

Transcending death and the continuity of life

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Introduction

Death has been and it is felt as a burden to humans not knowing how to cope with it. For many it means the end of life, and for those who have faith in the continuity of life it means the unknown. In a way or another, it produces anxiety. What troubles many is not just the unknown, but that death demands change. Sometimes-painful change. The enemy then is not death but *forced* change. Colonized by the idea that death is an enemy to defeat, we believe that the attitude is to fight a war; a great war. This is the reason we fight—in one way or another—with death silently and secretly in our consciousness during most of our existence. Understanding that death is a process to discern, manage and use for our own spiritual advancement, it is of paramount importance. If we can understand this, then, we will be able to pass through death as we pass with a car through a tunnel and arrive to a new country with a new landscape. As it is difficult and frightening to pass through a tunnel without light, but confidently and easily with light, in the same way we can pass through death confidently with spiritual light. A light we cannot buy, but each one has to develop and have well charged in the battery of the individual consciousness. Death is not the problem; the real problem for each individual is how to navigate through it: with fear and sadness or understanding and peace, even better with joy and happiness.

Death has been negatively symbolized like hell, the skull, the devil, a saint like the Mexican “Santa Muerte” (Saint Death) or as a god like the Hindu god Yama. In the Christian tradition, it is a terrible enemy, the last enemy to be defeated. From ancient times, death has been associated with the underworld, an eternal torturous suffering. Darkness has been used to scare children and adults as a menace. Generally, light is associated with life, while darkness has been associated with the absence of life or death. The ‘black plague,’ that devastated two thirds of the European population during the middle ages, is another reason why death is associated in the West with darkness.

To die, for many people, meant to go into eternal darkness. While black is the color of death and mourning in the Western culture, in China, white is the color of death and sometimes silver. However, the research done in the last forty years on Near Death Experience, and the common occurrence of finding a brilliant light at the end of a tunnel, little by little is changing the concept of a dark, painful and sorrowful death into a more hopeful luminous death. One recommendation to diminish the fear of death is a better understanding of it, a practical knowledge of what to do, in order to be prepared to face and navigate through it. Montaigne said: “We do not know where death awaits us: so let us wait for it everywhere. To practice death is to practice freedom. A man who has learned to die has unlearned how to be a slave.” We can learn how to stop being a slave and be free. Free of fear, free of death and freedom to cross over the bridge of eternal life.

Because we are slaves of generally imposed and accepted beliefs: death as the end of everything is one of them. Death can also be seen as a revolving door: it moves us from one space to another. The historical importance of death—in all cultures—can be seen all over the world through many monuments dedicated to it: the Pyramids, Stonehenge, Mausoleum Tomb, (Origin of the word *Mausoleum*), The Taj Mahal, etc. As our thinking determined who and where we are now, the probability is that what each person believes will determine how death will be manifested. Imagination is not a small thing on this topic, it counts and more that intelligence.

There is a question of attitude each person can develop. Facundo Cabral, an Argentinean singer and author who, since 1996, was an Ambassador of Peace for the UNESCO, said: “The problem to die when you haven’t lived it is exactly that: die. I can leave this morning, and before leaving, I have to give thanks to God. We must be happy because the unhappy people are those who ruin the party.” When he was a child saw four of his brothers die and his mother eat from trash. However, for his amazement, he watched her— before eating—to kneel down and give thanks. Later he could understand the greatness and the royalty of his mother’s spirit. He left his home and went all over the world to understand the meaning of life. At seventeen he met a beggar who changed his life. “Hello prince” said the beggar to him. “A prince?, I a prince?” “Yes,” said the beggar, and added, “Or how would you call the son of God? You know, each one is a prince or a princess, but we do not realize it. In cities many divisions are created and then we speak bad one against the other.” Then, seeing the mystical approach of the beggar he asked him about Jesus, there the beggar gave him a mirror and let Cabral know Jesus. In what mirror do we look for our real being? Only looking to the higher self, we can develop a higher attitude toward death and how to overcome it.

Let us hope the time will arrive when we can confidently go through the tunnel of death into the full light of the day; the full light of our own being. Zoroastrians believe in the resurrection from the dead for everybody. As we know many Zoroastrian beliefs were incorporated into de Jewish-Christian-Islamic religions, and the pre-Zoroastrian religion of the Persians was very similar to the Vedas. This gives more credibility to the Vedic concept that there is only one Truth, but the sages gave to it different names. Hinduism developed the concept of *Samadhi* as the final state of meditation reaching *moksha* or liberation. In Zen Buddhism is called *Satori*. Some of the great Masters showed how to transcend the experience of death: Buddha reaching the Nirvana, Elijah (a prophet accepted by Jews, Christians and Muslims), ascending into heaven in a whirlwind and Jesus resurrection and ascension. Each one of us has to find a way.

1. A few concepts of death in different cultures.

From the Native Americans

“Life is not separate from death. It only looks that way.”

Blackfoot proverb

“When I was in the other world with the Old Man, I saw all the people who have died. But they were not sad ... It was a pleasant land, level, without rocks or mountains, green all the time, and rich with an abundance of game and fish. Everyone was forever young.”

“After showing me all of heaven, God told me to go back to earth and tell his people you must be good and love one another, have no quarreling, and live in peace ...”

Wovoka, Paiute

(His vision of the Ghost Dance revival, 1889).

Greek-Roman

Socrates and *death as a friend* is well expressed by Plato in his work: ***The Apology of Socrates***. For the old teacher there is nothing to fear for the good man in this world, in death or after death.

