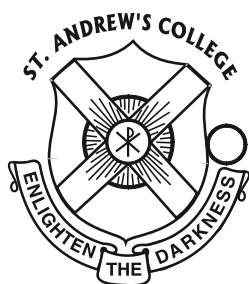


ISSN 2250-3331

Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation Chair of Inter-religious & Inter-cultural Dialogue



**Ethics and Society: An International Journal
Religions and Cultures for Peace and Harmony**

Vol. 3

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Archbishop Felix Machado
Rev. Dr. Stephen Fernandes
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Published: January 2014

Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation Chair
for Inter Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue
St. Andrew's College
Bandra, Mumbai - 400 050

Printed at JRose Enterprises

27, Surve Industrial Estate
Sonawala X Road No. 1
Goregaon East, Mumbai - 400 063

The Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation

The Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation has been constituted under Italian law and recognised by the Republic of Italy. It has legal base at Crema, Via Dante, 24.

In a world oscillating between indifference and fanaticism, His Eminence Cardinal Poupard, collaborator of the sovereign Pontiffs John XXIII, Paul VI and Benedict XVI is one of the most qualified representatives for the way of dialogue, identified by Popes as being able to establish peaceful and long-lasting co-existence between nations and different civilisations.

The Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation intends to conserve and make use of the considerable patrimony of culture and relations that the Cardinal created over many years, in seeking to create and encourage cultural initiatives that can foster the coming together and understanding between traditions and religions of all the world.

It seeks to promote congress, conferences, publications, create Chairs in universities throughout the world, help students with grants and promote the Prize “The Dialogue of Cultures”.

In order to do this, it is composed under the direction of His Eminence Cardinal Paul Poupard, of a President, who will have responsibility for all the activity of the Foundation, assisted by a scientific Committee made up of men and women from the field of culture and the world of business and finance, and will be a place of contact able to erect solid bridges between countries and cultural institutions. The members of this Committee witness, by their adherence, to the richness of different cultures across the world: France, Italy, Russia, United States, Latin America, India and Middle East.

The Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation: Inspired By An Open Humanism

One can synthesize the specific character of Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation, saying that it is inspired by an open Humanism and it is committed to its spread.

It is *Humanism*, because at the core of its concerns there is the human being, that means the one who has to defend himself from all the ideological, political and economic forces which tend to enslave him.

It is *Open*, because it recognises within each human being the spiritual openness, that means the religious dimension which constitute man's nature.

Therefore, it works through the initiatives that I am going to illustrate [or: that I have illustrated]; valorising man in his spiritual dimension, hoping that the different expressions of it do not become an occasion for violent conflicts, but rather a loyal and constructive comparison, for reciprocal enrichment and a common search of truth.

**Adv. Giuseppe Musumeci
President
Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation**

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**Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation
Chair of Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Dialogue
St. Andrew's College, Bandra**

Vision

To promote peace and harmony for a holistic development of society.

Mission

The Chair of Inter-Religious and International Dialogue at St. Andrew's College aims at promoting:

- The exchange of knowledge concerning religions and cultures in dialogue with one another
- Advanced studies and research in Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue
- A space for dialogue so as to foster social harmony and national integration
- The transformation of society by training people to live in peace and harmony.

Programmes Offered

Seminars: To promote study and research among the students into the major religious and cultural traditions.

Certificate / Diploma Courses: Short courses in the areas of inter-religious dialogue, religious pluralism and cultures so as to enable the participants to get to know various religions and cultures.

Local, national and international workshops: Workshops on Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue and Education as well as sensitizing teachers / students on the significance of the same.

Lectures: Lectures by distinguished persons of various religious traditions and cultures. The lectures will aim at creating better understanding among the students and participants, and at promoting peace and harmony.

Research: Offers the possibility for scholars to work on research papers and publications.

Inter-Collegiate Programmes: Essay and Quiz competitions, Seminars, Debates and Exhibitions.

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Introduction:

Life and Death Across Religions

Rev. Dr. Stephen Fernandes

Death is both a mystery and an enigma say the fathers of the Second Vatican Council. In the face of death the enigma of human existence reaches its climax. Human beings are not only the victim of pain and suffering but are also deeply, tormented by the fear of final extinction. Instinctively they shrink from, and reject, the idea of a total collapse and a definitive end of the mortal body. They carry within them the seed of hope for eternity, which cannot be reduced to matter alone, and so they rebel against death. All efforts of technology, however useful they may be, cannot calm one's anxieties; the biological extension of one's life-span cannot satisfy the desire inescapably present in one's heart for a life beyond this life. The papers in this journal articulate the solace what different religions have to offer to come to terms with this ultimate reality.

Dr. Maria Luisa Rossi in her article *Life and Death in the Christian Perspective* articulates what this means. It is a constant striving for harmony, health, peace all of which would have been our birthright had there been no original sin. And so it will be in the next life if we merit one. Every action, every moment, every breath I have taken out of love will be projected into eternity. Every minute of my life here on earth conditions the Life I will live in heaven. So for us Paradise is a house, which we build here and inhabit in the next life. Just as the sun, brings forth life in nature, so too only love in the human heart can bring about the triumph of life. In death, there is the separation of the soul from the body, the human body decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body. God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus' Resurrection.

Sr. Dr. Teresa Joseph in her article *A Liminal Pedagogy: To Understand the Art of Living and Dying in an Inter-Religious Perspective* reflects on death as a liminal experience and examines the attitudes believers of different religions assume in front of this inevitable reality. She shows us how to accompany the dying with a well-cared pedagogy of death. Death she argues is a great liminal experience for they remind us sharply of our powerlessness. Limiting experiences are liminal experiences. In a liminal moment the person crosses the threshold. This is marked

by a move from one's actual reality into a new one. She discusses the issue of reincarnation as put forward by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott and later discussed by The World Parliament of Religions. In Christianity the belief is that the person will be in the presence and the glory of God. The article then examines the positions of the Egyptians, Hindus, Buddhists and the Zoroastrians

Rev. Dr Gilbert de Lima examines *The Cosmotheandric Vision of R. Panikkar for the fullness of Life*. He highlights three problematic knots which need to be untied: the knot of the exhaustion of natural resources, the knot of Earth's sustainability and the knot of world-wide social injustice. Behind the knot of the earth's sustainability is the aggressive destruction of the earth in terms of the stockpiling of nuclear weapons which could result in a world war, the destruction of the ozone layer, the threat of global warming and so on. This kind of sustained aggression on the earth will eventually result in the earth losing its inner equilibrium and bring about its self-destruction. However, there are signs of hope. A new paradigm is taking shape: one which is holistic, systemic, inclusive, pan-relational and spiritual in character. This paradigm understands the universe not as a thing or a juxtaposition of things and objects but rather as a subject in which everything has to do with everything else, at all points, in all circumstances and in all directions, generating an immense cosmic solidarity. Thus every being depends on others, sustains others, shares in the development of others, communing in one same origin, one same adventure, and one same common destiny.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Fernandes in his article *The Role of Healthcare Institutions in Promoting the Gift of Life from Womb to Tomb* discusses life as God's greatest and most precious gift to us. He underscores the point that the right to die is contrary to the right to life. We must do our best to promote a deep respect for human life. The Second Vatican Council condemned crimes and attacks against human life, such as: murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or wilful self-destruction. Healthcare administrators and all involved in healthcare have a great responsibility in managing ethically sensitive medical practices in all life issues from the very beginning of life to its ultimate end. The doctor is called to humanize medicine and to ensure that the most advanced form of technology are used for life and not for death; and in this they should always have as their highest model Christ himself, the physician of souls and bodies.

Dr. Anjali Bhelande in her article *Dying to Live* argues that rising violence, lawlessness and uncertainty add to this stress and kill the joy of living. For most of us, to be alive in a given moment is to be hundred percent present, to be completely immersed in it. Unfortunately, we are hopelessly fragmented, thinking of ten different things at a time and failing to understand or savor the given moment in totality. While we encounter death around us we are reluctant to accept our own mortality. She quotes the sacred scriptures to maintain that even after the death of the body, the spirit lives on and is deathless. It is only by giving up one's attachment to the five senses and the ego-self that one can experience life in the true sense of the term. By living life to the fullest, one must be ready to die to all that is untrue.

Dr. Marie Fernandes in her article *Pyramids and the Sphinx in Ancient Egypt* discusses the practice of Ancient Egyptians to build 'eternal homes', first for kings, then for high functionaries. The Pharaohs who believed that they became gods in the afterlife, wanted their tombs to be very grand. Through their pyramid tombs the Pharaohs were making a statement about their own power and perhaps, about the glory and strength of their country. The architecture was essentially symbolic. The three massive pyramids erected on the Giza plateau at the threshold of the western desert (realm of the dead and the setting sun) bear witness to a veritable golden age for Egypt, a time when the country was rich and powerful.

Dr. Avinash De Sousa, a Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist, offers a *Bio-Psychological Perspective on Life and Death*. His study of Behaviourology, a strictly natural science, affords a new perspective on death and dying and supports a relevant behaviour technology. He examines death from the perspective of natural sciences, the concept of a person, he believes, is best construed as a concept of behaviour, not of body. A body only mediates the behaviour that we call a person. The whole dying process is sequential and in some cases can be slow paced across both the behavioural cessation and the subsequent body disorganization. The operant behaviour of a person can stop while some respondents and nearly all of the internal physiological functions continue. The individual thus exists in a comatose condition, but the behavioural events that define the person no longer occur. His article applies the philosophy and science of behaviourology to the interpretation of the events associated with death and dying, redefining terms, and describing new concepts that emerge from the analysis.

Zuhair Nathani in his article *Life and Death: An Islamic Perspective* asserts that every breath is a breath closer to death. ‘Life’ begins with death. For death was created before life itself. Only Allah, is able to transfer His creatures from the world of death to that of life, or from the world of life to that of death. Death occurs by the command of God. The purpose of life therefore is to attain God-Consciousness, God-Awareness. According to the Qur’an, man gains his happiness only from God, and it is He who fills all the gaps in his life, and satisfies him. The present life is a preparatory stage for an eternal life through the spiritual understanding of life. The human body is the vehicle of the soul to achieve this objective, the final goal being the Pleasure of God and the return to His Grace and Mercy, to be deserving of an eternal life in that Grace and Mercy.

Prof. Sharmila Dhote in her paper, *Life and Death Across Religions: A Bio-Psycho-Social Perspective* aims to understand and investigate the concept and the experience of death and dying across religions through the bio-psycho-social approach. She also examines various cultural and demographic differences regarding the concept of death and afterlife. Some empirical evidence indicates that the concepts of life and death vary greatly according to the person’s culture, religion, social awareness and transpersonal belief systems. For Christians whose lives are guided by the Bible, the reality of death is acknowledged as part of the current human condition, affected by sin. In Muslims, when death approaches, the close family and friends try to support and comfort the dying person through supplication as well as remembrance of Allah and His will. Hinduism believes in the rebirth and reincarnation of souls. Death is therefore not a great calamity, not an end of all, but a natural process in the existence of soul as a separate entity, by which it reassembles its resources, adjusts its course and returns again to the earth to continue its journey. She also examines the four broad categories that religions have with regard to life after death – Reincarnation, Universalism, Divinity and Judgement.

Prof. Jyoti Bhatia’s article, *Hinduism - Its Belief in Life And Death* states that Life and Death of creatures on this earth is governed by Lord Brahma as the Creator; Lord Vishnu as the Preserver; and Lord Shiva as the Destroyer. Hindus believe that there is a part of Brahman in every human being called – *Atman*; is the supreme universal self and the deepest essence of every creature. Hindus believe that all

forms of life contain a soul, and all souls have the chance to experience life in different forms. They also believe in reincarnation - a belief that the soul is eternal and lives many lifetimes, in one body after another. Samsara means going through the cycle of repeated births and deaths – that is, a belief that existence of this cycle is governed by Karma. She quotes from the *Puranas*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Vedas* and the *Arthashastra* to discuss concepts of Karma, Artha, Dharma and Moksha.

Prof. Shaheen S. Mukadam in her article *Life and Death -The Islamic Perspective* explains the Islamic doctrine which holds that human existence continues after the death of the human body in the form of spiritual and physical resurrection. There is a direct relation between conduct on earth and the life beyond. The afterlife will be one of rewards and punishments which are commensurate with earthly conduct. The Quran reveals that God (Allah), has created two lives: the first is worldly life, which is temporal. In it everything has an end. The pious believer while dying is surrounded by the angels of mercy and they greet him with peace and give him the glad tidings of entering Paradise. Therefore, the believer is happy and relieved. He is going to a far better place. It is an hour of bright prospect, of comfort and happiness hoped by every believer: to see the angels of mercy and be given the glad tidings of entering Paradise.

Prof. Neeraj Shukla in his article, *View on Life and Death in Vedanta* maintains that religion is philosophy in action. From time to time an ancient philosophy needs intelligent re-interpretation in the context of new times, and new men of wisdom, prophets and seers guide common man on how to apply ancient law to the present context. Our mortal world has been visited by immortals such as Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, Guru Nanak and many more to explain the meaning of Life and Death. The Vedic sages have declared that we can never find peace and harmony of permanent happiness in the realm of this changing world. *Vedanta* advises us to reduce the *vasanas* (impressions made on the mind due to desire). It warns human beings that thoughts of being rich or having all the pleasures of life, would no doubt be fulfilled if the desire is strong but it will never give us true and permanent happiness, as they are

subject to change. So we need to align ourselves to one which is not under the law of change, and that is God.

In conclusion it is pertinent to say that all religions believe in the life hereafter. Faith in the sacred scriptures is the hope that man clings to, with regard to the promise of immortality. We are all pilgrims on our journey to our eternal home and it will merit us if we reach out to our fellow beings in love and compassion.

Life and Death in the Christian Perspective

Dr. Maria Luisa Rossi

What is Life?

Life is a mystery. Doubtlessly, God, who created us, knows. From our own observation we know that life is not something that stagnates but grows; it is not static but it is in constant movement. Even if at times it slows down, it picks up and continues to develop. It can overcome all kinds of obstacles and goes on growing, multiplying, spreading and exploding.

Living in the Christian perspective is a constant striving for harmony, health, peace all of which would have been our birthright had there been no original sin. And so it will be in the next life if we merit one.

With the incarnation when God came down on earth He brought love. He who is the creator of life and who generated a new and greater life knew what was needed to sustain life: love was needed. And at the end of our lives he himself will judge us only on how much we have loved.

Life is considered an important passage and here lies our greatest trial! The measure in which as Christians we have allowed Jesus to live in us on earth that measure will remain for all eternity in the next life. Every action, every moment, every breath I have taken out of love will be projected into eternity. Every minute of my life here on earth conditions the Life I will live in heaven. So for us Paradise is a house, which we build here and inhabit in the next life.

In the book of Revelations, Jesus is called the Living One. *‘I am the First and the Last, and the Living One* (Rev 1:17-18). The same attribute is given to God:” *You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God* (Mt. 16:16). The entire mission of Jesus lies in giving his life; his supernatural life and his natural life. He says of himself: *“I am the Resurrection and the Life”* (Jn 11:25). Jesus then reveals in a very unequivocal way his love for life because he raises the dead and heals all kinds of sickness. The Good News does not end with his death on the cross but with the Resurrection.

The life we have is precious and a great opportunity in which we can achieve something truly beautiful, great and Holy. Jesus came on earth to communicate to us an extraordinary Life that does not die but remains forever. It is through this Life that we can transform our earthly existence in something wonderful, contributing to the fulfillment of that plan God has for the whole of humanity.

In springtime it is always a wondrous spectacle to observe the effect of the warmth of the sun in contact with nature. Everything re-awakens. The buds gain strength. The trees are clothed in green and mantled with flowers. And yet during winter the earth was protecting the seeds, which are now germinating in the warmth of the sun. It is not the season of spring that generates this explosion of life. If the sun comes early, the earth does not ask if spring has come; the seeds germinate all the same. And just as the sun in nature brings forth life, so too only love in the human heart can bring about the triumph of life.

How we see death

The Christian Creed - the profession of our faith in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in God's creative, saving, and sanctifying action - culminates in the proclamation of the resurrection of the dead on the last day and in life everlasting.

We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly raised from the dead and lives forever, so after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day.

Belief in the resurrection of the dead has been an essential element of the Christian faith from its beginnings.

The Pharisees and many of Jesus contemporaries hoped for the resurrection. Jesus teaches it firmly. To the Sadducees who deny it he answers, "*Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God?*" Faith in the resurrection rests on faith in God who "*is not God of the dead, but of the living.*"

But there is more. Jesus links faith in the resurrection to his own person: "*I am the Resurrection and the life.*" It is Jesus himself who on the last day will raise up those who have believed in him, who have eaten his body and drunk his blood.

To be a witness to Christ is to be a “witness to his Resurrection.” Encounters with the risen Christ characterize the Christian hope of resurrection.

How do the dead rise?

In death, there is the separation of the soul from the body, the human body decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body. God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus’ Resurrection.

Who will rise?

All the dead will rise, *“those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.”*

How?

Christ is raised with his own body: *“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself”*; but he did not return to an earthly life. So, in him, *“all of them will rise again with their own bodies which they now bear,”* but Christ *“will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body,”* into a *“spiritual body”*: This “how” exceeds our imagination and understanding; it is accessible only to faith. Yet our participation in the Eucharist already gives us a foretaste of Christ’s transfiguration of our bodies.

But the effect of the Eucharist goes beyond the resurrection of our body and involves the entire natural world. Paul says: *‘For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God: for the creation was subject to futility, not on its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.’*

Jesus who dies and rises is certainly the true cause of the transformation of the cosmos, but God also expects the contribution of those who have been nourished by the Eucharist to bring about the renewal of the cosmos. Therefore we can say that by means of the Eucharistic bread, humankind becomes ‘Eucharist’ for the universe in the sense that together with Jesus, Christians are the seeds of the

transfiguration of the universe. As the Eucharist is the cause of man's resurrection, man's body, divinized by the Eucharist is destined to decay underground to contribute towards the renewal of the cosmos. The earth consumes us and we consume the Eucharist; therefore the earth consumes us not to transform us in earth but to transform the earth into "new heavens and new earth".

When we will rise?

Definitively" at the last day," "*at the end of the world.*" Christ will raise us up "*on the last day*"; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. For, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already now on earth a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ. Every time we die to ourselves and love we experience the Risen Lord in us.

Death

Death is the end of earthly life. Our lives are measured by time, in the course of which we change, grow old and, as with all living beings on earth, death seems like the normal end of life. That aspect of death lends urgency to our lives: remembering our mortality helps us realize that we have only a limited time in which to bring our lives to fulfillment.

Death is a consequence of sin. The Church's Magisterium, as authentic interpreter of the affirmations of Scripture and Tradition, teaches that death entered the world on account of man's sin. Even though man's nature is mortal God had destined him not to die. Death was therefore contrary to the plans of God the Creator and entered the world as a consequence of sin. Jesus, the Son of God, also himself suffered the death that is part of the human condition. Yet, despite his anguish as he faced death, he accepted it in an act of complete and free submission to his Father's will. The obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing. I would like to read a prayer written by Chiara Lubich, a committed Christian, who expresses what death is in Christian perspective:

'My God this life that you have given us is such a mystery. And what a trial (death) we have to go through in order to reach the goal of our life, our true home! Thank you for having come down on earth and for showing us the

Way, for having become the Way. Losing ourselves in you we will always be in the light even if we are immersed in the depths of darkness. Thank you for having been born and for having lived and 'died for us' (Rm 5:8), for me. Died, yes, died. If you had not died how would we be able to face death? Instead, even in that supreme act we will think of you and we will die with you." (C.Lubich, *Scritti Sprirituali*/2 cit. p.57/58)

Because of Christ, **Christian death has a positive meaning**: *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* The saying is sure: if we have died with him, we will also live with him. What is essentially new about Christian death is this: through Baptism, the Christian has already "died with Christ", in order to live a new life; and if we die in Christ's grace, physical death completes this "dying with Christ" and so completes our incorporation into him in his redeeming act: In death, God calls man to himself. Therefore the Christian can experience a desire for death like St. Paul's: *"My desire is to depart and be with Christ."* He can transform his own death into an act of obedience and love towards the Father, after the example of Christ.

Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When "the single course of our earthly life" is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives. There is no "reincarnation" after death.

Some Catholic thoughts regarding life issues.

- **Human rights**

"Precisely in an age when the inviolable rights of the person are solemnly proclaimed and the value of life is publicly affirmed, the very right to life is being denied or trampled upon, especially at the most significant moments of existence: the moment of birth and the moment of death." (Evangelium Vitae no. 18, John Paul II)

- **Abortion**

"Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole

end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning to its end; no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right to directly destroy an innocent human being.” (Donum Vitae Intro 5, Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith)

- **Death Penalty**

“If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons, public authority must limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person.”
(Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 2267)

- **Contraception/Sterilization**

“The Church...teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life. Equally to be condemned...is direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary. Similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation – whether as an end or as a means.” (Humanae Vitae no. 11 and 14, Paul VI)

- **Euthanasia**

“Euthanasia must be called a false mercy, and indeed a disturbing ‘perversion’ of mercy. True ‘compassion’ leads to sharing another’s pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear.” (Evangelium Vitae no. 66, John Paul II)

- **Embryonic stem cell research and human cloning**

“No objective, even though noble in itself, such as a foreseeable advantage to science, to other human beings, or to society, can in any way justify experimentation on living human embryos or fetuses, whether viable or not, either inside or outside of the mother’s body.” (Donum Vitae no. 4, CDF)

A Liminal Pedagogy: To Understand the Art of Living and Dying in an Interreligious Perspective

Dr. Sr. Teresa Joseph fma

To understand the art of living and dying in an interreligious perspective, one needs to enter the in-between of time and space, life and death. In this article, we reflect on death as a liminal experience, the attitudes believers of different religions assume in front of this inevitable reality, and how to accompany the dying with a well cared pedagogy of death. Death is a great liminal experience: Experiences such as grave illness, death etc. Are limiting experiences that remind us sharply of our powerlessness. Limiting experiences are liminal experiences.

“Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness and to an eclipse of the sun and the moon”¹

A sense of connectedness is attributed to liminality. Encounter with liminality prompts one to reflect. “Liminoid”² is the term that Victor Turner and Richard Schechner used to describe the self-reflecting strategy that strikes modern rituals. The funeral rites in various religious traditions undoubtedly call for an element of self-reflection too. “At certain moments we may choose to emphasize the gaps, the blank spots, an unknowing may seem mysterious. (Liminal space) becomes a method or approach that opens up new possibilities or turns into a valued state for its own sake (Eigne, 1993, 247).”

Life as an ongoing liminal experience

Any serious reflection on death involves a simultaneous reflection on life as an ongoing liminal experience. Texts that communicate stories of human experiences and by extension our own personal stories touch us deeply. These are stories of liminality, stories of being

taken to the threshold. In a liminal moment the person crosses the threshold. This is marked by a move from one's actual reality into a new one. To a great extent one moves from what was, to the fullness of what is yet to come. As Victor Turner has expressed it a liminal time is a fluid time. A glance into two scriptural texts³ from the Holy Bible, Isaiah 6:1-8 and Luke 5: 1-11 can offer us a complete picture of a liminal experience. A liminal time is a fluid time a bit like the point in birthing when the woman feels contractions and experiences her pelvic bones softening and shifting so that the baby can be born. Both the Isaiah and Luke texts present a liminal experience, when time is 'out of joint' and God births in them a new reality. Being taken to the deep is a liminal experience and it is precarious. The Latin root for 'precarious' is *prex*, to pray. So when we put ourselves entirely in the hands of God, we put ourselves in a precarious position; for in deep waters, in the liminal moment, the holy work of God changes everything it touches, including us. Certainly we don't know where God will encounter us or where we will find God. We only know that we float in deep waters and may find ourselves crossing the threshold from the ordinary to the sacred at any time and at any place.

Who doesn't question life? Who is not curious to know about his or her origins? St. Augustine's thought provoking question can very well be a synthesis of what many other persons desire to know. Augustine near the outset of his *Confessions* plainly asks God:

*"Answer my prayer and tell me whether my infancy followed upon some other stage of life that died before it. Was it the stage of life that I spent in my mother's womb? For I have learnt a little about that too, and I have myself seen women who were pregnant. But what came before that, O God my delight? Was I anywhere? Was I anybody? These are questions I must put to you, for I have no one else to answer them. Neither my father nor my mother could tell me, nor could I find out from the experience of other people or from my own memory"*⁴ (Augustine 1961,1.6).

Death - the great unanswerable mystery

Who is not aware of the problems that plague any inquiry related to grave illness and death? There is incongruence between the concept and event of death and the multiplicity of approaches that we bring to it. Zygmunt Bauman's thought

provoking observation that modernity did not conquer mortality, it “categorized the knowable techniques and practices of measurable efficacy and effectiveness”⁵ is worth quoting here. According to Bauman, we humanize mortality by viewing it as set of problems. We look for an “enemy” and kill it. We take shelter in “projects” that we are used to handle this is our way of assuring ourselves a sense of mastery over reality. “Without family and community, I had no social presence, I was among the unloving.”⁶ Is it not death an ongoing experience? Well, we can ask ourselves: after physical death what remains: Another phase of threshold – liminality?

“I cannot say much about the soul’s liminality in a possible afterlife existence, although there are ancient texts that speak of this (the Bardo state). I do know for a fact, however, that a liminal space opens up for people around the death experience. In this liminal space symbols appear that have an uncanniness about them”⁷.

Where death is concerned, no single person can provide answers and therefore any inquiry into its cultural, scientific and spiritual profile must be a plural one. Human persons turn to various religions for answers to the existential questions of life and death.⁸ Any committed study on the topic of death has no doubt to address a few currents of thinking that have been well disseminated in society today. One strong current of thinking is about reincarnation?

The idea of reincarnation

The Theosophical Society founded in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott, in its modern sense pretends to form the “essence and the nucleus, the fruit and the goal of all the religions.”⁹ In the writings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky the preparation for eternity is articulated under the eternal progressive key. The elementary spirits are often exchanged for that of the death. The term reincarnation explicitly appears for the first time in 1882. Blavatsky explains reincarnation as the doctrine of rebirth and with a large mixing up of elements robbed from various currents of thinking, she puts across that reincarnation was a universal belief.

The World Parliament of Religions (Chicago 1893) offered some Oriental masters the first occasion to meet the Western audience. Reincarnation models genuinely

oriental began to be known in the United States and Europe.¹⁰ It is surprising that the author takes it for granted that the reincarnation models ‘genuinely oriental’ were known in the United States and Europe. Were they genuinely oriental or already diluted models? According to Walker, theosopho:

*“Reincarnation is an extremely simple doctrine rooted in the assurance of the soul’s indestructibility. It explains at once the descent and the destiny of the soul by so natural and forcible a method that it has not only dominated the ingenuous minds of all the primitive races, but has become the most widely spread and most permanently influential of all philosophies. Reincarnation teaches that the soul enters this life, not as a fresh creation, but after a long course of previous existences on this earth and elsewhere, in which it acquired its present inhering peculiarities, and that it is on the way to future transformations which the soul is now shaping.”*¹¹

An often-heard expression is that incarnation is the most ancient doctrine as the doctrine of resurrection has its origin only with Jesus. The question becomes a bit more delicate when one reflects further. In the ancient India, the discourse was focused on avoiding a possible reincarnation, the idea of reincarnation was considered in a negative sense. Today, the discourse on reincarnation takes on a positive note. At the heart of the discourse is the solemn advice to do everything possible that one may reincarnate. It is clear that in this context the argumentation on a historical continuity fades off. So what are we up to? Playing on words and feeding in new contents to the old words? Or is it not a diplomatic defensive mechanism making use of Oriental concepts to make them say what is in the subconscious of Occident? Professor Fuss offers a sharp rereading of this reality:

“”The central ideas of modern religious groups that refer their teaching to a mythical East’ are reincarnation and ‘karma.’ The author shows that both ideas are given a meaning that widely departs from the significance of the term in their original religious context. Actually, reincarnation has received the sense of a desirable and providential progress, in sharp opposition with the eastern perception of the concept as a terrible doom. Moreover, ‘karma’ has lost its original passive sense and has become the expression of the

ultimate freedom of man to master and improve his destiny. Therefore, these concepts of reincarnation and 'karma' must rather be considered as a development of merely western esoteric themes under an oriental guise mostly devised by the Theosophical Society during the last century".¹²

Reincarnation is the lens through which reality is read and the myth of reincarnation is inserted into a larger package of other truths. For the ancient people, myth was an expression of a scientific reality, just as today a thing is scientifically proved. Faith calls for a quality jump. When we focus on the resurrection of Jesus the Son of God and that of ours, we will never have a scientific proof. Here is the quality jump in faith. It is love that makes one believe in the resurrection. A religious belief can resemble a passionate commitment. It is truly a way of living. They are the experiences that promote this faith. There is no scientific proof about reincarnation. Both resurrection and reincarnation demands an act of faith. Both are so to say affirmations of faith.

"The social function of myths, in the traditional cultures as in the technological civilisation of post-modernity furnishes the frame within which all the connected data becomes significant."¹³ Reality needs to be considered in its totality enveloping various dimensions.

"The myth model is, as Geertz puts it, a model of and for reality; but unlike Geertz, I include under the term 'reality' the personal reality of the afflicted individuals. The logical implication of this leads us to abolish the distinction between the private and the public nature of symbols; for, as I said earlier, the personal and the cultural are part of the same action as far as personal symbols are concerned".¹⁴

Reincarnation speaks of Life after life and the possibility of dialogue with persons who are reincarnated. Multiple identity of life, one follows the other. Reincarnation – idea of evolution – future life is better, the ideal is to reach a divine life. Reincarnation speaks of progressive evolution.

In Christianity, the idea behind is 'I will be in the presence and the glory of God. I will never be God'. The underlying concept in Christianity is the idea of

redemption and that of participation and not of evolution. Reincarnation pretends to exclude God. It is 'I' that counts, everything depend up on me. There is no recognition of a God who offers mercy and pardon. As I behave today, I will have the results. Resurrection implies a hope that is lived - a style of living according to a standard of morals which means the person associates self already with the life of Jesus Christ and live according to the values of Jesus. The professional secret is 'you are a child of God and so act in such a way worthy of your calling'.

A Common heritage

On our pilgrim journey, we become aware that we have several things in common and we do share a few questions like: How to prepare ourselves for death? How to prepare ourselves for death, giving a sense to our sufferings? What type of psychological and pastoral guidance to be offered in this direction? What praxis of life to suggest?

The provisory nature of life (nothing is fixed or certain in life in the professional world, private or married life) leads one to think of reincarnation. Personal and emotive life is provisory Science has lead even to the choice of allowing embryos to live or no. The general image people have of life is that life itself is provisory therefore why can't I have a new chance? In the present life in which why no one is completely happy is explained by the past, attributing it to the fault of a past life. For example if one is mentally challenged and soon the fault is attributed to his parents. In this way, every responsibility for fault is removed throwing the blemish on to others. Another important element is the theory that affirms that life is a game and that we need to enjoy, making the best for self and manipulate life according to personal preferences.

Various religions provide different concepts regarding life after death. Profound transformation/ purification are necessary. The general idea is about a better life. Three aspects of justice:

reincarnation: man is responsible

Resurrection: man depends on God

Teodicea: explanation for the why of evil. Evil men caused the roots of evil in the world which today we need to put up with. Reincarnation is seen as a response to this.

Different ways of viewing death

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| For the ancient Egyptians | - <i>Not a return but a regeneration</i> The concept of death and resurrection in the ancient Egypt understood as union with God especially with Osiris. |
| Ancient Greek | - return - Reincarnation of Thymos |
| Ancient Romans | - Di manes – spirit of the dead, the friend who accompanies to divine life – divinized heroes – the person who is dying associates self with the family of the heroes. |
| Africa | - Life in solidarity-(in space and time) the person during death enters in ujama (collectivity) solidarity is at the root of the strength of life. Life changes from one position to another. Solidarity implies a moral vision of life. |
| Hinduism | - In the Vedas, there isn't a reincarnation...the law of Karma of cause and effect is a law of life. Life is considered as a great sacrifice. Appeal to a moral life – a pedagogy of life. Reincarnation is viewed as a great punishment. The entire life is defined through action. |
| Buddhism Bardo | - Intermediary state – listening to the word – For Buddha each moment is of death and life - not material death but Bardo - life of connectedness - relatedness and moral commitment. |

- Christianity
- There isn't dualism between body and soul participation in divine life by faith and grace in an act of love and dialogue.

The Egyptian book of the dead

The title: 'Book of the dead' was for the first time applied to the Egyptian texts. Today, there are other such texts (Islam, Tibetan etc.). In no tradition there exists a book of the dead. These are modern compilations with commercial interest. In ancient Egypt there were various texts and not one book of the dead. There was belief in the existence of two worlds – another one very same like our world.¹⁵ The fundamental elements of Egyptian belief on man are:

Ka – divine substance – return to the divine sphere after death

Ba – a part of the soul – a visible element which acts as mediator between the body and ka. Ba – heart - symbol of bird.

The heart – the very being of the person is the seat of all good and evil. The heart is subject to judgement. If the heart is good it goes up, if not it falls down. For the ancient Egyptians, the central idea was regeneration on the same level or in a superior way. Not a return but regeneration. Like the great mother who regenerates (like one time the child) the terrible great mother who devours and gives life.

Departed brothers and sisters – communicators of memory

Considering the dead as communicators of memory within the Family Circle¹⁶ is a form of remembrance in various parts of the world. In Mesopotamia through various forms of collective memory in its various aspects such as public (national) private (family) the remembrance of dead was kept alive. When a person played a significant role in the public role of the city that person was remembered and the religious structure of the city guaranteed this tradition. In the public context:

“To remember means the recitation of songs in the presence of the god or goddess of the city. The place where memory was created was the city temple. [...] With the emergence of the Amorite dynasties, the religious context within

which names were recited changed. The place where they were recited shifted from the temple to the throne room and the private house. The form this collective memory took became the family ritual for the dead, the kispu. This included both offering at the burial and the periodically repeated ritual for the dead, in which the deceased members of a particular family were invoked by name and food and drink offered to them”.¹⁷

The Christian perspective on life after death

The beauty of Christianity is that art of “looking at the history of Christianity as a history of loving respect of God for the sincere search of truth by man”¹⁸ specified in n° 11 of *Dignitatis Humanae*. Death and funeral is that liminal space – threshold – transport to the beyond. The sense of connectedness attributed to liminality reaches its climax at death in the Christian vision. The dialogical character of Christianity at death blossoms into a dialogical immortality.

Dialogical Immortality

At the heart of Christian revelation, there is that unique act of loving communication. God out of mere love takes the initiative to communicate with humanity. This communication becomes visible in the person of Jesus the Word made flesh and reaches its climax in His passion, death and resurrection. This liminal experience of Jesus opens wide a threshold for humanity. In and through Jesus, each person of good will on his own free will can become a partner in dialogue with God.

“We are called by God. With his word, God made us. Our life is a life of dialogue. It is at the end of life that we have to respond. Here is the core of the dialogical character of our life. This is the source from which every other dialogue is born. What is Christianity? How can we explain it, if we have to do so without using Jesus? Christianity is Word. We have to say that Christianity is a dialogical religion. Christ is the supreme expression of dialogue. Even at death he cried out with faith to God. Dialogical immortality not simply during life alone but a dialogical life eternal in the glory and presence of God”¹⁹.

The personal exploration of faith is this journey of dialogue that a person begins thanks to God's initiative.

[...] Christianity has always been a 'biographical religion' in which the persons have modelled their personal biographies on the salvific biography of Jesus Christ. In such a dense identification²⁰, the initial 'myth' of resurrection becomes the confident testimony that the fragmented dialogue of life of each one will have fulfilment in a 'dialogical immortality'²¹. In the practice of this existential dialogue emerges even today a renewed communitarian identity of Christianity".²²

The myth of resurrection speaks of one single life. The human person experiences God's personal love and God takes him/her to Himself after death. The entire concept of the human person is built around the myth of resurrection in Occident. The myth of resurrection in the profound sense of the word opens a frame of interpretation of the entire reality.

Dialogical immortality is the alternative vision that Christianity offers while reincarnation speaks of an individual life, the vision of resurrection speaks of an 'I' in relationship with God, others and self. It is the context of a community. The Christian vision highlights the sacredness of life. This vision looks at the person as free and responsible before God and others. Karl Rahner spoke about how at death man becomes one with all, with the entire Cosmos. Resurrection points to the new heaven and new earth. The wonderful perfection accomplished by God, this is the final moment - the last day. This perfection is called the New Event-Christ.

Apostle Paul had a special art in dealing with the topic of life after death. He was faced with the challenge of life after death.

"It is evident that the cults that, through initiation and purification ceremonies, promised people a better life after death were gaining ground [in Philippi in Paul's time]. The cults of Dionysos and the hero-horseman had a special place near those of the Kabiroi, the Egyptian gods, and the great goddess Cybele and her companion Attis" (Chaido Koukouli-Chrysantaki)²³

The evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John through their writings, present Jesus Son of God and Son of man and his work, mission, passion, death and resurrection. Paul begins with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Intention of Paul is to introduce the members of his community into a fuller life in Christ and what he narrates is his own personal interior experience, fruit of an emblematic encounter which goes much beyond every planned personal project. Therefore to capture the depth of his narration, it is necessary to meet him at that decisive moment of his life: the hour of Damascus. Beginning from that hour, we can see Paul on an in depth journey towards Jesus Christ to the point to say: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). For him the paradigm shift began from that hour of Damascus, as he himself would narrate in 1Cor 15:3-10.

"After having spoken many times and in many ways to our fathers through the prophets, has spoken to us in these latter days through the Son" (Heb 1, 1-2). For "if it is only for this life that we have set our hope in Christ, then we are of all men the most to be pitied" (1Cor 15, 19).

This rich interior experience with the Risen Lord gives a new meaning and profound sense to Paul's life. The experiences, writes Tonelli, are "elaborated with words"²⁴ to make it into objective and consistent message. It is precisely through the words that interpret, form, organize and codify; the profound and vital reason of an experience is formulated. This fact is verified in an exceptional manner in Paul, because going through his letters one sees in him a warm welcoming of the experience with the Risen Lord, and a re-elaboration of that experience which he places at the service of his Christians to make them relevant and efficacious. The revelation of God's love in Paul doesn't remain as a private property but becomes a common property and as many people are co-involved the better it turns out to be. While the evangelists give us an account of the empty tomb and the apparitions of the Risen Lord (Mt.28, 1-8, Mk 16,1-10) and narrates the here and how, Paul leaves the dramatic character of the resurrection at the margin and makes his interiority to emerge. So much so he doesn't speak of his experience with a spectacular style, he always gives the first place to the mystery. Only in the letter to the Galatians, when his identity as an apostle and in particular his witness and the language of his confession

of faith were at risk he speaks in a different manner: A careful analysis of the following texts will offer further insights:

2Cor 6, 2 - "For he says, 'At the acceptable time I have listened to you and helped you on the day of salvation'. Behold now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation".

