



JUBILO

CONFLICT PREVENTION, ETHNIC INTEGRATION AND PEACE BUILDING
THROUGH INTERFAITH DIALOGUE



DEATH

IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

A COMPARATIVE APPROACH



SPANDA

TEA FOR PEACE

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DEATH

*IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM
A COMPARATIVE APPROACH*



SPANDA

C O N T E N T S



TEA FOR PEACE
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in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
A comparative approach.*

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R E S E A R C H E R S

RACHEL BRONSTEIN, LUCA COSTA
SHEILA ECKERT, MANUEL NUÑEZ

W R I T E R S

LUCA COSTA, SHEILA ECKERT,
MANUEL NUÑEZ

E D I T I N G

SHEILA ECKERT

JEW, CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS ALL BELIEVE THAT LIFE HAS BEEN CREATED BY Y_h_v_h, God, Allah (God) and that all creatures will experience death at a certain time, however, the three faiths differ in their theological perceptions of death and the afterlife.

Judaism advocates the immortality of the soul. Jewish people believe death stimulates more productive and meaningful living, and focus more on life on earth than the afterlife. On the Day of Judgement, the souls of the dead will be resurrected in Israel, where God's kingdom will be established. Reform Jews leave room for personal choice about their perception on what happens after death. Judaism prescribes individuals to be judged according to their ethical behaviour during their lifetime.

In Christianity, death is the departure of the soul from the body. Christians view death as God's verdict upon men for their disobedience. Scholars argue that although God created humans to be immortal, Adam and Eve defied His decree by eating the forbidden fruit. This "original sin" was then transferred to all mankind and the punishment for it is mortality. Biblical scriptures distinguish spiritual and physical death: the former refers to alienation from God, while the latter means the collapse of the body. A person can be dead spiritually while physically alive and vice versa. Death is merely a transfer from one state of being to another. When the Day of Judgement comes, people will be resurrected and judged, based upon their deeds. The righteous who have been spiritually enlightened during their time on earth will live eternal life with God, while the wicked will face condemnation and be eternally separated from Him. The concept of redemption is central for understanding Christian views on death. It is believed that Christ has conquered death through his resurrection. Jesus has tasted death for everyone and people should await his return for the realisation of their immortality. Death is considered the path to the happiness of heaven. It should not be feared, since all will be raised and reunited forever in God's presence. Death is natural, inevitable and sacred; it is not an end but a glorious new beginning.

In Islam, death is the natural transition that comes at a predefined time and it should not be struggled against, but rather accepted and embraced. Muslims

are taught to be aware of death throughout life and be ever ready to meet it cheerfully. They believe in the Day of Judgment and the afterlife. This acceptance provides hope in the divine intervention of creating an eternal home for the righteous. It also brings clear purpose to humanity to fulfil God's will. The transition will be difficult for the wicked since they did not comply with God's commands and their life was spent carelessly and unwisely.

THE APPROACH TO DEATH IN SACRED TEXTS

8 ¶ The ancient Hebrews did not believe in life after death as it is conventionally viewed today. There was no heaven or hell, nor any sort of resurrection or reprieve from death. The prevailing view in the most foundational Jewish text, the Torah, is relatively obscure regarding what occurs after death, instead focusing on this world. There is no explicit description of what is to come, but the scripture describes a future in which man is undifferentiated from animals: "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust; again." (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20). The "one place" referred to in this passage is *Sheol*, described as "dark and deep," "the Pit," and "the land of forgetfulness," cut off from both God and human life above (Pss. 6:5; 88:3-12). It is a place of emptiness, in which a "shadow" or "shade" of the former self survives (Ps. 88:10) in a sleep-like state (Job 3:11-19). *Sheol* is unlike more modern conceptions of heaven and hell, as there is no idea of judgment or of reward and punishment. For all practical purposes, death was the end. As Psalm 115:17 says, the dead go down into "silence"; they do not participate, as do the living, in praising God (seen then as the most vital human activity) and Psalm 146:4 "When his breath departs he returns to his earth; on that very day his thoughts [plans] perish."

In contrast to notions of what awaits us after death such as resurrection and everlasting life in heaven, the initial conception in the Hebrew Bible views death as a relatively final act, a period rather than a comma. Here, perhaps, we find the reason for the emphasis Jews place on this life.

However, this conception of the hereafter changes in later Hebrew books. In the Book of Wisdom, Solomon strongly supports a view that believes in the immortality of the soul and resurrection of the dead. He declares: "But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their

hope is full of immortality" (Book of Wisdom 3:14) and "the dust will return to the ground as it was and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:17). Here we glimpse a more hopeful outlook on what awaits a man or woman after death.

