

How to Understand and Experience Love

Peter Fenwick, London, England

The 1960s were the decade of experiment. Drugs and meditation to expand consciousness, and the concept that a new loving social order was around the corner. The 70's with the publication of Raymond Moody's *Life After Life* suggested that expanded states of awareness occurred on the borders of death. It was, so to speak, our heritage. Much water has flowed under the bridge since that time and now, before the end of the century, near death experiences have come of age. The two following articles by MELVIN MORSE and KENNETH RING represent the growing points of the subject. The one looking at the science, a specifically primary quality Galilean paper, and the other a subjective view, post-modernist in form, where the experience of the individual is the data.

Melvin Morse reviews the scientific evidence which suggests that the right temporal lobe is primarily involved. At one time I too was convinced that the right temporal lobe was of prime importance, and in 1985, with several colleagues, published a paper in the *British Journal of Medical Psychology, Sensitives, Psychic Gifts, Psychic Sensitivity and Brain Pathology*, which suggested that right temporal pathology was associated with psychic gifts.

However, current neuroimaging suggests that it is wrong to be too specific about the brain areas involved in very ordinary activities. For a simple understanding of the world, most brain areas are used. From my own experience of epilepsy in the clinic, déjà vu experiences can be both right and left temporal, mystical experiences can be both right and left temporal, hallucinatory experiences, talking to God, with marked emotional content, can be left temporal and not right temporal. Some of the widest experiences that were reported to me by my patients were left rather than right temporal. It is also well known that mystical experiences are part of schizophrenia and here again a left temporal bias is likely.

Recent work by Vollen Weider from Zurich, studying mystical drug states by use of the PET scan, suggests that both temporal and frontal areas are activated in mystical states, although those with hallucinations tend to activate the parieto-sensory areas. Although the near death experience clearly occurs near to death, it also occurs under other, widely different, conditions. In *The Truth in the Light*, (Fenwick and Fenwick, Headline 1995) which was a study of 350 near death experiences, we found that many of the experiencers were not near death and we put forward the hypothesis that near death experiences were on the continuum of mystical experience. This view had the advantage that the near death experience no longer became a special state of consciousness, but became a reflection of an underlying state of consciousness which could be accessed in many different ways. It also had the advantage that all brain processes were part of the correlation and that no brain area was seen to have sole access to the divine. More importantly, the divine could be accessed at any time through a variety of methods and experiences. However, having said that, Melvin Morse marshals a particular aspect of the evidence and attempts to tie it in to a wider physics. This must be the way forward.

Kenneth Ring's article takes an entirely different perspective, and it is one to which I am very sympathetic. It is the empowerment of the individual, the validation of personal experience, the vindication of the post-modern. This viewpoint comes from either having had a near death experience, or a mystical experience in which one's consciousness has touched the deeper aspects of the cosmos. But, as Kenneth Ring says, what about those of us who have

had no such experience? In one of the first prospective studies of near death experiences, carried out by two colleagues of mine and not yet completed, the occurrence of near death experiences is likely to be about 5% of those who recover from a cardiac arrest. So there are many of us - about 95% in fact - who don't have the experiences and who need to learn from other people's. Like Kenneth, I am totally convinced that firstly universal consciousness is a unity, and secondly it is composed essentially of love and light. If only we could remember this and take to heart the lesson that Ken's subjects teach us, the world would be a very different place. Perhaps this is the lesson for the new millennium.

Dr. Peter Fenwick is emeritus consultant in neuropsychiatry and chairman of the Network Council