Harold Bloom in his book ***Omens of Millennium*** (Riverhead Books, New York, 1996), tells that: “There is a perpetual ambiguity in the relation between two ideas that tend to identify in a Christian or post-Christian society: immortality and resurrection. This ambiguity returns us to a central ambivalence both in Western history and in Christian theology: our thought-forms are Greek, our morality and faith ultimately are Hebraic, and much in the ancient Greek and Hebrew visions was profoundly antithetical to one another. The immortality of the soul, as we generally apprehend it, is a Platonic notion: its heroic exemplar is Socrates. Resurrection seems to have begun as a Zoroastrian idea, but its crucial development came with the intertestamental Jews, and its great exemplar is Jesus. This Socratic soul requires no resurrection, because it cannot die.

Plutarch, in his text “*Consolation to His Wife*” (***The Art of the Personal Essay***), says,

The messenger you sent with tidings of the death of our little daughter apparently missed me on his road to Athens, and consequently I learned about the child only when I arrived to Tanagra. I suppose that the funeral has already taken place. I could wish that the arrangements were such as to cause you the minimum of pain, both for the present and the future. If you omitted any ceremony which you think might lighten your grief because you wished to wait my approval, do carry it out. But excess and superstitions should be avoided; I know it is not in your character to indulge in them.

The soul is incorruptible, and you must imagine that this experience is like that of a caged bird. If it has been maintained in the body for a long time and has become habituated to this life by numerous concerns and long custom, then when it is lifted out it snuggles into the body again, as a bird in its cage... But the soul which remains in the body but a short span and is then liberated quickly recovers its natural form, for the constraint which was put upon it was but mild and gentle.

Japanese

Kenko, (c 1283-1350) in his *Essays in Idleness*, (*The Art of the Personal Essay*) says:

The soldier who goes to war, knowing how close he is to death, forgets his family and even forgets himself; the man who has turned his back on the world and lives in a thatched hut, quietly taking pleasure in the streams and rocks of his garden, may suppose that death in battle has nothing to do with him, but this is a shallow misconception. Does he imagine that, if he hides in the still recesses of the mountains, the enemy, called change will fail to attack? When you confront death, no matter where it may be, it is the same as charging into battle.

For Kenko then, the enemy is not death, but the enemy is change.

Chinese

Lu Hsun (1881-1936) many consider the greatest modern Chinese writer. In “Death” (*The Art of the Personal Essay*) he ironically says,

Some foreigners say that the Chinese are most afraid of death. But this is not true—actually, most of us die with no clear understanding of the meaning of death.

The general belief in a posthumous existence further strengthens the casual attitude towards death. As everyone knows, we Chinese believe in ghosts (more recently called ‘souls’ or ‘spirits’); and since there are ghosts, after death we can at least exist as ghosts if not as men, which is better than nothing. But the imagined duration of this ghostly existence seems to vary according to one’s wealth. The poor appear to believe that when they die their souls will pass into another body, an idea derived from Buddhism. Of course, transmigration in Buddhism is a complicated process, by no means so simple; but the poor are usually ignorant people who do not know this. ... Moreover, according to popular belief a ghost wears the clothes he had on at the time of death; and since the poor have no good clothes and cannot therefore cut a fine figure as ghosts, it is far better for them to be reborn at once as naked babies. Did you ever see a new-born infant wearing a beggar’s rags or a swimming suit? No, never. Very well, then, that is a fresh start. Someone may object: If you believe in transmigration, in the next existence you may even be worse off or actually become a beast—what a fearful thought! But the poor don’t seem to think that way. They firmly believe that they have not committed sins frightful enough to condemn them to becoming beasts: they have not had the position, power or money to commit such sins.

What [death] will be like, though, I still do not know.

South American

Borges in his essay “Blindness” (*The Art of the Personal Essay*) wrote:

Goethe could be referring not only to twilight but to life. All things go off, leaving us. Old age is probably the supreme solitude—except that the supreme solitude is death. And ‘everything near becomes distant’ also refers to the slow process of blindness, ...

(The concept that the world becomes more and more distant is something I heard from individuals approaching death. Or another concept is “little by little the world is closing down.”)

Roman

You can feel assured on my score of this: I shall not be afraid when the last hour comes—I’m already prepared, not planning as much as a day ahead. The man, though, whom you should admire and imitate, is the one who finds it a joy to live and in spite of that is not reluctant to die.”

Seneca (Roman Philosopher)

Chinese

Lao Tse:

Who dies and do not perish is eternal (Tao Te King, XXXIII)

I decided to finish with Seneca and Lao Tse; not only are they among some of my preferred thinkers, is the fact that we all have to face this stage of our existence, but we do not have to think that dying is perishing. We can still understand and manifest the continuity of life if we can manage the transition being consciously awake with dignity and joy. Yes joy! What a great thought is the possibility to go through the experience of death not with fear but with joy!

2. The Egyptian Book of the Dead, or Spells of Going Forth Into the Light of the Day.

The, so called, *Egyptian Book of the Dead* is a compound text that changed through the centuries. The importance of it can be seen when we realize that it is 3,500 years older than the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. This is telling us how ancient are belief systems about the afterlife, and the elaborate rituals to navigate successfully the way to

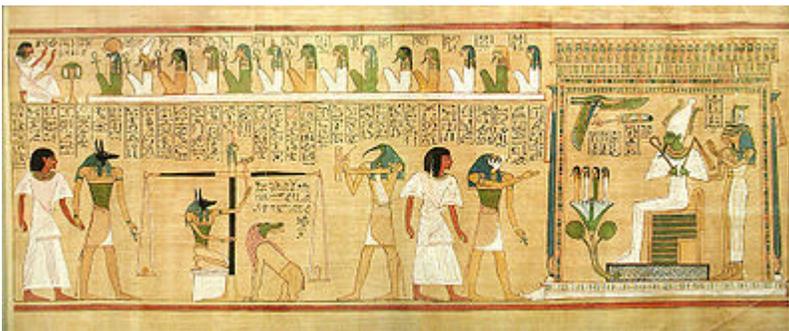
eternity are. This papyrus started as a funerary text more than 6000 years ago, and expanded including more prayers and spells, about the soul journey after death. The papyrus was placed in the tomb to help the dead person. Through the centuries appeared three versions of the text.

