

# INSIGHT BOOK REVIEW: Three Books on Near Death and Pre Death Experiences

*Into the Light* by John Lerma MD (2007)

*Messages from the Light* by Christophor Coppes (2011)

*Saved by the Light* by Dannion Brinkley (1994)



PHOTO: HowStuffWorks.com

Late last year (2011) the story of a high school student from my town appeared several times on the local news. The student was Ben Breedlove, who had been born with a heart condition that caused doctors to predict that he would not live beyond his teen years. In December of that year he created a YouTube video called "This Is My Story," which "went viral." In it he described (using only note cards) the near-death experiences that occurred to him during traumatic episodes resulting from his heart condition and concluded the video with the simple question and answer: "Do you believe in Angels or God? I do."

This powerful and unusual story prompted my curiosity about other reports of near-death experiences, so I went to an

online book seller and chose three books from among the many available: *Messages from the Light* by Christophor Coppes (2011), *Into the Light* by John Lerma, MD (2007), and *Saved by the Light* by Dannion Brinkley (1994).

In *Messages from the Light*, Christophor Coppes attempts to sum up and organize the entire body of known near-death experiences (NDEs). His approach appears to be to regard NDEs as evidence of a nonphysical parallel universe that can be known by examining the fragmented descriptions of those who have glimpsed it, almost as I imagine Renaissance Europeans might have tried to understand the New World by analyzing tales from returning explorers.

He describes the typical elements that appear in such experiences, some of which have become almost cultural clichés; for instance, the dark tunnel with a beckoning light at the end. Of course, not all NDEs begin this way, nor do they all contain all of the commonly reported elements. Nevertheless they all display a remarkable consistency. For instance, the “life review,” whereby a loving being of light meets the person and reviews all the events of the individual’s life, is almost universal. This is not done in a judgmental way but in a way that all the consequences of the person’s decisions and actions are experienced firsthand. Another common feature is the insistence by the NDE experiencer that the experience is “more real” than this life.

Coppes picks out messages from NDEs that seem to be of universal interest (as opposed to those that are of interest only to the person involved) and draws his own conclusions from them about how to live a better life in this physical world. He also investigates NDEs that are negative or frightening in character (which do make up a small fraction of reported experiences) and NDEs of those who attempted suicide. He considers an obvious question: If the life on the other side is happier and more real, then why not end one’s own life? Here he notes that whenever this thought comes up during

an NDE, the answer comes back that suicide is a mistake: Everyone has a specific purpose in this life that is short-circuited by exiting prematurely.

Dr. John Lerma, author of *Into the Light* is a palliative-care physician who practices at a large and well-regarded hospice in the Houston area. He is responsible for prescribing pain medication that allows patients to be as comfortable as possible without being comatose and arranging for other care as might be required by the patients or requested by their relatives. His book contains sixteen fairly detailed accounts of individual patients and their near-death experiences, ranging from a nine-year-old boy who had three Angelic buddies and swam with dolphins during his NDE, to a retired Catholic priest who joyfully refused all pain medication because he was convinced that his experience of pain was beneficial to humankind.

Dr. Lerma, by the very nature of his practice, spends a great deal of time at the bedsides of terminally ill people, and so many patients begin to open up and honestly describe their experiences to him. NDEs, at least during the period of time covered in the book, were routinely dismissed as hallucinations or delirium by other MDs, and in the face of such treatment, most patients learned to keep quiet. By maintaining an open mind, Dr. Lerma slowly gained the confidence of these sixteen patients and, by his account, personally much more.

All the near-death experiencers in this book also insist that their experiences are more compelling and real than the life they are about to exit. They report Angelic beings of various forms and statures who appear to them when awake, as well as compelling experiences during sleep. These patients sometimes were also able and willing to let Dr. Lerma ask a question or two himself to a visiting Angelic being.

The figure of Jesus also appeared to two or three patients,

each time at the foot of the bed, unlike the Angelic beings, who appeared in corners or other places in the room. Dr. Lerma asked about this, and the answer was that it was symbolic of the washing of the feet as a sign of respect and that those in the spiritual world hold us in the physical world in high regard. He also once asked another patient, "Why Jesus, and not Buddha or some other great religious figure?" and the answer was, "Dr. Lerma, is that really important?"