9 ¶ Christians believe death came into existence as God's punishment for sin (Gen 3:19; Rom 5:2,6,8). However, though God exacted the punishment, he also provided the remedy: his son, Jesus Christ, and through him, everlasting life in heaven (John 11:25-44). The New Testament depicts Jesus as having died to expiate the sins of humanity, he is the "lamb of God who take away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Thus, death is central to the New Testament, and Christianity in general, as Jesus' very purpose on earth was to propagate a new and radically different view of death. For those who die in Christ, death is union with the Lord. Jesus informed the thief being crucified next to him, "Today you shall be with me in paradise" (Luke. 23:43); Paul affirms, "to be absent from the body is actually "to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Jesus also preached about the impermanence of this life and that clinging too closely to this world hinders one from reaching everlasting life with him. He speaks of the futility of worldly ambition in favor of eternal salvation, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). During life, believers in Christ first spiritually "die" in the waters of baptism, and then are "born" to a new and better life in Christ (Roman 6:4).

¶ In the Qu'ran there is an overwhelming sense that death is not a final stop, but the beginning of the next life. Creation of both death and life, like all of God's creations, has its purpose. The role of the life in this world is to act as a sort of test for the life that follows. One of the Qu'ran's most direct statements on death is found in Surah 67:2 "He Who created death and life, that He may try which of you is best in deed". This reaffirms that the purpose of life is to act as a sort of trial to determine who gains entry to paradise with God. Death, according to the Qur'an, is not the end of a person's life, but the beginning another, elevated form of existence, "We have ordained death among you and We are not to be overcome, that We may change your state and make you grow into what you know not." (56:60-61). God reminds his followers not to lose sight of death in life, warning that "he that thinks his wealth will make him immortal" is headed for disaster (104:3-4) and "running away will not profit you if ye are running away from death or slaughter; even if (ye do escape) no more than a brief respite will ye be allowed to enjoy" (33:16).

CYCLE OF LIFE

A life-cycle reflects a person's progression from one phase of life to another. Crucial life-cycle occurrences include birth, puberty, and death, are key events in

most societies among the Abrahamic religions. The cycle of life is marked in the majority of the Abrahamic religions by the official rite of passage that removes a person from a previous status or role into a new one that compromised the individual with new duties and responsibilities.

Throughout the history of the world, the events and celebration within the Abrahamic religions have determined and therefore reveal the roots of the very heart of the family and the culture of Christian, Muslim and Jewish people.

10 ¶ In Judaism, the cycle of life is determined by the accomplishment of the crucial rites of an individual Jew, through life to death. The existence of the new person, within the Jewish community, is celebrated with a toast: “*Lchaim*” – life itself. As soon as possible a Jewish male baby is circumcised, an act that signifies the reception of the child into the faith, obtaining the physical distinguish of the Jewish male. After the birth of a girl, her father offers a blessing. Marriage, or *Kiddushin*, plays a key role in the process of life within the Jewish community, taking into account that the family and home are at the centre of the spiritual life, and marriage is therefore tremendously relevant. The marriage can take place anywhere, but the presence of a *chuppa* is mandatory. The ceremony can be given, any day of the week, with exception of the Sabbath, but the majority of orthodox Jews favour marriage on a Tuesday. Two male are required to serve as witnesses for the event, and after they must sign a contract of *ketubah* pronouncing the respective duties for each partner. Death is the final stage within the cycle of life.

¶ In Christianity the birth of the baby is considered the start of a new cycle. The majority of Christians believe that through baptism, the infant will become a member of the church, and is able to follow the path that Jesus has already gone. Importantly, it is believed that those who are baptised “die” in the waters of baptism, and then are “born” into a new life in Christ (Rom 6). In adolescence, the person is supposed to take part in different sacraments with the church, in which receiving the Eucharist (re-enacting the Lord’s last supper) should be the main act, in order to growth in faith, and shows commitment to the Christian life. This process is called confirmation in the Anglican and communion in the Roman Catholic tradition. By the moment the young Christian, is prepared to get married, in which the couple are engaged in a faithful and affectionate relationship. A Christian marriage ceremony is carried out by an ordained minister or priest. Nevertheless the couple undertakes some responsibilities, and as a result, rings are exchanged, and prayers are pronounced for the couple and their mutually life. Finally, the cycle of life ends with the death of the person, where the physical body dies, but the spiritual body will go to be united with God.

¶ In Islam, when a Muslim child is born the call to prayer (*adhan*) is whispered in its right ear and the command to rise and worship (*iqamah*) in the left. The significance of this is that the first word the child hears is: *Allahu Akbar* (God

is the Greatest). The oldest person usually pronounces these important words, preferable by a man.

Seven days after the birth of the child, the *Aqiqah* ceremony announcing, the name of the child takes place, for those close to him. During the ceremony, prayers are offered, soliciting Allah’s blessing for the future life of the baby. Some Muslims propose a sacrifice after the *Aqiqah* service. A sheep or a goat is offered for a female and two animals for a male.

