

Otherworld Personal Future Revelations in Near-Death Experiences

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ABSTRACT: Kenneth Ring (1982) described two kinds of precognitive visions in the near-death experience (NDE): the personal flashforward and the prophetic vision. I describe a third category, the otherworld personal future revelation (OPFR). The OPFR resembles the personal flashforward in that it previews the experiencer's personal future, but differs from the personal flashforward in that it is delivered to the experiencer by another personage in the otherworld rather than appearing in the visual imagery of a life review. The OPFR differs from the prophetic vision in having a personal rather than planetary focus. I cite four historic accounts to illustrate major features of the OPFR: entrance into the otherworld, encounter with others who foretell the experiencer's future, and later occurrence of the foretold events.

Kenneth Ring (1980) labelled the apparent preview of an individual's future during the life review portion of his or her near-death experience (NDE) as "flashforwards." The life review is one of the common elements of the NDE, in which the experiencer sees an extremely vivid, real, and extraordinarily rapid visual display depicting various events of his or her life often extending back into very early childhood. Ring wrote that "it is as though the individual is lifted out of the ongoing daily stream of mundane life and, for one moment outside of time, sees something like a life trajectory, extending in either direction from the present" (1988, p. 5).

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Ring called a life review that goes from the present to the past a "flashback" (1980, p. 67). A life review that goes from the present to the future he called a "flashforwards," as illustrated by the following case of a woman who had an NDE while recovering from surgery:

At one point during her NDE, she found herself facing what she described as an "enormous television screen." On the screen she was shown—in vivid color—various scenes from her life in a very rapid sequence of realistic images. Following that display, the screen disappeared but was followed by a second screen. That one, however, was dark and the images—in black and white this time—were much murkier and more difficult to discern. Nevertheless, she remembers being shown, among other events, the deaths of two members of her family (who were not ill at the time of this woman's NDE) and told that she would play a special role in caring for these persons during their terminal illnesses. This NDEr averred to me that these events, apparently disclosed during her flashforwards, did indeed come to pass. (Ring, 1988, p. 5)

In George Gallup's nationwide survey on beliefs and attitudes toward the afterlife with a special focus on those who had had NDEs, he found about 2 percent, or approximately a half million adult Americans, experienced during an NDE a premonition about some future event or events. Gallup further elaborated this point by saying that "there is occasionally a tendency for the person's thought patterns to be jarred out of the present altogether. In those cases, a flash of insight into some future event may be the result" (Gallup and Proctor, 1982, p. 32). For example, some of the people in the Gallup poll reported "that during near-death encounters or other related experiences, they learned of events that were in the process of happening at some distance or would happen in the future" (Gallup and Proctor, 1982, p. 54).

Ring (1982) described two types of precognitive near-death visions: the personal flashforward and the prophetic vision. The first type pertains solely to the personal future of the individual experiencer, while the prophetic vision has a planetary focus and pertains to a picture of the earth's future. Prophetic visions have been reported by a number of researchers, including John Audette (1982), Margot Grey (1985), Raymond Moody (Moody and Perry, 1988), and Melvin Morse (Morse and Perry, 1992), and we now know that they are usually reported to occur during or immediately following an NDE and are apparently disclosed only in a relatively small proportion of cases involving deep NDEs. Prophetic visions take the form of a distinct vision and tend to follow a single common scenario, reproduced by Ring as follows:

There is, first of all, a sense of having total knowledge, but specifically one is aware of seeing the entirety of the earth's evolution and history,

from the beginning to the end of time. The future scenario, however, is usually of short duration, seldom extending much beyond the beginning of the twenty-first century. The individual reports that in this decade there will be an increasing incidence of earthquakes, volcanic activity and generally massive geophysical changes. There will be resultant disturbances in weather patterns and food supplies. The world economic system will collapse, and the possibility of nuclear war or accident is very great (respondents are not agreed on *whether* a nuclear catastrophe will occur). All of these events are transitional rather than ultimate, however, and they will be followed by a new era in human history, marked by human brotherhood, universal love, and world peace. Though many will die, the earth will live. While agreeing that the dates for these events are not fixed, most individuals feel that they are likely to take place during the 1980s. (Ring, 1982, pp. 55-56)