1Cor 1, 30 - "He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

1Cor 2, 9. - "But, as it is written, 'what no eyes has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him'".

A rereading and reappropriation of Col 1, 15 -20 can offer us new insights for a radical Christian response: "He is the image of the invisible God... and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Christ is the new event for the Christians. "The general tendency is not to neglect these widely diffused beliefs; the author of the Christological hymn responds rather positively to this challenge applying the non-Christian terminology to the person of Christ".²⁵

The Buddhist perspective of death - a permanent liminal state

The Buddhist perspective of death helps to see the liminal space and more precisely the qualitative aspect of liminality. The Great Liberation through Listening (Tibetan book of the dead), is a collection of various texts. Nirvana, the liberation is attained through listening. This is something very profound. Human beings cannot conquer salvation; it is a gift to be received therefore the importance of listening. Shifting attention to the Christian perspective the vision of Karl Rahner '***Man listener of the Word***' – the person open to listen to Jesus. In the other religions there is listening in an existential way.

In the Buddhist tradition 'Bardo' is that intermediary state of listening, the state in which the person listens to the word. According to the vision of Buddha, each moment concludes with an act of dying and rebirth. It is not a material death but 'Bardo' – intermediary state. It is pure energy like an atom. Each cell of the body will be like

the many cells that are dying and reproducing. For the Buddhists, this happens at the end of death.

‘Bardo’ the between the interrelatedness

Buddhism considers life as an illusion. It speaks of the Great death, death of ego – nirvana. The experience of Great Death to which the Buddhist refers which Abe Masao considers in his book²⁶:

“The Great Death represents not just that day in the future when we die; nor even the little deaths along the way. Rather, the experience of the Great Death arises with an awareness of the emptiness and inner void we carry within self. It arises as we begin to appreciate that we do not exist within the secured and confining boundaries of self. What we usually consider as self is void, for we exist not within self, but within the world and the between of its interrelatedness. The experience of the Great Death is rooted in the truth of Sunyata and the awareness that there is nothing substantially we call the self. We exist as persons in terms of and along with all that is not one self, within the mutual and reciprocal offering of the world. We come to be and in turn pass away as part of the one living-dying process we share with one another and all that is nature. This reciprocal bond of the relatedness and emptiness of self manifests dying as forming the very core of relationship. Following in the direction of Abe’s reflections, we can say that it is not only living dying as one continuum; but the living dying –relatedness manifests the fullness of the continuum. The interdependencies of the world take place as dying and through dying.

This focus on death and emptiness need not represent a life-negating or nihilistic interpretation. To the contrary, it could be understood to represent the manner in which we live within and out of our openness to one another participating in the mutual and reciprocal give and take, offering and receiving that ultimately is world”.²⁷

‘Bardo’ the intermediary state is one of maturation. It is a state of living dying relatedness that is unique. It is a manner of living with openness to one another

engaged dynamically and whole heartedly in the process of mutual and reciprocal giving and receiving, becoming gifts to each other. The Great Liberation through Listening (Tibetan Book of the dead) is like a lifelong Catechesis. During life all the mysteries of death are considered. At the hour of death, the recitation of the book is done in the mission of accompanying the one who is to die.

The pedagogy of accompanying the dead in the Buddhist tradition

The pedagogy of accompanying the dead in the Buddhist tradition is characterized by the following: If the mortal remaining is present a friend reads these instructions repeatedly till the moment in which blood and pus comes out from the nostrils. The motif behind is the great liberation through listening. The atmosphere around is created in such a way that the departed is not disturbed in any way and the more possible positive actions are performed. The method of instruction too has a very personal and caring touch:

“Enter then into the state of intermediary existence bardo, in which will mature or receive the salvation or the rebirth. Precisely for this it is called intermediary existence because it is a temporary survival to death, a projection which has a double outcome: the nirvana or the samsâra, or the eternal peace or the tribulations of the continual birth and death”. ²⁸

Method of instruction

The purpose is to read before the dying person what will happen, Karma – positive and negative. The dying person is comforted with the very touching words which begins with Son of the noble family, ... the moment has come for you to search a way... you will enter into Bardo - light – at the end there is peace. According to the Tibetans, the first Bardo is for 49 days. A ‘Bardo’ moment in Tibetan Buddhist terms is a specially painful and meaningful threshold.

A special text is read before the tomb of the dead person. A passage through 6 phases:

First phase: birth after death. Death is birth. To wake up to attention. What will happen?

Second phase: the Bardo of dreams. The sleep of ignorance will be abandoned.

Third phase: the Bardo of meditation

Fourth phase: the Bardo of the moment that precedes death - moment of leaving all blocks and desires and attachments ... while leaving the body composed of flesh and blood it is recognized as transitory illusion.

Fifth phase: the Bardo of 'dharmata'- abandons all thought of fear and terror...

Sixth phase: Bardo of becoming- nirvana- salvation – final liberation.

The Judgement

The person himself or herself judges one's life. It is somewhat like the exam of conscience. 'I will look into the mirror of karma' as a self-judgement. The central point is one has to bear the consequences of one's own action. Meditation as preparation for death reaches knowledge and therefore doesn't need to be born again.

When we turn to the Zoroastrianism we get another view. A person can benefit from actions performed by others. The idea of the:

"Individual who is responsible for his or her own actions only is not at the centre of the Zoroastrianism [...] this responsibility certainly exists, and it is of great importance, but the system is much more diverse. It shows how a person can benefit from actions performed by others, how sins can be annulled or multiplied, how virtue can increase without any virtuous deeds being performed and above all how one's actions influence, and are influenced by, those of others. In other words, the individual in these texts is part of an extensive network of links that embed him in the various groups of which he/she is member: the family, the Zoroastrian community of the living and the community of the dead".²⁹

In her article *Seeing the Difference a Project on Viewing Death and Dying in Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Cristina M. Gillis, writes:

"The ultimate purpose of Seeing the Difference was to produce, in video, print, and on-line formats, a record that could be used in other settings where practitioners are trained to work with the dying. Our project was in

one sense about what cannot be figured: in the words of Dr. Frank Gonzalez Crussi, one of our speakers, it was about absence or 'negative space'; and it was about silence and the liminal. As the participants learned too, however, the institute was really about 'making meaning' of what all too often appears to be meaningless".³⁰

Viewing death from an interreligious perspective

The brief journey made with a general look at the term liminality, and seeing death and life as an ongoing liminal act has offered us a bird's eye view of how believers of different religions consider death and various attitudes that are encouraged to be cultivated leading to a well cared pedagogy of death. Death as a common question addressed by believers of each religion can and will offer us that liminal space to explore new possibilities to build up a culture of love and solidarity. Certainly, a careful discerning is required, as the frame of reference is not always the same. With dialogical religions there is possibility of entering into dialogue. When the currents are esoteric, spiritistic, theosophic etc. there should be a wise discernment and courage to denounce if needed. It is sharply evident that there is incompatibility of the Christian and other visions which remains a challenge to faith and experience. What type of a dialogue is possible? The Christian response to these ideas "must follow the method of accepting every possible underlying truth, inserting it in the Christian climate through a work of focusing the 'new' ideas around the person of Christ, socialising them within the Church and placing them within the historical background of the incarnation."³¹

A Family of brothers and sisters

Buddhism, Christianity and other religious traditions have different paradigms shaped under commitment to service and solidarity to express brotherhood and sisterhood of the human family. Other-centeredness is at the core of such brotherhood or sisterhood expressed through commitment, dedication and humble service.

"Religious faith becomes relevant to such a political process because faith is not so much a set of propositions to which one adheres. Religious faith is, rather, an act in which one entrusts oneself to God. Such trust allows one to

make the most of the gifts that come from God: love, joy, peace, patience, generosity, and self-control. These gifts shape both the content and method of caring for the body politic. [...] Individuals are never called for themselves but are called for service to others. 'Other-centeredness' then becomes an ethical sensitivity that opens the policy-maker to the merits of issues as helpful to human well-being".³²

It is astonishing but real to meet persons at a funeral or after the death of a person whom we have never met or so to say somewhat strangers to us, gifted with such a spirit to make us feel so close. Everything seems as though we had been friends forever. A sense of connectedness is attributed to liminality and death has the capacity to connect persons.

"As the grieving relatives exited with the corpse I collided with a youngish looking Sikh, complete with turban, both of us bent on retrieving our baggage from the overhead lockers. I had noticed him last night with the mourners. I murmured my condolences. He smiled. 'Oh no, he wasn't a relative. I'm a doctor and I signed his death certificate', he said: 'Of course in a sense, all my patients are my family. He bowed his head slightly and disappeared into the opaqueness of the crowds outside her majesty's Passport Control.'" ³³

Pastoral challenges³⁴

There is great need to interpret the myths of today (New Age and others). Reincarnation today is the great myth (general vision of the world – the frame in which everything else is interpreted) that is opposed to the myth of resurrection. In the dialogical dimension we can see the liturgical rites. It is so true that the funerals are celebrated for the living and not for the dead. To ensure that funerals become privileged occasion to make known the richness of liturgical rites that are symbols of faith, hope, love and mercifulness of God.

To prepare small groups of persons who can assist at the death of someone. The key point is to prepare our communities to stand by persons and not to allow the family of the dead person to be alone. We need persons who can accompany the dying and to offer comfort and consolation to the bereaved family. It is wise to prepare persons

to face death in a dignified manner. Special attention needs to be shown to the growing demands of old age in certain parts of the world.

There is need to initiate a process to motivate people to donate organs. This indeed is a spiritual service which requires a spiritual preparation. Again this is a splendid opportunity to bring forth the community dimension of our lives. The truth is that besides my personal life, I can offer something more and in this spirit to prepare families and religious communities for the donation of organs.

In case of emergency, we need to train persons for pastoral care. The vision of death as a mirror of life (this happens in the Buddhist Tibetan tradition). Each moment of life stands on the horizon of eternity. For a faithful this becomes motive for great hope and thanksgiving far from desperation. In the religions, we have mediators. Like the angels of one time these mediators are members of the community who help. Recalling to mind the positive symbols of death have proved helpful to a vast number of people. The thought of Abraham father of faith who welcomes the dead – sign of communion and community and introduces them to God is indeed a very positive one. Heaven considered as a banqueting table and in the Eucharist this meal is anticipated. The fact remains that also for a believer everything is not clear.

A pedagogy of life and death towards a dialogical immortality

The Church in her pilgrim journey (FR 2) together with the human family, members of various religious beliefs (FR 1) believes that in the end there will be the final revelation. Daily life is the martyrdom that all of us are called to face. Daily living and dying as witnesses of truth, persons seriously committed to search for the truth and courageous enough to bear testimony to the rays of truth even at the cost of life.

“Murders are limits, but martyrdoms are liminal; they stand as witnesses to us, as living promises, that the limits we experience in our lives are not the last word. [...] Martyrdoms point to a vision of the world which celebrates death all the deaths, both small and large, that limit our lives and mysteriously mingles that death with birth a liminal threshold over which we pass into an unseen world made whole”.³⁵

In his play, "Murder in the Cathedral" T.S. Eliot recalled the Christmas morning sermon of Archbishop Thomas Beckett, himself martyred at Christmas, murdered by his government.

"Beloved says the Archbishop, at this same time of all the year we celebrate at once the Birth of Our Lord and His Passion and Death upon the Cross. As the world sees, this is to behave in a strange fashion. For who in the world will both mourn and rejoice at once and for the same reason? For either joy will be overborne by mourning, or mourning will be cast out by joy; so it is only in these our Christian mysteries that we can rejoice and mourn at once for the same reason..."

For one who loves the limiting experience of death becomes a liminal threshold experience: a loving encounter and the carrying on of a never ending dialogue. A beautiful weekend that never finishes...we shall then be face to face with God our loving Mother and Father.

Endnotes

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- 19 Fuss Michael, Una 'Ars moriendi' cristiana? La sfida dell'evangelizzazione, from notes taken down in class
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- 21 Ratzinger J, *Eschatologie- Tod un ewiges Leben*. Regensburg 1978, 127 ss; G. Nachtweil, *Dialogische unsterblichkeit*, Leipzig, 1986.
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The Cosmotheandric Vision of R. Panikkar for the fullness of life

Rev. Dr Gilbert de Lima

The human race is faced with an unparalleled situation. It has to decide whether to continue to live or choose its own self-destruction. The risk comes not from any cosmic threat from human activity itself. For the first time in the process of hominization, human beings have provided themselves with the instruments of their own destruction. The indicators are alarming. They show that there is little time in which to make the changes needed. Optimistic estimates give a last date of the year 2030.¹ From then on, if urgent and effective measures are not taken, the sustainability of the Earth-system cannot be guaranteed.

We are faced with three problematic knots which need to be untied: the knot of the exhaustion of natural resources, the knot of Earth's sustainability and the knot of world-wide social injustice.²

Behind the knot of the exhaustion of natural resources lies a reductionist view of the earth. The earth is simply seen as a dead source of reserves to be exploited and not viewed as a super-system subtly articulated into systems and sub-systems with relationships of interdependence and synergy that guarantee the subsistence of each and every part. The earth is not perceived as a super-organism possessing a sacred character. Behind the knot of the earth's sustainability is the aggressive destruction of the earth in terms of the stockpiling of nuclear weapons which could result in a world war, the destruction of the ozone layer, the threat of global warming and so on. This kind of sustained aggression on the earth will eventually result in the earth losing its inner equilibrium and bring about its self-destruction. Behind the knot of social injustice is the pathetic fact that twenty percent of humankind enjoys eighty-three percent of the earth's resources, with the poorest twenty percent having only 1.4 percent. Consequently a billion persons suffer extreme poverty. This social system is the result of a form of economic, political and social organization that privileges some at the expense of the exploitation and destitution of the vast majorities. In the face of these

three knots we ask ourselves: how much violence can Earth still tolerate without breaking as a system? Apart from having been suicidal, homicidal and ethnocidal in the past, we are now beginning to be ecocidal. Shall we end in the not too distant future by being geocidal?

However, there are signs of hope.³ A new paradigm is taking shape: one which is holistic, systemic, inclusive, pan-relational and spiritual in character. This paradigm understands the universe not as a thing or a juxtaposition of things and objects but rather as a subject in which everything has to do with everything else, at all points, in all circumstances and in all directions, generating an immense cosmic solidarity. Thus every being depends on others, sustains others, shares in the development of others, communing in one same origin, one same adventure, and one same common destiny.

The universe forms a community of subjects, since all its components are characterized by what forms a subject: interactivity, historicity, interiority and intentionality. The universe there is in now viewed as a relational whole, inter-retro-connected with everything and greater than the sum of its parts. Thus the nature of matter is perceived as a dance of energies and relationships going in all directions. This vision furnishes us with the basis for a new hope, for a higher wisdom and for an alternative project of civilization.

The civilization which will emerge will be more in tune with the basic law of the universe, which is pan-relationality, synergy and complementarity. It will be, in a word, a civilization of re-binding everything to everything and of everyone to everyone. This is why it will be a civilization that gives **a central place to re-ligio**, to the body that proposes to re-bind everything together because it sees them umbilically re-bound to the Source of all being. This civilization will be re-ligious or it will be nothing. This emerging religious perspective will seek to promote that radical experience that succeeds in re-binding all things and generating a sense of integration and wholeness. Then the civilization of the planetary age, of the society of Earth, can emerge, the first civilization of humankind as humanity.

This vision is spelt out by Raimon Panikkar whose writings articulate a Christology from a religio-cultural perspective which spans the western philosophical and theological traditions as well as the Eastern religious traditions. **Cosmotheandricism**, i.e. the radical relatedness of reality is the key to understand his writings. The focal point of his thought is the principle of the radical relatedness of the entire reality. Radical relativity conveys the ontological state of the whole reality, which is a web of relationships. Nothing is, nor can be understood and defined without reference to its 'being-in-relation' to the rest of reality.

Hence every being bears in itself the stamp of the divine, the human and the cosmic. He coins this new term to express this fact: 'cosmotheandric'. In his thought, cosmos, theos and aner are not three dimensions of a whole, but all three are present in every single being. This makes the entire reality internally bound together by the 'cosmotheandric principle'. Thus since all beings share in the divine, the human and the cosmic, they are all, in their nature, internally related to each other.

Furthermore, Panikkar sees the relationship among various religions as a relationship among various 'myths'. In this perspective consequently a truly universal dialogue needs to take place among the various religious traditions and their experiences. This dialogue enables one to enter into the 'myth' of the other. Since each religion represents a different culture and world-view, we would need a 'cross-cultural hermeneutics' approach.

This dialogue between equals, will not undermine the unique contribution of each religious tradition, but result in a process of mutual fecundation as well as mutual correction. Consequently, interreligious Dialogue will take the form of testimony and witness. In time interreligious dialogue will lead to intra-religious dialogue wherein the religious tradition itself is influenced and transformed.

It is against this background of the **unity of all reality**, religious pluralism and the dialogue among religions, that Panikkar interprets the mystery of Christ. In fact, he states that all discussions and disputes that led to the Chalcedonian Christological doctrine, and the Christological reflections have attempted to capture the mystery of Christ by making it a problem which humans can objectify,

analyze and reflect upon.⁴ However legitimate and laudable these attempts had been to develop a meaningful Christology, they were done within the ecclesial tradition without any dialogue with the religious traditions as if they did not matter. While in the initial stages of the development of Christology, the fathers of the Church sought to get an insight in the meaning of the mystery of Christ, as they entered into dialogue with religious traditions and world views of the Greco-Roman world; with Christianity becoming the religion of the Roman empire, Christology became an inner-ecclesial affair irrelevant to those who did not share the Judeo-Christian world view. Consequently, in order to liberate Christology from a narrow and limited understanding of the person of Christ and to open up the possibility for people of all cultures and religious traditions to encounter the mystery of Christ, Panikkar holds that Christology must further develop into **Christophany**. He thus takes the valuable insights of traditional Christology, goes further to develop a christophany without supplanting it and provides Christology with new vistas and new possibilities to challenge one and all for a transforming vision of Christ.

It is this vision which thus leads him to distinguish Christology from Christophany. Whereas Christology is concerned about the mystery of Christ as it formed part of 2000 years of interpretation within the Jewish, Greek and the European milieu. Christophany will mark the beginning of a new phase. It is an approach to the mystery of Christ from a wide variety of cultures, experiences, religious traditions and backgrounds. Thus Panikkar succeeds in converting a tribal Christology into a non-sectarian Christophany, as he approaches the mystery of Christ from a wide variety of cultures, experiences, religious traditions and backgrounds.

Now, since the **mystery of Christ is universal**, the articulation of the mystery of Christ by Christians within the Christian tradition does not exhaust the riches of the great mystery of Christ. In fact, in the 2nd edition of the 'Unknown Christ of Hinduism'⁵, he declared that Christ is present in all cultures, religions, including Hinduism, and transcends them as well.