The *Bismillah* ritual (???????) is the commencement of the religious education of the child. It begins when the child is four years old. By the age of seven the youth is capable of offering up the five daily prayers, and by the age of ten, the child is seen as capable of assuming responsibility for their own religious actions. Marriage in Muslim society is most of the time arranged, but it can only occur with the consent of both parties. Men are allowed to have four different wives, but each has to be treated equally. In addition, a Muslim man is permitted to marry either a Jew or a Christian, but a woman may only marry a Muslim man.

In regards to the final acts of physical life, a person prepares for death by pronouncing the profession of faith (*Shahada*). After the termination of the life, the body is cleaned and covered, and buried as soon as possible.

A B O R T I O N

Abortion is the termination of a pregnancy by the expulsion of an embryo or a foetus before it is capable of living outside the womb.

11 ¶ Judaism neither bans abortion completely nor does it allow indiscriminately induced abortion. It is only permitted in serious situations and a rabbi’s consent is needed beforehand, otherwise it might be seen as blasphemy and unwillingness to continue the family line. Abortion is not explicitly referred to in the Torah as murder and is punishable only by fine. Judaism assumes a foetus is not a living soul until birth. That is why abortion is not considered a capital offence. Moreover, it is believed that the mother’s life takes precedence over the life of the foetus and abortion is permissive to save the mother’s life. In such circumstances, the baby is considered as intending to kill the mother (*rodef*). Abortion is justified if continuing the pregnancy will cause severe physical or mental harm to the mother. Traditionally, abortion for foetal abnormality is not allowed, but some rabbis permit it if it could cause severe distress for the mother. Many Jewish authorities permit the termination of a pregnancy in cases of rape, but abortion for economic or cosmetic reasons is forbidden. In general, Orthodox Jews oppose induced abortion, unless the

mother's life is in danger, while Reform and Conservative Jews tend to allow greater latitude and take into consideration women's reproductive choices.

- 12
- ¶ Roman Catholics and the Orthodox Christians believe that life begins at conception and oppose abortion in almost any circumstances, except to save the mother's life. In that situation, abortion is morally permissive and the death of the unborn baby is an unintended side effect. Roman Catholics make no exceptions for cases of rape or incest as the way conception occurs makes no bearing on the sin of abortion. Most other branches of Christianity also disapprove abortion and allow it only in extreme situations. The Episcopal Church recognises a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy when the mother's physical or mental health is at risk and when there are foetal abnormalities. However, abortion as a means of birth control, family planning, sex selection or any reason of convenience is prohibited. Methodists, Quakers, United Reformed, Presbyterian Christians, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations and the United Church of Christ generally advocate abortion rights and have reached more permissive conclusions regarding the practice.
 - ¶ There is no explicit mention of abortion in the Qur'an, in the collection of the sayings of the prophet Muhammad (*hadith*) or in the rulings of scholars. In general, Islam emphasises the sanctity of life and regards killing a major sin. There is a distinction between the death of a foetus less than 120 days and a foetus older than this age. Most Islamic scholars frown upon the abortion of a foetus older than four months and believe it to be equal to killing a person. Abortion within the first 120 days of the pregnancy is only allowed when the mother's life is in danger, when she is a victim of rape or incest, or when the foetus is deformed. Termination of pregnancy due to poverty or other financial reasons is clearly banned by the Qur'an. Islam prohibits abortion for gender selection or when the unwanted pregnancy is a result of adultery. According to *shari'ah*, abortion is considered the "lesser evil" because the mother is the "original source of life," while the foetus is only a "potential" life.

E U T H A N A S I A

Euthanasia is the ending of a terminally ill person's life in a painless manner that alleviates their suffering.

- ¶ In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the process of dying is considered spiritually important and any interference is a disturbance of God's plans. Euthanasia goes beyond the freedom of choice and is a rejection of God's sovereignty over life and death, an attempt to share God's powers, which is an unforgivable sin. The three faiths consider that material wealth should not matter when it comes to helping the terminally ill and palliative care should be provided regardless of

the price. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam encourage their followers to reflect upon death and it is especially important to allow and assist the dying in accepting their fate. Generally, patients may refuse treatment, which will not cure them, but none of the three faiths allows over-dosage of drugs, assisted suicide or any other form of euthanasia to be performed. When medical procedures cannot cure, the refusal to accept them is treated as an acceptance of one's fate and not as a form of suicide. The omission of life support is allowed in some circumstances and is not considered commission of any act that is contrary to the will of God.

