

# The End-of-Life Co-Experience

Diane Elliott (2026)

British Transpersonal Association/ELCEP

## Abstract

This paper introduces End-of-Life Co-Experience (ELCE) as a transformative, relational, and transpersonal phenomenon occurring around the dying process. Distinct from Shared Death Experiences (SDEs), ELCE repositions death as a relational event that can involve non-verbal, telepathic, and field-consciousness elements. Drawing from Transpersonal Psychology, Christian mystical traditions, and emerging research in quantum field theory,

This paper proposes that ELCE offers a bridge to transcendence in an era of declining religious affiliation. We integrate the Seven Transpersonal Stages framework to map how ELCE unfolds psychologically and spiritually for both the Experiencer (the dying individual) and the Co-Experiencer (those witnessing or participating in the event). The model also highlights the interplay between ELCE, telepathy, and the right hemisphere of the brain, suggesting a shift away from left-hemisphere-dominant, language-based cognition toward relational and non-verbal modes of knowing. Finally, we propose ELCE as a continuation of mystical experiences documented across religious traditions and explore its implications for modern spirituality, mental health, and consciousness studies.

## Introduction: A New Way of Understanding Death

Historically, religious traditions have provided frameworks for understanding the transition between life and death. Rituals, prayers, and eschatological beliefs have served to orient both the dying and the bereaved toward a greater cosmic order. However, with the decline of religious affiliation in many contemporary societies, experiences of death and dying often lack a shared existential or spiritual framework capable of holding their deeper relational and meaning-laden dimensions.

At the same time, emerging work across Transpersonal Psychology, phenomenology, and process-relational philosophy has begun to question whether consciousness is best understood as a private, brain-bound phenomenon, or whether it may also be relational, participatory, and context-sensitive. Within this broader re-emergence of *mind-at-large* perspectives, questions arise not only about what consciousness is, but about what kinds of human capacities are required to participate meaningfully in expanded or liminal states of awareness.

This paper introduces the concept of *Transpersonal Intelligence (TQ)* as a descriptive term for a developmental capacity through which individuals are able to orient to meaning, ethical presence, and relational coherence within non-ordinary or liminal states of consciousness. TQ is not proposed here as a cognitive ability or measurable trait, but as a mode of participatory knowing that becomes especially salient when self-referential processing softens and awareness reorganises relationally.

End-of-Life Co-Experience (ELCE) is introduced in this paper as one such context in which this capacity appears to become experientially accessible. Unlike traditional religious doctrines that externalise spiritual meaning, ELCE is experiential, relational, and embodied. It reframes death not as a purely individual biological event, but as a relational threshold in which shared states of awareness may arise between the dying person and those present with them.

This paper does not seek to establish definitive ontological claims about consciousness or the afterlife. Instead, it offers ELCE as a phenomenological and relational reframing of end-of-life experience, one that highlights how certain forms of presence, attentional organisation, and

meaning-making may emerge at the threshold of death. In doing so, it situates ELCE within a broader transpersonal and process-oriented conversation about consciousness as participatory, developmental, and relational in nature.

This paper will:

1. Define of End-of-Life Co-Experience (ELCE)
2. Differentiate ELCE from Shared Death Experiences (SDEs).
3. Provide Information On Integration Driven Versus Data Driven Follow-Up
4. Examine the role of non-verbal, telepathic, and field-consciousness elements in ELCE.
5. The Seven Transpersonal Stages framework illustrating ELCE's psychological and spiritual trajectory.
6. Explore ELCE's alignment with Christian mystical traditions.
7. Reflect Upon Cross-Cultural Perspectives on ELCE
8. Review Clinical and Ethical Applications of ELCE
9. Consider Emerging Research: AI & Neuroscience of ELCE
10. Offer a Conclusion: The Future of ELCE as a Bridge Between Science, Spirituality, and Relational Consciousness

## **1. Definition of End-of-Life Co-Experience (ELCE)**

ELCE is a transpersonal, relational phenomenon in which a Co-Experiencer - a person witnessing, joining, or being drawn into the end-of-life process - perceives or participates in the dying person's transition in ways that transcend ordinary consciousness. Rather than a solitary event, ELCE reveals death as an inherently shared and interconnected experience, dissolving the perceived boundaries between self and other, life and death. These experiences may involve altered states of consciousness, a profound sense of presence or love, telepathic awareness, shared visions, or an intuitive knowing of the Experiencer's (the dying person's) transition. ELCE arises naturally when conditions foster openness, deep connection, and receptivity to transpersonal awareness, independent of specific belief systems. Rooted in The Seven Transpersonal Stages - Imagination, Curiosity, Creativity, Expanded States of Consciousness, Wisdom, Spirituality, and Love - ELCE offers a transformative lens through which to understand death, not as an end, but as a threshold of profound relational significance. It invites us to reconsider consciousness as participatory and field-like, where the living and the dying may momentarily merge in a co-experience of transition

## 2. Differentiating ELCE from Shared Death Experiences (SDEs)

While ELCE shares similarities with SDEs, it is conceptually distinct. Raymond Moody (2010) and others have documented SDEs as experiences in which bystanders witness a dying person's transition, often involving visual, auditory, or out-of-body phenomena. However, ELCE expands beyond this definition by focusing on the relational and co-experiential nature of the event.

Key distinctions include:

- 2.1- Mirror Neurons, the Default Mode Network and ELCE's
- 2.2 - ELCE is not about 'receiving' imagery from the dying person but stepping into a transpersonal field of consciousness that exists beyond both parties.
- 2.3 - Most of the current experiencers are interviewed for raw data, for the content of the ELCE, not the ongoing integration and insights into field of consciousness or ongoing community support.