According to Panikkar, therefore, Christ is to be seen not only in the limited Abrahamistic or Semitic tradition but also in the cosmic tradition of mankind and

in all authentic religious traditions.⁶ The whole Christ is pre-existent, historical and trans-historical. He is the most perfect expression of the complete harmony between everything that is Divine, Human and Cosmic or the Cosmotheandric reality. This person who makes the human, the divine and the cosmic communion possible cannot be thought of only in spatio-temporal categories. It is true that it is in Jesus of Nazareth that a Christian encounters Christ. But the Christ of the Christian believer transcends the historical limitations of Jesus of Nazareth. However, this insight of Panikkar should be not construed as his attempt to separate Jesus of Nazareth from Christhood as some of his critics accuse him of separating the two. Indeed, the Christ of Panikkar's Christology is not an a-personal principle: 'The Christ that sits at the right hand of the Father is the first-born of the universe, born of Mary; he is the Bread as well as the hungry, naked or imprisoned. This Christ is the second Person of the Trinity, the pre-existent Christ who reveals himself in the Jesus of Nazareth'. He, indeed, is the living One who can be encountered in the sacraments, in all human beings and especially in the deprived and the depraved. Panikkar's attempt is therefore to overcome the tendency of Jesuology which makes Jesus an idol without transcending himself, which precisely is what happened at the resurrection.

Panikkar's is definitely an astounding "Christology," since it is one that "envision[s] a truly universal encompassing the spirit of the Christ as the completion of humanity, outside the dogmas and orthodoxies, denominations and traditions of history and sect, to embrace all people of all religions. In fact, it is a Christology that Atheist, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, Animist and Pagan could embrace without abandoning the distinctive mythos of their own tradition".⁷

Jesus Christ is thus perceived as that central symbol which embodies the entire reality. He is the living symbol of divinity, humanity and the cosmos. In Jesus Christ, the infinite and the finite meet. In him the human and the divine are united. In him the matter and the spirit, the masculine and the feminine are one. And so when we say Christ is the symbol of all reality, we say that 'in Christ are enclosed not only all treasures of the divinity, but also hidden all the mysteries of humanity and all the density of the universe.' Therefore Christ is not the symbol for reality, but the symbol

OF reality. The whole of reality is a 'Christophany', a manifestation of Christ. Indeed, every creature is a *christophany*.⁸

It follows thus while bridging cultural and religious languages Panikkar also finds deep and wide intentions and meanings of Jesus behind New Testament texts that include the social, political, and economic situations of oppressed people. What liberation theology began for Latin American people, Panikkar addresses to the *dalits* of India who are part of the wide world consciousness of Christophany that is opposed to structures of oppression and violence.

Furthermore, following the Christology of Chalcedon, Panikkar says that Christ is man but not one man, a single individual, he is the divine person, incarnated and is in hypostatic union with human nature.⁹ ...According to Panikkar the important issue is encountering him as true God and true man. The encounter is possible only when identity can be said to be real and thus true if we enter into a personal relationship with him. Only then may one discover the living Christ of faith who lives in the interior of oneself. In this experience one realizes that Jesus is one who does not fall into the category of singularity or individuality and his character is 'not singleness but communion, and not incommunicability, but relations'Therefore, according to Panikkar: 'The word Jesus has basically two different meanings: one as historical category and another as personal category. The former is reached by means of historical identification, which permits us to speak about Jesus and about the beliefs Christians have in and through him. The latter is reached by means of personal identity and allows us to discover him a 'part' or rather pole of our personal being, as one of the many traits that make our person.'¹⁰

Christ is indeed the real symbol of divinization—that is, of the Fullness of Man. 'Man' is more than a "human" nature. Here Panikkar insists that 'Man' is rooted in *manas*, mind, consciousness and is not gender exclusive. The subtitle, "the fullness of Man" thus refers not to a gender bias but to each human being and to the goal for all humanity.¹¹ In Panikkar's view Christ opens each human person to the challenging presence and power of the Trinitarian mystery.

Thus the humanistic goal of Christophany is not simply an already present divinization, but the challenge, task, and summons to respond to our deepest potential,

capability, and power to discover the deepest resources of divine action within us. To tune into the Christophanic experience within requires an interiority or deep sensitivity that allows absorption of the words of scripture addressed to us as faithful, attentive hearers and practicing disciples who enjoy the opening of a beautiful, living gift. Phenomeno-logically “every being is a Christophany,” a divine manifestation to humans. Our soul-selves are not the product of an ideological, bioneurological evolution, but are the “aspiration for the infinite” that desires to “enter into communion...with divine nature.... It is becoming another Christ. This is what Panikkar means by *“the fullness of man.”* All along he is telling us that “if the mystery of Christ is not our very own...it might as well be a museum piece.” Christophany, for Panikkar, must come from the most interior part of us. In that deep place the finite and the infinite meet.

Christophany also highlights the need for a ‘social Gospel’. In the context of alarming human crises, where 70% of humanity live in sub-human conditions, 1000’s of children die daily because of man-made injustices, wars kill 1200 persons daily, religious communalism and ecological crises, what does contemporary Christology have to say all of this?

A Christology deaf to the cries of man he says would be incapable of uttering any word of God. Panikkar consequently calls from the Christian side a second Council of Jerusalem, which would include other religions.¹² They would together articulate a response to the common responsibility they feel for the planet.

Hence, although Pannikar insists that Christians explore the depths of mystical awareness, he holds that this cannot be done at the expense of the social Gospel.

Nor says Panikkar is mysticism to be used merely as a tool of evangelism or missionary efforts, as a way to “sell” Jesus to people in non-Christian traditions. Pannikar opposes a universalizing impulse which would merely attempt to create a universal Christian theology or culture applicable to all times, places, and peoples. Mysticism, in fact, will enable Christians to experience the depths of their own identity in God, with no overt or covert goal of seeking to convert the whole world to Christianity!

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Endnotes

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- 2 Cf. L. Boff, 'The Globalizing Evil of Our Actual World,' in *Concilium*, 1990/5, pp. 1-5
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- 7 DiLascia, A., (Foreword by Alfred DiLascia) to *Christophany the fullness of Man*, by Raimon Panikkar, (Faith Meets Faith Series: Orbis Books), in www.wordtrade.com/religion/christianity/panikkarR.htm
- 8 In fact, Panikkar in the same perspective states, in *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, John Knox Press, Westminster, 1993, pp. 152-153, that with 'such a view of Christ I am not avoiding the *skandalon* of the Incarnation and the process of salvation. I am not ignoring these facts. The point is simply that I am not worshiping history as if it were God, and I am not limiting reality to history – not even to human history – and not to the history of abrahamic lineage. Just as traditional theology speaks of a *creatio continua*, we might imagine, analogously, a continued incarnation, not simply in the body but also in the actions and events of all creatures. Every creature is a *christophany*.'
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metanoia, the change of perspective and roles, takes place so that Jesus becomes the I and the seeker the thou, so that the Master's 'I am' becomes something more than a metaphysical or psychological statement. Then the Christian will utter: 'I live no more but Christ lives in me'

- 11 Lounibos, J., (Review of '*Christophany, the Fullness of Man*', by R. Panikkar, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004, pp. 214), in catholicbooksreview.org/2005/panikkar.htm
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The Role of Healthcare Institutions in Promoting the Gift of Life from Womb to Tomb

Rev. Dr. Stephen Fernandes

Introduction: The Gift of Life

God's greatest and most precious gift to us is the gift of human life. Once we are conceived, the miracle of human life begins. From conception, a human embryo has a complete genetic code and his or her growth and development is totally coordinated from within. From the very first moment of conception, we have the right to life. Life is a fundamental good which must be treated with great respect and treasured and appreciated by all. *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, gives the basic principle of Christian Ethics: "There is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of the human person, who stands above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable".¹ The so called right to die is contrary to the right to life.

The Inviolability of Human Life

It is true that all life comes from God. However, human life comes into human beings in a very special manner because God breathed the breath of life into the first human being.² Without this gift, no human being would be alive. Today, there is an increasing need to create a consciousness of the many dangers to human life. We must do our best to promote a deep respect for human life.

Crimes which offend the Inviolability of Human Life:

The Second Vatican Council condemned crimes and attacks against human life. It stated: "Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or wilful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are

treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society, and they do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator”.³ We need to create an awareness in society of all these acts of violent aggressions especially against the weak and the defenseless.

The Role of Healthcare Institutions:

Today healthcare administrators and all involved in healthcare have a great responsibility in managing ethically sensitive medical practices in all life issues from the very beginning of life to its ultimate end.

The late Pope John Paul II called for a general mobilization of consciences to build a new culture of life and solve today’s unprecedented problems affecting human life.⁴ Social institutions and in particular Catholic Healthcare institutions are supposed to mobilize the conscience of people by offering well-structured moral deliberations⁵ and policies that show utmost care and commitment to the sick. A hospital is meant to unite people with a specific mission of healing the sick. It gives the healthcare professionals the authority to act on its behalf, keeping in mind this mission and acting in conformity with a proper understanding of human dignity. For example, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services* provide authoritative guidance about how Catholic institutions approach the judgment of specific medical practices and form the consciences of people. Our healthcare institutions are to practice medicine by observing the policy of respecting and protecting the life of every single person from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. Hence, all violations to innocent human life such as abortion, embryo destruction and euthanasia are not to be permitted in each and every healthcare institution. Society does not have to accept such practices and sound moral judgments not only demonstrate the harmful effects of these procedures but also provide better alternatives. In the face of constant threats to human life and health, the respect for the dignity of the human person is to be emphasized. No personal or social gain can ever justify the destruction of human life which is intrinsically good and inviolable.

In this regard, “the work of health care persons is a very valuable *service to life*. It expresses a profoundly human commitment, undertaken and carried out not only as a technical activity but also as one of dedication to and love of neighbor. It is a ‘form of being a witness’.⁶ The medical profession urges all those serving people to be guardians and servants of human life.⁷ Hence, any healthcare institution must primarily serve all human life and the life of each and every human being.

Healthcare activity is based on an interpersonal relationship of trust between the one who is ill and suffering and the one who comes to his /her assistance. The mission of the medical professional is one of absolute dedication, who like the Good Samaritan goes to the side of the sick person, listens to him, understands him, empathizes with him and does all that he can to care for him and heal him. The identity of the medical doctor is the identity received from his therapeutic mission, from his ministry of life.⁸ He /She is called to humanize medicine and to ensure that the most advanced form of technology are used for life and not for death; and in this they should always have as their highest model Christ himself, the physician of souls and bodies.⁹ Pope Pius XII affirmed that the medical doctor must place his knowledge, his powers, his heart and his devotion at the service of sick people.¹⁰ The doctor must understand that he/she and the patients encounter each other placed beneath the will of God. Medicine is a reflection of the goodness of God.¹¹ The physician is to do his/her best to protect the good interests of the patients.

Our health care institutions are becoming more and more threatened by the commercialization of healthcare and unbridled technological progress leading to depersonalization of human beings and loss of spiritual values. It is the need of the hour to revitalize our health institutions and urge them to continue its specific mission of safeguarding human life and human dignity. Hence, all institutionally based health care services and medical professionals engaged in health care services are obliged to practice and promote sound ethical teaching on various issues that confront health care today. The Catholic Church has not provided a ready answer to ever specific moral dilemma but has certainly provided appropriate guidance for making a right ethical decisions in healthcare.

Some of the most important ethical decisions that should be followed in our Health Care Institutions from Womb to Tomb is discussed below:

- i) *Re: Abortion:* Direct or Procured Abortion is the deliberate or direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth.¹² The immorality of direct abortion is the same whether it is achieved by surgical or pharmacological means. One should always treat illness and alleviate the suffering of a pregnant woman, but not by direct abortion which is a breach of duty of care owed to the fetus by the mother and doctors.
- ii) *Re: Hysterectomy:*
 - a) When the uterus becomes so seriously injured (e.g., during a delivery or a Caesarian section) so as to render medically indicated even its total removal (hysterectomy) in order to counter an **immediate serious threat** to the life or health of the mother, it is licit to perform such a procedure notwithstanding the permanent sterility which will result for the woman.¹³
 - b) When the uterus (e.g., as a result of previous Caesarian sections) is in a state such that while **not constituting in itself a present risk** to the life or health of the woman, nevertheless is foreseeably incapable of carrying a future pregnancy to term without danger to the mother, it is not licit to remove the uterus (hysterectomy) in order to prevent a possible future danger deriving from conception.¹⁴
- iii) *Re: A woman who has been raped:* “A female who has been raped should be able to defend herself against a potential conception from the sexual assault. If, after appropriate testing, there is no evidence that conception has occurred already, she may be treated with medicines that would prevent ovulation, sperm capacitation, or fertilization. It is not permissible, however, to initiate or to recommend treatments that have as their purpose or direct effect the removal, destruction or interference with the implantation of a fertilized ovum”.¹⁵
- iv) *Re: Sterilizations:* Any sterilization whose sole immediate effect, of itself, that is of its own nature and condition, is to render the genera-tive faculty incapable of procreation is to be regarded as direct sterilization, as this is

understood in statements of the pontifical Magisterium, especially of Pius XII.¹⁶ It is absolutely forbidden, therefore, according to the teaching of the Church, even when it is motivated by a subjectively right intention of curing or preventing a physical or psychological ill-effect which is foreseen or feared as a result of pregnancy.¹⁷

- v) *Re: Treatment on Infertility:* all techniques of heterologous artificial fertilization,¹⁸ as well as those techniques of homologous artificial fertilization¹⁹ which substitute for the conjugal act, are to be excluded. On the other hand, techniques which act as an aid to the conjugal act and its fertility are permitted. Certainly, techniques aimed at removing obstacles to natural fertilization, as for example, hormonal treatments for infertility, surgery for endometriosis, unblocking of fallopian tubes or their surgical repair, are licit.²⁰
- vi) *Re: Human Cloning:* Human cloning is intrinsically illicit in that, by taking the ethical negativity of techniques of artificial fertilization to their extreme, it seeks to give rise to a new human being without a connection to the act of reciprocal self-giving between the spouses and, more radically, without any link to sexuality. This leads to manipulation and abuses gravely injurious to human dignity.²¹
- vii) *Re: The Freezing of Embryos:* Cryopreservation is incompatible with the respect owed to human embryos; it presupposes their production in vitro; it exposes them to the serious risk of death or physical harm, since a high percentage does not survive the process of freezing and thawing; it deprives them at least temporarily of maternal reception and gestation; it places them in a situation in which they are susceptible to further offense and manipulation.²²
- viii) *Re: Therapeutic Procedures on the Human Embryo:* A strictly therapeutic intervention whose explicit objective is the healing of various maladies such as those stemming from chromosomal defects will, in principle, be considered desirable, provided it is directed to the true promotion of the personal well-

being of the individual without doing harm to his integrity or worsening his conditions of life.²³

- ix) *Re: Human Organ Donation and Transplantation:* The Catholic Church approves organ transplantation, as reiterated by Pope John Paul II in an *Address to the International Congress of Transplants* on 29 August. Quoting from his encyclical *The Gospel of Life*, the Holy Father said, "...One way of nurturing a genuine culture of life is the donation of organs, performed in an ethically acceptable manner, with a view to offering a chance of health and even of life itself to the sick who sometimes have no other hope".²⁴ "Organ donation after death is a noble and meritorious act and is to be encouraged as an expression of generous solidarity"²⁵
- x) *Re: Organ transplants from living donor:* One can donate only what one can deprive oneself of without serious danger to one's life or personal identity and for a just and proportionate reason.²⁶ In India, the guidelines of the Human Organs Transplantation Act of 1994 are also to be adhered to.
- xi) *Re: Organ Transplant form a corpse:* The removal of organs from a corpse is legitimate when the death of the donor has been ascertained and prior informed consent was obtained. Ethically, not all organs can be donated. The brain and the gonads are not to be transplanted because they ensure the personal and procreative identity respectively. These are organs which embody the characteristic uniqueness of a person which medicine is bound to protect.²⁷
- xii) *Re: Xenotransplantation:* The Pontifical Academy for Life affirmed the legitimacy of the use of ani-mal organs for humans but also expressed various moral con-cerns of Catholic theologians. In particular, there should be assurances that animal viruses are not passed on to humans and that animal transplants should never affect the basic identity of humans. It specifically spoke against transplanting animal brains and sex glands.²⁸
- xiii) *Re: People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA):* Our response to people living with HIV/AIDS must be one of care and compassion. a) Hospitals and care

centres have the responsibility and obligation to ensure that People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA) and their families are cared for compassionately. Every hospital should attempt to have at least one trained counselor and a liason person for all matters of HIV/AIDS. b) All health care institutions are to provide treatment, health care services, social and psychological support and spiritual and pastoral care to the PLHA. There is to be no discrimination in matters of admission and treatment of PLHA. c) Health care institutions will make adequate provisions for standard precautions and basic infection control standards as recommended by NACO.²⁹

- xiv) *Re: Prevention of HIV:* Healthcare institutions should make efforts to do more work on prevention of HIV with community participation. Strategies will include health education, awareness building campaigns and teaching of values for behavioural change.³⁰
- xv) *Re: Blood and Blood Products:* Health care institutions must ensure that only tested blood and blood products will be used. Blood banks will develop a quality blood safety programme and adhere to the standards laid down by the laws.
- xvi) *Re: Voluntary Counselling and Testing:* HIV testing should be only voluntary, with pre and post-test counseling, as per the guidelines of NACO. Our health care institutions must abstain from any form of unethical testing practices and all testing will be confidential.³¹
- xvii) *Re: Euthanasia:* The constant Christian tradition has rejected euthanasia, defined as “an action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death, with the purpose of eliminating all suffering.”³² Even in the Indian laws, euthanasia is not permissible.

Human life, which is a gift of God’s love, is the necessary source and condition of every human activity. Consequently, the Declaration on Euthanasia³³ gives four norms:

- a) No one can make an attempt on the life of an innocent person.

- b) Everyone has a duty to lead his or her life in accordance with God's plan.
- c) Intentionally causing one's own death or suicide is as wrong as murder.
- d) Suicide must be distinguished from the sacrifice of one's own life for a higher cause.

In situations where the medical treatment is disproportionate to any expected results or when it imposes an excessive burden on the patient or his family, and when death is clearly immanent and inevitable, one can in conscience "refuse forms of treatment that would only secure a precarious and burdensome prolongation of life, so long as the normal care due to the sick person in similar cases is not interrupted".³⁴ "To forgo extraordinary or disproportionate means is not the equivalent of suicide or euthanasia; it rather expresses acceptance of the human condition in the face of death".³⁵

- xviii) *Re: the use of pain-killing drugs:* According to Pope John Paul II's instructive teaching, "it is licit to relieve pain by narcotics, even when the result is *decreased consciousness* and a shortening of life, "if no other means exist, and if, in the given circumstances, this does not prevent the carrying out of other religious and moral duties". In such a case, death is not willed or sought, even though for reasonable motives one runs the risk of it: there is simply a desire to ease pain effectively by using the analgesics which medicine provides".³⁶
- xix) *Re: Artificial Nutrition and Hydration:* "The administration of food and water to a patient in a vegetative state³⁷, even by artificial means is, in principle, an ordinary and proportionate means of preserving life. It is therefore obligatory to the extent to which, and for as long as, it is shown to accomplish its proper finality, which is the hydration and nourishment of the patient. In this way suffering and death by starvation and dehydration are prevented".³⁸
- xx) *Re: Brain Death:* Brain death is a well researched concept which is clear and logical. It is accepted by professional associations of neurologists around the world, and recognized by law in most developed countries. It is also accepted by the Catholic Church and most other major religions, as well as

by the vast majority of scientists and health care professionals. Total brain death is not a synonym for death, does not imply death, or is not equal to death, but 'is' death. Brain death means "the irreversible cessation of all the vital activity of the brain (the cerebral hemispheres and the brain stem). This involves an irreversible loss of function of the brain cells and their total, or near total, destruction. The brain is dead and the functioning of the other organs is maintained directly and indirectly by artificial means".³⁹ In India, organ donation and transplantation after total brain death is permissible under the Human Organs Transplantation Act of 1994.