Otherworld Personal Future Revelations

Ring's classification of precognitive near-death visions, accepted by most near-death researchers, does not recognize a third category of flashforwards, which I call "otherworld personal future revelations" (OPFRs). OPFRs resemble Ring's personal flashforwards in that they preview a personal event or events in the individual experiencer's future life on earth. However, OPFRs differ from personal flashforwards in three major respects. First, OPFRs do not occur during the life review feature of the NDE. Second, the future events in the OPFR are revealed to the experiencer during a visit to the otherworld, or during what Ring (1980) called Stage 5, "entering the light." Third, the NDEr is told of a future personal event or events by deceased relatives or friends or by an otherworld escort.

OPFRs also bear some resemblance to prophetic visions in that they preview the future, but they differ in their focus. Prophetic visions have a planetary focus, whereas OPFRs do not.

Ring stated that "flashforwards do seem to represent a genuine precognitive aspect of NDEs and merit further study" (1988, p. 6). I suggest that OPFRs merit study for essentially the same reason: they exist as a part of the NDE even though they may be relatively rare. This article presents an initial description of the OPFR.

Historical Accounts of Otherworld Personal Future Revelations

To illustrate OPFRs, I will recount the cases of four historical NDEs from the period between 1909 and 1923. The first NDE is that of a Kree

Indian chief from Canada, who described the following account in 1909:

The year before our company came here first, I was taken very sick, and was told by some of my Indian friends who had been dead many years, that I would soon be better, but I would get sick again some day, and that when I did again, I would die, but my friends should not think I was dead and bury me for I was not to be buried till my body was cold all over. When I woke up I called my family together and also the council of five chiefs, of which I was a member, for our tribe now lived in Manitoba, and I told them of my dream, and they laughed at me and didn't believe me, but I was afraid. Time went on and one day some time afterward, I was taken very sick, and I at once feared my dream would come true, so I warned my family not to be in a hurry to bury me even if I died, till they were sure I was cold all over. So I got weaker and weaker till I left my body, and I went away among a lot of Indians that I knew were dead; some I knew and some I didn't, as they had been dead so long, but they were not dead at all, and they told me to die was only to leave the body for your folks to take care of, and I would be where they were, but as for me, I had to go back and use my body again for several years. They said I was to go among the white people till I found a book that told of the history of these dead Indians who were not dead. I asked them how I would know the people who had the book, and they gave me five keys by which I would know the people who had the book that would tell my live Indian friends all about who they were and about their dead relatives, as follows:

- 1st: They will let you camp on their own lands, and trap and hunt.
- 2nd: They will treat you like one of them in business with them.
- 3rd: They will invite you in their meetings and ask you to speak.
- 4th: They will invite you to sit with them at their tables to eat.
- 5th: They will visit you in your camp and their men will not bother your women nor molest any of you.

When you find this kind of people, have them meet in your council, and tell you what they believe, and they will tell you about this book.

I then woke up and found my wife and my friends had about decided to bury me as I had been dead several days and was cold all over except for a small place over my heart, but when I came back to life and told them where I had been and that our Indian relatives were not dead at all, they wondered at me and when I told them I would pick about 20 families and would travel till I found the book, they again wondered, but as they all believed in a God, they would follow me, so in due time, we made up our company and started and made many camps, and traveled many seasons, but it was hard to find a people who answered the five keys till we landed among you, as we find not many people who are true friends of the Indian. (Crowther, 1967, pp. 142-143)

In this NDE account, the experiencer found himself in the other-world, where he was told by many deceased Indians to find and identify

a people with a book that contained a history of his people; and eventually those future events occurred.

A second NDE that contains an OPFR is that of a Canadian woman, in the following account related by her granddaughter:

As they moved, the family continued to grow, until by 1913, while living in Alberta, Canada, Bertha had given birth to 13 children. After much deliberation, she decided that life was just too difficult for her to bring any more children into the world.

It wasn't long afterwards that Bertha became seriously ill. I don't remember the nature of the illness, only that it was sufficiently serious that a nurse whom Bertha called Sister Edwards came to the home to care for her. In those days, in remote rural communities, going to hospitals was usually out of the question.

