

NDEs: Useful knowledge – three examples

That simply the knowledge of these reports can be helpful is something I have often experienced. Three quite different examples make this clear.

I had been speaking to a group of patients with tumours. After the presentation an older patient came to me and pointing at the door to the room where I had given the talk, she told me how full of fear she had been as she had come through the door. Mainly because of her illness, she had been dreading the remainder of her life, dying and death. Now, after the talk and the discussion, she could go home with confidence. 'The fear is quite simply gone' she said to me. What had also contributed to this turnaround in her feelings was the fact that a fellow patient had plucked up the courage to tell of his own NDE, thereby confirming my presentation.

The second case occurred in a school in Hamburg. After the teaching period a boy of about ten years came to me and, through his tears, thanked me most effusively for that which he had heard. Then he gave me the reason. Whenever he woke up at night, he would think of death and have to cry

intensely, because he had come to realize that dying is the destiny of us all. He had never yet dared to speak to his parents, or anyone else, about this in a sensible and helpful way. I asked him if he was of the opinion that I could help him further. He answered almost radiantly that this was no longer necessary, since he had now experienced so much about the transition to another world he would no longer be so sad upon waking in the middle of the night.

The third incident occurred quite dramatically, although still tranquil. Even today I am still churned up inside when I think about what I was told after a talk in a high school in southern Germany, and what happened thereafter. One of the people in the audience was a man of about 25 with a terminal disease of the musculature. He was unable to take part in the discussion, since his breathing was not good enough to allow him to speak loudly. In any case, his breathing was being assisted with a medical appliance. That he was able to even listen to the lecture was solely due to the efforts of a student I knew, who had been befriended with him since doing his community service stint. This student had collected his friend from the place where he was being looked after, put him in a wheelchair and

accompanied him to the lecture hall. At the end of the event I offered to go to the home of the sick man the following morning to discuss any possible questions he might have. He accepted the offer willingly. Imagine how surprised I was, however, as he told me during the agreed meeting (which his friend also attended) that his most vital issue had actually already been settled. He then explained to me the mode of operation of his wheelchair, told me of the times when he was healthier and able to undertake longer journeys. The entire morning developed into a happy chit-chat session. He died a few months ago. On the hard disc of his computer were found many poems written by him, of which no-one had had the slightest inkling. In these poems he describes his inner misery, his love for his fellow man, and his desperate thoughts about a future possible recovery. After the lecture in the high school, he wrote two further poems. I would like to quote here the first two stanzas of his very last text. He describes death in them as 'Dark Angel'. At the beginning he describes again his inner condition and then he writes this little work of art, describing a meaningful, hopeful reversal in his life.

"Dark Angel,
No-one sees this pain within me,
A pain that does not diminish.
Deep wounds in my soul, which do not heal
Cause me to shriek internally in agony.
Oh, my Dark Angel, shall you come?
Shall you come to save me?
Will you destroy the pain
And take me away from here?"

Dark Angel, hold me tight and fly away with me.
Heal my soul, and kiss my tears away.
Give me hold, give me strength and give me love,
So I shall not stumble and lose my hope....."

After his death his friend told me that the thoughts about NDEs had made the last two years of his life more tolerable. His difficult, almost unbearable life had been touched by a ray of hope.

However, the effects of NDEs change people in a different sort of way so that they experience life anew. They have, maybe for the first time, seen a reason for everything which brings joy and hardship to this earth. This does not mean that everything appears to them in a pleasant golden light. They now guess, or even actually know, the

reason why they are here. Every life has a purpose. To find this purpose one has to go looking. NDEs are very useful to this end.

With many people one can observe a sort of inner emptiness, which Viktor Frankl – Viennese psychologist and founder of Logo therapy – calls the 'existential vacuum'. After an NDE this is no longer discernible. Even in our affluent society such a vacuum is frequently to be found. Indications for this are the repeated complaints from younger people about boredom, and also older people with 'midlife crises'. The memory of an encounter with the light, and the knowledge gained from the 'film of life' assist us in now knowing what is to be done in our life, actually in every life, namely – and we have seen this in the text above – the realization of love and the attainment of knowledge and wisdom. Now one has understood that at the end of our earthly existence an unending love awaits us. For many people this opens a whole new outlook on life. The existential vacuum disappears. One develops a social commitment, voluntary work is undertaken, even a change in job may occur in order to do more meaningful work than was done before.