- 13
- ¶ The Roman Catholic Church regards euthanasia as a violation of the "Thou shalt not kill" commandment. Suffering does not stop life from being valuable. Prolongation of life out of compassion and love is ethically acceptable in the Orthodox Christian tradition. However, death is also seen as the last clothes protecting human's dignity from unbearable suffering. Medical means to prolong life are only justified if they guarantee certain quality of life. Artificial support for brain-dead people is not desirable, relatives can pray for the death of terminally ill loved ones, but not actively participates in evoking it.
 - ¶ In Islam, it is prohibited to deliberately end or hasten the death of anyone, as God has made life sacred. Muslims believe in accepting any hardship or illness with equanimity as suffering is seen as a means of purification. Whoever shows fortitude and acceptance of their suffering gains credit in the eyes of God. Differences exist between Muslim scholars and higher clergy regarding whether it is against the Islamic principles to remove life support from a person deemed dead or in a coma. The contention stems mainly from the definition of death, since not all Muslims accept brain death as the end of one's life. Generally, it is allowed for physicians to passively assist a terminally ill person to die in only two cases: by administering analgesic that may shorten the life of the patient, but will relieve the physical pain or mental distress and by withdrawing futile treatment.

S U I C I D E

Suicide or self-killing is the act of voluntarily ending one's life. It occurs almost in every culture and social setting, not excluding the three Abrahamic religions.

- ¶ In Judaism, there are about eleven instances of suicide in the Torah, yet nothing explicitly reproaching self-killing. In addition, there is little discussion about it in the Talmud. In history, Jews committed suicide to avoid being forcefully converted to another faith. The responses to such acts are inconsistent among Jewish scholars: some consider them heroic martyrs; others think it is wrong to take one's own life. Modern Jewish tradition opposes suicide and considers it a violation of God's will.

- ¶ In Christianity, only the suicidal act of Judas Iscariot is mentioned in the New Testament, but there is no condemnation of it in particular. In fact, some early Christians, who refused to compromise their faith, advocated martyrdom. However, suicide is regarded a mortal sin, since Christians are obligated to preserve the body, as it is a gift from God. Taking one's own life is considered to be a serious offence against God's power over life and death. Christianity distinguishes direct and indirect suicide: the former is considered to be the most serious crime. People who committed direct suicide are not allowed to have a Christian burial, except in cases of insanity. When people harm their health through excessive smoking, drug abuse, drinking and unnecessary risk-taking, it is considered immoral but it does not have the same implications as direct suicide.
- ¶ Islam holds life as a sacred gift from God. Suicide is denounced as a grave sin since life is not one's personal property, but belongs to God. There are specific injunctions against self-killing in the Qur'an, which condemns the perpetrators of suicide to hell. However, the recent suicide attacks and bombings sparked significant debate in the Islamic world on the merits of suicide. All Muslim suicide bombers justify their actions within their faith and, more specifically, within the concept of Holy war (*jihad*). In the main, suicide attackers' own justifications suggest that, for them, the call for *jihad* is the primary motivation as they seek to emulate the *jihad* waged at the time of Prophet Muhammad to expand Islam. The religious grounds of suicide attacks may be also linked to the concept of martyrdom, as the martyr is one who dies in *jihad* and, as such, is entitled to a special status on the Day of Judgement and to paradise.

D E A T H P E N A L T Y

The death penalty, or capital punishment, is the execution of death for capital offences through a judicial process.

- ¶ The Torah does not oppose the death penalty, however, Jewish courts rarely impose it. It mandates capital punishment for crimes such as murder, idolatry, bestiality, blasphemy, adultery, violating the Sabbath, wizardry or disrespecting one's parents. The methods of execution include stoning, burning, strangulation or slaying by the sword. The Torah distinguishes between the premeditated murder and unintentional killing. In the latter case, the killer can flee to three cities east of Jordan – Golan, Ramoth and Bosor, set aside by Moses as places of refuge. Jewish law is based both on the Torah and the Talmud, where the discussion of capital punishment seems to exist only in the realm of theoretical speculation. In practice, execution is very difficult, if not impossible, because of the obstacles created by various Talmudic decisions, which require overwhelming

evidence for the conviction. Most Jewish people support it only in extreme cases with absolute proof, such as well-documented cases of genocide.

- ¶ Christians believe that life, as the property of God, is sacred and untouchable, even when spent committing crimes. Nevertheless, the imposition of the death penalty is consistent with the Biblical scriptures. The Old Testament suggests that capital punishment is the creation of God and prescribes it for 36 capital offences and other various transgressions. The New Testament does not deny the execution right of the state for the common good since God has entrusted the power of life and death to civil authorities. The death penalty can be justified as a punishment for extreme crimes. However, some Christians who oppose the death penalty argue that there should be no exceptions from the commandment "Thou shalt not kill". They consider capital punishment incompatible with the Biblical teachings for compassion, forgiveness and value of life. Adversaries of the death penalty believe that murder should also be punished differently, and believe that the other 35 crimes prescribed by the Old Testament to deserve execution are no longer punishable by death. They argue that in many countries, the death penalty is biased towards the poor and its deterrent effect on crime has not been proven. Although the traditional amendments of the Church do not exclude recourse to the death penalty, it should be performed only as a last resort to defend human lives. In practice, the execution of the death penalty is rare since courts require overwhelming evidence to issue the conviction.
- ¶ Capital punishment is acceptable in Islamic law. The Qur'an forbids murder, but allows the death penalty when prescribed by law. According to Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the death penalty is permissive as punishment and deterrence for serious crimes threatening the fundamental principles of the Islamic society such as treason and apostasy, land, sea or air piracy, terrorism, rape, adultery and homosexual behaviour. Intentional murder can also be applied to capital punishment, but the victim or the family of the victim has the right to pardon the perpetrator and accept monetary compensation instead. Execution should be carried out in public for general deterrence. Though all Muslim states retain the death penalty in their laws, the actual practice varies considerably among them. Methods of execution differ across countries and include beheading, hanging, stoning and firing squads. The law requires very strict evidence to be provided for a death sentence to be pronounced. While the death penalty as retaliation (*qisas*) is permissive, forgiveness is more encouraged in the Qur'an. There is growing support for the abolishment of the death penalty since many consider it to be a repressive tool against women and the poor. In some cases, the procedural rules are ignored and the defendant's rights, such as

