

The aftermath of life: dying and death

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Abstract

Neither father nor sons nor one's relations can stop the King of Death. Death is an enfeeble form of life. Death is a continuation of life. Death is perpetual development. Death is waiting. Death is cycling and recycling. In nearly all circumstances human death is a process rather than an event. Death is the permanent termination of the biological functions that sustain a living organism. The dying process usually begins well before death actually occurs. As one begins to accept their mortality and realises that death is approaching, they may withdraw from their surroundings. The uncertainty of life helps us appreciate life and prepare for death. Throughout history, specific cultural contexts have always played a crucial role in how people perceived death. The Rigveda is the first recorded insight into the importance of respiration to potential life. The Upanishads, the ancient set of Hindu religious texts, postulated an eternal, changeless core of the self called as the "Atman." "Moksha" is the traditional Sanskrit term for release or liberation from the endless chain of deaths and rebirths. When devout Hindus sense death approaching, they begin repeating the monosyllable Om (this word refers to Brahman and is widely used in religious observance to help concentrate the mind on what matters). Unlike all other religions which require faith and belief (faith in a belief without evidence), spiritualism/spiritism is the only religion which is based on evidence and direct experience.

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"The certainty of death and the uncertainty of the hour of death is a source of grief throughout our life".

E. Morin, French philosopher and sociologist, Method V

In remorse

I lost my father seven months ago. He was 80 years old and no one realised how ill he was until the last two days. I don't think he even knew. In fact, he had been to the doctor only five days before the final day and the doctor had diagnosed him as having a lung infection and irregular pulse rate. Though the pacemaker was replaced immediately, he passed away four days later resulting from a multiple organ failure. He died suddenly and I, along with the rest of my family, never got to say goodbye, or communicate one last time how much we loved him. Trusting in some sort of design in the universe, I hope his spirit is safe in the care of higher beings and involved in a process constructed to guide the millions of people who die and leave the planet every day. I am left here on earth to cope with loss, regrets and grief, and with the gut realisation that death is present, a pervasive reality, and it has now changed my life forever.

Neither father nor sons nor one's relations can stop the King of Death. When he comes with all his power, a man's relations cannot save him. This verse clearly calls attention to our powerlessness when it comes to death. It sweeps through our lives, often without warning, and nothing can

prevent it and points out how most people hide their heads in the sand, pretending death will never affect them, that this life will go on forever. I realise now that it is true; I never thought my father would be taken so suddenly and so soon. I wanted to turn back the clock and tell him so many things that, now, I will never be able to say. Grief over the loss of someone I love so much has, over the past months, opened me up, deepened my understanding of how temporal life is and how much more important people are than anything else. My heart was torn open, and I experienced my own humanity perhaps more than I ever have. Life has an urgency now, I feel impelled to enjoy others more fully, to assess my time carefully, to be in the present as much as I can. I must be in this moment because I will never have this moment, with this person, again.

Death is a word that we know and fear, but what exactly does the word death mean to you? The end of life? The end of time? The end of hope? Well... maybe.

Jan Carter: what does death mean?

Death is an enfeebled form of life. Death is a continuation of life. Death is perpetual development. Death is waiting. Death is cycling and recycling.

Death is an enfeebled form of life: Common in Mesopotamia thousands of years ago and states that the deceased person is gradually submerged into the underworld.

Death is a continuation of life: Tribal societies view death as a state that has much in common with life. Life is a hazardous journey even after death. Life after death also includes the risk of death. Dayak of Borneo believe the soul returns to earth after its seventh death thus entering a mushroom or fruit near the village. The returned soul invades the body of a woman who eats it and one is reborn. If an animal eats it first then the soul is reborn as an animal losing human identity.

Death is perpetual development: Derived from the prophets and philosophers of evolution. Philosophers Samuel Alexander and Lloyd Morgan built on Darwin's discoveries of the evolution of species by suggesting that evolution applies to the universe as a whole. Life itself is an emergent quality from a universe that continues to transform itself. Mind is a further quality that has emerged from life. The relationship between life and death continue to evolve.

Death is waiting: "After a death event... We wait!" In Western society, the waiting process includes three phases—the person is presumed to exist in sleeplike state, Dramatic Day of Judgement, soul proceeds to ultimate destination or condition.