### 2.1 Why ELCE Is Fundamentally Different from Raymond Moody's Model of SDEs as an Empathic Transfer of Mirror Neurons

**The Mirror Neuron System (MNS):** Mirror neurons are specialised cells that activate both when an individual performs an action and when they observe the same action performed by others. This mirroring mechanism is believed to play a crucial role in understanding others' actions, intentions, and emotions, thereby facilitating empathy and social learning.

**The default mode network (DMN):** A brain network associated with self-referential thinking, egoic identity, and autobiographical memory, has been found to exhibit reduced activity or total deactivation under the influence of psychedelics like psilocybin, LSD, and DMT. This reduction is often correlated with ego dissolution, the experience of a diminished sense of self and increased interconnectedness with the surrounding environment or a greater, transpersonal reality.

### DMN Deactivation in Psychedelic Studies

- **Loss of Ego Boundaries:** Participants report experiences of unity, transcendence, and dissolution of self-other distinctions.
- **Increased Connectivity:** The brain shifts from a hierarchical, constrained mode of processing to a more global, hyperconnected state, often resembling states observed in deep meditation or near-death experiences.
- **Transpersonal Experiences:** Many subjects report encounters with ineffable realms, deceased relatives, or a profound sense of love and connection beyond personal identity.

**Default Mode Network (DMN):** The DMN is a network of brain regions, including the medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate cortex, and angular gyrus, that shows increased activity during rest and self-referential mental processes, such as daydreaming, recalling personal memories, and envisioning the future. It is typically deactivated during goal-directed tasks requiring external attention.

**Interaction Between MNS and DMN:** Recent studies in social cognitive neuroscience suggest that the MNS and DMN are both involved in social cognition but serve different functions. The MNS is primarily engaged in action observation and imitation, allowing individuals to directly understand others' behaviors through embodied simulation. In contrast, the DMN is implicated in inferring others' mental states, traits, and intentions, processes often referred to as mentalising or theory of mind.

These networks may operate in a complementary manner. For instance, when observing someone perform an action, the MNS becomes active to simulate the action, while the DMN may be recruited to infer the underlying intentions or future plans of the observed individual. This suggests a dynamic interplay where the MNS provides a direct, embodied understanding of observed actions, and the DMN contributes to higher-order cognitive processes related to social interpretation.

This view is supported by a 2013 paper from *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* entitled 'Self-Processing and the Default Mode Network: Interactions with the Mirror Neuron System, which states that the "MNS and the DMN are functionally connected and dynamically interact during social-cognitive processing."

### **Mirror Neuron Hypothesis for End of Life Co-Experiences**

In his book, *Glimpses of Heaven*, Raymond Moody's account states, "It might be mirror neurons that explain shared death experiences. It is through these neurons that a form of thought transfer might take place at the moment of death, allowing the dying person's thoughts and feelings to become available to a person who is truly empathic." Moody suggests that mirror neurons facilitate a kind of thought transference at the moment of death, this emphasises social cognition, perspective-taking, and a self-other distinction.

If we accept Moody's model, the assumption is that Co-Experiencers receive thoughts and feelings from the dying individual via a heightened empathic response, enabled by mirror neurons. However, activated mirror neurons are known to also activate the DMN...and, it is a **deactivated - not an activated DMN**, which is shown to correlate with ego dissolution, the experience of a diminished or loss of a sense of self and increased interconnectedness with a 'Field of Consciousness' and aligns with reports from people who have experienced an ELCE (from the author of the paper observing many ELCE interviews and accounts and also from integration sessions with people who've had psychedelic experiences)

### **Similarities and Differences of ELCE's and Psychedelic Experiences.**

a comparative analysis of End-of-Life Co-Experiences (ELCE) and Psychedelic Experiences, focusing on their shared characteristics, differences, and implications for consciousness studies. Comparing End-of-Life Co-Experiences (ELCE) and Psychedelic Experiences Both ELCEs and psychedelic experiences involve profound shifts in consciousness, an expanded sense of reality, and potential encounters with non-ordinary states. The similarities between the two suggest a possible neurophysiological and transpersonal bridge between the dying process and altered states of perception.

**Key Similarities:***Altered States of Consciousness and Ego Dissolution:*

ELCE: Deeply altered states, heightened awareness, expansion of perception and loss of self, requiring surrender, sense of self may dissolve into a relational field.

Psychedelics: Intense altered states, loss of egoic boundaries, requiring complete surrender.

*Encounters with Non-Physical Entities*

ELCE: Perceived presence of the dying person's consciousness, deceased loved ones, or other guiding intelligences.

Psychedelics: Encounters with spiritual beings ancestors or archetypal entities.

*Telepathic/Non Local Awareness:*

ELCE: Co-Experiencers report telepathic communication with the dying, causing shifts in worldviews and changes in lifestyle.

Psychedelics: Report feeling connected to and communicating with a larger intelligence, entity or ancestor which provides information, causing shifts in worldviews and changes in lifestyle.

*Timelessness:*

ELCE: Time may feel distorted.

Psychedelics: Often experience a complete dissolution of time.

*Expanded Love and Compassion*

ELCE: Intense feelings of love, interconnectedness and unity

Psychedelics: Profound feelings of oneness, universal love and deep emotional release.

*Symbolic and Archetypal Imagery:*

ELCE: Co-experiencers often report visionary imagery of light, tunnels or landscapes

Psychedelics: Experiencers report similar landscapes and archetypal encounters.

*Emotional and Psychological Impact:*

ELCE: Can lead to long-term spiritual shifts, reduced grief and acceptance of mortality.