Despite there being only sixteen experiences in this book, as opposed to the hundreds that were surveyed in Coppes's book, they make up for that by their depth, the contexts of the persons who experienced them, and the conversational quality of many of them. The phrase "negotiating with Angels" appears more than once in this book. Negotiating not about whether to stay in this world or not but about arrangements to either forgive or provide for their family members before they leave permanently. I get the feeling that there is much wisdom embodied in the experiences documented here—what is said in the context of a person's life, what is said for the benefit of everyone else (presumably including the readers of the book), and what is left unsaid. I plan to visit this book again.

*Saved by the Light* was ghost-written by Mr. Paul Perry, who in his foreword to the book describes wanting to write a book about the best and most revealing near-death experience. Putting this question to Dr. Raymond Moody, the "father of near-death studies," in 1992, Perry found out about Dannion Brinkley. Perry subsequently spent an extensive amount of time with Brinkley, interviewing him, and even living for a period of time in Brinkley's home, sleeping on Brinkley's couch.

Brinkley was by his own admission not the nicest of people. Most of his early life was spent as a contractor for the U.S. Armed Forces, in what seems like a special operations role. In 1975, at the age of twenty-five, Brinkley was struck by lightning while talking on a landline telephone in his home

state of South Carolina. The resulting injuries were severe enough that doctors did not expect him to live, even after he recovered from being clinically dead. It was during this latter event that he had his long and detailed NDE.

The description of his NDE life review consists mostly of the recounting of things that he regrets, such as the numerous fights and other trouble he got into while growing up. After the life review he was ushered into a wondrous lecture hall in a crystal cathedral, where thirteen beings of light behind a podium communicated information to him. The first twelve each presented images of future events such as images of hollow people, who symbolized the Spiritual emptiness of America after the Vietnam War, nuclear and other ecological disasters, and wars in the Middle East and elsewhere. The book jacket states that 117 revelations were given, 100 of which have been realized. Nowhere near 117 are described in the book, and while many of the revelations have come to pass, the dates ascribed to many others in the crystal cathedral have passed without the associated events transpiring.

The thirteenth light being did not have predictions but instead stated that the preceding visions of future events were not necessarily cast in stone—that humans are powerful Spiritual beings. He said that those who go to earth are heroes and heroines who have the courage to go to earth to expand their beings and become cocreators with God. In furtherance of this the thirteenth being went on to direct Brinkley to establish healing centers. There were seven types of rooms to be used in these centers, each being specially designed to perform a specific function.

After this, the NDE ended, and most of the rest of the book is taken up with Brinkley's recovery from the debilitating physical effects of the lightning strike. Like others who have experienced near-death, Brinkley found his experience so compelling that he was moved to try to communicate it and the importance of establishing the healing centers, even though

his ability to talk was shattered. His friends and family described him as constantly babbling like a madman the first few weeks and months after the strike. His ability to walk and speak eventually returned after much effort. This story is of interest in itself; however, I wish that more of the book had been oriented toward describing the healing centers and his progress toward making them a reality.

These three books provide a good enough introduction to NDEs, but there are now available extensive writings on the subject. Coppes's book contains a bibliography and is well documented. Both Dr. Lerma and Dannion Brinkley have published additional books, and there exists a *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, as well as at least two websites that are dedicated to this topic. ([Near Death Experience Research Foundation](#) and [International Association for Near Death Studies](#)).

Cosolargists will not be surprised by the appearance of the word "light" in the titles of these three books as well as many others. There can be little doubt that Spiritual life is composed of light or some form of energy that is closely related to light. Also of note is the report of a vibratory level in some NDEs with higher, brighter beings and regions having a more rapid rate of vibration than lower and darker regions.

Finally, one of the most fascinating aspects of these experiences is the insistence that they represent a form of existence that is more real than physical life. For me this is strong evidence that this physical plane of existence was either created by mistake or for a purpose which has not yet been generally revealed.

Submitted by Ron Theriault