Death is cycling and recycling: Often expressed by children and says that death comes and goes, wending in and out of life. Adults, according to this view, regard death as a temporary condition that alternates with life and represents transition between one form of life and another.

Is death the irreversible loss of function of the whole organism (or cell); that is, of every one of its component parts? Or is it the irreversible loss of function of the organism (or cell) as a whole; as a meaningful and independent biological unit? To perceive the difference between the two questions is to understand many modern controversies about death. The described dichotomy is clearly part of a much wider one: civilisations fall apart yet their component societies live on; societies disintegrate but their citizens survive; individuals die while their cells, perversely, still metabolise; finally, cells can be disrupted yet the enzymes they release may, for a while, remain active.

In nearly all circumstances human death is a process rather than an event. Unless caught up in nuclear explosions people do not die suddenly, like the bursting of a bubble. A quiet, "classical" death provides perhaps the best illustration of death as a process. Several minutes after the heart has stopped beating, a mini-electrocardiogram may be recorded, if one probes for signals from within the cardiac cavity. Three hours later, the pupils still respond to drops by contracting, and muscles repeatedly tapped may still mechanically shorten. A viable skin graft may be obtained from the deceased 24 hours after the heart has stopped, a viable bone graft 48 hours later, and a viable arterial graft as late as 72 hours after the onset of irreversible asystole (cardiac stoppage). Cells clearly differ widely in their ability to withstand the deprivation of oxygen supply that follows arrest of the circulation. Similar problems arise, but on a vastly larger scale, when the brain is dead but the heart (and other organs) are kept going artificially. Under such circumstances, it can be argued, the organism as a whole may be deemed dead, although the majority of its cells are still alive.

These issues were authoritatively discussed in 1968, at the 22nd World Medical Assembly in Sydney, Australia. The assembly stated that "clinical interest lies not in the state of preservation of isolated cells but in the fate of a person. The point of death of the different cells and organs is not as important as the certainty that the process has become irreversible." The statement had a profound effect on modern medical thinking. "Irreversible loss of function of the organism as a whole" became an accepted clinical criterion of death. The Concise Oxford Dictionary for instance defines death both as "dying" (a process) and as "being dead" (a state).

Death is the permanent termination of the biological functions that sustain a living organism. Phenomena which commonly bring about death include old age, predation, malnutrition, disease, and accidents or trauma resulting in terminal injury. The nature of death has been for millennia a central concern of the world's religious traditions and of philosophical enquiry, and belief in some kind of afterlife or rebirth has been a central aspect of religious faith. The word death comes from Old English *deað*, which in turn comes from Proto-Germanic *daupaz* (reconstructed by etymological analysis). This comes from the Proto-Indo-European stem *dheu* - meaning the 'process, act, condition of dying'

Misdiagnosed

There are many anecdotal references to people being declared dead by physicians and then "coming back to life", sometimes days later in their own coffin, or when embalming procedures are about to begin. Public's fear of being mistakenly buried alive. Various suggestions were made to test for signs of life before burial, ranging from pouring vinegar and pepper into the corpse's mouth to applying red hot pokers to the feet or into the rectum. Writing in 1895, the physician J.C. Ouseley claimed that as many as 2,700 people were buried prematurely each year in England and Wales.

The dying process usually begins well before death actually occurs. Death is a personal journey that each individual approaches in their own unique way. Nothing is concrete, nothing is set in stone. There are many paths one can take on this journey but all lead to the same destination. As one comes close to death, a process begins; a journey from the known life of this world to the unknown of what lies ahead. As that process begins, a person starts on a mental path of discovery, comprehending that death will indeed occur and believing in their own mortality. The journey ultimately leads to the physical departure from the body.

The Journey begins: one to three months prior to death

As one begins to accept their mortality and realises that death is approaching, they may withdraw from their surroundings. Process of separation begins. They contemplate their life and revisit old memories. They may evaluate how they lived their life and sort through any regrets. The dying person may experience reduced appetite and weight loss as the body begins to slow down. The body doesn't need the energy from food that it once did. Sleep more and not engage in activities that they once enjoyed. The body does a wonderful thing during this time as altered body chemistry produces a mild sense of euphoria. They are neither hungry nor thirsty and are not suffering in any way by not eating.

It is an expected part of the journey they have begun.