Decision making and setting organizational priorities in health care require not only sound procedures, but also attention to foundational goals and ends of care which are consistent with promoting the culture of life. Catholic hospitals, to remain Catholic, must abide by Church teaching, and engage staff who agree to practice their profession in accordance with the teachings of the Church. It pertains to the conscience either of the sick person or of those qualified to speak in the sick person's name, or of the doctors to decide what is to be done. Every hospital and healthcare institutions called to abide by sound ethical principles and valued defending life.

The Rule of St. Benedict aptly stated "The care of the sick is to be placed above and before every other duty, as if Christ were being directly served in waiting upon them. The Infirmarian must be thoroughly reliable, known for his piety and diligence and solicitude for his charge". The whole purpose of the health care ministry is being humanitarian.⁴⁰ May each one of us do our best to promote a culture of respect for life in our society and thus be able to build an authentic civilization of truth and love.

Endnotes

- 1 Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), no. 26.
- 2 Genesis 2: 7.
- 3 *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 27.
- 4 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 1995.
- 5 Grattin, Brown, Conscience of a Catholic Institution Growing in Catholic Identity, *Ethics and Medics*, Vol. 31 No. 8 (August 2006).
- 6 Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, *Charter for Health Care Workers*, 1994, No. 1. Also see John Paul II, during his visit to Mercy maternity Hospital in Melbourne, 28 November , 1986, in *Insegnamenti*

- IX/2 (1986) 1734, no. 5. See also Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) No. 2288.
- 7 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, No. 89.
 - 8 Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragan, Keynote Lecture “The Identity of the Catholic Medical Doctor” on the occasion of the 21st World Congress of F.I.A.M.C., Sept 1-4, 2002, Seoul, Korea.
 - 9 Cf. Pope John Paul II to the XV Congress of Catholic Doctors (AMCI). ‘Cinquant’ Anni di Vita per la Vita’, *Orizzonti Medici* (1994), pp. 105-114.
 - 10 Cf. Pope Pius XII, ‘Radio Messaggio al VII Congresso Internazionale dei Medici Cattolici (11.09.1956)’. *Discorsi ai Medici*, p. 503.
 - 11 *Ibid.*
 - 12 John Paul II, *Declaration on Procured Abortion*, No. 58
 - 13 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Responses to Questions concerning Uterine Isolation, 31 July 1993.
 - 14 *Ibid.*
 - 15 National Conference of Catholic Bishops (USA), *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Facilities* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1995), Directive 36.16 See especially the two allocutions to the Catholic Union of Obstetricians and to the International Society of Hematology; see also *Humanae Vitae*.
 - 17 Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Responses on the Sterilization in the Catholic Hospitals, *Quaecumque sterilization*, March 13, 1975. Latin Text in AAS 68 (1976): 738-740).
 - 18 The term heterologous artificial fertilization or procreation refers to “techniques used to obtain a human conception artificially by the use of gametes coming from at least one donor other than the spouses who are joined in marriage” (Instruction *Donum vitae*, II: AAS 80 [1988], 86).
 - 19 The term homologous artificial fertilization or procreation refers to the technique used to obtain a human conception artificially by using the gametes of the two spouses joined in marriage. (Instruction *Donum vitae*, II: AAS 80 [1988], 86).
 - 20 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction “*Dignitas Personae*”, Doctrinal Congregation Instruction on Some Bioethical Questions, 2008, no. 13.
 - 21 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum vitae*, I, 6: AAS 80 (1988), 84; JOHN PAUL II, Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See (10 January 2005), 5: AAS 97 (2005), 153.
 - 22 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum vitae*, I, 6: AAS 80 (1988), 84-85.

- 23 Pope John Paul II, Discourse to the participants in the 35th General Assembly of the World Medical Association, October 29, 1983: AAS 76 (1984), 392.
- 24 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 86. This teaching echoes the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “Organ transplants conform with the moral law and can be meritorious if the physical and psychological dangers and risks incurred by the donor are proportionate to the good sought for the recipient” (No. 2296).
- 25 Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2296.
- 26 John Paul II, *To the participants at the First International Congress on the Transplant of Organs*, 20 June 1991, in *Insegnamenti XIV/I* (1991) 1711.
- 27 Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, *Charter for Health Care Workers*, 1994, No. 87 - 88.
- 28 Vatican Pontifical Academy for Life “*Prospects for Xenotransplantation: Scientific Aspects and Ethical Considerations*”, 26 September 2002.
- 29 CBCI Commission for Healthcare, HIV/AIDS Policy of the Catholic Church in India, 2005, p. 29, 33. NACO = National AIDS Control Organization. 30 CBCI Commission for Healthcare, HIV/AIDS Policy of the Catholic Church in India, 2005, p. 12.
- 31 CBCI Commission for Healthcare, HIV/AIDS Policy of the Catholic Church in India, 2005, p. 31.
- 32 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* no. 65.
- 33 Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Declaration of Euthanasia, Vatican City, 1980.
- 34 John Paul II, EV 65; Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Euthanasia* (5 May 1980), Ch IV.
- 35 John Paul II, EV 65; Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Euthanasia*, Ch IV.
- 36 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, No. 65.
- 37 Pontifical Academy of Life, International Congress On “Life-Sustaining Treatments and Vegetative State: Scientific Advances and Ethical Dilemmas” (Rome, 10-17 March 2004). See Definition of Vegetative State.
- 38 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Responses to certain questions of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops concerning artificial nutrition and hydration, 2007.
- 39 Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Why the Concept of Brain Death is Valid as a Definition of Death, 2007.
- 40 Rev. Russell Smith, “Health Care Rationing: A Theologian’s Perspective” in *Linacre Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (August 1993), 20-29.

Dying to Live

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For most of us, life in our times is characterized by a dreary routine with a hectic pace that causes stress. Rising violence, lawlessness and uncertainty add to this stress and kill the joy of living. According to the sages, most human beings hardly 'live' life. As sage Dada Gavand puts it, they are "just continuing in time"[Bhalla,Vipin.p 62]. For most of us, to be alive in a given moment is to be hundred percent present, to be completely immersed in it. However, currently, whether we are eating, walking, talking or thinking, we are rarely fully there, except perhaps in a moment of either crisis or ecstasy. The rest of the time, we are hopelessly fragmented, thinking of ten different things at a time and failing to understand or savor the given moment in totality.

The opposite of life is death, which is perhaps the most dreaded word in the dictionary of any language. It signifies the cessation of all activities and experiences, thoughts and sensations; whereas what man covets the most is the state of immortality. Interestingly, life and death are closely linked and may even co-exist. For instance, old cells die and new ones are born in our body at frequent intervals. Neurosurgeon, Deepak Ranade points out that in Quantum Physics, "Analogous to Schrodinger's cat being simultaneously dead and alive, the photon exists in a wave and particle form simultaneously." [Times of India, 'Speaking Tree' December 11, 2012] Life is constantly in a state of flux. Childhood is replaced by youth and then by old age. We die to past experiences and are born into new ones until we reach physical death - the ultimate biological full stop. We encounter death around us too and yet we are reluctant to accept our own mortality.

As Dada Gavand says in one of his pointers, "life resides more in the unknown than in the known". We are yet to unravel the secret of life / creation .We do not know where we go after death. We have no idea where we go during deep sleep but we are not afraid of falling asleep as we believe we will wake up next morning.

Surprisingly, though 'I' goes to sleep, some witness [we know not 'who'] persists and hence, on waking up, one may describe a dream/nightmare or say one has enjoyed sound sleep. The '*Mundaka Upanishad*' throws light on this detached witness and its relationship with 'I', by using the metaphor of two birds on a tree who are 'ever associated' : "Of these, one eats the fruit of divergent tastes, and the other looks on without eating"[Third *Mundaka*, Canto 1, Verse 1,p 137 in **Eight Upanishads – Vol. II**] A large fraction of questions regarding the functioning of the human brain remain unanswered. Much of the universe too is still a mystery to us, both at the macro and micro level. We do not know what the next moment has in store for us. Our life is ridden by the fear of the unknown and as a result we are often as much afraid of life as we are of death.

Fear is considered to be the deadliest of poisons. J. Krishnamurti says in **Nature of the New Mind**[The Sixties], "Living with fear is evil because it breeds hatred, distorts your thinking, and perverts your whole life."[p.95] Krishnamurti, here, is alluding to psychological fear and not to spontaneous, physical fear [say of a snake] which is just the instinct of self-preservation. Ignorance, or the identification with body-mind rather than spirit, is the root cause of fear, as much as of sorrow. It is said that Sri Ramana Maharshi, at the age of sixteen , was suddenly gripped by the fear of death one day. The young lad dramatized the occurrence of death by holding his breath, stiffening the body and imagining it being carried to the funeral ground and burnt to ashes. However, as Arthur Osborne reports in '**The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His own Words**', the young Ramana suddenly realized that even after the death of the body, the spirit lived on and was deathless: " The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death . That means I am the deathless Spirit. All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as the living truth which I perceived directly, almost without thought-process. 'I' was something very real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with my body was centered on that 'I'. From that moment onwards the 'I' or Self, focused attention on Itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death has vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on". (p.iv)

Very few people can maintain equanimity in the face of death or sorrow. **Shreemad Bhagwad Geeta** (Chapter VI) defines the ‘Sthitapragya’ as “He who, through the likeness (sameness) of the Self, O Arjuna, sees equality everywhere, be it pleasure or pain, he is regarded as the highest Yogi”. This is also an approach suggested in the Bible which recommends being in the world, but not of it. Self-enquiry is one of the ways to arrive at such a state of self-realization. Complete surrender to the Higher Self/God is the way suggested by religion.

The mystics affirm the possibility of rising beyond the here and now, by touching the dimension of the timeless which is beyond all dualities such as life and death, sorrow and joy etc. According to Dada Gavand (see www.mysticdada.org), man is never free and is totally conditioned by his past, “You are pushed around and you are living in time, counting your days, months and years. There is a new way of living which is a timeless process. There is a new momentum which moves, which lives from moment to moment and that is true living. And it is the greatest discovery of life – to discover that moment which moves in eternity. With that movement alone you live because in fact that is the living thing. What you call life is just inertia of the past which is pushing you. So let us discover that living momentum and then we will know what living is, what the effervescence of that energy is”.

Life is not easy to define. Scientists debate over issues such as brain-death or comatose condition. Living cells constantly exchange energy and can replicate themselves. At a philosophical level, the **Mandukya Upanishad** mentions four possible states of living with regard to human beings: the waking state, the dream state, the deep sleep state and the ‘Turiya’ state which cannot be described in words except through the negation of all attributes. It is the substratum of all illusion. It is neither “conscious, nor unconscious; which is unseen, beyond empirical dealings, beyond the grasp (of the organs of action), un-inferable, unthinkable, indescribable; whose valid proof consists in the single belief in the Self; in which all phenomena cease; and which is unchanging, auspicious and non-dual. That is the Self, and That is to be known”[Chapter I, Verse 7 ,p 200 in **Eight Upanishads-Vol. II**].

According to Advaitin spiritual teacher Rajiv Kapur, in order to experience the joy of living, we must be willing to die even to the present, the waking state and reach the Source itself – from where this present moment has manifested. “While a few

take the 'Here' and 'Now' to be the only reality, and equate awareness only to a waking state consciousness, others even imagine life after death (heaven, astral planes, etc.) and that is the reason they close themselves to exploring death, for they fear it. **But true living must embrace death first for there is no other way.** When you die to everything, which includes even this present moment, only then will you truly live and know yourself as Love. It is hard to describe in words but it is something like watching the entire mechanism of body/mind collapse. The whole world may seem to be crashing down on you. You may feel like you are sitting on a pyre and burning. Every cell of your body will revolt and you will feel your skin peeling off. This is only a process that takes away everything you once were holding on to. So, whatever you once knew yourself to be – the body form, mind, senses, breath, prana, oneness – all of that will burn in that fire and turn to ashes. It is not a very comfortable place to be in but there will be no escape till the movement comes to a halt. Once this ends you will find yourself in another dimension altogether. You will know yourself as Love – the substratum of all. **This is real silence where Consciousness itself will be missing.** There will be no centre"[see www.rajivkapur.com]. Mystics have always affirmed that love and bliss are the natural outcome of such a death.

To die to everything does not imply literal or physical death. It is to die to the ignorant belief that one is one's body / mind and to realize one's true Self which is pure, unconditioned, intuitive awareness or 'beingness'. As Sri Ramana Maharshi puts it in his **Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi**, "Birth and death pertain to the body only; but they are superimposed on the Self, giving rise to the delusion that birth and death relate to the Self"[p 547] . Several Scriptures and spiritual teachers point the way to the true Self .Though the practices they suggest may differ they agree on one basic point : it is only by giving up one's attachment to the five senses and the ego-self that one can experience life in the true sense of the term. This does not mean that one has to live a life of seclusion and renunciation, away from society and worldly life. On the contrary, one then lives as a truly integrated and free being whose every action arises spontaneously, without the dictates of the ego-self, bringing about the greatest good of the greatest numbers .Thus, paradoxically,

if one is 'dying to be happy' by living life to the fullest, one must be ready to die to all that is untrue.

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Pyramids and the Sphinx in Ancient Egypt

Dr. Marie Fernandes

You never see a U- Haul behind a hearse, Ryder.
 The Egyptians tried it. It doesn't work.
 You can't take the money with you. / Ryder?
 You can't take the money with you

In most religions when a person dies he / she has to make the long journey alone – without family, friends or possessions. Ancient Egyptians were however different and what we witness today are memorials they built for their dear departed, particularly members of their royal family. The first to build entirely in stone was Pharaoh Djoser's architect Imhotep. He lived during the time of the Old Kingdom which started around 2780 BC to 2181 BC. Stone architecture arose from the desire to build 'eternal homes', first for kings, then for high functionaries. Djoser was the first pharaoh to bear the title of *Golden Horus*: the flesh of the pharaohs is golden like that of the deities. For such a king, an eternal home was a necessity to his eternal life.

Pharaohs believed that they became gods in the afterlife, so their tombs had to be very grand. These pyramid tombs represents the mound of earth that rose out of the dark ocean at the beginning of time, from which the creator god *Re* emerged. As far the great size of many of the pyramids in Egypt, we can really only surmise that the Pharaohs were making a statement about their own power and perhaps, about the glory and strength of their country. However, it should also be remembered that many of the latter pyramids were not nearly as large as the Great Pyramids at Giza.

The task of transforming (with stone, a durable material) the palace of the living king into a grand palace for the deceased king fell upon Imhotep, a brilliant architect. He created the first royal tomb in the shape of a pyramid. Imhotep built his greatest opus on the Saqqara plateau at the edge of the desert near Memphis.

The immense funerary complex in white limestone includes: the first Egyptian step pyramid, conceived as a superposition of six mastabas of diminishing dimensions above a set of underground funerary chambers and galleries; a mastab functioning

as a second tomb, with an underground pink granite funerary chamber without a *sarcophagus*; rows of chapels, sanctuaries, and houses around a vast court; a colonnaded entrance; and a wall surrounding the entire complex with fourteen false doors.

The architecture is essentially symbolic. The majority of the buildings in the complex were meant to play a magical role. Artificial decorative elements abound: false doors and windows, false beams simulated fences, stone curtains and mural panels imitating the reed wall paper found in houses and decorated with blue tiles. Inside the chambers, a variety of objects were found: numerous vases in stone, alabaster and rock crystal depicting the king; bas reliefs; stone crockery including cups, bowls, and plates; and the friezes of djed pillars symbolizing the kings' stability.

The architecture of the step pyramid, formed of mastabas piled in an ascending order, reflects the growing importance of the solar theology of Heliopolis, where Imhotep was high priest.

The steps are the symbolic ladder that allows the kings' heavenly ascension. In effect, it was the Kings' privilege to have a solar destiny following his death. The deceased sovereign climbed to heaven to rejoin Re – or according to other formulations, he took flight in the form of a falcon or a scarab-beetle. In the skies, he was received triumphantly by the sun god.

The sarcophagus chamber – the true tomb of the king meant to house his mummy – was cut into the stone under the pyramid. Mummification preserved the body from destruction. At first only the kings and persons of royal blood were embalmed. The embalming technique was very thorough, the body was entirely emptied, cleaned and stuffed with aromatic spices, were put aside in vases called canopic jars. Then the body was plunged into a vat full of natron, where it stayed for seventy days.

Once the desiccation was achieved, the embalmers washed the body with perfumed oils and swathed it with resin-soaked linen strips. All these procedures were accompanied by prayers and litanies recited by priests, who sometimes wore the masks of Anubis the jackal god and guardian of the necropolis. In later times, mummification was extended to everyone. Many different classes of embalming were available, and the costs varied accordingly.

The sarcophagus chamber was surrounded by funerary halls full of offerings. A little room, the serdab, contained the statue of Djoser, the putative incarnation of the pharaohs "ka", a kind of spiritual double or vital force that remained lively after death.

The Egyptians called the deceased "he who has passed into his 'ka' or he who has rejoined his 'akh'" (the principle of a celestial spirit). The "ka" of the deceased remained inside the tomb, walking about the funerary halls and tasting the gathered offerings. The soul, or "ba", of the deceased left his body in the form of a bird and roamed.

According to Anders Bettum, Egyptologist at the University of Oslo, the Egyptian elite was buried in a coffin placed inside another coffin in ensembles of up to eight coffins. It was intended to transform the deceased from human to deity. Everybody knows the ancient Egyptian practice of mummifying their dead. What is perhaps less known is that they placed the mummies inside layer upon layer of coffins.

The child king Tutankhamun was buried in as many as eight coffins, according to Bettum. "For men and women who were members of the ancient Egyptian elite at that time, three or four coffins were not unusual", he adds.

Linking the dead to the gods.

"They also played a key role in the process that would link the deceased to their ancestors: to Osiris, the god of the afterlife, and to Amun-Ra, the sun and creator god, Bettum says.

The rituals and the myths that were reiterated during the seventy days that a funeral lasted are symbolically rendered on the coffins. The components of each nest, including the mummy cover, the inner and outer coffins reflect the Egyptians view of the world.

The decorations, the forms and the choice of materials signify a unification of the two myths about Osiris and Amun-Ra respectively. On the outer coffin, the deceased is portrayed as Osiris, with a mummified body, a blue striped wig and a pale, solemn face. The coffin is painted yellow and varnished, and must have shone like gold. The very richest Egyptians did in fact use gold leaf on their coffins".

“The choice of colour is not coincidental: it represents the light and its origin in the sun. That, the figure of Osiris being bathed in sunlight can, in my mind, only mean one thing. The decoration invokes a well-known mythical image: when the sun god arrives in the throne hall of Osiris in the 6th hour of the night and the two deities join in mystical union. According to the Egyptians, this union was the source of all regeneration in nature, and it was here, at the centre of this catalyst of life that the deceased wanted to be placed for all eternity”. (*Mumbai Mirror Bureau mirrorfeedback@timesgroup.com TWEET @_MumbaiMirror*)

The Giza Pyramids

The three massive pyramids erected on the Giza plateau at the threshold of the western desert (realm of the dead and the setting sun) bear witness to a veritable golden age for Egypt, a time when the country was rich and powerful.