access to a lawyer, public trial or judicial revision, are violated. Generally, Islamic countries reject the abolition of the death penalty and believe it to be an attempt of Western cultures to influence Islamic criminal justice values.

O R G A N D O N A T I O N

Organ donation is a surgical operation in which organs or tissues are removed from the donor (who can be either recently deceased or living) and are transplanted to another person. There is no common definition of official death between and within the three faiths, which makes organ donation a very controversial issue.

¶ Jewish law poses a contradiction regarding organ donation as it states that it is a sacred duty to preserve life, but it also prohibits any desecration of a dead body, since it hosted the soul. There is no general injunction for organ donation, and it is encouraged when there is an immediate recipient and when the donor is officially dead. However, donating to ‘organ banks’, for medical research or for student practice is not allowed. Another contradiction stems from the risks of transplantation both to the recipient and to the donor and the fact that one is not allowed putting oneself in danger. Most authorities believe that the obligation to save life overrides the prohibition and the main issue is the definition of official death. The Talmud indicates that a person is dead if a feather placed on the mouth does not move or the heartbeat cannot be heard. Modern medicine however has made it possible for the heart to continue beating even when the brain functions have stopped. The Conservative, Reformist and Orthodox Jews have almost come to an agreement that a person is considered dead when brain death occurs, which allows for safer harvesting of the organs and lessens the dangers of transplantation.

¶ Even though almost all branches of Christianity encourage organ donation, limitations exist. For example, it is prohibited to use human tissue obtained from a foetus after abortion for research or treatment. It is also not allowed to transplant organs that are connected to human personality and procreative activity, such as the brain and the reproductive organs. Jehovah’s Witnesses are opposed to blood transfusion but not to organ donation, as long as the blood has been drained from the organs. The Church of England declares organ donation a “Christian duty” but opposes the selling of organs, which transforms the act from a gift to a purchase. The Roman Catholic Church accepts brain-stem death as official death, after which it is allowed for the organs to be harvested. Advancements in medicine, however, raise the question whether brain death is enough to declare a person deceased. In the Orthodox tradition

death is a mystery which is approached with awe and respect; it can only be generally described rather than explicitly defined. The Orthodox Church opposes any clear-cut criteria to identify the official death.

¶ The Qur’an states that the killing of one person is equal to the killing of all people, and the saving of one life is like saving all people. Muslims are encouraged to preserve the life of others. Organ donation is a very controversial issue in Islam, and it is generally allowed and often encouraged, but obstacles exist in establishing official death. Muslims do not see brain death to be the end of a person’s life; death is pronounced only when all bodily functions cease, a distinction that highly increases the risk involved in transplantation. An equality of brain and cardiac death has been established. Some Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan, perform organ transplantations from heart-beating donors. Differences exist between the Arab Muslim countries and those in the Indian subcontinent as to the permissibility of organ donation. Indian and Pakistani Muslims consider organ donation to be too dangerous, maiming the body, tinkering with God’s divine plans and therefore impermissible. Others believe organ donation is a necessity that is permissible because the duty to preserve Allah’s gift of life supersedes the prohibition for bodily deformation and so organ transplantation is allowed. Consent of the donor or a family member is necessary for the transplantation and several requirements should be met. Transplantation should be a treatment of last resort and organs from non-Muslims can be accepted only if a Muslim donor is not available. For Muslims, the body and soul are the property of Allah and everything should be done to protect and heal them, as that is his will. Paid organ donation is strictly forbidden to preserve the generous and selfless character of donation.

F U N E R A L R I T E S

The funeral is a rite of transition from one state of being to the other. Burial practices vary significantly between cultures but hold the same universal purpose; to help the soul complete the journey to the heavenly realms and to commemorate the deceased.

