

Religious Concepts of Death

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Abstract

“Death may be the greatest of all human blessings” Only Philosophers can state that death is a blessing. The word itself is very much frightful. It reminds us about the bare fact of non-existence of ourselves. We get afraid of knowing that one day I will be nowhere in this material world. And this fear of death, fear of non-existence binds us to act perfectly, rather morally. As we know life is a journey that comes to an end through death. So it may be said that death completes the journey of life. Death is an inevitable part of life and of our discussion too. Every religion and intellectuals talked about death and they have placed their personal opinions on it. Death scares all human being and it is a subject of curiosity also. Death is end of life to some people and some believe that there is another beginning after death. Many sages from ancient times had given enormous effort to unveil the secret of death. Majority part of human beings believe in hell and heaven after death and reward and punishment systems after the end of this life. We will discuss these perspectives here from three major religions of the world - Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. They observed their opinions and beliefs and we will explore those gradually.

Keywords: Death, Religion, Religious views on death, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Heaven, Judgment day, Eternity, Soul.

Introduction:

Death has been always talk of the town from time immemorial. Death has always triggered human's curiosity as it is the most certain but unknown part of our life. No one has the accurate answer about its actual feature. We all want to know our origin, the meaning or relevance of life, actual characteristic of death and most importantly, the situation after our death. The concept of death has been discussed all over the world and each and every religion and school of philosophy too. All the major religions have talked about death in their scriptures and expectedly they all have different opinion too as these all religions have originated from different geographical position, there were different demography, rituals, social beliefs, mass psychology, economic conditions etc. which have deep impact on each and every religion. That is why all religions analyse and observe every subject in different way and that help them to live a meaningful life as per their own scriptures. We will discuss about religious perspective of death here and we will focus on three major religions - Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. Here Islam and Christianity belong to same religious group - Abrahamic and because of that they have some similarities in their belief systems about death but at the same time they have some differences too. Hinduism holds completely different philosophy about the same as it originated, developed, practised and experienced by people of absolutely different mindset on different land of opposite nature to other two.

ISLAM on death:

Islam doesn't see human's existence from materialistic point of view. It says, "...human is not only a network of material interactions and a material body...".Islam cites that human being is the only creature on earth who participates in creation of Allah (the almighty) consciously. This unique nature of human being differentiates it from the rest. Islam believes in the existence of soul and they termed it "*Nafs*". This word also means life, breath, self, human being, and body. There is another concept of Islam that is called "*Fitrah*" which says that every human being has born with same nature on this earth. Islam believes that human life is not a result of evolution or it is not any sudden thing but it is a planned creation of Allah (the almighty) and "humanity" has been ordained by divine plan. Islam observes that human being has great consciousness and it holds dignity of high value too. But Human being

doesn't have any authority to end own life as it is created by by the almighty and only he has the right to end it and no one else.

Islam believes that this life is a delusion and original life is awaiting on the other side of death. Human being will realize the fact that this living life is just a dream after his/ her death. Death is inevitable and everyone has to experience it one day when the actual time will arise for that particular person. Every person has to wait until the judgement day when he/ she has to face Allah (the almighty) and has to get rewards for own good deeds and has to face consequences of bad deeds here on earth. There is no escape route. This worldly life is a tool to purify the sacred soul and the person who realizes the actual meaning of life and created system of Allah, his/ her fear of death vanishes as he/ she comes to know the originality of own soul.

Hadith observes that human's pain, distress, sorrow, trouble, calamities etc are just a test of the almighty and it is done by him to prepare human beings for hereafter. Islam believes that a person will get reward if he/ she can tolerate all these negativeness or challenges in life but if he/ she gives up here, will miss have to face consequences accordingly too. Islam is in favour of saving human life at any cost, even against going to its own ideology sometimes. Hadith mentions that one should take initiative to undergo treatment as per requirement instead of facing pain or illness that statement shows that Islam cares for human health and life always on this worldly life too though it says it is not the ultimate state of life.