One to two weeks prior to death

Mental changes: This is the time during the journey that one begins to sleep most of the time. Disorientation is common and altered senses of perception can be expected. Delusions are common. The dying person may also experience hallucinations, sometimes seeing or speaking to people that ain't there. Often times these are people that have already died. Some may see this as the veil being lifted between this life and the next. The person may pick at their sheets and clothing in a state of agitation. Movements and actions may seem aimless and make no sense to others.

They are moving further away from life on this earth.

Physical changes: The body temperature lowers by a degree or more. The blood pressure lowers. The pulse becomes irregular and may slow down or speed up. There is increased perspiration. Skin colour changes as circulation becomes diminished. This is often more noticeable in the lips and nail beds as they become pale and bluish. Breathing changes occur, often becoming more rapid and laboured. Congestion may also occur causing a rattling sound and cough. Speaking decreases and eventually stops altogether.

These basic body changes result in the death of all vital body systems

Pulmonary: Unable to oxygenate the body. Assess for poor oxygenation - skin pale, cyanotic, mottled, cool; in dark skinned - assess mucous membranes, palms of hands, soles of feet.

Cardiovascular: Large load on heart when lungs fail. Heart not getting needed oxygen. Pumping heart not strong enough to circulate blood. Blood backs up causing failure. Leads to pulmonary and liver congestion.

Blood circulation: Decreased, as heart less able to pump. May have a "drenching sweat" as death approaches. Pulse becomes weak and irregular. If pulse relatively strong, death is hours away. If pulse is weak and irregular, death is imminent.

Failing metabolism: Metabolic rate decreases, almost stopping. Feces might be retained or incontinence might be present.

Failing urinary system: Urinary output decreases. Blood pressure too low for kidney filtration. Further load on cardiovascular system due to increased circulating volume.

Failing nervous system: Decrease oxygen to the brain, means decreasing brain function. Sensation and power lost in legs, first, then arms. May remain conscious, semi-conscious, or comatose.

Specific sensory decline: Dying person turns toward light - sees only what is near. Can only hear what is distinctly spoken. Touch is diminished - response to pressure last to leave. Dying person might turn toward or speak to someone not visible to anyone else. Eyes may remain open even if unconscious. Person might rally just before dying.

Journey's end: a couple of days to hours prior to death

The person is moving closer towards death. There may be a surge of energy as they get nearer. They may want to

get out of bed and talk to loved ones, or ask for food after days of no appetite. This surge of energy may be quite a bit less noticeable but is usually used as a dying person's final physical expression before moving on. The surge of energy is usually short, and the previous signs become more pronounced as death approaches. Breathing becomes more irregular and often slower, rapid breathes followed by periods of no breathing at all, may occur. The person usually becomes unresponsive and may have their eyes open or semi-open but not seeing their surroundings. It is widely believed that hearing is the last sense to go so it is recommended that loved ones sit with and talk to the dying during this time. Eventually, breathing will cease altogether and the heart stops. Death has occurred.

Death can involve fears that are physical, social, and emotional:

Physical: Helplessness, dependence, loss of physical faculties, mutilation, pain.

Social: Separation from family, leaving behind unfinished business.

Emotional: Being unprepared for death and what happens after death.

Fears of the patient: Fear of isolation, fear of pain, fear of dependence, fear of death itself, death and immortality, death as the end.

Responses of the patient's family: Anticipatory grief. Phases of grief - shock and numbness, yearning and searching, disorganisation and despair, reorganisation.

The uncertainty of life helps us appreciate life and prepare for death. It is natural for one's body to decay especially when accelerated by disease processes. In the final stage when life-sustaining systems begin to shut down, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual changes may occur over weeks, days or hours. Though, each person's experience is unique, there are some general similarities. In the final stage of living, commonly called "dying", here are some suggested ways of caring to understand and be prepared for these changes, in order to provide appropriate and safe support and comfort holistically.

Never lose sight

Death is the end, as we know it, for that person. We can only support, listen therapeutically, and make the person as physically comfortable as possible. We can also use our knowledge and expertise to strengthen, support, and prepare the family.

To make the "process of dying" easy

This is often a time of self-examination, of questioning, of looking for the meaning of life. Assist the person with physical tasks, while being sensitive to their feelings, maintaining their dignity and attending to their comfort as much as possible, especially with regard to symptom control and protection from injury. Love and humour can take the tension away from a stressful situation. To be patient, non-judgemental, compassionate, allowing the person's own wisdom to evolve. When regrets appear, see them as lessons learned, encourage memories of meaningful events and practice rejoicing, by seeing the benefits of the kind ac-

tions of one's life, allowing whatever faith, hope and love the person has, to exist and develop freely.