With Sister Edwards sitting beside her bed, Bertha suddenly realized she was rising in the air above her bed, the pain and discomfort of a few moments earlier was suddenly gone. As she looked down at her bed, she could see Sister Edwards sitting beside the bed.

Thinking Bertha had died, Sister Edwards later said she wanted to call the others into the house, but was prompted to do nothing. She had a peaceful feeling that everything would be all right if she just waited a few minutes.

Bertha felt relieved. The pain was gone. She was so full of peace, that she had no particular desire to return to her body.

She was greeted by a woman who escorted her into a large room where she was greeted by many of her departed friends. One was a young man she had befriended and encouraged to develop his artistic talents. He was sitting in front of an easel, painting. Though he was very happy to see Bertha, he quickly returned to his work as though his time was very precious.

Bertha was then taken into another room where there were many children. On the far side of the room she saw two little girls, whom she did not know. They were so beautiful she could not look away from them.

"Do you want them?" the guide asked.

"Yes. Oh, yes," she responded quickly. "Can I return to earth life and have them?"

"Yes," said the escort. "That is the purpose of this visit, to let you see them. Now we must return." Bertha returned to her body, much to the relief of Sister Edwards. After recovering from the illness, Bertha told Jonathan [her husband] she wanted more children.

A year later, after moving to Oakley, Idaho, Bertha gave birth to a new little girl whom she named Alberta. Two years later she delivered another little girl, LaVirle. For the remainder of her life, Bertha insisted these were the two little girls she had seen in the large room. (Nelson, 1988, pp. 37-39)

As in the previous NDE account, the experiencer in this case was told by her escort in the otherworld that she could have as her earthly children the two little girls she saw in that otherworld; and those foretold events later occurred.

A third illustration of an OPFR is that of a man who had an NDE in 1920. He wrote:

On Aug. 7, 1920, I was moving in a hay derrick under a live electric wire, the derrick pole caught on the wire and consequence was I received a shock that threw me in the air, then I fell under the derrick frame and the boys that were with me seeing the situation urged the horses up a few feet which left me pinned under the frame, until they received help.

The boys who were with me were Henry Merchant, a hired man, LeGrande Stirland, a brother-in-law, and my two boys Lyman and Ray. They all said I was dead. LeGrande took my boys away from the terrible scene while the Merchant boy went to the nearest house to telephone for a Doctor and for help. I lay there about an hour before the Doctors Eliason and Wallace Budge came. They at once lifted me out from under the derrick and took me to the Utah Idaho Hospital. . . .

While my body was under the derrick and they thought me dead, I had an experience in the spirit world which I wish to relate.

My spirit left the body and I could see it lying under the derrick and at that moment my guardian angel, my mother and my sister Ann were beside me. My mother died Jan. 31, 1918 and my sister at the age of four years. I saw that her spirit was full grown in stature, and also seemed very intelligent. (Crowther, 1967, p. 5)

This NDEr was told by his deceased mother that his brother John

who has been somewhat careless in a religious way would someday take a turn in regard to him and his family. Also at the death of my father, my brother William would have the privilege of being in charge of the records. (Crowther, 1967, p. 111)

In addition, this NDEr was told by his deceased mother that his father would receive another large record of their dead relatives, and another guide in the otherworld told him that another earthly acquaintance would receive a similar record (Crowther, 1967). These future events later came to pass as previewed in this NDE (L. Zollinger, personal communication, April 11, 1992).

A final illustration of an OPFR is that of a man who was apparently in the otherworld for only a few moments in 1923 and then returned to mortality. He gave this account of his NDE:

One evening just before Christmas while addressing an audience at the old Farmers' Ward chapel on South State Street, I was stricken with intense pain from a strangulated hernia. That night I underwent an abdominal operation. My condition was so serious and my chances of living so slight that the doctors did not remove the afflicted section. They

simply sewed up the wound, feeling that it was only a matter of a few hours at most before I would die.

Next morning when I awoke my family and others were kneeling about my bed and Bishop LeGrand Richards of the Sugarhouse Ward was praying for my recovery.