Saite Recension (or Saite Version)

From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_the_Dead

Early versions of the book of the dead were not standardized, and were not organized by thematic content; however, this changed by the *Saite* period:

- **Chapters 1-16** The deceased enters the tomb, descends to the underworld, and the body regains its powers of movement and speech.
- **Chapters 17-63** Explanation of the mythic origin of the gods and places, the deceased are made to live again so that they may arise, reborn, with the morning sun.
- **Chapters 64-129** The deceased travels across the sky in the sun ark as one of the blessed dead. In the evening, the deceased travels to the underworld to appear before Osiris.
- **Chapters 130-189** Having been vindicated, the deceased assumes power in the universe as one of the gods. This section also includes assorted chapters on protective amulets, provision of food, and important places.^[2] There are 192 unique chapters known, and no single papyrus contains all known chapters. Depending on the translation the verses are divided into Spell numbers as opposed to Chapter numbers.



Picture from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:BD_Hunefer.jpg



This scene, from the Papyrus of Hunefer, shows the Hunefer's heart being weighed against the feather of truth. If his heart is lighter than the feather, he is allowed to pass

into the afterlife. Vignettes such as these were a common illustration in Egyptian books of the dead.

My perception is that the criterion to determine the fate of the individual was not judging about good or bad thoughts, small or great deeds, but more about good or bad sentiments: love, compassion, mercy or hate, ire, rage. The scale of justice measured the weightlessness of truth against the heaviness of wrong attitude. After the explanation of the human behavior, the most important affirmation was: *I am pure, I am pure, I am pure!* From early ages purity was the passport for returning to the company of the gods and eternity).

The Buddhist tradition affirms: “Be free of attachment and aversion. Keep your mind pure. And unite your mind with the Buddha” (*The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 223).

In the Christian tradition Jesus’ words are clear, “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God” ([Matthew 5:8](#)).

Purity is a fundamental aspect for a good death, transition and a resurrection (or rebirth for Buddhism, Hinduism, and all those who believe in reincarnation.) The complete list of *the declaration of innocence* can be read in the Notes.

3. From *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*,

by Sogyal Rinpoche

The importance of death in Buddhism it is because that is the moment of great opportunity to obtain liberation from samsara. It is the moment of the mind when it naturally will manifest the Ground Luminosity and Clear Light, if the individual is ready to recognize the teachings, he will attain liberation and illumination. This can be done only if one gets acquainted with the nature of mind through constant spiritual practice. (I took the Sogyal Rinpoche’s version of the book for its clarity to transmit the Tibetan concepts into the Western culture).

Looking deeply into the way that we care for the dying, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross has shown that with unconditional love, and a more enlightened attitude, dying can be a peaceful, even transformative experience. The scientific studies of the many different aspects of the near-death experience that followed the brave work of Raymond Moody have held out to humanity a vivid and strong hope that life does not end with death, and there is indeed a ‘life after life’” (10).

“But whether we fear death and refuse to face it, or whether we romanticize it, death is trivialized. Both despair and euphoria about death are an evasion. Death is neither depressing nor exciting; it is a simple a fact of life” (10).

“We can begin, here and now, to find meaning in our lives. We can make of every moment an opportunity to change and to prepare—wholeheartedly, precisely, and with peace of mind—for death and eternity” (11).

“In the Buddhist approach, life and death are seen as one whole, where death is the beginning of another chapter of life. Death is a mirror in which the entire meaning of life is reflected” (11). Death offers a life time opportunity to transform ourselves.

The changing stages called “bardos” happen during the lapse between death and rebirth. However, these special stages happen continuously throughout life and death, these are specific moments when the possibility of liberation and enlightenment can happen. From the Buddhist point of view there are four bardos (stages or transitions) of interlinked realities:

- 1) *The natural bardo of this life;*
- 2) *The painful bardo of dying (Like going to sleep the elements of thoughts dissolve and open the experience of Ground Luminosity)*
- 3) *The luminous bardo of dharmata, (state of Luminosity or Clear Light (Before dreaming in sleep)*
- 4) *The karmic bardo of becoming (rebirth).*

To understand the whole process it is necessary to live and die with no regrets, with a light mind and a pure heart, that is: no baggage at all. Life, from a Buddhist point of view, is “*impermanence;*” we are transient beings like clouds in the sky, they appear, move, dance, and disappear. If a person comprehends the impermanence of life, it is obvious that we need to understand death and to pursue enlightenment.

An example of a Tibetan Buddhist dying is told by Sogyal Rinpoche, can be read at the end under notes, number 2.

The natural bardo of this life

The importance of understanding the stages, or bardos, is that it is possible to realize these states of mind while we are still alive, in the here and now. This stage in Buddhist tradition depends on the individual karmic aspects, and it depends on countries, cities, families, culture, education and beliefs, etc. It is dominated by the ego.

Negative emotions: pride, jealousy, desire, ignorance, greed, and anger, generate six realms of existence: god, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hells.

Perceptions of those realms depend on karmic visions. All of them are illusion. The negative karmic aspects have darkened and obscured the perfect perception. The spiritual path is the way to dissolve and leave behind the tyranny of the ego.

