

Review *Life after Loss*

Life after Loss: Finding Hope through Life after Life by Raymond Moody and Dianne Arcangel (Rider, 2002, 0-7126-0272-0), xii + 228 pp.; £9.99.

Reviewed by the Revd Neil Broadbent of the Sozein Healing Trust, Council member of CFPSS.

Dr Larry Dossey in his Foreword claims ‘There is no better practical guide for confronting pain and loss than [this] fine book. The [authors] write from personal insight and experience, and they have immense wisdom to share.’ Why then am I reminded of candy floss and does my heart sink?

There are chapters on ‘Early Grief Experiences’, ‘The Stress of Grief’, ‘Grief Carries Strong Emotions’ and ‘The Many faces of Loss’. In these first 78 pages there is much pop psychology (not of itself a bad thing) showing that grief is a common strand throughout life’s ventures, full of powerful emotions. Four pages cover religion and spirituality. Either side of a chapter on ‘Functional versus Dysfunctional Grief’ was good stuff on ‘Giving and Receiving Sympathy’ and ‘Adjusting to the Loss’. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’ five stages of mourning, whilst far from the only model, has stood the test of time.

Chapter 8 tells us survivors eventually reach restoration or transcendence. The next lists, in brief paragraphs, ‘The Blessings Received from Loss’: gain sensitivity, fragility of the human body, become less materialistic, humility, passion is enriched, clarification of self, desire to serve others, wisdom is acquired, etc. The final chapter glimpses at Near-Death Experiences and ‘Characteristics of Death Coincidents’.

I briefly wondered if this was a book from the Hogwartian school of spells and wizardry. Though full of short, personal anecdotes of grief experiences, this volume seems as if all the tales are composed in varying shades of pretty or sickly pink. There is no sense of the gravitas, the solemnity of loss of life. Nor is there any wrestling with God, any feel for the numinous: nurturing the soul is dealt with in one page and *GriefNet* – a website – in its one mention gets one more than God.

Psychic experiences are not critically assessed: there is a real need for a group such as the CFPSS to publicise traditional spiritual criteria for discerning the quality of paranormal happenings. The psychic is no substitute for the spiritual.

On the plus side, the pages 162-171 on ‘Death Coincidents’ was news to this reviewer. This is ‘when family members or friends accompany their dying loved one into the other realm and then return to their bodies’.

The 36 pages of supportive resources, largely American publications, may be the most useful part of the book to CP readers or researchers.