

Kenneth Ring

Kenneth Ring is a retired American psychology professor who has researched and written extensively about near-death experiences – their content, perceived meaning and implications.

Life and Career

Kenneth Ring was born on 13 December 1935 in San Francisco.^[1] He majored in psychology at the University of California at Berkeley, further studied social psychology at the University of Minnesota and UCLA, and earned his PhD at the University of Minnesota in 1963. By this time he had already started as an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut, where he taught until 1994. After another two years there as professor emeritus, he relocated to the San Francisco area where he still lives.^[2]

Research

Near-Death Experiences

By the late 1960s, Ring found his interests drifting away from psychology and towards the less conventional topics of [altered states of consciousness](#) and transpersonal psychology, the latter of which he ended up teaching. By his own account, he transformed from ‘a typical Jewish professor – wedded to rational thought, committed to science and atheistic in my worldview’ – into a spiritual researcher, the catalyst being a 12-hour unplanned LSD trip in 1972. He writes:

At some point for a moment outside of time I – except there was no ‘I’ any longer – experienced an inrushing of the most intense and overwhelming rapturous LOVE and knew instantly that this was the real world, and that the universe, if I can put it this way, was stitched in the fabric of this love, and that I was home ... There was only this energy of love and ‘I’ was an indissoluble part of it, not separate from it.^[3]

For the next three years Ring tried to make sense of his experience. He then read Raymond Moody’s ground-breaking 1975 book *Life After Life* and saw similar experiences to his own among Moody’s reports of [near-death experiences](#) (NDEs). Deciding that a more structured scientific approach was needed, Ring immediately began to design a study, collaborating with graduate students to locate and analyze 102 NDEs. He published his findings in his 1980 book *Life at Death: A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience*.

From this study, Ring drew several conclusions, all of which have been confirmed by subsequent NDE research. They may be found on his [website homepage](#) and are summarized here:

- People at the point of clinical death tend to experience the moment of death as ‘one of unparalleled beauty, peace and comfort – a feeling of total love and

total acceptance'. They often experience moving through a void or tunnel toward a 'luminous light,' and meeting deceased relatives.

- This experience cuts across race, gender, age, education, marital status, socioeconomic level, and religion (or lack thereof).
- Experiencers often sense the presence of a vast and loving power, and glimpse a future life.
- The experience cannot be explained in terms of anaesthesia or medication, or as a 'hallucination'.
- Lasting aftereffects are almost always transformative and include loss of fear of death, greater appreciation of life, greater self-acceptance, greater love for others, and stronger spiritual inclination.

Ring's second NDE-related book, *Heading Toward Omega*, ventures beyond science and somewhat into advocacy. Drawing from his exploration of the meanings of NDEs, he envisions societal transformation brought about by general knowledge of the nature of the experience as well as the personal transformations experienced by NDErs. He writes: 'It could be that eight million NDErs may be to the world what that hundredth monkey was to his islands. The myth at least gives us hope of possibility and if it should become widely enough shared, it could begin to generate its own reality'.^[4]

Near-Death Experiences and UFOs

Ring's comparison of the sequelae of NDEs and claimed UFO encounters has gained new relevance with the recent public investigations of UFOs/UAPs in the USA. In his 1992 book on the subject, *The Omega Project*, Ring reports on a study in which he found not only a shift in worldview to more holistic, positive, spiritual and loving in both groups, but a tendency to somehow cause electronics around them to malfunction, increased psychic abilities such as [healing](#) or [psychokinesis](#), expanded mental functioning, altered body temperature and blood pressure, and decreased need for sleep. He also delineates an 'NDE-prone' (and also UFO-prone) personality type, sensitized to paranormal experiences and often (but not always) a victim of abuse in childhood free of psychological pathology.^[5]

NDEs in Blind People

Ring and Sharon Cooper (who conducted the interviews) performed a study of 31 visually-impaired and fully blind people who had experienced NDEs or [out-of-body experiences](#) (OBEs). Sixteen of the subjects had experienced both NDEs and OBEs, ten OBEs only and five NDEs only, and about half had been blind from birth. The results are described in the pair's 1999 book *Mindsight: Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences in the Blind*. They conclude that blind people's NDEs have the typical features as described above, and in some of their cases, people blind from birth described perceptions that were clearly visual. In the book, different explanations for this 'mindsight' are considered and discussed.^[6]

Ring has done studies on other aspects of NDEs including [distressing NDEs](#), NDEs of suicide survivors, NDEs and [precognition](#), NDEs and [psychedelic substances](#), veridical perceptions in NDEs, religious aspects of NDEs, effects of NDEs on associates of the experiencer, and more.