The pyramidions, pointing heavenward and covered in fine gold, symbolized petrified sun rays, a means of communication between earth and heaven which the deceased kings travelled in order to rejoin the sun god Re.

Since Antiquity, various legends have sprouted around the pyramids and the pharaohs who erected them. Herodotus claimed the pharaohs were accursed and that the Egyptians detested them. He let himself be persuaded that Cheops sold his daughter into prostitution so as to obtain the large amounts of money needed to build his pyramid. Cheops and Chephren, it was claimed closed the temples, forbade sacrifices, and oppressed the populace, forcing thousands of people to work relentlessly – and in the worst possible conditions –in order to erect their pyramids.

These edifices are the collective accomplishment of a nation moved by faith, similar to what motivated the builders of cathedrals in the Middle Ages. The people who erected them stone by stone with techniques that seem rudimentary to us, gathered their energies to build a ladder towards heaven.

By contributing to the glorious destiny of their king, the people linked themselves to his solar transformation, hoping that they would be drawn along into a collective celestial afterlife. The pyramids bear witness to an ideal connected with the growth of Heliopolis.

The Egyptian Sphinx

Carved from the bedrock of the Giza plateau, the Sphinx is truly a mysterious marvel from the days of ancient Egypt. Facing the rising sun the Giza Sphinx represents a crouching lion with a human head whose face resembles that of King Chephren. Considered a symbol of the god Harmakhis, the *Horus of the Horizon*, it was meant to guard the royal necropolis. In between the paws of the Sphinx is a stela, now called the “Dream Stela”, a story is inscribed. The 18th Dynasty story tells of the time when Thutmosis IV fell asleep under the Sphinx which was covered to the neck in sand. Thutmosis had a dream that the Sphinx spoke to him and promised that if he would free the Sphinx from the sand, Thutmosis would be destined to become king of Egypt. During the 18th Dynasty, Thutmosis IV probably did clear the Sphinx at that time. But it is more likely that the story about the dream was created for political purposes, an ancient propaganda story to help prove the legitimacy of the king. This type of story could support the validity of a kingship, asserting and assuring the power of the pharaoh as designated by the gods, or in this case, the Sphinx itself. (Guardian’s Sphinx - Text and Photos Copyright © 1995-2005 Andrew Bayuk (<http://www.guardians.net/egypt/sphinx/>)

The Phoenix.

The story of the phoenix begins in ancient Egyptian mythology and was later developed in the Phoenician, Indian and Greek traditions. The phoenix is said to be a sacred firebird with beautiful feathers of gold and red or purple and blue. It is said to live for 500-1,000 years and it then builds itself a nest of myrrh twigs. The nest of myrrh and the phoenix burn fiercely until they are reduced to ashes. Myrrh is a resinous sap that releases heavy, bitter-smelling smoke when ignited. Myrrh was used by the ancient Egyptians to embalm the dead and was also burned as a religious sacrifice. Historically, myrrh has often been worth more than its weight in gold.

The Phoenix as a Symbol of Rebirth

After this purification, a phoenix egg or a young bird appears, renewing the life cycle of the bird and making the phoenix virtually immortal and invincible. The phoenix also has the ability to regenerate itself when wounded. In the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the phoenix is a stork-like bird called the “benu”. In other Egyptian

texts, the phoenix is associated with Heliopolis, the city of the sun, and the Egyptian sun-god Ra.

These are the many myths that one associates with the Egyptians. We know a lot about the ancient Egyptians largely because they buried so many artefacts with them for use in the after life. As a result, their tombs reveal an enormous amount of information from which archaeologists have been able to piece together a detailed picture of their daily life. Moreover, Egypt's hot and dry climate is ideal for preserving these ancient sights and artefacts.

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Bio-Psychological Perspective on Life and Death

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The convoluted practices with which we now cope with death often seem to be adrift in the swirling currents of ancient folklore. Many traditional practices implicitly accept the horror and agony that nature carelessly visits on terminally ill people. Behaviourology, a strictly natural science, affords a new perspective on death and dying and supports a relevant Behaviour technology. But that approach is unfamiliar, and people must have an opportunity to adjust to it if they are to understand and accept it.

Life is a process or function, not an entity having ontological status, and the functional relations definitive of life occur among real physical entities. When the process stops completely, in all of its varieties and manifestations, the status of the system thereby changes from “living” to “dead.” Evidence for life is manifested in physical events, mostly in the class called movements, but from this perspective nothing actually lives in the traditional spiritual or mystical sense. Not even living organisms are alive in that way. Hypothetical constructs such as human spirits, souls, ghosts, and autonomous internal selves are construed as fictional entities that have been invented to support spurious explanations of life in the absence of a natural science of organic bodies and their interactions with their environments. In most of these convenient explanations, Behaviour is simplistically attributed to the exercised will of the invented mystical agent (of whatever name), and that conjured spirit-agent is always magically endowed with exactly those powers that would be necessary to produce whatever Behaviour is observed. Life is a process. Therefore, life happens, but it does not exist as an entity; it can stop and start, but it cannot come and go. Life consists of various dynamic relations in and among body parts, which in carbon-based organisms, through the accidents of natural history on this planet, are essential for the maintenance of the whole Behaviour-mediating organism. Behaviour consists of a set of innervated functional relations between the organism and elements of its environment. Both life and Behaviour are naturally occurring functions in all respects.

From the perspective of the natural sciences, the concept of person is best construed as a concept of Behaviour, not of body. A body only mediates the behaviour that we call a person. A person is a Behavioural repertoire—a unique set of operant and respondent Behaviours conditioned during a lifetime, plus a few unconditioned respondents capacitated as an inherited genetic endowment. Bodies, as opposed to persons, are said to die when certain internal physical and chemical relations, critical to body maintenance, break down. Because some of the operant and respondent Behaviour that defines the person is also indirectly necessary to the maintenance of the body, a cessation of the person usually produces a delayed breakdown in the internal life functions of the body.

The whole dying process is sequential and in some cases can be slow paced across both the Behavioural cessation and the subsequent body disorganization. The operant Behaviour of a person can stop while some respondents and nearly all of the internal physiological functions continue. The individual thus exists in a comatose condition, but the Behavioural events that define the person are no longer occurring. Sudden death is largely irrelevant to the concerns of this article. Usually unexpected, it is often accidental. Bodies that still exhibit worthwhile behavioural repertoires are suddenly disorganized. All Behaviour stops abruptly, which is total person-death. As a preventative measure, substantial resources are typically expended at the cultural level on programs of accident and crime prevention. Sometimes, however, under contingencies of negative reinforcement, the opposite is true: Programs of abrupt elimination are undertaken because the cost-benefit ratio for persons in some group or class has dropped below certain standards. Typical examples include war at the group level and criminal executions at the individual level. But in cases of sudden death, whether deemed good or bad, the focus of intervention is on events other than the dying per se, which may last only minutes, seconds, or less. The important issues in quick dying pertain either to prevention or to developing the means for more efficient dispatch, as the case may be. The Behaviour of a dying person becomes important only in cases of prolonged dying. In that case, a need exists for programs of Behaviour management as all parties respond to the long sequence of mostly aversive events.

The kind of scientific and philosophical foundations upon which people base their practices for coping with the dying process substantially affect their practices.

This article applies the philosophy and science of Behaviourology to the interpretation of the events associated with death and dying, redefining terms, and describing new concepts that emerge from the analysis. Upon this new foundation new perspectives and practices can be constructed, and it is to facilitate such an exploration of the behavioural approaches to the issues of death and dying that this work is dedicated.

Life and Death

An Islamic Perspective

In The Name of Allah The Beneficent, The Merciful

Salamun alaykum !

From the time you are born, whether prince or pauper, the one absolute certainty, irrespective of faith or station, is that you will die. Every breath is a breath closer to death. 'Life' begins with death. For death was created before life itself.

Life in this world started with death and not with life. According to our logic it should have started with life. The beginning of creation – as we understand it – is life. By relying on this concept we do not then understand the meaning of life.

People understand the meaning of life as the time during which man exists, and death as nonexistence or nothingness, whereas the truth is otherwise.

Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, says in the Holy Quran:

He, who created death and life to test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct – and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving [Al-Mulk , 67: 2]

Thus, death is not nonexistence, but one of the creations of Allah just as life. Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, created death just as He created life. Both are the creations of Allah. Each is governed by its own rules, its time of occurrence and its events. Only Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, is The One Able to transfer His creatures from the world of death to that of life, or from the world of life to that of death.

The Soul Neither Enters The Body Nor Gets Out Of It

It must be understood that the relation between the soul and the body is not by way of Hulool (penetrative migration). It is not like the entrance of water in a utensil or of air in vacuum. It also cannot be said that it remains out of body or it goes out of it at the time of death because soul is essence, not matter. There is no question of its entering or vacating. The only thing is that its relation with body is such that it remains fully attentive to the body **Death disconnects this relation.**

It is also obligatory for us to believe that death occurs by the command of God. The same Power which had, established this relation in the womb of mother at the last moment of the worldly life, disconnects this relation between the body and soul. Only He is the bestower of life and of death. The Holy Quran says: "God gives life and only God causes death also." (S. Zumar, V: 42)

The Qur'an tells us, the purpose of creating human beings is given as 'worship'. [2 The Qur'an, 51:56] This may seem to us too difficult to understand. Of what use is worship for God? It does not benefit Him. Of what use is it to man? But this point has been explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an as the purpose of Creation. Contrary to the view that the next life is subsidiary to this one, the Qur'an says: "If there were no Resurrection, Creation would be futile." And again it says: "Do you suppose that we have created you in vain?" [The Qur'an, 23:115] It is suggestive of something wisely done.

Allah does nothing in vain, and all is rightful and not in play, and there is a return to Him who accounts for the whole universe. We never come across the idea in the Qur'an that man is created in order to know more and act more to attain his goal. He is created to worship, and the worship of God is in itself a goal.

Thus the goal and ideal that Islam offers is God, and everything else is preparatory to it. In the verses where the Qur'an mentions perfect human beings, or speaks on their behalf, it says they have truly understood the goal of life and endeavoured to attain it. The Quran quotes the prophet Abraham : "My prayer, worship, life and death are for God, who is the Lord of the Universe . " [The Qur'an, 6:163]

Thus, in Islam everything revolves round the axis of God.

The purpose of life therefore is to attain God-Consciousness, God-Awareness.

According to the Qur'an, man gains his happiness only from God, and it is He who fills all the gaps in his life, and satisfies him. The Qur'an says: "Those who have faith and their hearts are tranquil in thinking of God, know that all hearts find peace by remembering God." [The Qur'an: 13:28] Only God brings repose to the anxious and inquisitive hearts of man. Other things are subsidiary and preliminary matters,

not the final stage. The same is said of worship: “To remember God, pray.” [The Qur’an: 20:14]

The present life is a preparatory stage for an eternal life through the spiritual understanding of life. The spiritual understanding of life and moral sense of life are the two principles that are the foundation of the moral order that Islam lays down for humankind. This criterion is the satisfaction, pleasure of God, be He exalted. The satisfaction or pleasure of God that Islam lays as the general criterion in life which steers the human ship to the shore of righteousness, goodness and justice, taking into consideration both the individual and society securing a balance between both.

The human body is the vehicle of the soul to achieve this objective, the final goal being the Pleasure of God and the return to His Grace and Mercy, to be deserving of an eternal life in that Grace and Mercy.

The soul is but a Trustee of this body, accountable for every thought and deed, for the body as God’s creation like all of creation in the Universes is created in perpetual harmony of God’s law and is in perpetual Glorification of the Creator. It is only the free will granted to the soul that leads us to either follow the path shown us by God to achieve our goal or divert ourselves away from it.

Life in this world is temporary abode. Yet it is of critical importance. Our lives can be divided into three parts: Our relationship with God, our relationship with ourselves and our relationship with others. Each of these relationships has a right on us and a duty towards it.

It is the right of the Creator to know Him and love Him. It is His right to be worshipped, to accept and submit ourselves to His WILL.

It is the right of us, body and soul, to be nourished and not be abused, to realise our full potential towards the goal, to use it otherwise would be in violation of God’s law.

It is the right of our fellow humankind and the right of all the creatures on earth that we do them justice with compassion and love, thereby helping them reach the same goal as ourselves, The Grace and Mercy of God in an everlasting life.

In the words of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) [The Nahj ul Balaghah, Wisdom 229:] “Some worship God for the sake of their desires, and that is a merchants’ worship; some worship out of fear, and that is a slaves’ worship; and some worship out of gratitude and that is the worship of the noble,”

Again, in another saying, Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) is even more explicit: “O God, I do not worship you for fear of your Fire or for cupidity in desiring heaven; I worship you because you are worthy of it.”

The remembrance of God by way of ritual prayer and supplications is one way of worship. Fulfilling the rights on ourselves and humankind is also worship. Fasting and charity, doing good, and leading a virtuous life is worship.

Fulfilling the right of our parents, especially the mother*, is worship. The rights of our children, our kith and kin, our neighbours, our teachers, our friends and adversaries, our society, all have rights on us. It is beyond the scope of this paper to enumerate them all. Suffice it to say that we have been guided through prophetic messages and immaculate guides sent to every nation and people, through every age and day, towards our goal. That is the requirement of Justice and Mercy. For God is Just and Merciful.

Having thus lived within the bounds of God’s law and fulfilled the rights of others and his duties man approaches death. “For nothing is closer to man than death” (Ali ibn Abu Talib a.s.)

He sees and hears the call of the angel of death, Israeel.

If in his life time man has fulfilled his required duties, avoided forbidden deeds, and possessed ethical values and these are in his unblemished records then let him not fear death.

If man has taken account of the value his days, his nights, his hours and minutes he will never be frightened of death.

For the soul of this man will disconnect like a silk cloth taken away swiftly from a smooth surface. If he has lived otherwise, then picture that fragile silk cloth being ripped away over a bed of thorns.

The soul is in another dimension and can see us and hear us but we cannot see it or hear it. The doors of faith and belief are shut forever but the doors of deeds are still open. For every result of good that he did will continue to be written to his account. Every blessing and prayer sent his way will add weight to elevate his status in the Hereafter.

The body is prepared for burial, washed and shrouded and lowered into the grave.

The soul will be in a condition or dimension called Barzakh, a veil, an abode of waiting till the day of Resurrection. In that state he will either see the Joy, Grace and Mercy that awaits him or the tortures of the Fires of Hell.

There are many Quranic verses showing that after a man dies his companion will be his deeds, that is, the result of the deeds done by him in the world.

Here we suffice with only one verse / ayat:

Almighty Allah says: O Messenger! Remember the Day when every person will see his good deeds before him. Similarly he will also face his bad and evil deeds and will wish that he may be distanced from them. But those evil deeds will not go away from him and O People! Your Lord warns you of His anger and wrath. And God is always kind to His servants. (Surah Aale Imran: 3)

It is God's Mercy that He has conveyed innumerable admonitions and warnings to mankind through His Messengers.

The Day of Resurrection will be a day when a loud Trumpet shall sound and all mankind that perished will be brought back to life. Several verses in the Quran mention this in clear terms. The incredulous Arabs even asked how rotten bones will come back to life. The Quran says that all humankind whether buried, burnt or eaten by animals or drowned in the oceans will be Resurrected by the Command of God.

Each soul shall receive it's just reward or punishment "So whosoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whosoever does an atom' weight of evil will see it" (Quran 99:7,8)

Eternal life in an abode is described in detail, some would claim metaphorically. The body and soul united in a form that we do not know or understand in ageless beauty living in bliss with everything that the heart would desire. Imagine, the reaction of a desert Arab when told that Heaven had rivers flowing and green clothing of soft silk and fruits and food and drink of every kind that the heart would desire. The sheer joy and happiness at the thought !

And the image of tortures of an Everlasting Fire, eternal heat and thirst would indeed be Hell if you had experienced a fraction of it in the deserts.

Yet the real torture the real punishment would be separation from the Grace and Mercy of God. In his supplication taught to Kumail Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) says;

“ supposeO my God, my Master, my Protector, my Lord that I am able to endure Thy chastisement, how can I endure separation from Thee. And suppose that I am able to endure the heat of Thy Fire, how will I endure not gazing on Thy generosity.....”

“And do not call those who were slain in Allah’s way (i.e. in faith and testimony) ‘dead’ Rather they are living.....”

In conclusion I quote the Quran : “ Verily we belong to Allah and to Him do we indeed return” (Quran: Sura Bakrah 2)

“.. Therefore glory be to Him in whose hand is the kingdom of all things and to Him you shall be brought back.”

And finally as all things created but die even death shall be annihilated.

“ ... Everyone on it is ephermal,

And there will endure forever the Face of your Lord, the Lord of majesty and glory”
(Quran: 55: 26-27)

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5. Goal of Life : Ayatullao Murtada Motahhari
6. Man and Universe : Ayatullao Murtada Motahhari
7. Our Philosophy : Allama Muhammed Baqir as-Sadr

I quote here Allama Iqbal :

Khudi ko kar buland itna, ke har Takdeer se pehle

Khuda Bandese khud pooche: “Bata teri Reza kya hai?”

In loose translation: Elevate yourself to such heights that before each destiny,
God Himself would ask His servant : “What is thy wish ?”

* (“Under the feet of the mother lies Heaven”)

Life and Death Across Religions: A Bio-Psycho-Social Perspective

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Introduction

Social scientists recognize that religion exists as an organized and integrated set of beliefs, behaviours, and norms centred on basic social needs and values. Moreover, religion is a culture universally found in all social groups. For instance, in every culture, funeral rites are practiced in some way, although these customs vary between cultures and within religious affiliations. Despite differences, there are common elements in a ceremony marking a person's death, such as announcement of the death, care of the deceased, disposition, and ceremony or ritual. These universals, and the differences in how societies and individuals experience religion, provide rich material for research.

Concept of death across different religions

For Christians whose lives are guided by the Bible, the reality of death is acknowledged as part of the current human condition, affected by sin. Although eternal life is a gift that is granted to all who accept salvation through Jesus Christ, faithful Christians await the second coming of Jesus for complete realization of their immortality. While waiting for Jesus to come again, Christians may be called upon to care for the dying and to face personally their own death.

Among Muslims, when death approaches, close family and friends try to support and comfort the dying person through supplication as well as remembrance of Allah and His will. The attendance is to help the dying person to iterate his commitment to unity of God. The family of the dead has a responsibility to fulfil any debts he had as soon as possible. They have the commitment to maintain contacts and courteous relationships with close relatives and close friends. They frequently pray and supplicate for him. Charity, fasting, prayers, and pilgrimage are often performed on behalf of the dead. Visiting the graves is recommended for the living to remember death and the Day of Judgment.

Hinduism believes in the rebirth and reincarnation of souls. Death is therefore not a great calamity, not an end of all, but a natural process in the existence of soul as a separate entity, by which it reassembles its resources, adjusts its course and returns again to the earth to continue its journey. In Hinduism death is a temporary cessation of physical activity, a necessary means of recycling the resources and energy and an opportunity for the soul to review its programs and policies. When a person dies, his soul along with some residual consciousness leaves the body through an opening in the head and goes to another world and returns again after spending some time there.