Sogyal Rinpoche says that “Two people have been living in you all your life. One is the ego, garrulous, demanding, hysterical, calculating; the other is the hidden spiritual being, whose still voice of wisdom you have only rarely heard of attended to... The memory of your real nature, with all its splendor and confidence, begins to return to you” (120). We can see that we have here the same duality of the Bible, the Adam nature of humanity that fell from grace, and the real spiritual man created at the image and likeness of Spirit. Jesus—as the other prophets, came to save humans from the false, violent, egoistic, criminal, and greedy mind, reminding them of their luminous and blessed identity.

In Buddhism the three wisdom tools to realize the “egolessness” of being are: listening, contemplation, and meditation. Listening to spiritual teachings helps to remind us of the hidden wisdom nature. It is necessary to listen like the beginner’s mind, empty mind, ready mind to really hear. The understanding comes through contemplation and reflection. After listening and contemplating, the use of meditation puts the teaching into practice.

In order to follow the spiritual path, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, quotes Buddha’s “Four Reliances”:

*Rely on the message of the teacher, not in his personality.
 Rely on the meaning, not just on the words;
 Rely on the real meaning, not on the provisional one;
 Rely on your wisdom mind, not on your ordinary, judgmental mind (130).*

The advice of Sogyal Rinpoche is not to get trapped into a “shopping mentality” going from master to master, or teaching to teaching without continuity. At the end of the spiritual journey choose one because “Knowing one, you accomplish all” (131). To follow Jesus advice to ask in order to be given, can be very useful. Ask in prayer and meditation, listen and the revelation will come.

Dzogchen Path

The way to discover the innermost essence and die fearlessly and in complete security is through the practice of Dzogchen. This is not a teaching but a state, the primordial state of total awakening of the heart-essence of all the Buddhas and spiritual paths. The “true meaning of Dzogchen: the already self-perfected state of our primordial nature, which needs no ‘perfecting,’ for it has always been perfect from the very beginning, just like the sky” (*The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 151). This state cannot be sought externally; it is the absolute and perfect state of being we always have had.

The practice of Dzogchen Path is described in terms of View, Meditation and Action. The importance of View is described by Dudjom Rinpoche, “The View is the comprehension

of the naked awareness, within which everything is contained: sensory perception and phenomenal existence, samsara and nirvana. This awareness has two aspects: ‘emptiness’ as the absolute, and appearances or perception as the relative” (*The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 152). The practice of meditation are for the purpose of removing the obscurations to let the wisdom shine. The purifications are for inner transformation.

To emerge from samsara and follow the path of liberation there are specific practices:

- Taking refuge in Buddha to awaken and trust the inner Buddha nature.
- Give birth to compassion (Bodhichita—or the heart of the enlighten mind).
- Remove obscurations and ‘defilements’ through visualization and mantra practice of purification and healing.
- Accumulating merit and wisdom by developing universal generosity and creating auspicious circumstances. (Idem, 155).

Sogyal Rinpoche explains the essence of Dzogchen Path in four points:

1. When one past thought has ceased and a future thought has not yet risen, in the gap, in between, isn’t there a consciousness of the present moment; fresh, virgin, unaltered by even a hair’s breath of concept, a luminous, naked awareness?
Well, that is what Rigpa is!
2. Yet it doesn’t stay in that state forever, because another thought suddenly arises, doesn’t it?
This is the self-radiance of that Rigpa.
3. However, if you do not recognize this thought for what it really is, the very instant it arises, then it will turn into just another ordinary thought, as before. This is called the ‘chain of delusion,’ and is the root of samsara.
4. If you are able to recognize the true nature of the thought as soon as it arises, and leave it alone without any follow-up, then whatever thoughts that arise all automatically dissolve back into the vast expanse of Rigpa and are liberated.

This takes time and patience, but it is revolutionary and powerful.

Action, after practicing the View, is to reach and remain in the state of great equilibrium, where all good and bad, peace and distress, are devoid of true identity.

There are two practices in the Buddhist tradition that are useful to know for people of all traditions: 1) The *Tonglen Practice*, which means ‘giving and receiving’ in Tibetan.

- 2) The practice of PHOWA, which means transference of consciousness.

There are three variations of PHOWA

Practice One

Assume you are going close to death in a comfortable meditation position, or just lying down.

Bring your mind home, relax completely and release.

1. In the sky in front of you invoke the embodiment of whatever truth you believe in the form of a radiant light. It can be Buddha, Holy Spirit, God, Christ, Jesus, or a pure radiant light, etc. The important aspect is to consider the visualized embodiment as the presence of truth, wisdom, and compassion. If the visualization is not very clear, it doesn't matter, what matters is that you can fill your heart with the presence and trust.
2. Then focus your mind, heart, and soul on the invoked presence and pray:

Through your blessing, grace, and guidance, through the power of the light that streams from you:

May all my negative karma, destructive emotions, obscurations, and blockages be purified and removed,

May I know myself forgiven for all the harm I may have thought and done,

May I accomplish this profound practice of phowa, and die a good and peaceful death,

And through the triumph of my death, may I be able to benefit all other beings, living or dead.

3. Now imagine that the presence of light you have invoked is so moved by your sincere and heartfelt prayer that he or she responds with a loving smile and sends out love and compassion in a stream of rays of light from his or her heart. As these touch and penetrate you, they cleanse and purify all which are the causes of suffering. You see and feel that you are totally in light.
4. You are now completely purified and completely healed by the light streaming from the presence. Consider that your very body, itself created by karma, now dissolves completely into light.
5. The body of light you are now soars up into the sky and merges, inseparably, with the blissful presence of light.
6. Remain in that state of oneness with the presence for as long as possible.