Simply being there near the person, holding the hand, sending loving thoughts, silently praying, meditating, just being there for them provides a comforting, safe and peaceful atmosphere that facilitates the person's inner work. The caregiver should try to respect the person's wishes and be aware of what personal desires come up in their own mind and how these can be addressed without disturbing the mind of the dying.

The dying are very sensitive to what is communicated by the caregiver's body, speech and mind and the caregiver can become more aware of reactions and messages from the person by watching and listening. The eyes, facial expressions, and breathing changes often indicate what the person is feeling or thinking.

As the digestive system gets weaker, food may become more of a discomfort than an enjoyment, some medications may change the tastes of food, and finally the energy required to process the food becomes greater than the energy derived from it. It's often the hardest thing for the family to face; but the refusal to feed the body is not a refusal for nourishment. The person approaching death needs to know that it is okay not to eat. Respect and acceptance brings people closer together which comforts the dying person and the caregiver too.

The level of awareness and cognition can change frequently and unexpectedly, due to many causes (i.e. disease processes, tiredness, medication). Do not negate what they say or argue with them. This is their personal reality, which can be a pleasant comforting experience for the person and could also be a sign that the person's mind is peaceful or joyful with happy expectation. But if their experience upsets or disturbs them, gently touch or stroke their arm or hold their hand and speak calmly with a soft reassuring voice and remind them of who you are, where they are, what day it is, etc. Aromatherapy and their favourite music or chanting of their faith, is also helpful.

If breathing is difficult with or without oxygen being given, sometimes a fan blown over the body to give the sensation of being in fresh air, combined with the mental suggestion of visualising sitting on a beach in the wind or the top of a high hill, can give relief. Closer to death, the breathing involves the whole rib cage and is fast (up to 30-50 breaths per minute) mostly through the mouth and then may pause for even ten to 15 seconds before the next in-breath. This period of no breathing is called "apnoea".

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross,[1] in her landmark work entitled *On Death and Dying*, identified five emotional stages experienced by dying individuals: denial - or "no not me", anger - or "why me?" bargaining - or "Yes, but. . .", depression - or "It's me!" acceptance - or "It's part of life. I have to get my life in order."

The extended grief cycle

The initial state before the cycle is received is stable, and then, into the calm of this relative paradise, a bombshell bursts.

Shock stage: Initial paralysis at hearing the bad news.

Denial stage: Trying to avoid the inevitable.

Anger stage: Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion.

Bargaining stage: Seeking in vain for a way out.

Depression stage: Final realisation of the inevitable.

Testing stage: Seeking realistic solutions.

Acceptance stage: Finally finding the way forward.

What to say to the family

I'm sorry. I'm sad for you. How are you doing with all of this? I don't know why it happened. What can I do for you? You must really be hurting. It isn't fair, is it? You must really feel angry. I'm here and I want to listen. Please tell me what you are feeling. This must be hard for you. What's the hardest part for you? I'll call you tomorrow. Take all the time you need. Thank you for sharing your feelings.

What NOT to say

I understand how you feel. Death was a blessing. It was God's will. It all happened for the best. You're still young. Be strong! You have your whole life ahead of you. You'll feel worse before you feel better. You can have other children. You can always remarry. Call me when I can help. Something good will come out of this. At least you have another child. He/she led a full life. It's time to put it behind you now.

Nearing death awareness

Hospice nurses Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley[2] pioneered the idea of nearing death awareness through their work caring for the dying. They recognised signs that patients knew something were happening to them - that they somehow knew death was near, even though they couldn't explain it in terms most of us understand. They wrote about this special knowledge in their moving book *Final Gifts*. As a patient moves through the dying process, she may make statements or gestures that don't seem to make any sense. Others may label her as "delirious," "losing her mind," or "hallucinating." Medications may be given to treat what some doctors or nurses think is delirium. Family and friends may try to help by "baby talking" to soothe her or by trying to re-orient her to "reality" and discounting what she is saying.