The Bhagavad Gita describes two paths along which souls travel after death. One is the path of the sun, also known as the bright path and the other is the path of the moon, also known as the dark path. What happens to a soul after the death of a mortal being on earth depends upon many factors, some of which are, his previous deeds, his state of mind at the time of death, the time his death, the activities of his children, that is whether they performed the funeral rites in the prescribed manner and satisfied the scriptural injunctions. Hinduism believes in the existence of not one hell and one heaven but in the existence of many sun filled worlds and many dark and demonic worlds. *Vaikunth* is the world of Vishnu, *Kailash* is the world of Siva and *Brahmalok* is the world of Brahman. *Indralok* is the standard heaven to which those who please the gods through their activities upon the earth go. The standard hell is *Yamalok*, which is also ruled by a god called Lord Yama, who is also the ruler of the southern quarter. In the ultimate sense, the purpose of these worlds is neither to punish nor reward the souls, but to remind them of the true purpose of their existence.

Is there life after death?

Most of the world's religions believe in some sort of life after death. These fall into four broad categories.

- **Reincarnation:** With its Hindu roots, reincarnation is the cycle of a person, after dying, returning as just about anything cow, crow, or cockroach or as another person. The Western version has rewritten the concept into a kindlier, gentler form, in which people only come back as people.

- **Universalism:** In modern culture, many people assume they will go to heaven after they die. One of the evidences cited for universalism is the peaceful “near-death experience” that some describe. Most of these episodes involve a person whose heart stops for several minutes, then is restarted. Following recovery, the person usually describes having seen a tunnel with a light at the end.
- **Divinity:** Mormonism teaches that people can become gods after they die. Despite historical evidence which argues strongly against its authenticity, Mormonism retains millions of followers today. They have no evidence whatsoever to support their belief in people becoming gods.
- **Judgement:** The thought of standing for judgment can be delightful or frightful, depending on the place towards which a person seems to be heading, because of the permanence associated with the outcome. As taught by Christianity, it is resulting in heaven and hell as eternal dwelling place, that is,. Jesus said that he came from heaven and would return to heaven. He said that those who believe in him and follow him would spend eternity in heaven, while those who do not will be tormented forever in hell.

Death - Different Perspectives

Medical Terms

In plain and simple medical terms, death is the end of all the biological functions of a living organism. It could be either the breakdown of the functions of the heart, the brain or both. This could be either in natural circumstances or man-made circumstances - wars, murders, capital punishment and so on.

Religious and Spiritual Interpretation

On a very general note, there are views that death is actually the death of the body and not of the soul. The body becomes a part of this universe and it returns to the original elements of which we are made. The Bhagvad Gita, the holy scripture of the Hindus, also proposes the same thing. Death is the ultimate end.

According to The Bible, death is a result of sins, rather the wages of sins is death. It believes that physical death is the separation of the soul from the body and spiritual

death means that the soul is separated from the almighty. Similarly, there are numerous other interpretations and connotations attached to death.

Concept of Afterlife

When one talks of afterlife, there are basically three major viewpoints from where the concept of afterlife or life after death, has been derived. They are Religion, Esotericism and Metaphysics. To add to the popular notion of afterlife, after someone dies, he or she is believed to go on a particular plane of existence, decided by god, based on his or her deeds during their lifetime. Those who are lucky enough, achieve 'Moksha' or freedom from this cycle of life and death, as believed by the Hindu religion. Islam's concept of afterlife is similar to some extent, to that of The Bible and Christianity, that life after death and where the person goes after death, depends upon his or her sins. This comes close to the Hindu religion's concept of 'Karma', that the way you lead your life and deeds you do in your life have an impact on your afterlife.

One of the empirical views of life after death is the concept of reincarnation. It is a major aspect of Hindu religion's description of afterlife, especially in the Upanishads. Reincarnation too, has two meanings. One is the preservation of the 'essence' of that being or being born in some other form.

Then, there are atheists who believe that there is no life after death. On the other hand, in many religions, and as scripted in the Bhagwad Gita, the soul is believed to be immortal. The spirit lingers, as believed in Zoroastrianism. Egyptians on the other hand, were amongst the first to believe in life after death and so is the practice of mummification and keeping the Book of Dead, food, jewellery and curses for the body.

Contemporary Perspective of Afterlife

Most psychologists are known to have voiced their opinions regarding the issue of soul and rebirth. Parapsychology and a few other branches have tried to unravel the secrets of this mystical process and related paranormal phenomena, but there have been no concrete conclusions.

In the modern era, what can be related most to, rather than the soul and rebirth, are the near death experiences and stories narrated by people who have been in such experiences i.e. from the occurrence of an accident, till the person is taken to the hospital and the vitals were taken care of, the experience the person felt in those few minutes. That could probably explain what a near death experience is. Then, in relation to this, the issue of what is an out-of-body experience also comes to the fore i.e. a human heart which has stopped beating for a few seconds during a surgery or any medical condition and then after a shock treatment, it starts beating again. A great majority of Americans believe that there is some sort of afterlife, or a “continued existence” after death. Studies show that people hesitate to name others they believe are bound for hell, even “extremely heinous historical figures.” Many Americans believe that their spirits will continue into the afterlife instead of their physical bodies.

Forms of Immortality:

Robert Lifton has identified five forms of Immortality namely:

- Biological immortality – Living on through ones offspring; contributions
- Theological immortality – Spiritual, religious continuation of existence
- Creative immortality – Living on through “works of achievement”
- Nature immortality – Living on because of being intertwined with nature
- Experiential transcendence – Mystical immortality

Theological immortality is the most common understanding of afterlife among traditionally religious people in America. This mode was also found to counter a fear of death and the loss of control after death, unlike the other forms. Age does not seem to be a predictor of belief in an afterlife, although studies amongst religious believers show that those between the ages of 30 and 69 are more prone to believe in an afterlife.

Demographic information such as gender, education, and socio-economic status seems to correlate with belief in the afterlife. Women are more likely to agree to the existence of heaven and hell than men, which may be affirmation of the fact that women tend to be generally more religious than men. There is a drop-off of believers among those with some college experience, and especially among those with four

or more years of college experience. This trend continues in the socio-economic demographic, with lower levels of believers in the afterlife among the upper class, with highest levels in the working and lower class.

Religion and Anxiety about Death

Some researchers believe that belief in an afterlife should correlate with anxiety about death. While most data have shown inconclusive results regarding this matter, a study by Osarchuk and Tatz shows that making believers aware of the imminent threat of death increases their faith in the existence of an afterlife. Similarly, many people may be inclined to alter their behaviour based on the prospect of life after death.

Near-Death Experiences

15% of Americans allege to have experienced a so-called near-death experience (NDEs), while this number rises to 23% among those with religious identification. This also seems to correlate with belief in other “extraordinary phenomena”. Many believe cultural influence to play a significant role in the amount of NDE experiences in a certain area.

Contact with the Dead

Another way to assess a belief in an afterlife is the prevalence of reported contact with the deceased, or as some have called it, “idonecrophany.” Research varies on the issue, and the percentage of those with a recent death of a loved one who claim to have had contact with that person ranges from 40% to 90% and corresponds highly with cultural and demographic differences. Still, it is difficult to separate “obsessive thinking” from actual belief of contact with the loved one. Almost all widows report feeling their late husbands’ presence, and one study shows 64% continue to think about their husbands a great deal a year after death. A rift appears in a study that shows that while 40% of those interviewed claim to have contacted the dead, only 24% believe that such contact is even possible. Moreover, religious

affiliation does not seem to play a role in whether someone is more or less likely to have a contact experience.

Coping and Fear of Death

Does having a religion reduce one's fear of death and dying? Research problems such as confounding measures and weak experimental designs challenge the empirical study of this question. However, large multi-study surveys point towards the probability that religious commitment does in fact play a role in mollifying a fear of death. Intrinsic religious observers tend to have less anxiety about death than extrinsic observers; that is, those who are more internally religious have less anxiety about death, and those who practice religion for the social or economic benefits have more fear of death. Research consistently shows that those who are intrinsically religious report more successful coping habits than nonreligious or extrinsically religious individuals. However, religion's role in coping from the death of a loved one may be an indirect one. Some psychologists claim that instead of directly positively effecting an individual's mental understanding or rationalization of the death of a loved one, religion works to strengthen social bonds in times of need, which in turn work towards facilitating the individual's coping ability. Still, others believe that coping success comes from religion's offering of a promise of an afterlife, where people can be reunited with ones they have lost. Religion can also offer meaning to mourners by suggesting death serves a greater purpose or even because it is the result of punishment.

Religion and Death in the Elderly

Many studies have shown that religious people over the age of 65 have less anxiety and concern about death. In those that are both religious and disengaging later in life, religion may replace lost contacts or activities. Whether religion actually plays a role in longevity is a controversial topic. One study found the 1-year survival rates of 1,300 octogenarians to be unrelated to religion. Follow up studies confirm this finding. However, other researchers claim that chronically ill patients who were religious lived longer. Since then, others have pointed out that those who died sooner also were in poorer health, a factor that may account for their counterparts' report of religiosity. The stress of impending death can bear down on the elderly. For those who are religious, the traditional religious coping mechanisms come to play a major role in their everyday

lives. Prayer is the most popular of these mechanisms. Altogether, researchers across the board admit that the happiest of the elderly are also the most religious. Few psychologists doubt the power of religious faith later in life.

Beliefs about death and dying

Beliefs about death and dying vary greatly up a person's culture, religion, social awareness, and transpersonal belief systems. Many people in western society feel threatened by the awareness of death and often cling to cultural values (without deeply investigating the values) in an effort to find an authentic meaning and significance to their eventual death and the importance of their life (Ryan & Deci, 2004). Death used to occur in a person's home or a close family member's house but, due to the advances in medicine and life sustaining procedures that can only be managed in a hospital, most deaths now occur in an unfamiliar and sterile environment (Coppola, 2002). Psychologically this can result in feeling an even greater anxiety or threat surrounding death for the terminally ill patient rather than presenting an environment that facilitates a transpersonal investigation about the meaning of death and a spiritual awareness of the transformation to a different state of being. Sadly, this is not available or discussed in the hospital environment even with the inclusion of chaplains (Coppola, 2002).

Although many people who followed classic psychologists such as Freud had, dismissed the incorporation of death into psychological research (although acknowledging it in biological research), Grof (2000, p. 220) has been able to demonstrate an alternative way to understand and investigate the experience of death and dying by researching traditional cultures. Grof (2000, p. 225) noted that traditional cultures have books of the dead, rites of passage (that may or may not include Western traditions such as applying make-up to the deceased), shamanic methods, spiritual practices, and stories surrounding mysteries of death and rebirth. Grof (2000, p. 228) found that many traditional cultures practice and experiment with holotropic states so that when they find themselves experiencing death they are better prepared to manage the different realms and inner territories of the psyche. The ignorance, educational suppression, and misinterpretation of holotropic states by Western cultures is considered to be one of the greatest failures of Western society with regard to preparing individuals for the experience of death (Grof, 2000, p. 229).

However, there are many reports from people in Western cultures who state they have had spiritual emergencies such as near death experiences. These individuals report that they see their deceased relatives, spirits, alternate universes, or supernatural beings; however, these experiences are often dismissed by the biomedical community as synapses firing irregularly or the presence of hospital lights (Grof, 2000, p. 165). Western cultures have systematically removed the rituals that were prevalent in what was considered to be more primitive societies such as specific rites of mourning, the participation in the transfer from the land of the living to the land of the dead, or food and clothing rituals that represent the loss of the loved one but also represent the cycle of death and rebirth (O’Gorman, 1998). However, holistic psychology has brought back interest in the incorporation of death and dying concepts, education, and rituals to modern health and healing perspectives, often with the incorporation of traditional cultures into current religious and health practices (O’Gorman, 1998).

Conclusion

There are numerous perspectives and interpretations of death and afterlife. These perspectives and interpretations develop in the individual based upon the influences of one’s culture and social structure. This paper aimed at providing an insight into the biological, philosophical, psychological, socio-cultural and religious perspectives that affect an individual’s view of their own death and the death of others. The path that eventually one chooses to interpret the final stage of life and existence after death and to cope with one’s mortality, is her or his own path.

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Hinduism: It's Belief in Life and Death

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Introduction

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions and cultural systems, predating recorded human history, and has no one particular human founder. *Sanatana dharma* - popularly known as Hinduism is heterogeneous religious tradition of India. Despite claiming that its followers worship more Gods as compared to any other religion, Hinduism sees itself as essentially a monotheistic faith. The Hinduism supporting scriptures are *Vedas* (the Universal Hindu Framework), the *Bhagvad Gita* and the *Upanishads* (scriptures reflecting integration).

Hinduism believes that Life and Death of creatures on this earth is governed by Lord Brahma as the Creator; Lord Vishnu as the Preserver; and Lord Shiva as the Destroyer.

It is a belief that there is a universal soul or God called Brahman. Brahman takes on many forms that some Hindus worship as Gods or Goddesses in their own right. Hindus believe that there is a part of Brahman in every human being called –*Atman*; supreme universal self and deepest essence of every creature. The physical portion of the human being is the human body, a vulnerable vehicle within the ceaseless *atman*.

Hindus believe that all forms of life contain a soul, and all souls have the chance to experience life in different forms. They also believe in reincarnation - a belief that the soul is eternal and lives many lifetimes, in one body after another. *Samsara* means going through the cycle of repeated births and deaths - ie a belief that existence of this cycle is governed by Karma.

According to Hindu religion, there is one thing that is certain in this lifetime: eventually we all must die. A belief in the cyclical reincarnation of the soul is one of

the foundations of the Hindu religion. Death is viewed as a natural aspect of life, and there are numerous epic tales, sacred scriptures, and Vedic guidance that explain the reason for death, the rituals that should be performed surrounding it, and possible destinations of the soul after departure from its existence on the earth. While the ultimate goal is to transcend the need to return to life on earth, all Hindus believe they will be reborn into a future that is based primarily on their past thoughts and actions.

Beliefs of Hindu Religion

The *Puranas* is a collection of ancient Hindu tales about the different incarnations and the lives of saints. According to the *Puranas*, the soul is eternal but the body is temporary. So when the body is finished on death, the soul continues to exist in another body. Reincarnation is passing of the soul from one body to the next. Life is truly a circle of birth, death and re-birth. Soul never dies; it only changes its physical form during existence. There are 84 lakhs different forms of bodies; and it is believed that every Hindu has been through all of them. Being Human is the highest form of life on this earth as they can reap the benefits of good actions performed in the past. It works on the principle - You get what you deserve. No one is happy all the time or sad all the time, because everyone takes some good acts and some bad acts every day, the result of our good and bad acts will be happiness and suffering in the future in the given situation is proportionate to our acts.

According to the *Bhagavad- Gita*, Lord Krishna said:

“One who has taken his birth is sure to die, and after death one is sure to take birth again.” (Chapter 2 verse 27)

You may think that while death may come to others, you will somehow continue to live forever. You will hear about others dying, but it never comes to your mind that you could be next. The whole situation is like that of a slaughterhouse where one animal is being slaughtered and another one is busy munching grass and doesn't realize that it will be next. This is ignorance.

Lord Krishna said:

“From the highest planet in the material world down to the lowest, all are places of misery wherein repeated birth and death take place. But one, who attains to my abode, O son of Kunté, never takes birth again.”(Chapter 8 verse 16)

Material life is full of calamities. The less intelligent persons try to adjust to those calamities, as they have no information on the abode of the Lord, which is full of bliss and without a trace of calamity. The intelligent persons try to give up attachment for this material world. You may think that your life is very comfortable as you have money, house, nice cars, good partner etc. But actually there is no value of this comfortable life as one day everyone will lose everything and be slaughtered by nature. Like animals a human being cannot escape the wrath of nature. However leading a life of Human, you have a choice of either going through the vicious cycle of material life- birth, old age, disease, death or become free from material life.

The souls in the plants and animals have to go through 8 million births before they get a human birth. The humans have been through the 8 million births in the plant and animal kingdoms. After this life the sinners will take birth on one of the hellish planets and after their punishment is over they will again return to this or other Earthly planets in a suitable (human or animal) body as per the conditions of life according to their proportional acts. Only by engaging in Bhakti Yoga -devotional service of Lord Krishna a human being can become free from material life and go to the kingdom of God.

The Vedas are considered the earliest literary record of Indo-Aryan civilization containing hymns, incantations, and rituals, and the most sacred books of India. They are the original scriptures of Hindu teachings, and contain spiritual knowledge encompassing all aspects of our life. According to the Vedic scriptures, the oldest known to mankind, there is hell, heaven, and something beyond them- the spiritual universe called *Vaikuntha*. Hell and heaven are temporary but the spiritual universe is permanent.

The *Rig Veda*, The sacred scriptures of the *Rig Veda* states King Yama's promise that all who have been good will receive admission to Yama's paradise and the everlasting enjoyment of all heavenly pleasures, include the restoration of a sick body, the maintaining of family relations and the highly desired elevation of person.

Cremation is a ritual designed beyond perception of disposing the body; it is intended to release the soul from its earthly existence. Hindus believe that cremation (compared to burial or outside disintegration) is most spiritual benefit given to the departed soul. It's based on the belief that astral body will remain present despite waiting as long as the physical body remains visible. If the body is not cremated the soul remains nearby for days or months. The only bodies that are not generally burned are unnamed babies and the lowliest of castes that return to earth. The dead body is presented as offering to Agni- the fire which also conveys the offering to heaven.

Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV, IV-Death and the Hereafter, 22

'This Self is that which has been described as not this, not this. It is imperceptible, for it is not perceived; undecaying, for it never decays; unattached, for it is never attached; unfettered, for it never feels pain and never suffers injury.'

The *Arthashastra*, a Hindu textbook from the second century BCE, offers a detailed description of some of the more frightening realms. Preceded by vital wind of the soul, it takes on another body of the same form, a body born of its own karma in order for the body to be tortured. The evil man becomes born as an animal; in other wombs that are evil and painful. When there is none of his evil left, and he is filled with merit, then he starts climbing up to higher castes-*Shudra, Vaishya, Kshatriya*, and so forth, sometimes eventually reaching the stage of Brahmin. Those souls or man leading a life of grace, austerity and meditation can look forward to the possibility to reach *Brahmaloka*. There is no need for them to return to earth because they have freed themselves from all material desires. They experience a sense of individuality and oneness with Brahma.

Law of Karma:

For every action you take there will be a reaction in the future. This is the law of Karma. In Hinduism your perpetual soul's future and the quality of your rebirth and progress towards liberation depend on your actions in life. The law of karma states that every event has a cause and effect, and every cause has a destiny. Death is not considered opposite to life; it is actually opposite to birth. Karma is accumulated through prior existences and defines your character, tendencies, capacities, and caste. Hindus consider life to be a journey of soul between birth and death of body. In Hinduism sound life is proportionate to soundness of body and mind. Deviation from this balance results in illness in body which is instigated by bad karma. However, many Hindus consider illness simply as part of ordinary life experience and a test from God. Hence system of karma perpetuates transmigration that results from ethical or unethical consequences.

Astrological Beliefs

Astrology Birth chart or the Natal Chart is an astrological chart which shows the position of the sun, the moon and other planets at the exact time of a person's birth at a particular place on earth.