Practice Two

1. Begin as before resting quietly, and then invoke the presence of the embodiment of truth.
2. Imagine your consciousness as a sphere of light at your heart, which flashes

out from you like a shooting star, and flies into the heart of the presence in front of you.

3. It dissolves and merges with the presence.

Through this practice you are investing your mind in the wisdom mind of the enlightened being you are invoking, the same as surrendering your soul into the nature of God. Imagine that through this surrendering your mind is transformed into the wisdom and mind of the enlightened presence.

Do you remember St. Paul speaking about, having the same mind that was in Christ? That is the Divine Infinite Mind or God.

Practice Three

This is the simple way to practice it. Merge your mind with the wisdom and mind of the pure presence. Affirm, “My mind and the mind of Buddha, of Christ, or God, are one.” Take one of these versions and practice in a way that it becomes natural for you. The masters consider that practicing this way at the moment of death it comes naturally. It is said that when Gandhi was shot, his only words were “Ram... Ram!” Which is, in the Hindu tradition, the sacred name of God.

These practices can be applied to help the dying person.

The principles are the same but the difference is that you visualize the spiritual presence (Buddha, Christ, or God) above the head of the dying person. Imagine the rays of light pour down and purifying his or her whole being, and see how he or she dissolves into light and merges into the spiritual presence. This practice has to be done when the person is still breathing and immediately after the last breath. If the person knows that you are doing *phowa* there is a great comfort and peace.

4. PRACTICAL IDEAS TO HELP THE TRANSITION

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross suggested five possible stages in the process of coming to terms with emotions and thinking of the dying: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

We let the person to experience his or her emotions: pain, grief, anger, or silence.

We stay present as companions of their anxiety, fears, or doubts.

We do not judge only listen with attention without ego attitude to prove the person is right or wrong or retaliate.

Most people demand only to be understood.

If a person asks to be told the truth, specialists recommend telling the truth as kindly and sensitively possible. Why? Most of them know anyway.

The worse attitude is to deny reality saying that all is well and think “positively.” This attitude leaves the person crying and not giving the opportunity to share fears, panic, grief, and personal thoughts.

It is important to generate an atmosphere of relax, peace and dissolve any tension.

Build some trust with the person to allow the dying person to bring up those topics are bothering her or him.

When the person is communicating his or her inner feelings do not interrupt, deny, or diminish what it is expressed.

Avoid the temptation to preach the dying or give a personal formula. This is not the moment to convert, but if asked, it can be useful to share the honest spiritual perspective to bless the person.

Never be distressed if apparently our help is not producing great impact.

The most important thing is to show unconditional supporting love, from a friendly perspective, as one human being to another.

A great consolation can be given by just touching or caressing a hand. This shows the individual that he or she is treated as a person, not as someone diseased.

It is important to recognize the stage in which the person is moving. If it is a moment of tears, or anger, or sorrow, let he or she go through those stages, generally having the opportunity to express emotions—finally, the person it is very likely to arrive at moments of peace and feel your love.

Recognizing personal fears—when helping others— it is important to advance in the personal journey of understanding, compassion, and spirituality.

Let the person express the anxiety of the unfinished business and how to go ahead without attachments.

The difficulty of saying goodbye to the dying person means that we have to learn to let go. Avoid being attached to the dying person, even when sometimes it’s not easy. This can delay the experience with more physical suffering.

Tenderness and love is necessary recognizing that dying is a natural aspect of life. As someone said, “Don’t worry we all die successfully!” There is no need to suffer, and there is no need of a permission to let go.

Let the person know that she or he is not alone in the process, he or she can have your love and you are going to pray continually.

Not only the person who is dying has to learn to let go, but the whole family has to learn to let go.

For a peaceful death, the environment is important. If it can be at home much better, but if it is in a hospital, bringing living plants, let children visit and stay overnight if possible, have pictures and photos, children drawings, and even homemade food.

Don't speak negative things in front of comatose individuals. Many near-death experiences show that those individuals had very vivid and detailed accounts of what was going on around their bodies. Some times, they were aware of what was going on in other rooms of the hospital.

A peaceful death is a basic human right, very much ignored. The spiritual future of the person depends on how he or she is dying. It is a great gift of charity to help a person to die well.

Encourage the dying person to have fun and enjoy every minute.

While helping others the sacred rule is to keep our thoughts in the absolute, avoid falling into the same material circumstances. It is imperative to keep our thought in communion to the divine, and our being in the spiritual perfection.

CONCLUSION

From the selections of concepts from different cultures and times it is possible to conclude that death is an experience of life, and that the essence of life does not end with it. In many cultures there exists the idea of continuity, encounter and recognition on the other side of death. Two classic texts are: the Egyptian and Tibetan books of death. They are different: the Egyptian is full of instructions to help the dead person pass the exam before the gods and earn a place among them. The Tibetan book presents meditation techniques to prepare individuals to face the transition. Following Buddha's teachings, the emphasis is in the individual preparation and not in the gods. However, in both cases there are similar qualities considered relevant for the process: purity of the heart and the mind, wisdom, compassion, and some knowledge and training to be ready for the experience.

Mona Simpson concluded her eulogy for her brother, Steve Jobs, with these words: "He was working at this, too. Death didn't happen to Steve, he achieved it." All the previous concepts, beliefs, procedures, are a kind of preparation for our own understanding of an event we will face, but probably we have already faced it before, and have successfully

passed through. It is what many call the first death. It is said that cowards go through many deaths many times, wise individuals—those who learn and understand—only once.

During the process of death, or better called, during the process of transition many transformations take place. One of the best known is healing. There are cases of persons who died and were given the death certificate, resuscitated and were healthy, with no trace of the previous sickness. A better tender character is one of the main transformations. In other cases individuals develop a new vision, a sense of a mission, an unspeakable peace. This is what we know from those who returned from what we call Near Death Experience. We don't know all the transformations that take place in those who do not return.