Psychedelics: Often leads to long-term personality changes, emotional healing, existential insight and reduced death anxiety.

*Healing and Integration:*

ELCE: Can provide deep spiritual insight, peace and meaning to grief and loss.

Psychedelics: Often leads to healing, self-understanding, forgiveness and a return to child-like enthusiasm for life.

**Key Differences***Triggering Mechanism:*

ELCE: Occurs spontaneously at the threshold of death.

Psychedelics: Induced intentionally through substances like psilocybin, LSD, DMT, or ayahuasca.

*Duration:*

ELCE: Often brief but intensely transformative (minutes to hours).

Psychedelics: Can last several hours depending on the substance.

*Context*

ELCE: Typically occurs in the presence of a dying individual.

Psychedelics: Happens in therapeutic, ritualistic, or recreational settings.

*Physical state of the Person:*

ELCE: The Co-Experiencer is often in normal waking consciousness but suddenly enters an altered state.

Psychedelics: The experiencer takes a substance that initiates the altered state.

**Conceptual Limitation in the Mirror Neuron Hypothesis for ELCE's**

Mirror neurons alone cannot explain veridical experiences (accurate perceptions of events or people at a distance, which are often reported in ELCE and NDE literature).

Empathy and mentalising rely on social cognition, which still assumes that consciousness is a localised brain function rather than a transpersonal field.

If mirror neurons and empathy were sufficient, then most highly empathic individuals should frequently experience ELCE's, which does not appear to be the case.

**Why This Matters**

ELCE is not just an extension of SDE theory - it fundamentally shifts the explanation away from neurological mirroring and empathy and toward transpersonal immersion in a shared field of consciousness.

This also aligns ELCE more closely with NDEs and psychedelic experiences rather than with social cognition models of empathy.

**2.2 Reframing the Mechanism**

**Note:** In this paper, the term “*shared field*” refers primarily to an **intersubjective organisation of awareness**, in which experience is no longer structured around a single, bounded self, but arises relationally between persons. This field is not proposed as a physical entity or mechanism, but as a **phenomenological configuration of consciousness** characterised by boundary softening, shared presence, and non-verbal attunement.

From this perspective, the Co-Experiencer does not simply “mirror” the dying person, nor is ELCE best understood as a *shared vision* or the reception of imagery from another mind. Rather, ELCE involves participation in a **shared field of awareness** in which experience is co-constituted. The experience is not transmitted from one person to another, but arises through direct participation in a relational state that is experientially shared.

While this paper does not seek to establish a definitive ontological account of this field, the phenomenology of ELCE challenges strictly localised models of consciousness based on neural simulation or mirror-neuron mechanisms alone. The experiences reported suggest a form of

awareness that is **participatory rather than representational**, bearing similarities to states described in contemplative practice, psychedelic research, and other contexts in which self-referential processing is reduced.

This reframing has important implications for how connection at the end of life is understood. Within hospice and bereavement contexts, profound connection is often assumed to arise through deep empathy — understood as feeling into, or simulating, the emotional state of the dying person. However, if empathic simulation maintains activity within the Default Mode Network and reinforces self–other distinction, it may inadvertently limit access to the non-dual, immersive states of awareness described in ELCE. In this sense, ELCE may be facilitated not by intensified empathy, but by a **softening of self-referential engagement**, allowing awareness to reorganise relationally.

#### Two Modes of Relational Presence at the End of Life

Empathy-Oriented Relational Presence	Field-Oriented Relational Presence (ELCE)
Emphasises emotional attunement to the dying person's feelings.	Emphasises shared presence and alignment of awareness.
Often involves empathic simulation and perspective-taking.	Involves reduced self-referential processing and participatory awareness.
Maintains a clear self–other distinction.	May involve temporary softening of self–other boundaries.
Commonly expressed through verbal or emotional interaction.	Often characterised by stillness, silence, and non-verbal connection.
Can support emotional bonding and meaning-making in grief.	May be associated with shifts in how grief and death are experienced.

*These modes are not mutually exclusive, and both may be present at different moments within end-of-life care.*

## Reflective Note on the Origin of the “Shared Field” Concept

The framing of ELCE as participation in a shared field of awareness did not arise from a prior commitment to field-based or non-local theories of consciousness, but from repeated phenomenological observations across interviews and accounts. In a number of cases, profound co-experiences were reported even when the dying person appeared withdrawn, unresponsive, or not interpersonally engaged with the witness. This challenged explanations based on empathic mirroring, emotional resonance, or the transmission of experiential content from one person to another. The concept of a shared field emerged as a way of accounting for experiences that appeared genuinely shared, yet not dependent on active relational exchange or mutual attention, suggesting that awareness itself may reorganise relationally under end-of-life conditions.

-----

## 2.3 Implications for the Future of Death Studies

This distinction from Shared Death Experiences is significant, as it suggests that ELCE is not simply a matter of shared emotional states, but may involve **shared states of consciousness**. From this perspective, empathy alone may be insufficient to account for ELCE, as the experience appears to require a shift in how awareness itself is organised. ELCE is therefore better understood as a **direct participatory engagement with a shared field of awareness**, rather than as the mirroring or simulation of the dying person's inner experience.

This reframing has important implications for death studies, palliative care, and bereavement research. Contemporary approaches often emphasise empathy as the primary means of connection at the end of life. While empathy remains essential for compassionate care, ELCE suggests that certain co-experiential states may arise *not* through intensified empathic engagement, but through a **softening of self-referential attention**, allowing awareness to become relationally distributed. In this sense, prevailing models may be limited not because they are incorrect, but because they do not fully account for altered or non-dual states of awareness that can arise under end-of-life conditions.