¶ For Jews, death is very much a part of life. The extensive rituals accompanying the passing of one of the faithful are a demonstration of devotion to life, not rejection of death. Most Jewish communities have a special group of volunteers, the *chevra kaddisha*, or “holy society” whose job is to care for the dead. This work holds great merit since those they serve can never repay them. They are responsible for washing the body and preparing for burial in accordance with Jewish custom. There are 3 major stages of preparation of

the body: washing (*rechitzah*), the ritual purification (*tabarah*), and dressing (*halbashah*). The deceased is not left alone until the funeral, which should take place as soon as possible. The body is covered with a simple linen shroud and buried without a coffin or, if the local legislation demands it, a hole is made in the casket to allow for contact with the earth. In Israel, the Jewish funeral service will usually commence at the burial ground. Otherwise, the funeral service will usually begin at a funeral home, synagogue or temple, with the mourners proceeding to a Jewish cemetery for the burial.

A handful of soil from Israel is placed with the body, as the dead will rise in Israel in the Messianic age. Traditionally, a tombstone is placed on the grave, so that the deceased is not forgotten and the grave is not desecrated. Cremation and embalming are not allowed, although exceptions are made for autopsies and organ donation.

¶ Christian funerals vary according to the Christian denomination to which people belong. Sometimes, when a person is dying, a priest or minister will come to their bedside to pray with them and to help them prepare for death. In Roman Catholicism, a priest will perform the “Last Rites”, which consist of hearing the dying person’s confession and absolving them of their sins, administering Holy Communion and Extreme Unction, anointing the person with oil that has been blessed by a bishop. Christians usually bury their dead, although cremation is also permitted (except in the Eastern Orthodox Church). Full funerals rites are prohibited in certain cases, such as anabaptised people, those who did not live in accordance with the Church’s prescriptions, those who committed suicide, people killed in a duel, and pagans and heretics. However, contemporary practice is to interpret these restrictions as leniently as possible. The deceased is washed and dressed in clean, simple clothing. Throughout the night before the funeral, often the family and friends hold a wake, a vigil for the dead, chanting psalms and praying for God’s mercy for the soul of their loved one. The funeral is generally held at a church and consists of readings from the Bible, a sermon given about the person who died, prayers and hymns and blessings bestowed by the pastor. There is usually the opportunity for close friends or family to say a few words about their loved one or recite a poem or special prayer. The body is then conveyed to the gravesite, where the priest or minister will say a final prayer as the body is lowered into the ground. Often, this is then followed by the sprinkling of dirt onto the casket, which symbolizes the sentiment of “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” which serves as a reminder that we are all part of God’s cycle of life.

According to Orthodox rituals, a paper of absolution is read and then placed into the hand of the deceased and left with the body in the grave. The coffin is then taken to the grave, sprinkled with holy water and buried. In the

Catholic tradition, the body is put to rest, when possible, with the head facing West to replicate the position that a person takes in church.

¶ When a Muslim is dying, loved ones may gather around and recite verses from the Qur’an, give physical comfort, and encourage the dying one to recite words of remembrance and prayer. It is recommended, if at all possible, for a Muslim’s last words to be the declaration of faith: “I bear witness that there is no god but Allah.” Muslim tradition prescribes that the body of the deceased should be buried as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours of death. Cremation and embalment are forbidden and burial at sea is performed only if necessary. The body is washed carefully at the graveside where possible, or in a mosque. Generally, a person from the same sex should perform the washing, but it is permissible for a spouse to perform the ablution. Then the body is wrapped in a clean, white shroud. Funeral prayers (*salat-l-janazah*) are said over the body. These prayers are commonly held outdoors, in a courtyard or public square, not inside the mosque. The community gathers, and the *imam* stands in front of the deceased, facing away from the worshippers. The funeral prayer is similar in structure to the five daily prayers, with a few variations. The deceased is then taken to the cemetery for burial (*al-dafin*). While all members of the community attend the funeral prayers, only the men of the community accompany the body to the gravesite. The body is placed in the grave without a casket, if local law allows, on his or her right side, facing Mecca. Each attendee will take a turn in pouring three handfuls of soil into the grave while reciting “We created you from it, and return you into it, and from it we will raise you a second time” (Surah 20:55).

Ideally, a Muslim should be buried where he or she died, and not be transported to another location or country (which may cause delays or require embalming the body). If available, a cemetery (or section of one) set aside for Muslims is preferred. At the gravesite, it is discouraged for those left behind to erect tombstones, elaborate markers, or put flowers or other mementos. Graves are traditionally not extravagant, as it is believed that money is better spent helping the poor than erecting monuments for the dead. Rather than put on a show of ostentation, Muslims are exhorted to remember Allah and His mercy, and pray for the deceased. Relatives and friends observe a ritual of mourning for three days. The mourning ends with a banquet to remember the dead and a pilgrimage to the grave, where guests greet the deceased, as it is believed the dead can hear the living.