If we can consider valid the “Transfiguration” described in the New Testament, then being continues developing the best spiritual qualities, those that define a character. Moses and Elijah didn't change or were not reincarnated in new bodies. They manifested the continuity of spiritual life. We can expect the same, if we believe and imagine the same.

For the topic of death, our imagination is not small, it is fundamental.

The experience of Mona Simpson suggests a simple teaching: work at the transitional process to achieve a luminous death, to make our transit and ascension into the purity, beauty and grace of our being. Steve Jobs last words? “Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh wow.” They were not moments of fear but of epiphanies and inspiration. Probably even bliss.

In the transit no human being is less than another. We all face it naked and no previous achievement of glory, success, power or knowledge counts. Only counts our purity, our compassion and our forgiveness. Love awaits us, the luminous love of infinite Life.

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Notes

and additional concepts:

1) The Declaration of Innocence-Chapter 125 (Ancient Egypt).

Introduction

What should be said when arriving at the Hall of Justice, of Two Truths, purging N [the deceased] of all the forbidden things he has done, and seeing the faces of all the Gods.

Spell for descending to the broad hall of Two Truths:

N shall say: (“N” is the dead person)

Hail to you, great God, Lord of Justice! I have come to you, my lord, that you may bring me so that I may see your beauty, for I know you and I know your name, and I know the names of the forty-two gods of those who are with you in this Hall of Justice, who live on those who cherish evil and who gulp down their blood on that day of the reckoning of characters in the presence of Wennefer. Behold the double son of the Songstresses; Lord of Truth is your name. Behold I have come to you, I have brought you truth, I have repelled falsehood for you.

I have not done falsehood against men, I have not impoverished my associates, I have done no wrong in the Place of Truth, I have not learnt that which is not, I have done no evil, I have not daily made labor in excess of what was to be done for me, my name has not reached the offices of those who control slaves, I have not deprived the orphan of his property, I have not done what the gods detest, I have not slandered a servant to his master, I have not caused pain, I have not made hungry, I have not made to weep, I have not killed, I have not turned anyone over to a killer, I have not caused anyone’s suffering, I have not diminished the food-offerings in the temples, I have not debased the offering cakes of the gods.

I have not taken the cakes of the blessed, I have not copulated illicitly, I have not been unchaste, I have not increased nor diminished the measure, I have not diminished the palm, I have not encroached upon fields, I have not added to the balance weights, I have not tempered with the plumb bob of the balance. I have not taken milk from a child’s mouth, I have not driven small cattle from their herbage, I have not snared birds for the

gods' harpoon barbs, I have not caught fish of their lagoons, I have not stopped the flow of water in its seasons. I have not built a dam against flowing water; I have not quenched a fire in its time. I have not failed to observe the days for haunches of meat. I have not kept cattle away from the God's property; I have not blocked the God at his processions.

I am Pure. I am pure. I am pure. I am pure. My purity is the purity of this great Phoenix that is in Heracleopolis, because I am indeed the nose of the Lord of Wind who made all men live on that day of completing the Sacred Eye in Heliopolis in the 2nd month of winter last day, in the presence of the lord of this land. I am he who saw the completion of the Sacred Eye in Heliopolis, and nothing evil shall come into being against me in this land in this Hall of Justice, because I know the names of these gods who are in it.

[The Bible has inherited this idea of purity: "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God" ([Matthew 5:8](#))].

Declaration of Innocence Before the Gods of the Tribunal

Hail Far-strider who came forth from Heliopolis, I have done no falsehood.

Hail Fire-embracer who came forth from Kheraha, I have not robbed.

Hail Nosey who came forth from Hermopolis, I have not been rapacious.

Hail Swallower of shades who came forth from the cavern, I have not stolen.

Hail Dangerous One who came forth from Rosetjau, I have not killed men.

Hail Double Lion who came forth from the sky, I have not destroyed food-supplies.

Hail Fiery Eyes who came forth from Letopolis, I have done no crookedness.

Hail Flame which came forth backwards, I have not stolen the god's offerings.

Hail Bone-breaker who came forth from Heracleopolis, I have not told lies.

Hail Green of Flame who came forth from Memphis, I have no taken food.

Hail You of the cavern who came forth from the West, I have not been sullen.

Hail White of teeth who came forth from the Faiyum, I have not transgressed.

Hail Blood-eater who came forth from the shambles, I have not killed a sacred bull.

Hail Eater of entrails who came forth from the House of Thirty, I have not committed perjury.

Hail Lord of Truth who came forth from Maaty, I have not stolen bread.

Hail Wanderer who came forth from Bubastis, I have not eavesdropped.

Hail Pale One who came forth from Heliopolis, I have not babbled.

Hail Doubly evil who came forth from Andjet, I have not disputed except concerning my own property.

Hail Wememty-snake who came forth from the place of execution, I have not fornicated with a child.

Hail You who see whom you bring who came forth from the House of Min, I have not misbehaved.

Hail You who are over the Old One who came forth from Imau, I have not made terror.

Hail Demolisher who came forth from Xoïs, I have not transgressed.

Hail Disturber who came forth from Weryt, I have not been hot-tempered.

Hail Youth who came forth from the Heliopolitan nome, I have not been deaf to words of truth.

Hail Foreteller who came forth from Wenes, I have not made disturbance.

Hail You of the altar who came forth from the secret place, I have not hoodwinked.

Hail You whose face is behind him who came forth from the Cavern of Wrong, I have neither misconducted myself nor copulated with a boy.

Hail Hot-foot who came forth from the dusk, I have not been neglectful.