From a neurophenomenological perspective, ELCE appears to arise in a post-empathic state characterised by reduced sympathetic activation, sustained ventral vagal safety, and a quieting of Default Mode Network activity. While empathic engagement relies on emotional simulation and perspective-taking, ELCE becomes possible when these self-referential processes recede, allowing awareness to reorganise relationally. This post-empathic condition is not a withdrawal of care, but a deepening of presence in which connection is no longer mediated through effort or narrative. The issue is not “empathy vs ELCE” it's **which mode of consciousness is active - pre or post empathatic presence**.

### Future Work

While the implications of ELCE for end-of-life presence and care are significant, this paper does not propose practical guidance or techniques for facilitating such experiences. An ELCE cannot be induced or reliably produced, and any attempt to instrumentalise it risks undermining the conditions under which it may naturally arise. Future work obviously won't guide people toward an experience, as already specified, an ELCE cannot be induced, it will help them not get in the way of a state that sometimes arises naturally, it will be a guide to recognising, protecting, and not obstructing post-empathic states of presence at the end of life.

### A Field-Based Interpretive Model

Within this framework, ELCE suggests that the experience is not best explained as a transmission of content from the dying person to the Co-Experiencer. Instead, both appear to participate in a **wider field of awareness** that becomes experientially accessible at the end-of-life threshold. The Co-Experiencer does not “receive” something from the Experiencer, but enters a shared state of awareness that neither person generates independently.

Several existing bodies of work offer interpretive frameworks that resonate with this phenomenology, including field-based models of consciousness, research on reduced Default



Mode Network activity in near-death and psychedelic states, and contemplative traditions that describe the dissolution of egoic boundaries as central to non-dual awareness. While these perspectives do not constitute proof, they suggest that ELCE may be situated within a broader landscape of research exploring consciousness as participatory, relational, and not entirely confined to individual cognition.

## 2.4 Why This Matters

ELCE is not simply an extension of Shared Death Experience theory, but represents a shift in explanatory emphasis - from models centred on neurological mirroring and empathic simulation toward a relational account of **participatory awareness**. While neuropsychological processes such as empathy and mirroring remain relevant to many end-of-life interactions, they do not fully account for experiences in which awareness appears to reorganise relationally and is reported as shared.

This reframing situates ELCE in closer dialogue with research on Near-Death Experiences, psychedelic states, and contemplative practices, where reduced self-referential processing and altered modes of awareness are central features. In these contexts, experience is often described as immersive, non-dual, and not easily reducible to social cognition models alone.

By shifting the unit of analysis from individual perception to relational organisation of awareness, ELCE opens conceptual space for understanding reports of non-local or identity-transcending experience without requiring premature ontological conclusions. Rather than replacing neuropsychological interpretations, ELCE complements them by addressing aspects of end-of-life experience that appear to exceed models based solely on mirroring, simulation, or individual cognition.

In this way, ELCE invites a broader transpersonal framework for understanding shared experiences at death — one that remains grounded in phenomenology while remaining open to interdisciplinary dialogue across neuroscience, consciousness studies, and end-of-life research.

## 3. Integration-Driven Versus Data-Driven Follow-Up

Much of the existing research involving Co-Experiencers has focused primarily on the collection of phenomenological data - documenting the content, imagery, or perceptual features of the experience itself. While such data are valuable, they are often gathered without sufficient attention to **integration**, reflective meaning-making, or ongoing relational support. As a result, the deeper implications of ELCE - particularly those relating to relational awareness and field-like consciousness — may remain under-examined.

Phenomenological introspection and interviewing offer a particularly appropriate methodology for studying expanded states of consciousness such as ELCEs and psychedelic experiences. These approaches provide a structured way of accessing, describing, and reflecting upon experiences that are deeply subjective, relational, and often difficult to articulate (for example, through methods such

as the British Transpersonal Association's AIME framework). Their value lies not only in data collection, but in how they support understanding without prematurely reducing experience to existing explanatory categories.

### **Capturing Lived Experience Without Reductionism**

Phenomenology prioritises first-person description while temporarily bracketing interpretive frameworks. This allows individuals to articulate what the experience was like for them without being forced into binary explanations (such as hallucination versus proof of an afterlife). In the context of ELCE, this helps preserve the richness and subtlety of experiences that might otherwise be flattened or dismissed.

### **Accessing Subtle and Overlooked Dimensions**

Expanded states of consciousness often involve non-ordinary perceptions, altered time awareness, relational unity, or ineffable qualities that are easily overlooked or minimised. Through careful phenomenological inquiry, individuals can revisit and articulate aspects of their experience that might otherwise be suppressed by habitual cognitive or narrative processes. This is particularly relevant for ELCEs and psychedelic ego-dissolution experiences, where meaning may be implicit rather than immediately accessible.

### **Facilitating Integration and Meaning-Making**

Many people struggle to integrate expanded consciousness experiences into their everyday lives, especially when these experiences challenge prior beliefs or worldviews. Phenomenological interviewing supports a slower, reflective process through which meaning can emerge organically from the experience itself, rather than being imposed externally. This can reduce distress, support psychological integration, and allow transformation to unfold without pathologisation.

### **Supporting a Non-Dual, Relational Mode of Understanding**

Expanded states of consciousness are often characterised by non-verbal, relational, and holistic modes of awareness. Phenomenological approaches resist the tendency toward over-analysis and reification, allowing experience to remain fluid and relational. In this sense, such methods are well aligned with the nature of ELCE, where meaning often arises through presence rather than interpretation.