Final Gifts

In *Final Gifts* the authors also write: "By keeping open minds and by listening carefully to dying people, we can begin to understand messages they convey through symbol or suggestion. Often we can decipher essential information and in the deciphering relieve a dying person's anxiety and distress. By trying to understand, and therefore participate more fully in the events of dying, families and friends can gain comfort as well as important knowledge about what the experience of dying is like and what is needed to achieve a peaceful death." Through speech or actions, a dying person may be trying to convey to us their needs, wishes, or desires for a peaceful death. They may simply be preparing their loved ones for an event they cannot fully explain. It's important to carefully listen to what your dying loved is saying so you don't miss something important and special.

Thanatology

The study of death delves into matters as diverse as the cultural anthropology of the notion of soul, the burial rites and practices of early civilisations, the location of cemeteries in the Middle Ages, and the conceptual difficulties involved in defining death in an individual whose brain is irreversibly dead but whose respiration and heartbeat are kept going by artificial means.

The cultural background

Throughout history, specific cultural contexts have always played a crucial role in how people perceived death. Different societies have held widely diverging views on the “breath of life” and on “how the soul left the body” at the time of death.

Ancient Egypt

Two ideas that prevailed in ancient Egypt came to exert great influence on the concept of death in other cultures. The first was the notion, epitomised in the Osirian myth, of a dying and rising saviour god who could confer on devotees the gift of immortality; this afterlife was first sought by the pharaohs and then by millions of ordinary people. The second was the concept of a postmortem judgement, in which the quality of the deceased’s life would influence his ultimate fate. Egyptian society, it has been said, consisted of the dead, the gods, and the living.

During all periods of their history, the ancient Egyptians seem to have spent much of their time thinking of death and making provisions for their afterlife. It is clear why the Egyptians never cremated their dead: to do so would have destroyed for the deceased all prospects of an afterlife. Fortunately, there was no question of organ transplantation; in the prevailing cultural context, it would never have been tolerated.

Mesopotamia

The Mesopotamian (Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian) attitudes to death differed widely from those of the Egyptians. They were grim and stark: sickness and death were the wages of sin. Although the dead were buried in Mesopotamia, no attempts were made to preserve their bodies. According to Mesopotamian mythology, the gods had made humans of clay, but to the clay had been added the flesh and blood of a god specially slaughtered for the occasion. God was, therefore, present in all people. The sole purpose of humanity’s creation was to serve the gods, to carry the yoke and labour for them. Offended gods withdrew their support, thereby opening the door to demons. The dead were, in fact, among the most dreaded beings in early Mesopotamian demonology.

The Babylonians did not dissect bodies, and their approach to disease and death was spiritual rather than anatomical or physiological. They did not speculate about the functions of organs but considered them the seat of emotions and mental faculties in general. The heart was believed to be the seat of the intellect, the liver of affectivity, the stomach of cunning, the uterus of compassion, and the ears and the eyes of attention.

Hinduism

Among the collected hymns of the Rigveda, there is a “Song of Creation.” “Death was not there,” it states, “nor was there aught immortal.” The world was a total void, except for “one thing, breathless, yet breathed by its own nature.” This is the first recorded insight into the importance of respiration to potential life. Later, by about 600 BC, the Upanishads (a collection of searching, intellectually stimulating Indo-Aryan texts), an essential attribute of the living was their ability to breathe (an). Their prana (“breath”) was so vital that on its cessation the body and its faculties became lifeless and still. The word for “soul,” *atman*, is derived from *an*, thus placing the concept of breath at the very core of the individual self or soul.

The Upanishads, the ancient set of Hindu religious texts, postulated an eternal, changeless core of the self called as the “*Atman*.” This soul or “deep self” was viewed as being identical with the unchanging godhead, referred to as *Brahma*. Untouched by the variations of time and circumstance, the *Atman* was nevertheless entrapped in the world of “*samsara*” (the cycle of death and rebirth). Life in this world means suffering. What keeps us trapped in the *samsaric* cycle is the law of *karma*. It is the necessity of “reaping one’s *karma*” that compels human beings to take rebirth (to reincarnate) in successive lifetimes. In other words, if one dies before reaping the effects of one’s actions (as most people do), the *karmic* process demands that one come back in a future life.