At midnight I was fully awake. I heard the Christmas chimes and felt the nurse taking my pulse and temperature. Suddenly, a coldness attacked my feet and hands. It moved up my limbs and up my arms towards my body. I felt it reach my heart. There was a slight murmur. I gasped for breath and lapsed into unconsciousness, so far as things mortal.

As I turned my head in the direction I intended to go, I saw my little daughter, Elna, who had died twenty-one years before. She was more mature than when she passed away, and was most beautiful to my eyes, so full of life, intelligence, and sweetness. As she came towards me she raised her right hand and said, "Go back, Papa, I want Richard first. Then Grandma must come, and then Mama is coming, before you."

The next thing I knew was my body gasping for breath. I felt my heart action start and was conscious of the coldness leaving my body. All numbness left me and the natural warmth returned. I felt the nurse shaking me and heard her say, "Mr. Monson, you must not let yourself slip like that again." . . .

For five weeks I remained in the hospital, gaining a little strength each day. . . . Mrs. Monson visited me every day with my son Richard. She was told by the doctor, C.F. Wilcox, that there was no hope for my recovery, and of course, her visits were attended with deep emotion.

Many times little Richard, for he was barely six years old, took my hand and pressed it affectionately against his cheek. "Daddy," he would say anxiously, "you're not going to die, are you?" I could not control my emotions, try as I would, but I managed to say, "No, Dick, it is not my turn."

Four weeks after I returned home, my boy, Richard passed away. During the last hours of his life he sat up in bed, opened his big blue eyes and looked toward the door with intense interest. "Come in, Elna," he said, "there's only papa and mama here."

I asked him whom he could see and he answered, "Elna is there. It's funny you can't see her. And there are a whole lot of people with her who want me to come."

He called his mother to the bed and put his arms around her neck. "Can I go with Elna?" he asked.

"Yes, my dear," she answered, "you have suffered enough."

"Then I'll go. And I'll be happy if you will promise not to cry once for me," he pleaded.

Mrs. Monson gave him the promise he wished and left the room.

"Daddy," he said to me, "come here. I guess mama has gone out to cry."

He paused a moment, then turned and looked in the direction of the door and listened intently at something he evidently heard.

"Dear old daddy," he went on at length, "so you promised at the hospital I could go. Now I know why you cried when I said, 'You are not going to die, are you, daddy?'"

Three hours later his eyes closed in eternal sleep.

How he knew that I wept because I had been told by Elna that he was to go first and that my coming back was equivalent to a promise that he might precede me to the great beyond, can only be explained through knowledge given him from Elna herself, for he knew nothing of the circumstance of what I saw and heard while my spirit was separated from my body at the hospital.

Three weeks after his passing, I visited my mother, Ellen Monson, at Preston, Idaho. Mother had been a sufferer for many years, but her constitution was strong and the doctor had told her that she had every chance of living for ten or fifteen years. She lamented the fact that she was spared, while my boy was taken. She said she had desired to die for twenty-two years. Without realizing what I said, I made her this promise: "Mother, you haven't twenty-two days to suffer."

Nineteen days from that time, mother left us. And six years from the time of mother's death, Mrs. Monson passed away. (Crowther, 1967, pp. 145-146)

Just these few illustrations reveal a general pattern of the OPFR, whose major features might be described as follows: A person who is near death as a result of being ill, seriously injured, or some similar circumstance finds him- or herself outside the physical body, whereupon that person enters into the otherworld and encounters others who foretell a future event or events in the experiencer's life that eventually occur in his or her lifetime.

Conclusion

Moody and Paul Perry wrote that even "as science struggles to get a handle on near-death experiences, it cannot even begin to grasp flash-forwards during NDEs" (1988, p. 25). Ring attempted to explain the personal flashforwards and offered a variety of interpretations of prophetic visions. But I suggest that this kind of conjecture is not required for the OPFR, where a personal future revelation is given to the NDER while in the otherworld and is later fulfilled after the return to this world. It is, I suggest, simple and straightforward, nothing more nor less than an otherworld personal future revelation. These OPFRs should be recognized by near-death researchers as a third category in the classification of near-death precognitive visions.

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