As per the Hindu philosophy the soul existing in a much higher dimension sends a human as its instrument to gain certain experiences which are not possible in the world where souls exist. So at the end of one life the physical body is left behind, soul returns to the higher dimension and plans next life after reviewing what task is left and what is done. Physical phenomenon is governed by planets and stars. A person is born on the earth at an appropriate time in accordance with the position of planets. The horoscope of a person therefore not only contains information about probabilities of current life but also those of previous and next probable life. The Hindu *Jatak* (human being's) Birth chart, is divided into *Chakra*, the complete 360° circle of life, divided into houses, and represents our way of enacting the influences in the wheel. Each house has a significance of planets which can alter the interpretation of a particular house.

Astrologers claim that *Grahas* (planets) influence the energy bodies and minds of beings connected to the Earth. The accurate birth time is agreed upon as the first breath and location are necessary for the calculation of the exact degree of the signs that are rising, setting, culminating up, and culminating down, known respectively the ascendant, descendant, *medium coeli* (or “midheaven”), and *imumcoeli* (or “lower midheaven”). These degrees, also known as the angles, are essential for mapping the positions of the native’s twelve houses. The person’s death occurs according to the planetary positions in the universe at the time already reflected in the Birth chart on his existence. The astrological birth chart also reflects the manner in which the person will end his life, cause of death and reason for his existence on this earth.

According to astrologers, *panchak* constellations (last five *Nakshatras* in the almanac) are inauspicious as due to their nature, any work done during this time repeats five times. Five persons, relatives or close friends die within a short span of the death of a person during *panchak*. So the body is cremated in the *panchak* by keeping four dummies of flour and grass besides the dead body.

Achievement of Moksha

Hindus believe that the goals of human life encompass the following four broad categories:

- Karma - achieved by pure acts, knowledge and devotion to reincarnate to a higher level.
- Artha - the pursuit of achieving material gain or goals by lawful means.
- Dharma - the religious and moral duties or code for leading one’s life.
- Moksha - release of the soul (*atman*) from the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*).

As Lord Krishna mentions in *The Gita*, a body can achieve liberation from *samsara* by dying within city of Banaras (Varanasi)- on the Ganges. Even a droplet of Ganges water carried one’s way by the breeze will erase the sins of many lifetimes in an instant. Death, which elsewhere is feared, welcomed as a long-expected guest in Ganga River as it has a power to destroy sins. The funeral pyres, which are located on the river, burn nonstop. Hindus travel from around the country and the planet to spend their last days in Banaras as they believe

that they will achieve moksha- the rarest, most precious and most difficult goal of soul. For those who are unable to die in Banaras, cremation on the banks of the Ganges or the spreading of the ashes in her waters is preferred. Referred to as the “River of Heaven” or the Goddess, Ganga is considered to be sacred from her source, all the way to the sea.

‘*Garuda Puranam*’ explains the complete journey of the soul to the higher worlds. Sage Vasista in his ‘*Yoga Vaasistam*’ lucidly explains the reasons behind the phenomena of birth and death. Sankaracharya who is believed to be the incarnation of God Siva has contributed several volumes on spiritualism.

Conclusion

Hindus believe that the soul passes through a cycle of successive lives and its next incarnation is always dependent on the previous life and acts. Karma is the cause of our particular destiny.

Misfortunes in our present life are the result of acts that we have committed in the past. In the same way, our actions in our present lives will determine our fate in the lives that follow. Hindus therefore aim to live in a way that will cause each of their lives to be better than the life before.

The spiritual goal of a Hindu is to become one with Brahma. This freedom is referred to as moksha. Until moksha is achieved, a Hindu believes that he/she will be repeatedly reincarnated in order that he/she may work towards self-realization of the truth. To achieve this, they choose one or all four of the following paths:

- a. The path of Spiritual knowledge -leading to the knowledge of the relationship between the soul(atman) and God (Brahman)
- b. The path of Meditation - The idea is to concentrate so you can reach the real self within you and become one with Brahman
- c. The path of Devotion - Choosing a particular god or goddess and worshipping them throughout your life in actions, words and deeds.
- d. The path of Good Works -This involves doing all your duties correctly throughout your life.

Hindu scriptures aim to seek a good death through a conscious dying process. The last moment of life of human being is especially important to determine the properties of rebirth of the soul.

Given that secular society is geared toward gain, especially in the materialistic sense, it comes as no surprise that death has little or no place in its worldview. In the case of Hinduism this life after death comes in the form of a new mortal life whose state is a direct result of the type of life one led prior to death (karma). Although the promise of renewed or continued life is most often the focus of the practitioners of various religious traditions, the fact remains that all these promises depend on the quality of the life that you lead before death.

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Life and Death across-The Islamic Perspective

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Introduction

Islam means complete submission to the will of Allah. Allah means ***The Only One***(God), who is omnipotent , omnipresent and omniscient.

It is a misconception that Islam is a new religion that came into existence 1400 years ago. Prophet Adam who was the first human and first prophet on this earth and all other Prophets including Solomon, David, Moses, Joseph were followers and propagators of the message, that God is one and worship Him. Prophet Muhammad SAW, who is the last Prophet of Islam, has also given the same message as all the previous Prophets had given that God is one and worship him alone. ***Islam forbids ascribing divinity to any other form or being besides God.***

The holy Quran which is believed to be the word of God provides the most graphic details of what comes after death and lies beyond. Islam views death to be a natural threshold to the ***next stage of existence.***

“What you love to have with you in the Hereafter you should advance today, and what you hate to have with you, you should abandon today.” as quoted by SalmanIbn Dinar (RA).

Islamic doctrine holds that human existence continues after the death of the human body in the form of spiritual and physical resurrection. There is a direct relation between conduct on earth and the life beyond. The afterlife will be one of rewards and punishments which are commensurate with earthly conduct.

Allah says in the Holy Quran,

“Everyone shall taste death. And only on the day of Resurrection shall you be paid your wages in full. And whoever is removed away from the fire and admitted to Paradise he indeed is successful. The life of this world is only the enjoyment of deception (a deceiving thing).”

(Aal-‘Imraan 3: 175)

The afterlife will be one of rewards and punishments, which is commensurate with earthly conduct. A Day will come when God will resurrect and gather the first and the last of His creation and judge everyone justly. People will enter their final abode, Hell or Paradise. Faith in life after death urges us to do right and to stay away from sin. In this life we sometimes see the pious suffer and the impious enjoy. All shall be judged one day and justice will be served.

Faith in life after death is one of the fundamental beliefs required of a Muslim to complete his faith. Rejecting it renders all other beliefs meaningless. When it comes to doing school work, a child may feel lazy because he does not quite understand what a sound education will do for his future. Now, think of a man who does not believe in the Day of Judgment. Would he consider belief in God and a life driven by his belief in God to be of any consequence? To him, neither obedience to God is of use, nor is disobedience of any harm. What incentive would he have to suffer the trials of life with patience and avoid overindulgence in worldly pleasures? The acceptance or rejection of life after death is perhaps the greatest factor in determining the course of an individual's life.

Allah, praise and glory to Him, has given us in the Quran, an ordered specification of all the stages of life till the Day of Resurrection. First we were dead then Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, gave us life. Then He shall make us die then He shall resurrect us, alive, on the Day of Resurrection to face Judgment.

We notice here that life in this world started with death and not with life. According to our logic it should have started with life. The beginning of creation – as we understand it – is life. By relying on this conception we do not then understand the meaning of life.

People understand the meaning of life as the time during which man exists, and death as nonexistence or nothingness, whereas the truth is totally different.

Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, says what he means:

[[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed – and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.

[Al-Mulk , 67: 2]

Thus, death is not nonexistence, but one of the creations of Allah just as life. Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, created death just as He created life. Both are the creations of Allah. Each is governed by its own rules, its time of occurrence and its events. Only God, praise and glory to Him, is The One Able to transfer His creatures from the world of death to that of life, or from the world of life to that of death.

The Quran reveals that God (Allah), has created two lives: the first is worldly life, which is temporal. In it everything has an end. The share of each one of us in it is different. Some people live for hours, some for a day, some for months, some for years and some live till they reach the most decrepit [old] age.

Allah made the end of worldly life the transmission to the world of death. The life of the Hereafter is eternal; there is no death in it. The period of the existence of death ends by the beginning of the life of the Hereafter, where there shall be no more death.

Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, has pointed to us that true life for mankind is not in this world but in the hereafter. Life in the hereafter is eternal, where blessings are bestowed by the Power of Almighty God. You will neither leave the blessings nor will they forsake you.

The message is highlighted in Quranic verse mentioned below

[How can you disbelieve in Allah? Seeing that you were dead and He gave you life. Then He will give you death, then again will bring you to life (on the Day of Resurrection) and then unto Him you will return.] [Al-Baqarah, 2: 28]

When Allah, praise and glory to Him, created the Prophet Adam (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) He created in him all his offspring from the first till the last ones upon whom the Hour (of Resurrection) will come, based on His Saying, Blessed and Exalted is He, what means:

[And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we have testified.” [This]

– lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, “Indeed, we were of this unaware.”] [Al-A‘râf, 7: 172]

To understand this Saying we must state that life cannot continue if its rings are not linked together. My life is from an alive spermatozoon from my father. And my father’s life is from an alive spermatozoon from my grandfather. And my grandfather’s life is from his father...and so forth until we reach Adam (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). If the life chain was cut at any of its rings it would not have continued. If my father died before life was transmitted from him to me, I would not have existed and I would not have come to life.

We spend in the world of worldly life as much as God wills for us to spend, then comes the time of death and we move to the death world, then we move after that to the world of the life of the hereafter. According to Allah, The Most Exalted:

[[It will be said], “You were certainly in unmindfulness of this, and We have removed from you your cover, so your sight, this Day, is sharp.”] [Qâf, 50: 22]

Thus, from the hour of dying man starts to see what he has not seen in worldly life because Allah lifts the veil of this world off him and he sees a new world. This world exists but he cannot see it in his journey of worldly life. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said: “People are asleep and when they die, they wake up.”

How is man in the life of this world asleep and becomes alert only at death? Though we see him (i.e. the dead person) still before us?!

Alertness here arises from seeing what he could not see before. He now knows that all the unseen matters that Allah has informed him about are an actual existing reality but he was screened from them.

This is the picture of the pious believer while dying; he is surrounded by the angels of mercy and they greet him with peace and give him the glad tidings of entering Paradise. Therefore, the believer is happy and relieved. He is going to a far better place. It is an hour of bright prospect, of comfort and happiness hoped by every believer: to see the angels of mercy and be given the glad tidings of entering Paradise

But the un-pious buried in the graves are desperate of receiving any mercy in the hereafter. And this can never be except if there is comprehension and awareness. Thus, as per Islam, death is not nonexistence but a world having its own laws where man understands and perceives.

There are many things that the dead experience and feel while between this world and the Hereafter. Since death is a creation and life is another one, both include a kind of sensibility different from the other. Both have their own laws and both are far removed from nonexistence.

We have to notice that Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, mention death before life in many Ayats in the Noble Qur'an. This is because death precedes life. Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, wants to always attract our attention to death, so that on remembering it we hurry to righteousness, faith and good deeds. It is needless to draw our attention to life for the motive power for life masters the human soul.

Who amongst us, when the first of the month comes, forgets to receive his salary? Or who among us does not try to get the biggest share from this world? Thus, the motives for living in the human soul are many in order for man to be able to fulfill his mission in this world, making land a prosperous place, and building civilizations. But by remembering life every second we forget death. And if someone reminds us of it we seek refuge with Allah(God) from it.

We need to always think of death as an inescapable reality. Therefore, Allah, The Exalted, states death first in His Saying: [[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed – and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving] [Al-Mulk, 67: 2]

Death is the end of the human power of free choice. In the life of this world you have a will and a freedom of choice. But at the moment of death the mission of human will ends, it no longer has a role to perform.

Conclusion:

Thus the Quran, has clarified the meaning of life and death. Both of them are creations of Allah. But the life that shall continue is the eternal life in the Hereafter. As for death, it shall end at resurrection. After resurrection there shall be no more death, but immortality in the life of the Hereafter. Life is not – as we understand – sense and motion but everything in the universe has a life that suits it. The heavens, the earth, the inanimate objects...everything we think it to be lifeless has a life that suits its mission in the universe. Death is not nonexistence, but a kind of life that has its own laws. It comprises many matters that God, all praise and glory to Him, has kept hidden from us.

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View of Life and Death in Vedanta

Prof. Neeraj Shukla

A mature man who has lived his experiences intelligently and has maintained an alert, critical attention upon the incidents of life, will come to such an inner maturity that he will feel a certain unrest. He has the necessities of life, but is not completely satisfied. He sits back and listens to muffled questions from within, “Where did I come from?” “Where will I go? (as one day I must)?” “Is life an empty and meaningless accident? or “ Does life have a purpose?”

Religion is for this man; it provides him assurance and guidance in his endeavor to answer these inner questions and to live the gift of life in its true spirit. Religion is philosophy in action. From time to time, ancient philosophy needs intelligent re-interpretation in the context of new times, and new men of wisdom, prophets and seers guide common man on how to apply ancient law to the present context. Our mortal world has been visited by immortals such as Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, Guru Nanak and many more to explain the meaning of Life and Death.

In their own way each of these stalwarts have tried to explain the meaning and purpose of life, which shoots from “the unknown and begins as a child, grows old and then dies and again goes to the unknown”. To explain this unknown or mystery each religion has spoken at length.

Here I would take up the **Vedantic** view of Life and Death.

I have divided my discussion into the following parts

An Analysis of Life

Man in his pilgrimage from the womb to the tomb, is always motivated and propelled by two inevitable impulses, repulsion from sorrow and a craving for joy. Thus man engages himself in an endless chase after happiness among objects and environment which in turn keeps on changing. The machine age is certainly making an honest effort to create a glorious world that can provide greater happiness for its generation. Indeed superficially viewed, the present age is spectacular in its arrangements. But

the world of object in itself does not insure happiness. As objects donot have any power within them to give us happiness or sorrow. For instance cigarette may fill one with joy and satisfaction, while it drives another mad with annoyance. We are all familiar with the striking contradiction in life between a millionaire sad in his loneliness in his palatial house and a peasant happily singing a song of joy beside his thatched hut.

The Vedic sages have declared that we can never find the peace and harmony of permanent happiness in the realm of changing world. Happiness is a mental condition and therefore enquiry into happiness can be conducted only by a person who has learned to observe and regulate the happenings in his own mental environment.

With the aim of discovering the art of this inner mastery, the sages of the Upanishads examined life. They observed that life is a series of experiences and any analysis of it should necessarily accept our moment- to- moment experiences as the basic units. The sages further analyzed that an experience is not possible without three fundamental factors- 1) The Experiencer 2) The object of experience and 3) the relationship between the two , the experiencing.

The experience is the subject who gains experiences of the world through the three instruments of experience; the body, the mind and the intellect. Everyone gains experiences of three different worlds through these instruments. Through the body, one experiences the world of objects, through the mind, the world of emotions, and through the intellect the world of ideas. All these put together constitute the total field of experience of the individual.

The Veil

Mind is man. As the mind, so is the individual. If the mind is disturbed, the individual is disturbed. If the mind is good, the individual is good. If we observe carefully, we may consider the mind as constituted of two distinct sides – One facing the world of stimuli that reach it from the world, and the other facing the ‘within’ which reacts to the stimuli received. The mind reacts as if it is made up of soft matter. So, as each thought passes through it, an impression is left on the mind, just like a scratch. Then when similar thoughts are repeated, the scratch deepens into a canal. Every subsequent

thought wave has a tendency to flow through this ready-made canal. So if the canal is made up of good thought waves, then a good character is formed and strengthened. This canal or tendency decides the behavior of the person outside. This explains why different people behave differently and react differently to the same situation they are faced. At each moment, a man meets with different patterns and responds as per the tendencies called 'vasanas' hoarded within.

Hence when we perceive an object or try to evaluate a situation the five sense organs of eyes, nose, tongue, or skin bring in their reports to the mind, which compiles them and presents the data to the intellect for the final evaluation. The very ability of the intellect to rationalize and judge is conditioned by these unmanifested tendencies called *vasanas*.

Suppose, one fine day, as I walk on Hill road, close to St Andrew's College, I observe a gentleman smartly dressed, accidentally dropping his wallet. Now my mind has taken in the situation and my reaction to the situation would be, "Oh! God thank you so much, I have been praying to you for help, and yes this is you who have put me in such situation and this is the way you help me." I would pick the wallet secretly, and make even God my partner in crime. Now my other reaction to the same situation can be, "Oh the fool has dropped his wallet, and when he realizes it he would be sad, as the whole month is still to go. I do not have much to give in charity, but God has given me an opportunity to do so, let me call him and give him what is rightly his". I get lost in the crowd and sing a silent song of happiness in my heart, for I did what was right.

Now both of the reactions above can come from any individual put into a situation where he has to choose between right and wrong, and this decision is due to the tendencies inherent in the individual called 'vasanas'. And that is why each individual reacts to the world outside due to differences in *vasanas* or tendencies.

The Vedas proclaim that the conditions of body, mind and intellect must be transcended in order for us to regain our true nature, the divine self or some call it enlightenment or nirvana or spiritual realization. To achieve this spiritual realization the mind has to be purified of its desires and agitations, thus relieving it of its *vasanas*.

Only with great effort and intelligent self control can this purification be achieved. The fewer the agitations in the mind, the fewer the vasanas, and the fewer the vasanas, the quieter the mind. As the mind becomes quiet, it remains in a state of meditation.

Death

In Vedanta death is not the end but continuation of the journey. Before discussing death let us analyse Life. Now in our world we see so much of diversity in life, among human beings, some are born in the family of kings and some as beggars, some are healthy and some are lepers, some poor and some rich, and if this is due to some god sitting in the clouds, then he is biased, and I refuse to accept such a god who grants some with all the happiness and some with all the struggles in life by his own biased will. The explanation of such diversity of life could be either due to some biased god or just an accident.

The Vedanta explains this diversity, by the theory of reincarnation (Theory is to explain a phenomenon, it may not be correct, and same phenomenon can be explained by another theory as in Science or Maths). When an individual dies his grosser body is burned or buried, but his subtler aspects such as thoughts emotions remain as energy. So in the next birth he would get the body as per his strongest tendency (desire) entertained by him when he was alive. To enable him to fulfill the desire entertained by him in the next birth. Thus, if a person has desire to be rich, or to harm someone, he would get the same body (instrument) and environment to exhaust his tendencies (desire). This explains the diversity in the current world. Thus, it is said that "God or nature conspires to give you that if you truly have desire to achieve" and this is true not only when we are living but also during death. That is why many Hindus name their children after gods, so that at the time of their death, they may not remember god but would remember their children, and thus would get a passport to god.

That is why, after understanding death, Vedanta advises us to reduce the vasanas (impressions on our mind due to desire). It warns human beings, that thoughts of being rich or having all the pleasures of life, would no doubt be fulfilled if the desire is strong, but it will never give you true and permanent happiness, as they are subject

to change. So align yourself to one which is not under the law of change and that is GOD. But if you have any desire then definitely you would get the next life to exhaust that desire. But we keep on accumulating desire thus increasing the veil of *vasanas* over our true nature and thus are tossed in the wheel of the world. Thus our aim is to liberate ourselves, to be free and attain God-hood from Man-hood using religion as a guide.

Conclusion

The very goal of Vedanta is to attain God-hood, the true nature of a human being which is the divine self. The only method of regaining one's true nature is to vigilantly and ceaselessly divert one's mind and intellect away from the preoccupation with objects, emotions, and thoughts and direct it to an awareness of the divine Self. When this is consistently followed, an individual can successfully transcend his *vasanas*, to emerge as a divine being. Thus he can be truly free and happy in the everchanging world.

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