### **Bridging Experiential Validity and Theoretical Development**

One of the central challenges in consciousness research is balancing experiential authenticity with academic rigour. Phenomenological interviewing offers a methodologically robust way to honour lived experience while contributing to theoretical refinement. In the case of ELCE, this approach supports the articulation of relational and transpersonal dimensions of experience without reducing them to individual cognition alone.

## Implications for ELCE Research and Practice

Applied to ELCE, phenomenological methods may help to:

- clarify distinctions between the Experiencer and the Co-Experiencer by mapping their respective subjective states
- identify conditions associated with co-experiential awareness, such as shifts in attention, relational openness, and altered time perception
- inform future guidance on integration and reflective support, without instrumentalising the experience
- support end-of-life and hospice contexts in recognising and holding such experiences without pathologisation

## 4. Non-Verbal, Telepathic, and Field-Oriented Dimensions of ELCE

One of the most striking features of End-of-Life Co-Experiences is their predominantly **non-verbal** character. Many accounts describe a sense of shared knowing, presence, or communication that does not rely on spoken language and is often experienced as immediate, intuitive, and difficult to articulate. Experiencers may refer to these moments as *telepathic*, *shared awareness*, or *direct knowing* — not as technical claims, but as attempts to describe experiences that exceed ordinary modes of interpersonal communication.

### 4.1 Non-Verbal Awareness and Right-Hemisphere Processing

Neuroscientific and neurophenomenological research suggests that the brain's right hemisphere plays a central role in holistic perception, relational awareness, and non-verbal meaning-making (McGilchrist, 2019). As linguistic, analytical, and self-referential processes associated with left-hemisphere dominance diminish near the end of life, awareness may increasingly orient toward modes of perception that are relational, embodied, and context-sensitive.

Within this framework, ELCE may be facilitated by a convergence of attentional states in which both Experiencer and Co-Experiencer become attuned to non-verbal and relational modes of knowing. This does not imply a specific neurological transmission mechanism, but rather a **shared configuration of attention** in which meaning is apprehended directly rather than symbolically.

### 4.2 Telepathic Language and Field-Based Interpretations

Some ELCE accounts are described by participants as *telepathic*, in the sense that emotions, thoughts, or imagery appear to be known without sensory mediation. From a phenomenological standpoint, such descriptions can be understood as attempts to convey experiences in which the usual boundaries between self and other are softened, and awareness is experienced as shared or relational.

Field-based theories of consciousness, such as Rupert Sheldrake's concept of morphic resonance, offer one interpretive lens through which such reports may be considered. Within the ELCE framework, these theories are not presented as explanatory proofs, but as **conceptual resources** that resonate with accounts of shared, non-local, or relational awareness without reducing them to individual cognition alone.

### 4.3 Neurophenomenological Correlates

Research on Near-Death Experiences, psychedelic states, and deep contemplative practices consistently points to reduced activity in the Default Mode Network (DMN), accompanied by diminished self-referential processing and softened ego boundaries. Similar conditions may be present in ELCE contexts, particularly as the Experiencer approaches death and the Co-Experiencer enters a state of sustained stillness and presence.

These findings suggest conditions under which awareness may become less individuated and more relationally organised, without implying that neural processes alone generate the experience.

### 4.4 Speculative Analogies and Open Questions

Some researchers have drawn analogies between consciousness and quantum phenomena such as non-local correlation or entanglement (e.g., Hameroff & Penrose, 2014). While such models remain speculative, they highlight the limitations reminding us of the limits of strictly local, brain-bound accounts of consciousness and underscore the need for further interdisciplinary research.

Within the ELCE framework, these perspectives are best understood as **open questions rather than conclusions**, inviting careful exploration rather than premature synthesis.

## 5. ELCE and the Seven Transpersonal Stages

The Seven Transpersonal Stages framework offers a developmental lens through which the **impact and integration** of End-of-Life Co-Experiences can be understood, rather than an explanation of how ELCEs occur. Within this framework, ELCE is not treated as an isolated event, but as a potentially transformative encounter that may influence psychological orientation, meaning-making, and spiritual understanding over time.

Unlike models that focus primarily on the phenomenological content of the experience itself, the Seven Transpersonal Stages attend to **how individuals assimilate and live with such experiences**. This is particularly relevant in the context of ELCE, where Co-Experiencers often report enduring changes in their relationship to death, identity, and relational presence, even when the experience itself was brief or subtle.

### 5.1 ELCE as a Developmental Threshold

Within the Seven Transpersonal Stages, ELCE most clearly aligns with the transition into **Expanded States of Consciousness**, where ordinary modes of perception and self-reference are temporarily reorganised. However, its significance often unfolds across later stages, including Wisdom, Spirituality, and Love, as individuals reflect upon and integrate the experience into their lives.

Importantly, the framework does not assume that all Co-Experiencers will interpret ELCE in spiritual or metaphysical terms. Rather, it recognises that meaning emerges developmentally and contextually, shaped by the individual's psychological maturity, cultural background, and capacity for reflection.

## 5.2 Relational Transformation in the Co-Experiencer

While ELCE is often discussed in relation to the dying person, the Seven Transpersonal Stages draw attention to the **developmental impact on the Co-Experiencer**. Many report shifts such as:

- reduced fear of death
- a softened sense of personal boundaries
- increased relational openness
- a deepened sense of compassion or presence
- a reorientation toward meaning and connection

These changes are not necessarily dramatic or immediate, but may unfold gradually as the experience is revisited, reflected upon, and integrated.