Hail You of the darkness who came forth from the darkness, I have not been quarrelsome.

Hail Bringer of your offering who came forth from Sais, I have not been unduly active.

Hail Owner of faces who came forth from Nedjefet, I have not been impatient.

Hail Accuser who came forth from Wetjenet, I have not transgressed my nature, I have not washed out the picture of a god.

Hail Owner of horns who came forth from Asyut, I have not been voluble in speech.

Hail Nefertum who came forth from Memphis, I have done no wrong, I have seen no evil.

Hail Tempsep who came forth from Busiris, I have not made conjuration against the king.

Hail You who acted according to your will, who came forth from Tjebu, I have not waded in water.

Hail Water-smiter who came forth from the Abyss, I have not been loud-voiced.

Hail Prosperer of the common folk who came forth from your house, I have not reviled mankind.

Hail Bestower of good who came forth from the Harpoon nome, I have not been puffed up..

Hail Bestower of powers who came forth from the City, I have not made distinctions for myself.

Hail Serpent with raised head, who came forth from the cavern, I am not wealthy except with my own property.

Hail Carrier-off of His Portion who came forth from the Silent Land, I have not blasphemed God in my city.

Translation by Allen and Faulkner

Provided by Marie Parsons

2) Example of a Tibetan Buddhist dying is told by Sogyal Rinpoche, which was a great teaching for him. He tells:

Lama Tseten died in an extraordinary way. Although there was a monastery close by, he refused to go there, saying he did not want to leave a corpse for them to clear up. So we camped and pitched our tents in a circle as usual. Khandro was nursing and caring for Lama Tseten, as he was her tutor. She and I were the only two people in his way of calling her “A-mi,” meaning “my child” in his local dialect. “A-mi,” said tenderly, “come here. It’s happening now. I’ve no further advice for you. You are fine as you are: I am happy with you. Serve your master just as you have been doing.”

Immediately she turned to run out of the tent, but he caught her by the sleeve. “Where are you going?” he asked. “I’m going to call Rinpoche,” she replied.

“Don’t bother him, there is no need,” he smiled. “With the master, there’s no such thing as distance.” With that, he just gazed up into the sky and passed away. Khandro released herself from his grip and rushed out to call my master. I sat there, unable to move.

I was amazed that anyone who was staring into the face of death could have that kind of confidence.

...

Khandro did go to fetch Jamyang Khyentse. I shall never forget how he stooped to enter the tent. He gave one look at Lama Tseten’s face, and then, peering into his eyes, began to chuckle. He always used to call him “La Gen,” “Old Lama”; it was a sign of his affection. “La Gen,” he said, “don’t stay in that state!” He could see, I now understand, that Lama Tseten was doing one particular practice of meditation in which the practitioner merges the nature of his mind with the space of truth. “You know, La Gen, when you do this practice, sometimes subtle obstacles can arise. Come on. I’ll guide you.”

Transfixed, I watched what happened next, and if I hadn’t seen it myself I would never have believed it. *Lama Tseten came back to life*. Then my master sat by his side and took him through the *phowa*, the practice for guiding the consciousness at the moment before death. There are many ways of doing this practice, and the one he used then culminated with the master uttering the syllable “A” three times. As my master declared the first “A,” we could hear Lama Tseten accompanying him quite audible. The second time his voice was less distinct, and the third time it was silent; he had gone. (*The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 5/6).

3) Shall We Know Each Other in Heaven?

By: Lehman Strauss , Litt.D., F.R.G.S. ([Bio](#))

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=923

The ancient Athenian philosopher Socrates could say that since “death conveys us to those regions which are inhabited by the spirits of departed men, will it not be unspeakably happy to escape from the hands of mere nominal judges? Is it possible for you to look upon this as an unimportant journey? Is it nothing to converse with Orpheus, and Homer, and Hesiod? Believe me, I could cheerfully suffer many a death on condition of realizing such a privilege. With what pleasure could I leave the world, to hold communion with Palamedes, Ajax, and others!”

Cicero wrote: “For my own part, I feel myself transported with the most ardent impatience to join the society of my two departed friends. O, glorious day! when I shall retire from this slow and sordid scene, to assemble with the divine congregation of

departed spirits; and not with those only whom I have just mentioned, but with my dear Cato, that best of sons and most valuable of men! . . . If I seemed to bear his death with fortitude, it was by no means that I did not most sensibly feel the loss I had sustained: It was because I supported myself with the consoling reflection that we could not long be separated.”

Untaught savage kings in some part of the world believed that they could send secret messages to departed friends by whispering the message in the ear of one of their subjects and then immediately cutting off his head. It is reported that in some savage tribes, when a king died, hundreds of his subjects willingly submitted to death in order that their king might be better served in the spirit world. Even our American Indians, in some places, believed that when the tribal chief died, it was proper to slay his wife and other close associates in order that he might retain his dignity and be assisted by the same servants in the future life.

The belief in recognition and reunion in the afterlife is a universal one. It prevailed among cultured philosophers and poets, among untutored pagans, and it is voiced by the peoples of the world in our own day. The universal, instinctive belief is that we shall know each other in the future life.

4) Heavenly Recognition in the Old Testament

An encouraging oft-repeated refrain in the Old Testament substantiates the doctrine of Heavenly Recognition:

Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people ([Genesis 25:8](#)).

And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people ([Genesis 25:17](#)).

And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him ([Genesis 35:29](#)).

And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people ([Genesis 49:33](#)).

Aaron *shall* be gathered unto his people; for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the waters of Meribah ([Numbers 20:24](#)).

And the Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also *shalt* be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered ([Numbers 27:12, 13](#)).