So, we can conclude about Islamic view on death as it considers death as a gateway to reach the ultimate place of human soul and get reward or punishment according to own deeds on earth and only this worldly life can purify one's soul. This is a rare opportunity to purify a soul, so it is very important to live a meaningful and ethical life on this planet. This will ensure a peaceful and happy judgement day before the almighty for everyone. Death has to come one day so there is no meaning of fear or there is no way to escape that either. Death doesn't end a soul, it only takes the soul to its origin. Death is the end of a materialistic body only and that body is not given too much importance in Islam like any other major religions or school of philosophy.

Human life has a sacred value in the view of Islam and life's ultimate control is in the hand of Allah (the almighty) and it is also to be mentioned that death is part of life, not the end of it. Death completes a lifespan.

CHRISTIANITY on death:

Christianity echoes Islamic philosophy on human's body and soul as it is very normal and expected because both have originated from same geographical place and both have Abrahamic roots. Christianity says, human soul is eternal and it exists after the end of human body. But on the day of judgement, the soul and the form come together again. Though the concept of form is identical to the body but both are not exactly same. The materials of both the bodies are different. The human body is perishable but the spiritual body is recreated that seems to be the worldly body.

Christianity believes that this worldly life is the result of human's eternal sin and it is a separation from God. This generally called 'life' is actually "spiritual death". Human beings suffer in this life as they are inherently sinful. Those people who believe in Jesus and live a life according to Christianity, live an eternal life in the company of God after their death on earth. But on the opposite end, the non-believers suffer eternally after their materialistic life.

There are many variations in Christianity all over the globe - Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox. But each of these units has many subdivisions or different school of thoughts since first century AD. Orthodox churches are a communion of 14 churches those are situated in eastern Europe, Greece and Russia. We can easily evaluate from this tiny description of Christianity's variations of belief systems that there will be differences on any ethical or philosophical question undoubtedly.

Christianity also says like Islam that a human life is a sacred existence and human doesn't have any right to end it. It is all in the control of God. Only the almighty will decide the end of a human life. Christianity maintains that human life has a sanctity as it is created by God and one should be fearless about death as the death is actually communion to God. Apart from this view, Christianity also supports the philosophy taking tests of human beings by the

almighty with sorrow, pain, trouble, sadness etc. It is just a part of life and one must be patient enough to pass this test in order to purify own soul.

The concept of resurrection in Christianity has a deep importance. Jesus had asked for mercy of the sinners, that regained mankind's relationships to God. This act saved human beings. Jesus's resurrection shows victory over sin and death. People who believe in Jesus and follow Christianity, will be enjoying eternal life in Heaven though their earthly death will be continued as this materialistic body is perishable.

There are two views on judgement day in Christianity unlike Islam. One idea says that there will be an individual judgement just after immediate death of a person and he will be either rewarded or sent to hell as per his deeds here. And another idea says, there will be a mass judgement at the end. A particular time will come when there will be judgement for everyone. There are two stages of judgement as it is believed - *personal judgement* and *definitive judgement*.

In Christianity, there is a concept called - free will. This suggests that anyone can choose their own moral way or they are free to act as per their will. Even they can deny the existence of Jesus too. But when someone denies the existence of Jesus or don't follow rules of Christianity, he/ she will be suffering eternally after worldly death.

Roman Catholic church has a different view that is not accepted by other Christian institutions. They observe that there is a state after earthly death that is called - *Purgatory*. This is a place where any sinner is purified in a "cleansing fire" and then he/ she is accepted in Heaven. But other institutions rejected this concept and said, there will be one final judgement and one single decision will be taken on its basis that whether the person will be sent to hell or heaven eternally. But one point is important here to mention that meeting God after achieving heaven doesn't mean oneness with God. God will always be the superior entity and his creations will be at the lower level of existence unlike Hinduism. There is a hell and heaven difference between meeting God and becoming God at the end of earthly death.