Within this framework, ELCE can be understood as a **relational initiation**, not in a ritualised sense, but as an encounter that subtly reorganises how a person understands self, other, and the continuity of experience.

## 5.3 Integration, Not Interpretation

A key contribution of the Seven Transpersonal Stages is its emphasis on **integration over interpretation**. Rather than asking what ELCE “proves” about death or consciousness, the framework encourages attention to how the experience influences:

- emotional regulation
- relational capacity
- ethical sensitivity
- tolerance for uncertainty
- openness to mystery

This approach aligns with the phenomenological stance of the present paper, which resists premature ontological conclusions while acknowledging the depth and significance of lived experience.

## 5.4 ELCE as a Relational Developmental Process

Viewed through the Seven Transpersonal Stages, ELCE is not simply an anomalous experience at the end of life, but part of a broader **relational developmental process**. It highlights the possibility

that human consciousness, particularly in liminal contexts such as dying, may be shaped as much by relational presence as by individual cognition.

In this sense, ELCE contributes to Transpersonal Psychology not by adding a new category of experience, but by illuminating how **shared, post-empathic states of awareness** can function as catalysts for psychological and spiritual maturation.

## 6. Christian Mystical Parallels and ELCE

Although End-of-Life Co-Experience (ELCE) is presented here as a contemporary phenomenological framework, aspects of the experience resonate with themes long articulated within Christian mystical traditions, particularly those concerned with relational consciousness, apophatic knowing, and peace beyond conceptual understanding. These parallels are not presented as theological validation, but as points of **experiential convergence** across historical and cultural contexts.

### 6.1 Relational Continuity and the Communion of Saints

Within Christian mysticism, the doctrine of the *Communion of Saints* expresses the idea that the living and the dead remain connected within a shared spiritual reality. While articulated within a theological framework, this notion reflects an understanding of death as a **relational threshold rather than an absolute rupture**.

ELCE echoes this relational orientation by framing death not solely as an individual biological event, but as a moment in which awareness and presence may be experienced as shared. Importantly, ELCE does not rely on doctrinal belief in an afterlife or spiritual hierarchy, but points to a phenomenological experience of continuity that arises in relational contexts.

### 6.2 Apophatic Knowing and The Cloud of Unknowing

The anonymous 14th-century mystical text *The Cloud of Unknowing* describes an apophatic approach to divine encounter in which knowing occurs beyond intellect, language, and conceptual grasp. This emphasis on **unknowing** as a legitimate mode of awareness closely parallels the non-verbal, ineffable quality reported in many ELCE accounts.

Co-Experiencers often describe their experience as resistant to language, emerging through presence rather than thought, and understood only indirectly or retrospectively. Such descriptions align with apophatic traditions that privilege silence, receptivity, and relational presence over explanation.

### 6.3 Peace Beyond Cognition

A recurring feature of ELCE accounts is a sense of profound calm or peace that is difficult to attribute to emotional reassurance or cognitive interpretation alone. In Christian mystical literature, similar states are described as a peace that transcends understanding, captured in Philippians 4:7: “*the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.*”

Within the ELCE framework, such peace is not interpreted as evidence of divine intervention, but as a **state of post-empathic presence** in which self-referential processing quieters and awareness becomes relationally grounded. The convergence of language across these contexts suggests that certain states of consciousness may be accessible across belief systems, even when interpreted differently.

## 6.4 ELCE as a Contemporary Point of Convergence

These parallels suggest that ELCE may function as a contemporary point of convergence between lived experience and longstanding mystical insight, without requiring adherence to religious doctrine. Rather than replacing or validating religious interpretations, ELCE offers a phenomenological vocabulary through which experiences historically framed in theological terms can be explored within a transpersonal and interdisciplinary context.

In this way, ELCE contributes to a broader dialogue between spirituality, psychology, and end-of-life studies, highlighting how relational and non-dual states of awareness have been recognised across traditions, even as their meanings have been articulated differently.

# 7. Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Relational Awareness at Death

While End-of-Life Co-Experience (ELCE) is articulated here within the language of contemporary transpersonal psychology, elements of the phenomenon it describes—relational awareness at death, non-verbal knowing, and experiences of continuity beyond ordinary self-boundaries—have been recognised across diverse cultural and spiritual traditions. These parallels are not presented as evidence of a single underlying mechanism, but as **cross-cultural convergences in how human beings have made sense of death as a relational and liminal event**.

## 7.1 Tibetan Buddhism: The Bardo and Transitional Awareness

In Tibetan Buddhism, the *Bardo* refers to transitional states of consciousness associated with dying, death, and rebirth (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992). These teachings emphasise that consciousness does not immediately cease at death, but undergoes a period of transition in which awareness may be fluid, relational, and responsive to subtle influences.

While Tibetan practices are embedded within a specific religious and soteriological framework, their attention to non-ordinary awareness at the threshold of death resonates with ELCE accounts in which relational presence and altered modes of knowing are reported. Importantly, ELCE does not assume the metaphysical claims of Buddhist cosmology, but shares an interest in how awareness may reorganise in liminal states, both for the dying and for those closely present.

## 7.2 Shamanic Traditions: Death as a Communal and Liminal Event

Across many Indigenous and shamanic traditions, death is understood not solely as an individual event, but as a **communal and spiritual crossing**. Shamans are often described as entering altered

states of consciousness in order to accompany, guide, or witness transitions between worlds, using ritual, rhythm, and symbolic imagery to support the community.

Descriptions of *soul flight* or journeying are best understood here as symbolic and experiential languages used to describe non-ordinary states of awareness, rather than literal accounts of travel. In this sense, they resonate phenomenologically with ELCE reports in which Co-Experiencers describe a temporary participation in an expanded relational field at the moment of death, without implying direct equivalence or shared ontology.

