

How different religions view the Afterlife

Christianity

Whilst there are different orthodox Christian beliefs – Catholics, Protestants, the Baptists and other Christians, the core of Christian belief about the afterlife is that there is an afterlife, that conduct on earth – how we behave - will determine where in the afterlife you will eventually end up. That there is a hell for the wicked ones – especially the Catholic Church still teaches that hellfire is for eternity and there is heaven for those who behaved well. Also, the Catholic Church claims there is an afterlife state which is between heaven and hell the Catholic Church calls ‘purgatory.’ The theological teaching is that after a time of purgation, the spirit will eventually be progress and will go to heaven. There are other Christians, the Protestants, who do not accept purgatory. Catholic theology also states that sinners can confess their sins to Catholic priests and those sins are forgiven for ever – it does not matter how grave the sins might be – including genocide – if the sinner truly repents, he will be forgiven.

Spiritism/Spiritualism

Spiritism and Spiritualism say that all people and animals that have been loved (had their vibrations raised) such as pets, continue to live after physical death. On crossing over we take three things with us: our etheric or spirit body (a duplicate of our physical body) all memories and our character.

On crossing we go to a realm that will accommodate the vibrations we accumulated from all the thoughts and actions of our lifetime. Average decent people go to what is usually termed as the Third Realm. Those who have been willfully cruel and consistently selfish go to the darker, very unpleasant Astral regions because their level of vibrations would be much lower than the vibrations of the Third Realm.

Information transmitted from the other side tells us that the Third Realm is a place of enormous beauty, peace and light. There will be scope to continue to spiritually refine indefinitely. Those who earned it can progress to the fourth level, then the fifth, and sixth and so on.

For humans we know that there are at least seven realms vibrating from the lowest to the highest - the higher the vibrations the more beautiful and better the conditions.

Spiritualists accept the Law of Progress- that those who are in the lower realms will one day slowly go upwardly towards the Realms of the Light even if it takes eons of time.

Unlike all other religions which require faith and belief (faith in a belief without evidence), Spiritualism/Spiritism is the only religion which is based on evidence and direct experience. Spiritism, briefly, is very similar to Spiritualism and is based on Allen Kardec's research.

Spiritualism is the acceptance of empirically elicited evidence that the human consciousness survives physical death and that those who survive can communicate with those who are physically on earth in a number of ways. This communication can be made through at least twenty different empirically validated processes including mental, physical and direct voice mediumship, telepathy, xenoglossy, Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP), Instrumental Trans-communication, Apparitions, Ouija Board, Death Bed Visions, Poltergeists.

In addition, Spiritualists follow the universal law of cause and effect, accepting self responsibility and that the universe is governed by Mind, commonly called God.

The modern Spiritualist movement began in 1848 in Hydesville, New York with the Fox sisters who demonstrated that spirits communicated with them by rapping on tables. The historical record is that finding of a skeleton in the basement where the Fox sisters used to live – as the spirit of a man who was murdered there had directed the Fox sisters to search by digging in the basement. The finding of the skeleton confirmed the rappings directed at the two Fox sisters. The murdered former resident of the house informed the Fox sisters who actually murdered him and the police caught the murderer.

To-day, as it was in the past for thousands of years, millions of people around the world experience for themselves communication from the afterlife from their loved ones.

Communication is now accepted world wide. Highly credible world famous scientists using their scientific skills regularly confirm this communication. Scientific testing is being done regularly on gifted mediums with great success. Some Spiritualists organize themselves and have service meetings in Spiritualist Churches. Others call themselves Spiritualists without aligning with any formal organisation.

Spiritism is defined by Spiritist Doctrine as the collection of principles and laws, considered to be revealed by Superior Spirits, contained in the works of Allan Kardec, which constitute the **Codification of Spiritism: The Spirits' Book, The Mediums' Book, The Gospel According to Spiritism, Heaven and Hell and The Genesis According to Spiritism**. A most credible Spiritist definitive work on communication from the afterlife is by Allan Kardec and titled: The Spirits' Book.

Spiritists' (Kardecist) Beliefs:

- Jesus as the Highest Spirit to incarnate on Earth.
- There is no Progression without the Practice of Charity.
- Reincarnation.
- All Life is Eternal – There is No Death.
- Spirits can communicate with the Physical World.
- No Eternal Hell.
- No Original Sin.
- Eternal Progression open to Every Soul.
- The Doctrine of Karma.

Buddhism

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

Where Buddha departed most radically from Hinduism was in his doctrine of "anatta", the notion that individuals do not possess eternal souls. Instead of eternal souls, individuals consist of a "bundle" of habits, memories, sensations, desires, and so forth, which together delude one into thinking that he or she consists of a stable, lasting self.

Despite its transitory nature, this false self hangs together as a unit, and even reincarnates in body after body. In Buddhism, as well as in Hinduism, life in a corporeal body is viewed negatively, as the source of all suffering. Hence, the goal is to obtain release. In Buddhism, this means abandoning the false sense of self so that the bundle of memories and impulses disintegrates, leaving nothing to reincarnate and hence nothing to experience pain.

From the perspective of present-day, world-affirming Western society, the Buddhist vision cannot but appear distinctly unappealing: Not only is this life portrayed as unattractive, the prospect of nirvana, in which one dissolves into nothingness, seems even less desirable.

A modern-day Buddha might respond, however, that our reaction to being confronted with the dark side of life merely shows how insulated we are from the pain and suffering that is so fundamental to human existence.

Following death, according to Tibetan Buddhism, the spirit of the departed goes through a process lasting forty-nine days that is divided into three stages called "bardos." At the conclusion of the bardo, the person either enters nirvana or returns to earth for rebirth.