When Abraham died, he was buried in a cave at Machpelah in the land of his sojourn. He purchased the field himself for a possession to be certain of a burying place at death, but it was not the sepulcher of his ancestors. Therefore, the language of the Scripture does not mean that his body was gathered to the place of his forefathers, for some of them had died and were buried back in Ur of the Chaldees. Notice also that Abraham was gathered to his people before his body was buried, for it was after he was gathered to his people (verse 8) that his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah (verse 29). The same is true also of Moses who was gathered to his people, but whose body was buried in a valley in Moab, and “no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day” (Deuteronomy 34:6). As we study the lives of other Old Testament characters of whom it was said that they were gathered unto their people, we will find that it meant more than merely being buried with them. They were gathered to their loved ones in the abode of departed spirits with not one moment’s solitude between their memories on earth and their joining them in Heaven. A blessed recognition! A hallowed reunion!

The attitude of David at the death of his child shows that Israel’s King believed in Heavenly Recognition. He had fasted and wept in the hope that God would be gracious to him and allow the child to live. But when final word was received that he was dead, David ate food, wiped the tears away from his eyes, and found comfort in a hope that he expressed in the words: “I shall go to him” ([2 Samuel 12:23](#)). Would there be any comfort for David if he had to go to his child whom he would not know? What would the blind get out of going to behold a sunset? What would the deaf get out of going to hear music?

May we say here that we do not believe there will be infants in Heaven as such. There will be no deformed, deficient, nor decrepit bodies in Heaven. There will be no old age or infancy in the home of the blessed. We have stated in the previous chapter that no infant who dies will be lost and sent to Hell. However they will not appear in their resurrected bodies as infants, for, as Dr. West has said: “Infancy is an immature stage and an imperfect state of existence. Adam and Eve were not infants when made, but adults.” What a tragedy if weak and helpless infants are doomed to an eternal state of weakness and infirmity! We encounter no problem here in a parent recognizing its child in Heaven. When we think of Christian mothers who have died giving birth to a child, and the child growing to full maturity and becoming a Christian, we still believe that the mother shall recognize her son or daughter even though her last view of the child was in its infancy.

5) Heavenly Recognition in the New Testament

The scene on the Mount of Transfiguration is generally accepted as strong evidence of Heavenly Recognition. After death, the spirit is clothed with a spirit body that is recognizable. This fact was in evidence when Jesus took Peter, James, and John up into the Holy Mount. As Heaven shone forth in celestial effulgence, there appeared before Christ and His disciples Moses and Elijah. These two Old Testament saints did not appear as angels or ghosts, but, Luke says: “There talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias” ([Luke 9:30](#)). Not only were Moses and Elijah recognizable by our Lord, but they were known to the disciples also. Peter certainly knew them, for he said:

“Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles: one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias” (verse 33). When we recall how the disciples with earthly, limited vision could recognize the two saints from Heaven, certainly when we arrive there in our glorified bodies and with heavenly vision, we will be able to recognize those with whom we associated on earth.

When the rich man died and went to Hell, “he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” ([Luke 16:23](#)). Here is a case that proves both recognition and remembrance in the future life. If, in the abode of the lost with its limitations of spiritual wisdom and perception, there is feeling for and recognition of loved ones, how much greater will be the affinity and knowledge of our loved ones in the eternal Home of the redeemed where cognizance is not limited!

Heaven is revealed as a social place, where enjoyment and fellowship are set forth under the figure of a feast. Jesus said: “And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” ([Matthew 8:11](#)). Assuredly, the patriarchs and prophets knew each other at this holy festival, and so will the saved from every quarter of the earth.

The Apostle Paul believed and taught that Heaven was a place of mutual recognition for the children of God. In his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy” ([1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20](#)). There is no mistaking what Paul had in mind. He fully expected to meet the converts from Thessalonica in Heaven, and furthermore, he looked forward to being able to distinguish them from others who had found Christ during the years of his ministry. By the Holy Spirit, Paul taught also that those who were saved under his teaching and preaching would know him. He says, “As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus” ([2 Corinthians 1:14](#)). Elsewhere Paul speaks of “the whole family in heaven and earth” ([Ephesians 3:15](#)). Heaven is our home, and all who go there are one family with God as their Father. How sad if we had to live throughout eternity as strangers! It would not be home.

But we take courage and press on hopefully, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” ([1 Corinthians 13:12](#)). Today our knowledge is confined to the revelation that God has given us, and how we do praise Him for that marvelous revelation in His Word! But in that day-“face to face!” O blessed hope! Face to face with family and friends whom we have loved and long since lost awhile. But more wonderful still we shall see Him as He is, “face to face.”

6. What to do with the body?

While spiritually people held diverse beliefs, the dead body is treated differently: Hindus use cremation to dispose of the body, Buddhists bury the body, Muslims bury the body,

Zoroastrianism used to expose the corpse over a “tower of silence” to be eaten by scavenger vulture birds, but in cities they bury or cremate the bodies, Christians bury the body, but in present day some people prefer cremation. However, there are exceptions in all the main traditions according to context and specific situations.

7. *Which Way Out?* By Max Alexander

*The surprising satisfaction of a home funeral, (from **Smithsonian**, March 2009).*

Max Alexander had to cope with two funerals, two days apart, of his father and his father in law. As they died in the space of 17 days, during those moments there was no time to think about meaning. Both men were Catholics but one was buried and the other was cremated. In order to avoid dealing with the physical reality of death people pay an average \$6,500.00 per funeral, not including cemetery costs.

While the cost of his father in law, having the funeral at home, demanded about \$500,00 his father cost was \$11,287.83. The interesting point the author makes is that the one done at home, not only was cheaper but was more satisfactory.