### 7.3 African Ancestral Traditions: Continuity of Relational Consciousness

Many African cosmologies emphasise the concept of the *living-dead*—ancestors who remain relationally present within family and community life through memory, ritual, intuition, and dreams (Mbiti, 1970). Death is not understood as severing relationship, but as transforming its mode.

This orientation contrasts with Western models that often frame death as an abrupt individual termination followed by private grief. The emphasis on ongoing relational continuity in African traditions parallels ELCE's phenomenological insight that dying may be experienced not as isolation, but as a shared threshold in which relational awareness remains active.

### 7.4 ELCE as a Contemporary Cross-Cultural Convergence

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that ELCE is not merely a Western psychological construct, but a contemporary articulation of experiential patterns that have been recognised and held across cultures in diverse symbolic and ritual forms. ELCE does not seek to subsume or reinterpret these traditions, but offers a phenomenological framework through which relational and transpersonal aspects of dying can be explored without reliance on specific religious doctrines.

In this sense, ELCE contributes to a broader intercultural dialogue on death and consciousness, highlighting how relational awareness at the end of life has been repeatedly noticed, even as its meaning has been expressed through different cultural languages.

## 8. Clinical and Ethical Implications of ELCE

As research into End-of-Life Co-Experience develops, questions naturally arise regarding its relevance for clinical practice in palliative care, grief support, and transpersonal psychotherapy. While ELCE is not proposed as a clinical intervention or therapeutic technique, its recognition carries important implications for how end-of-life experiences are understood, held, and integrated within professional settings.

Crucially, the clinical relevance of ELCE lies not in facilitating such experiences, but in **responding ethically and skilfully when they are reported**.

### 8.1 Implications for Palliative and End-of-Life Care

End-of-life care already emphasises presence, compassion, and attunement. ELCE invites a further refinement of this orientation by drawing attention to **non-verbal and relational dimensions of awareness** that may become prominent as death approaches.



Rather than introducing new practices, an ELCE-informed perspective encourages caregivers to:

- recognise shifts in presence, stillness, or relational atmosphere
- remain open to non-verbal forms of connection
- avoid interrupting subtle states of shared awareness through unnecessary intervention

Such sensitivity does not replace symptom management or medical care, but complements it by acknowledging that dying may involve experiential dimensions that extend beyond physiological processes alone.

## 8.2 ELCE and Grief Support

Individuals who report ELCEs often hesitate to share their experiences due to fear of disbelief, pathologisation, or misunderstanding. When unacknowledged, such experiences may become sources of confusion or isolation during bereavement.

Within grief support contexts, ELCE-informed practice does not require affirming particular metaphysical interpretations. Rather, it involves:

- validating the *meaningfulness* of the experience for the individual
- supporting reflective integration rather than immediate interpretation
- exploring how the experience has influenced the person's relationship to loss, death, and continuity

When held phenomenologically, ELCE accounts may offer comfort, reduced fear of death, or a sense of ongoing connection, even as grief itself remains present.

## 8.3 Ethical Considerations in Clinical and Therapeutic Settings

Given the sensitivity of end-of-life contexts, ethical considerations are paramount.

### Respecting Testimony Without Imposing Meaning

Clinicians and caregivers should neither dismiss nor uncritically endorse ELCE reports. A stance of respectful openness allows experiences to be explored without being reduced to pathology or elevated into belief systems.

### Differentiating Integration from Destabilisation

While many ELCEs are described as peaceful or reassuring, others may be confusing or unsettling. Careful assessment is required to distinguish between experiences that support integration and those that contribute to distress, disorientation, or spiritual emergency, ensuring appropriate support is offered.

### Cultural and Spiritual Sensitivity

Understandings of death, continuity, and relational consciousness vary widely across cultures and belief systems. ELCE-informed care must remain sensitive to these differences, allowing individuals to interpret their experiences within their own cultural and spiritual frameworks.

## 9. Emerging Research Directions: Neuroscience and AI

While End-of-Life Co-Experience (ELCE) is currently best understood through qualitative and phenomenological approaches, emerging developments in neuroscience and artificial intelligence may offer complementary methodologies for exploring the conditions under which such experiences arise. These approaches are not proposed as explanatory proofs, but as potential avenues for **correlational and integrative research** that could deepen understanding of altered and relational states of consciousness.

### 9.1 Neuroscience and Altered States at the End of Life

Neuroscientific studies have documented transient surges of neural activity in near-death and dying states, including increased gamma coherence and complex patterns of brain activity shortly before death (Borjigin et al., 2013; Martial et al., 2021). These findings have been associated with reports of vivid, meaningful, and sometimes transformative experiences in Near-Death contexts.

While such studies do not explain the content or meaning of ELCE, they suggest that the dying process may involve **non-linear and integrative neural dynamics** rather than simple neurological shutdown. Future ELCE research may explore whether similar patterns of altered neural organisation are present in contexts where relational or shared experiences are reported, without assuming causal or non-local mechanisms.

### 9.2 AI-Assisted Phenomenological Research

Artificial intelligence is increasingly being used to analyse large qualitative datasets in consciousness research, including Near-Death Experiences, mystical reports, and altered states narratives (Greyson, 2021). AI-assisted approaches may offer valuable tools for ELCE research by identifying recurring phenomenological themes, linguistic patterns, and cross-cultural similarities across large numbers of accounts.

Such methods are particularly well suited to ELCE, where experiences are often subtle, non-verbal, and difficult to categorise. Importantly, AI analysis would not be used to validate metaphysical claims, but to support **systematic phenomenological mapping** and hypothesis generation for future interdisciplinary study.