It is imperative that the dying individual remain fully aware for as long as possible because the thoughts one has while passing over into death heavily influence the nature of both the after-death experience and, if one fails to achieve Nirvana, the state of one's next incarnation.

Stage one of the Bardo (called the "Chikai" Bardo), the bardo of dying, begins at death and extends from half a day to four days. This is the period of time necessary for the departed to realize that they have dropped the body. The consciousness of the departed has an ecstatic experience of the primary "Clear White Light" at the death moment. Everyone gets at least a fleeting glimpse of the light.

The more spiritually developed see it longer, and are able to go beyond it to a higher level of reality. The average person, however, drops into the lesser state of the secondary "clear light."

In stage two (called the "Chonyid" Bardo), the bardo of Luminous Mind, the departed encounters the hallucinations resulting from the Karma created during life. Unless highly developed, the individual will feel that they are still in the body.

The departed then encounters various apparitions, the "peaceful" and "wrathful" deities that are actually personifications of human feelings and that, to successfully achieve nirvana, the deceased must encounter unflinchingly. Only the most evolved individuals can skip the bardo experience altogether and transit directly into a paradise realm. Stage three (called the "Sidpa" Bardo), the bardo of rebirth, is the process of reincarnation.

Judaism

Traditional Judaism firmly believes that death is not the end of human existence. However, because Judaism is primarily focused on life here and now rather than on the afterlife, Judaism does not have much dogma about the afterlife, and leaves a great deal of room for personal opinion. It is possible for an Orthodox Jew to believe that the souls of the righteous dead go to a place similar to the Christian heaven, or that they are reincarnated through many lifetimes, or that they simply wait until the coming of the messiah, when they will be resurrected. Likewise, Orthodox Jews can believe that the souls of the wicked are tormented by demons of their own creation, or that wicked souls are simply destroyed at death, ceasing to exist.

Islam

According to the tenets of the Muslim faith, death is the complete end of physical life and the beginning of a period of rest until the day of resurrection when Allah judges the living and the dead. Many Muslims believe that the righteous are able to see visions of G-d after death and that the wicked see visions of hell.

Except for these possible visions of heaven or hell, Muslims believe the soul remains in a kind of "soul sleep" until Judgment Day. When the Day of Judgment arrives, everyone is judged according to their deeds in life. Many Muslims believe that non-Muslims can attain heaven only after a period of purification in the fires of purgatory.

In the eighth century, a mystical sect of Islam began which merged the mystical traditions of the Greeks, Buddhists and Hindus with traditional Islamic faith. Concepts found in Sufism can be found in a great many near-death experiences which have been reported.

The Sufi masters teach that, after death, a person judges himself thereby bringing about their own heaven or hell. Sufism is known as "the Way of the Heart" and the "Way of the Pure." It is a means by which one can move from the lower level of self to ascend to the Divine Light that penetrates the entire universe. This light concept is common to many other religions as well as the near-death experience. According to Sufi tradition, there are many ways to ascend, but the essence of the path to G-d is to find yourself. As the Sufi saying states, "Know yourself, know your L--d."

Hinduism

The Upanishads, the ancient set of Hindu religious texts, postulated an eternal, changeless core of the self called as the "Atman." This soul or "deep self" was viewed as being identical with the unchanging godhead, referred to as Brahma (the unitary ground of being that transcends particular gods and goddesses). Untouched by the variations of time and circumstance, the Atman was nevertheless entrapped in the world of "Samsara" (the cycle of death and rebirth). Unlike Western treatments of reincarnation, which tend to make the idea of coming back into body after body seem exotic, desirable, and even romantic, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other southern Asian religions portray the samsaric process as unhappy. Life in this world means suffering.

What keeps us trapped in the samsaric cycle is the law of Karma. In its simplest form, this law operates impersonally like a natural law, ensuring that every good or bad deed eventually returns to the individual in the form of reward or punishment commensurate with the original deed. It is the necessity of "reaping one's Karma" that compels human beings to take rebirth (to reincarnate) in successive lifetimes.

In other words, if one dies before reaping the effects of one's actions (as most people do), the Karmic process demands that one come back in a future life.

Coming back in another lifetime also allows karmic forces to reward or punish one through the circumstances to which one is born. Hence, for example, an individual who was generous in one lifetime might be reborn as a wealthy person in the next incarnation.

"Moksha" is the traditional Sanskrit term for release or liberation from the endless chain of deaths and rebirths. In the southern Asian religious tradition, it represents the supreme goal of human strivings.

Reflecting the diversity of Hinduism, liberation can be attained in a variety of ways, from the proper performance of certain rituals to highly disciplined forms of yoga. In the Upanishads, it is proper knowledge, in the sense of insight into the nature of reality that enables the aspiring seeker to achieve liberation from the wheel of rebirth.

What happens to the individual after reaching moksha? In Upanishadic Hinduism, the individual Atman is believed to merge into the cosmic Brahma. A traditional image is that of a drop of water that, when dropped into the ocean, loses its individuality and becomes one with the sea. Although widespread, this metaphor does not quite capture the significance of this merger. Rather than losing one's individuality, the Upanishadic understanding is that the Atman is never separate from Brahma; hence, individuality is illusory, and moksha is simply waking up from the dream of separateness.

Along with heaven realms, Hinduism also developed notions of hell worlds in which exceptionally sinful individuals were punished. Many of the torments of Hindu hell worlds, such as being tortured by demons, resemble the torments of more familiar Western hells. Unlike Western hells, however, Hindu hell worlds are not final dwelling places. They are more like purgatories in which sinful souls experience suffering for a limited term. After the term is over, even the most evil person is turned out of hell to once again participate in the cycle of reincarnation.