Hence, for example, an individual who was generous in one lifetime might be reborn as a wealthy person in the next incarnation. “*Moksha*” is the traditional Sanskrit term for release or liberation from the endless chain of deaths and rebirths. In the southern Asian religious tradition, it represents the supreme goal of human strivings. What happens to the individual after reaching *moksha*? In Upanishadic Hinduism, the individual *Atman* is believed to merge into the cosmic *Brahma*. The Upanishadic understanding is that the *Atman* is never separate from *Brahma*; hence, individuality is illusory, and *moksha* is simply waking up from the dream of separateness.

When devout Hindus sense death approaching, they begin repeating the monosyllable *Om* (this word refers to *Brahman* and is widely used in religious observance to help concentrate the mind on what matters). If it is the last word on a person’s lips, it guarantees a direct passage to *moksha*. When the dying are judged to have only an hour or so left, they are moved from their bed to a mattress on the floor and their heads are shaved. The space between ground and the ceiling is thought to symbolise the troubled area between earth and sky, and those dying there may return after death as evil spirits. A space on the ground is sanctified with Ganges water and various other ingredients, including cow dung, barley, and sesame seeds. A Hindu should never die in bed, but lying on the ground.

Islam

The basic premise of all Quranic teaching concerning death is Allah’s omnipotence: he creates human beings, determines their life span, and causes them to die. The Quran states: “Some will die early, while others are made to live

to a miserable old age, when all that they once knew they shall know no more. Damnation and salvation are equally predetermined: "Allah leaves to stray whom he wills, and guide whom he wills".

The very term Islam, Arabic for "surrender," implies an absolute submission to the will of god. Death is repeatedly compared with sleep, which is at times described as "the little death." God takes away people's souls "during their sleep" and "upon their death." He "retains those against whom he has decreed death, but returns the others to their bodies for an appointed term". During death, the soul "rises into the throat" before leaving the body.

According to the tenets of the Muslim faith, death is the complete end of physical life and the beginning of a period of rest until the day of resurrection when Allah judges the living and the dead. Many Muslims believe that the righteous are able to see visions of god after death and that the wicked see visions of hell. Except for these possible visions of heaven or hell, Muslims believe the soul remains in a kind of "soul sleep" until Judgement Day. When the Day of Judgement arrives, everyone is judged according to their deeds in life.

Christianity

Death is at the very core of the Christian religion. Not only is the cross to be found in cemeteries and places of worship alike, but the premise of the religion is that, by their own action, humans have forfeited immortality. Through abuse of the freedom granted in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve not only sinned and fell from grace, but they also transmitted sin to their descendants: the sins of the fathers are visited on the children. And as "the wages of sin is death", death became the universal fate: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men".

The core of Christian belief about death is that there is an afterlife, that conduct on earth – how we behave – will determine where in the afterlife you will eventually end up. The Catholic Church claims there is an afterlife state which is between heaven and hell the Catholic Church calls 'purgatory.' The theological teaching is that after a time of purgation, the spirit will eventually progress and will go to heaven. Catholic theology also states that sinners can confess their sins to Catholic priests and those sins are forgiven for ever – it does not matter how grave the sins might be – including genocide – if the sinner truly repents, he will be forgiven.

Buddhism

Buddha accepted the basic Hindu doctrines of reincarnation and karma, as well as the notion that the ultimate goal of the religious life is to escape the cycle of death and rebirth. Buddha asserted that what keeps us bound to the death/rebirth process is desire, desire in the sense of wanting or craving anything in the world. Hence, the goal of getting off the Ferris wheel of reincarnation necessarily involves freeing oneself from desire. Nirvana is the Buddhist term for liberation. Nirvana literally means extinction, and it refers to the extinction of all craving, an extinction that allows one to become liberated.

Where Buddha departed most radically from Hinduism was in his doctrine of "anatta", the notion that individuals do not possess eternal souls. Instead of eternal souls, individuals consist of a "bundle" of habits, memories, sensations, desires, and so forth, which together delude one into thinking that he or she consists of a stable, lasting self. In Buddhism, this means abandoning the false sense of self so that the bundle of memories and impulses disintegrate, leaving nothing to reincarnate and hence nothing to experience pain.

Judaism

Traditional Judaism firmly believes that death is not the end of human existence. Judaism is primarily focused on life here and now rather than on the afterlife. Judaism does not have much dogma about the afterlife, and leaves a great deal of room for personal opinion. The death of human beings was like that of animals: "As one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts . . . all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again". Life alone mattered: "A living dog is better than a dead lion".