Organizational Work

Ring was instrumental in the founding of the organization now known as the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). He was present at an initial meeting in November 1977 in Charlottesville, Virginia, USA, along with [Bruce Greyson](#), Raymond Moody, Michael Sabom and John Audette, who was the first president. In 1980, Audette handed the reins to Ring, who renamed the organization IANDS and procured office space for it at the University of Connecticut. A brief history of IANDS and its foundation from the viewpoints of its presidents may be read [here](#).^[7]

Works

Select Books

Short descriptions of these and other books by Ring can be found on his website [here](#).

Life at Death: A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience (1980). New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan.

Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience (1984). New York: William Morrow & Co.

The Omega Project: Near-Death Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind At Large (1992). New York: William Morrow & Co.

Mindsight: Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences in the Blind (1999, with Sharon Cooper). Self-published through iUniverse, Bloomington, Indiana, USA.

Lessons from the Light: What We Can Learn from the NDE (2006, with Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino). Needham, Massachusetts, USA: Moment Point Press.

[Waiting to Die: A Near-Death Researcher's \(Mostly Humorous\) Reflections on His Own Endgame](#) (2019). Tuscon, Arizona, USA: Wheatmark. (All fifteen essays which form the book may be read on Ring's website by clicking on the link.)

Select Short Works

[Religiousness and near-death experiences: An empirical study](#) (1980). *Theta* 8/3, 3-5.

[Precognitive and prophetic visions in near-death experiences](#) (1982). *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies* 2, 47-74.

[Do suicide survivors report near-death experiences?](#) (1980, with S Franklin). *Omega* 12/3, 191-208.

[Near-death experiences: implications for human evolution and planetary transformation](#) (1986). *ReVISION* 8/2, 75-85.

[The omega project: an empirical study of the NDE-prone personality](#) (1990). *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 8/4, 211-39.

[Further evidence for veridical perception during NDEs](#) (1993, with M Lawrence). *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11/4, 223-29.

A full collection of Ring's scholarly papers, book reviews and book chapters can be found on his website [here](#).

Website

Kenneth Ring's well-stocked website can be visited [here](#). Contents include his [books](#); his [publications](#) including papers published in the IANDS journal, the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, papers published in other journals, book reviews by him, reviews of his books by others, and book chapters by him; a comprehensive [collection of links](#) to sites about NDEs, post-mortem survival and other related topics; a [multimedia page](#) with video and radio interviews and documentaries; and his [blog](#).

KM Wehrstein

Literature

Alexander, J.B. (1993). [The Omega Project: Near-Death Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind at Large, by Kenneth Ring](#). [Review]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11/4 (Summer), 247-50.

Grosso, M. (1985). [Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience by Kenneth Ring](#). [Review]. *Anabiosis - The Journal for Near-Death Studies* 5/1 (Spring), 49-64.

Ring, K. (1984). *Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience*. New York: William Morrow & Co.

Ring, K. (2011). [How I came to spend my life among the once nearly dead: Ken Ring's story](#). *Neuroquantology* 9/3 (September) 419-24. [Preserved on the Internet Archive.]

Ring, K. (2020a). [The official website of Dr. Kenneth Ring](#). [Webpage on Ring's website.]

Ring, K. (2020b). [The biography and professional life of Dr. Kenneth Ring](#). [Webpage on Ring's website.]

Twemlow, S. (2002). [Mindsight: Near-Death and OBEs in the Blind by Ken Ring, Sharon Cooper](#) [Review]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 21/1 (Fall), 43-46.

Endnotes

Footnotes

1. ^ Ring (2020a).
2. ^ Ring (2020b). All information in this section is drawn from this source except where otherwise noted.
3. ^ Ring (2011), 420.
4. ^ Ring (1984), 263. For an interesting contextualizing review, see Grosso (1985).
5. ^ See Alexander (1993).
6. ^ See Twemlow (2002).
7. ^ All information in this section is drawn from this source.

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