

Interview: Ineke Koedam by Michael Visser

NDE network Australia

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Ineke Koedam studied at the University of Humanistic Studies and is a former hospice coordinator. Since 2003 she has her own practice for death and bereavement. From 2009 till 2011 she carried out Peter Fenwicks (UK) research on end-of-life experiences. Ineke speaks and writes about death, dying and organ donation. She is author of a.o. *In the light of Death, experiences on the Threshold between life and death.*

Why this book and who is it for?

Having learned from all those who experienced near death it's time we became more sensitive to the dying process. In the nearness of the dying we may catch a glimpse of a different reality. It will most likely broaden our consciousness and may completely change our vision on life and death.

From 2009-2011 I carried out Peter Fenwicks (UK) research on deathbed phenomena. Peter Fenwick is a prominent neuro psychiatrist and researcher in the UK, who had been studying near-death experiences for decades before he became intrigued by so called 'end-of-life experiences'. I happen to meet with Peter Fenwick in the Netherlands while we were both to speak at a conference 'Beyond Consciousness'. Not long after we met I began to carry out his research on these wonderful phenomena in the Netherlands.

So, I set out without the intention to write a book. However, after concluding the study I found myself with so much wonderful anecdotal material that I could not refrain from writing about the dying preparing for death. Having been a hospice coordinator myself I learned that death is a process rather than a single event in time and that death may be heralded by specific phenomena that comfort the dying and help to prepare them for their transition from life to death.

'In the Light of Death' contains many accounts and anecdotal evidence of hospice staff and has turned out to be a real contribution to diminishing the fear of dying which is so widely spread in our Western societies.

Further, this research suggests that loving spiritual care is most important. By developing openness and understanding for these kinds of 'end-of-life experiences' we create more room to the needs of the dying. Not only for carers but for whoever is professionally or personally involved with dying, *In the Light of Death* is educational, reassuring and very needed in a time when people are afraid of dying.

Could you elaborate on the miraculous nature of end-of-life-experiences?

I consider myself immensely blessed whenever I experience these kinds of phenomena. And we should, L. Stafford Betty tells us. 'If we don't make the mistake of assuming they are 'confused' we are likely to feel some of the excitement they convey. For we are witnessing the momentary merging of two worlds that at all other times remain tightly compartmentalized and mutually inaccessible.'

End-of life experiences as amply described in this book suggest that these leave a long and lasting impression on the people involved. They are of a subtle, otherworldly quality, they comfort the dying, their loved ones and carers and above all they suggest that death is a passage to alternate forms of existence.

A blue light all around

She was lying on her side and I sat in a chair by her side. She looked at me with her large blue eyes. I told her that her family were on their way and that everything was alright, that I would stay with her and that she was doing fine. I put my hand over hers and felt incredibly close to her. I didn't say much and we just looked at each other ... and we kept on looking. It was as though we were interlocked by this captivation through our eyes. It was so overwhelming and I became very still. I felt as though it lasted for a long time, but it can only have been for a moment. While we were looking at each other, she died. She died, of that I was sure, but she was still looking at me. I will never forget that moment as long as I live. Everything was light, I was light. There was a blue light all around. I was there, and yet I wasn't. So much happened during that

moment, everything lifted away. I felt as though ... oh, there just aren't any words. So I sat there and began to cry, still looking at her. Then the experience ebbed away and I thanked her. (from: In the Light of Death)

These kinds of end-of-life experiences just occur. They seem to be part of the dying process and we are able to experience them when we open ourselves up for the mystery, which is hidden in this passage. That requires to overcome our fear of dying, to go beyond our concepts of who we are and to let go of belief systems. Then we find ourselves in a state of Oneness and this when miracles occur.

Can you give us a brief reflection on the healing and transformation effected by end-of-life experiences?

We distinguish transcended experiences and final meaning experiences. The transcend experiences are, as said, of a subtle, other-wordly quality. These phenomena not only seem to announce impending death but can often calm and alleviate the manner of dying. Phenomena that seem to occur most often, or at least are reported most often, are visions of deceased relatives and occasionally of religious figures.

The apparitions appear to have the express purpose of collecting or taking away the dying person. The fact that the dying can interact with the consciousness of their departed loved ones is not only comforting but leads, not rarely, to new insights about what death might be.

Final-meaning end-of-life experiences are of profound meaning in the sense that they seem to prompt the dying person to finish unfinished business before death. We know that people who are facing death are inclined to not only making peace with their impending death but also tying up loose ends and coming to terms with their lives. Settling unfinished business appears to relieve existential unrest and discomfort and enables the dying to prepare spiritually as death is approaching.

End-of-life experiences, when fully understood and acknowledged, appear to lead to transition with a peaceful mind. I profoundly feel that dying in peace is our ultimate gift to the world. In fact, it is our contribution to world peace. We

cannot solve all the conflicts and chaos in the world and we may not end any wars at all. However, peace starts within ourselves and dying in peace, the most essential experience in our lives, to go through in peace, is our ultimate gift. Where fear subsides, there is love. Love is the healing power, and family, friends and carers may resonate with this state of being. Experiencing end-of-life phenomena reemerges us being receptive to otherworldly realms and to insights what life is all about.

Testimonials:

'Ineke Koedam has a deep understanding of what it is like to die, and her focus is primarily on the emotional and spiritual needs of those who are dying and the way these can be met by those caring for them. This makes her book of inestimable value to us all'.

Peter Fenwick, neuro psychiatrist, author of *The Art of Dying* and many more books/articles.

'I am convinced that this book will make a huge contribution to the acknowledgement and recognition of end-of-life experiences, which can diminish the fear of death even in its final stages.'

Pim van Lommel, cardiologist, author of *Consciousness Beyond Life: The Science of Near-Death Experience*.

'Thank you for your lovely book. It is a heart-felt work that will bring much light, love and comfort to this world'.

Eben Alexander M.D., the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Proof of Heaven*.