, Roszell also draws upon well known contemporaries in the growing field of near-death studies, such as Melvin Morse, Kenneth Ring, Michael Sabom, Moody, and of course Ritchie. Roszell also draws meaningfully from such other notables as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Carl Jung, Swami Prabhavananda, Albert Einstein, Carl Sagan, Isaac Newton, Plato, and Galileo. Thus Roszell's short 91 pages reflect breadth and depth of both research and thought.

The Near-Death Experience specifically addresses not only the question of "why?" but also the question of "why not?" Many people return from an apparent death and do not recall any aspect of an NDE. The question arises whether they experienced an NDE and simply failed to recall it, or whether they will experience a life after permanent physical death. Roszell writes that, unlike those fortunate to have an NDE or other transformative experience, "others never wake up" (p. 73). Finally, what of those reported NDEs resulting from real fright of death but where there were no physical or mental pathological conditions? Roszell addresses these tangential questions in a fashion that makes his book required reading for anyone seriously interested in the study of NDEs.