G R I E F A N D M O U R N I N G

Mourning is the grief felt over the death of someone and is comprises the set of practices or rituals that have developed in which the bereaved participate in,

such as wearing black for a period of time. Customs diverge depending on culture as well as religion. Following these guidelines aids mourners in dealing with their loss and can set them on the path of healing.

¶ Judaism provides a codified approach to mourning that involves three stages. Judaism's extensive mourning rituals do not signify protest of death, but rather shown the value Judaism places on life in general and the life of each single person. Mourning in Judaism has two purposes: to show respect for the deceased, *kavod ha-met*, and to comfort the living, *nihum avelim*, who will miss the dead. The mourning period consists of different phases. The first seven days (*shivah*) after death are the most intense for the family. Upon first hearing of the death, the closest relatives rip their clothes, and recite a prayer of acceptance of the decision of the "true Judge" to take the deceased. Those observing *shivah* must stay in and not bathe, shave, work, have sex or study the Torah. Within *shivah*, there is an even more intense mourning period, the *aninut*, observed from the time of death until the funeral, where the family is left alone to be able to experience the full extent of their grief in private. During this time no condolence calls or visits are made. After the funeral, extended family and friends take care of the grieving by bringing over the "meal of condolence" (*Seudat Havra-ah*), made out of bread and eggs. The period of *schloshim* (thirty) starts and it lasts for thirty days after the funeral. During this time the bereaved are not allowed to go to parties, listen to music, shave or cut their hair. If a parent dies, the son should observe the 12-month mourning period (*avelut*). The mourner does not participate in social activities, go to the theatre or concerts, and must recite a prayer (*kaddish*) every day for 11 months. This ritual is aimed at reaffirming the faith of the grieving in God. The prayer recited at the end of Shiva reflects the positive lens through which Jews view death and the mourning process, "No more will your sun set, nor your moon be darkened, for God will be an eternal light to you and your days of darkness shall end" (Isaiah 60:20). "Like a man whose mother consoles him, so shall I console you and you shall be consoled in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 66:13).

¶ Christians express grief for a loved one by withdrawing from social life and wearing somber, dark mourning clothes. The mourning period traditionally lasts for forty days, though contemporary mourning protocol is relaxed and informal, and takes place mainly in the emotional and spiritual realm. Some Christians feel conflicted over their grief and inclination to mourn: if one truly has faith that their loved one is resurrected and with Jesus, and believe that one day they will be reunited with their loved one in heaven, should they not be ecstatic rather than miserable? Does their mourning not signify a lack of faith? This anxiety is misplaced. Sorrow at the loss of a loved one is a natural human reaction and Christians should not be dissuaded from grieving. Mourning the passing of a loved one is a healthy outlet and way in which people heal the pain

they incurred from loss. Biblical allusions reinforce that mourning is an important facet of life and loss, maintaining that God takes care of us and consoles us and in turn, Christians are to calm and comfort those who are in mourning.

Orthodox Christians believe the fortieth day after death is particularly important, as the soul undergoes judgement for the person's deeds on earth. Children and infants should be buried in a special part of the cemetery and white garments should be worn for mourning. Since children are not considered morally responsible for their sins, prayers for forgiveness are not part of the funeral. Tombstones, decorated with a cross or a crucifix, symbolising Christ's victory over death, usually mark Christian graves.

¶ The Islamic word for mourning is *Hidaad*. Mourning is not to be excessive, which is seen as more than three days, aside from when a wife mourns the death of a husband. Islamic loved ones and relatives of the deceased observe a three Day mourning period. Increased devotion, receiving visitors and condolences, and avoiding decorative jewellery and clothing are features of the mourning. Widows observe an extended mourning period (*Iddah*) of 4 months and 10 days, in accordance with the Qur'an 2:234. During this period, she may not remarry, move from her home, or wear decorative jewellery and clothing.

In Islam, showing grief at a person's death by weeping is acceptable, but to express grief by wailing, shrieking, beating the chest and cheeks, tearing hair or clothes, breaking objects, scratching faces or performing in any manner that is perceived to be outlandish is prohibited.

A F T E R L I F E

The afterlife represents the belief in the life of the soul after biological death has occurred. All three Abrahamic faiths maintain that the world will end and, with it, a general resurrection of the dead will commence when the souls will be reunited with the bodies for an unending new life.

¶ The Jewish tradition places clear emphasis on the importance of this life as opposed to focusing on the afterlife.

Early Jewish Scriptures depict the afterlife as a state in which the soul waits for the Day of Judgement, when the Messiah (*Mashiach*) will come. Judaism is focused on deeds rather on beliefs, and what is important is acts of human kindness (*mitzvot*). Jews believe that good people go to heaven (*Gan Eden*) and bad people go to hell (*Gehenna*, *Gehinnom*), a different state from *Sheol*. It is believed that, after death the soul stays connected to the body for a year and then goes to either *Gan Eden* or *Gehenna*. Proximity of the soul to God is considered heaven and the detachment from God is hell. The World to

come, the World of Truth (*Olam Ha-Ba*) is open for all righteous people, no matter which religion they belong to. The soul is part of God and as such, it does not submit to the laws of physics and is immortal. Moreover, it is commonly believed that communication with the dead is possible.