HINDUISM on death:

Hindu philosophy on death is completely different. Hinduism considers life as a cycle. It continues to repeat itself until and unless *Moksha* is achieved. In Hinduism, there is a concept of *Pralaya* also but it is synonymous to judgement day. Pralaya is just a point to restart this whole creation again afresh. Hindu ancient sages observed that human soul is eternal and only body ends. The good and bad deeds of a person only survives after the end of a earthly body. There is no other special importance of body except using it as a tool for the betterment of own soul. It is only the good deeds that make a human being complete. The whole discussion summarizes that only our memory survives after the death. Those memories can be good or bad but we will have to carry that.

No Hindu scripture gives importance to birth and death too much apart from their worldly value (temporary and their utility), because there are no such beginning of life with birth and there is no such end of life with death as the only eternal truth is soul. In Hindu philosophy, a soul travels through countless bodies to attain Moksha (salvation) at the end. That is the ultimate target of a Hindu believer to get rid of repetitive rebirths.

Each and every *Upanisads, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Vedas* etc also confirmed the concept of indestructible nature of the soul. These scriptures maintain that a soul can not be touched, destructed, get wet, killed etc. Its presence is eternal. And this concept is an eternal truth too. Advaita Vedanta cites that this whole creation is Maya (unawareness). Each and everything that can be witnessed, heard, smelt, all things are illusions. In the same way, this concept of death is also an illusion as we are unaware of the hereafter. The unknown fact makes us scared. This is happened just because of lack of knowledge about the ultimate and achieving that knowledge must be our life's motto. Each and every living entity will realize one day that there is no beginning of life and there is no end of life in reality. Life goes on continuously but appears differently. After life state is like just other stages of life like - infant, childhood, teenage etc. The only difference is the after life's state can not be experienced with our physical sense organs so we suffer from ignorance.

Hinduism doesn't go with the concept of death as there is no birth also as per its philosophy. All matters is our deeds that determines our rebirth tenure. If a person does good deeds, he/ she will get Moksha sooner than those who are committing bad deeds on earth.

Hinduism alone doesn't believe in salvation but other two major religions, Christianity and Islam also believe in this concept but there are differences in philosophy. Different schools of philosophy in Christianity believes in different ideas. In Islam, salvation is equal to entering the heaven and to do so, one just need to have faith in Allah (the almighty). But now the question arises here in Hinduism that what actually happens after attaining *Moksha*?

Hinduism strongly affirm that one gets united with the almighty (*Bramha*) after attaining Moksha and he/ she loses all ego, selfishness and realizes own original identity. He/ she finds himself/ herself in a complete different dimension that was unknown to that person before achieving *Nirvana* or *Moksha*.

Conclusion:

We witnessed that every religion believes in one common thing that this worldly life is not the ultimate place or the ultimate goal of our life. There is something that is waiting for all human beings after earthly death but this death is not the end of eternal self. The goal of human life is realizing own ultimate self and get united to God or Allah Or Bramha accordingly. Another common belief is our deeds determine our hereafter. So, we must act on this planet wisely to secure a good and peaceful hereafter. We need to act ethically and consciously to reach the ultimate goal. Death is just an illusion in every religious belief system and it must not be given too much importance and one should not be afraid of death as it is just an entrance gate to the eternal life.

So from this above discussion, we can conclude that all the differences among all the religions we think off every day, all of those are on external practices or rituals but the internal or to be precise, the core concept of every religion is almost same - the actual self is something completely different from this earthly body and that self is eternal. One day that eternal self will meet the almighty, or the creator or the Bramha. But there are few differences in philosophy of "meeting with the almighty" in different religions. For example, in Islam, on the day of judgement every person who has good deeds here will meet the almighty but the

difference of the supreme creator and creations, all human beings, will remain same. But in Sanatana belief system, Moksha or Nirvana means the eternal soul will be united to the ultimate entity. There will be no difference left between the creator and his creations. This unification is known as Nirvana or Moksha in Sanatana system or belief and this unification is the ultimate goal of every living entity on this planet.

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