### 9.3 Speculative Models and Open Questions

Some theoretical models propose that consciousness may not be fully reducible to brain-bound processes, drawing analogies with concepts such as non-local correlation or quantum coherence (Penrose & Hameroff, 2014). While these models remain speculative and contested, they highlight ongoing debates about the limits of strictly local explanations of consciousness.

Within the ELCE framework, such perspectives are best understood as **conceptual provocations rather than explanatory accounts**. ELCE does not provide evidence for quantum or non-local theories of mind, but it does raise questions about how relational and shared experiences of awareness might be accommodated within future models of consciousness.

These analogies are included to highlight conceptual tensions in current models of consciousness, not to imply that ELCE requires or confirms quantum explanations.”

End-of-Life Co-Experience (ELCE) refers to a relational and transpersonal phenomenon in which a person who is present with, or meaningfully connected to, someone who is dying may experience a shared shift in awareness, presence, or consciousness during the end-of-life process. Unlike models that frame such experiences primarily as empathic mirroring or neurological simulation, ELCE proposes that awareness may reorganise relationally, giving rise to a shared field of experience characterised by non-verbal attunement, boundary softening, and post-empathic presence. Drawing on phenomenological accounts, transpersonal psychology, neurophenomenological research, and cross-cultural and mystical traditions, this paper offers ELCE as a conceptual reframing rather than a definitive explanation. Its aim is to provide careful language for experiences that have often remained unnamed, marginalised, or prematurely interpreted, while maintaining epistemic humility and ethical responsibility.

## 10. Conclusion: ELCE as a Relational Reframing of Death

End-of-Life Co-Experience (ELCE) offers a relational reframing of how consciousness may be encountered at the threshold of death. Rather than positioning dying as a purely individual or internally contained process, ELCE foregrounds the possibility that awareness, presence, and meaning can arise **between people**, particularly under conditions of stillness, relational openness, and reduced self-referential processing.

By drawing together phenomenological accounts, neurophenomenological perspectives, transpersonal psychology, and resonances with mystical and cross-cultural traditions, this paper has proposed ELCE as a conceptual framework rather than a definitive explanation. Its contribution lies not in resolving longstanding debates about the nature of consciousness or life after death, but in **re-centering relational experience** as a legitimate and under-examined dimension of end-of-life phenomena.

Importantly, ELCE does not replace existing neuropsychological or clinical models, nor does it require commitment to specific metaphysical claims. Instead, it invites a shift in emphasis—from individual cognition and empathic simulation toward post-empathic, participatory modes of awareness that may become accessible in liminal contexts such as dying.

Future research may build on this foundation by:

- developing careful phenomenological and interdisciplinary methodologies for studying non-verbal and relational aspects of end-of-life experience
- exploring how ELCE-informed perspectives can support ethical integration and meaning-making in palliative care and bereavement contexts
- examining how relational and field-oriented descriptions of consciousness might be accommodated within broader theoretical models, without premature ontological conclusions

Taken together, End-of-Life Co-Experience (ELCE) suggests that dying may be understood not only as a biological event or a private psychological process, but as a relational threshold—one that can be encountered collectively as well as individually. By offering careful language for experiences that have often remained unnamed or marginalised, ELCE contributes to a more nuanced and humane understanding of death, presence, and relational consciousness at the end of life. Seen in this way, ELCE also illuminates a form of Transpersonal Intelligence: a capacity for participatory, post-empathic presence through which human beings may remain meaningfully attuned within liminal, shared states of awareness at the threshold of life and death.

## Further Reading and Contextual Sources

### 1. Near-Death, Shared Death, and End-of-Life Experience Research

(Empirical, phenomenological, and clinical foundations)

- Ring, K. (1980). *Life at Death: A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience*.
- Van Lommel, P. (2010). *Consciousness Beyond Life*.
- Greyson, B. (2021). *After*.
- Moody, R. (2010). *Glimpses of Eternity*.
- Beischel, J., & Rock, A. J. (2009). *Journal of Parapsychology*.

### 2. Transpersonal Psychology and Participatory Models

- Grof, S. (1985; 1988). *Beyond the Brain; The Adventure of Self-Discovery*.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2002). *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory*.
- Miller, L. (2021). *The Awakened Brain*.
- McGilchrist, I. (2009). *The Master and His Emissary*.

### 3. Neuroscience of Dying, Altered States, and Integration

- Borjigin et al. (2013). *PNAS*.
- Martial et al. (2021). *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*.
- Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The Body Keeps the Score*.

### 4. Mystical, Religious, and Apophatic Traditions

- *The Cloud of Unknowing* (14th c.).
- Underhill, E. (1911). *Mysticism*.
- Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). *On Death and Dying*.
- Teilhard de Chardin, P. (1959). *The Phenomenon of Man*.

### 5. Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Death and Relational Consciousness

- Mbiti, J. S. (1970). *African Religions and Philosophy*.
- Sogyal Rinpoche (1992). *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*.
- Eliade, M. (1964). *Shamanism*.

### 6. Field, Non-Local, and Speculative Consciousness Models

- Sheldrake, R. (1981). *A New Science of Life*.
- Laszlo, E. (2007). *Science and the Akashic Field*.
- Radin, D. (2006). *Entangled Minds*.

### 7. Quantum and Philosophical Models of Consciousness

- Penrose, R., & Hameroff, S. (2014). *Physics of Life Reviews*.
- Kastrup, B. (2019). *The Idea of the World*.
- Stapp, H. P. (2007). *Mindful Universe*.