Spiritualism

Unlike all other religions which require faith and belief (faith in a belief without evidence), spiritualism/spiritism is the only religion which is based on evidence and direct experience. Spiritualism is the acceptance of empirically elicited evidence that the human consciousness survives physical death and that those who cannot survive can communicate with those who are physically on earth in a number of ways. This communication can be made through at least twenty different empirically validated processes including mental, physical and direct voice mediumship, telepathy, Electronic Voice Phenomena, Instrumental Trans-communication, Apparitions, Death Bed Visions, Poltergeist. In addition, spiritualists follow the universal law of cause and effect, accepting self-responsibility and that the universe is governed by Mind, commonly called God.

Spiritualism is a belief system or religion of right thinking and right actions based on universal laws such as Personal Responsibility and the Law of Attraction. Spiritualism's key tenet postulates that spirits of the dead residing in the spirit world have both the ability and the inclination to communicate with the living. It is thought that such communications are corroborated by scientific research into life-after-life. Spiritualists teach that any person may receive spirit messages, but formal communication sessions, sometimes called séances or message circles, are held by "mediums", who can then provide information about the afterlife and evidence proving the survival of the spirit.

Spiritualism says that all people and animals that have been loved continue to live after physical death. On crossing over we take three things with us: our etheric or spirit body (a duplicate of our physical body), all memories, our character. On crossing we go to a realm that will accommodate the vibrations we accumulated from all the thoughts and actions of our lifetime. Average decent people go to what is usually termed as the Third Realm. Those who have been wilfully cruel and consistently selfish go to the darker, very unpleasant astral regions because their level of vibra-

tions would be much lower than the vibrations of the Third Realm. Information transmitted from the other side tells us that the Third Realm is a place of enormous beauty, peace and light. Those who earned it can progress to the fourth level, then the fifth, and sixth and so on. For humans we know that there are at least seven realms vibrating from the lowest to the highest - the higher the vibrations the more beautiful and better the conditions. Spiritualists accept the Law of Progress - that those who are in the lower realms will one day slowly go upwardly towards the Realms of the Light even if it takes eons of time.

Death to various stages of life

Many of us in this world are so busy trying to live life beyond its existence that truly living life to its fullest is a rather difficult affair. When you try making children understand a profound concept like death, it's difficult to penetrate through their innocent minds that there is going to be a vacuum created henceforth and that life moves on. For kids it's probably a notion that god sent me here for a certain period in life and now that he's so lonely after having created so many things around him, so he needs me back there! We assume life to be unending only to find that all this time spent was really to better equip yourself with the reality called "death", which perhaps explains the reason why as we get older, we tend to become closer and closer to god! Perhaps it's the final reckoning with the Almighty that makes us do so! Amidst the pain and the truthful experiences in life that make us wiser by the day it still leaves many questions unanswered, what do we mean by death?

On death

"Against the fear of death, man has produced a lot of logical arguments which undervalue both the fear and death. Death, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, since when we are, death is absent, and, when death is present, we are not any more. It is nothing, then, either to the living or to the dead." - *Epicurus, 341-270 A. C., Greek philosopher, Letter to Menoeceus*

"Men come, go, sing and dance, without uttering a word about death. All this is very fine but, when it comes either to themselves, their wives, their children, or their friends, taking them unawares and unprepared, then what torment, what outcries, what madness and despair." - *Montaigne, 1533-1592, French writer*

"Life is a great surprise. I do not see why death shouldn't be an even greater one." - *Vladimir Nabokov, 1889-1977, Russian writer, Pale Fire*

On Death – on a lighter note

"All tragedies are finished by a death. All comedies are ended by a marriage. The future states of both are left to faith." - *Lord Byron, 1788-1824, English poet, Don Juan*

"When death comes around, nobody is willing to die and old age is no longer a burden." - *Euripides, 480-406 b. C., Greek poet, Alcestis*

On Death – in reminiscence

"You can shed tears that she is gone,
or you can smile because she has lived.
You can close your eyes and pray that she'll come back,
or you can open your eyes and see all she's left.
Your heart can be empty because you can't see her,
or you can be full of the love you shared.
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday,
or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.
You can remember her only that she is gone,
or you can cherish her memory and let it live on.
You can cry and close your mind,
be empty and turn your back.
Or you can do what she'd want:
smile, open your eyes, love and go on."

-*David Harkins*

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