¶ Christians believe that life after death is made possible by the resurrection of Jesus and, if they follow his teachings and accept him as their saviour, they will be granted resurrection as well. Heaven is the home of God, while hell is where the Devil reigns. God is just and cannot allow any bad deeds to be left unpunished; therefore, souls must redeem their minor sins in Purgatory before they go to heaven. The Bible does not describe heaven and hell in detail and theologians argue that heaven is the state of eternal happiness experienced by the blessed souls. The Bible explicitly depicts the eternal suffering of the souls of the corrupt, condemned to hell. Hell is the state of the souls shared by the enemies of God after death. In hell, the soul is separated from God, just as the blessed are free from pain, the condemned never experience any pleasure.

¶ In Islam, present life is considered to be a preparation for the realm to come. Muslims believe in the Day of Judgement (*Qiyamah*) that will come about with the destruction of the universe. The dead will be resurrected for a new unending life and each person will be rewarded or punished by God according to their deeds. *Barzakh* is the state the soul goes through between death and the Day of Judgement, waiting for their destination in either heaven or hell. It is believed that when a person dies, Azrael, the Archangel of Death (*Malak al-Maut*), descends with a coffin to take the body to meet God. If the person behaved badly in life, the coffin is not allowed to go through the gates of heaven. After the soul meets God, it is taken back to the grave to await judgement. Nakir and Munkar, two angels from heaven, come to question the dead about their faith. The good deeds come as a beautiful, sweet-smelling being to keep the deceased company until the Day of Judgement. If the person led a sinful life, their deeds take the form of an ugly, foul smelling creature. Heaven and hell are not only spiritual places, after the Day of Judgement, the bodies of the just will be reborn to new life of physical and spiritual pleasure and those of the wicked will be condemned to eternal suffering. Symbolically, heaven (*Janna*) is a place of beauty, with palaces and mansions, food, drinks and gorgeous, heavenly virgin maidens (*houris*), who will become wives for those who have died for their faith. Their earthly wives were obedient and faithful they will join martyrs. References in the Qur'an about what happens to women in the after-life are scarce, but it is believed that mothers have a special place in heaven. There the righteous will live happily with their families and enjoy eternal bliss.

Hell (*Jahannam*), is described in great detail in the Qur'an and in the Muslim tradition (*sunnah*) as a place with seven doors, leading to the different levels of punishment with a fiery pit at the bottom. Believers are condemned to hell for a limited period of time to pay for their misconduct, but heretics will stay there forever.

C O N C L U S I O N

The three Abrahamic faiths maintain the sanctity of life and demand their followers to protect it. When death occurs, Christians, Jews and Muslims approach it as a natural component of life and accept it as part of God's divine plan.

Jews believe that what happens in the afterlife is in the hands of God and their duty is bound to life on earth. Christians think of the afterlife as a spiritual state of the souls, which are reunited with God and, after the Day of Judgement, with their bodies. For Muslims, life after death is a spiritual and physical state, where the righteous will receive symbolic gifts of incredible richness and the evil and heretics will be punished for eternity. While Christians and Jews consider the departure to the heavenly realms to occur after death, Muslims maintain that the souls await judgement and cannot enter heaven or hell before the Day of Judgement.

Although the three faiths differ in the prescribed prayers and their particular funerals rituals, for all of them, the aim is the absolving of the soul from its earthly sins. They all believe that only God can claim life and have power over it, so suicide and euthanasia are not allowed. At the same time, they are obligated by their faiths to preserve life and their bodies, although differences exist, organ donation is considered one of the greatest forms of self-sacrifice in the name of others.

Most differences between the three faiths center on the issues of abortion and the death penalty. It is usually accepted to terminate the pregnancy in order to save the mother's life. However, the permissibility of abortion varies between and within the different traditions. In Judaism and Christianity, the death penalty has almost been abolished, while it continues to be practiced in Muslim countries. †

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GLOSSARY

Related to Jewish [J] and Muslim [M] culture.

Amalek [J] See Amalekites.

Amalekites [J] A nomadic tribe descended from Esau, who dwelled in the desert between Sinai and Canaan and were enemies of the Israelites. They were defeated by Saul and destroyed by David (I Samuel 15-30).

Bar Kokhba rebellion [J] The third revolt (from 132-135 CE) against the Roman Empire by the Jews of Judea and the last of the wars between the Roman Empire and the Jews. The rebellion was led by Simon bar Kokhba, who was proclaimed to be the messiah by his followers who believed he would restore Israel as a sovereign nation. The uprising failed and helped to define Christianity as a separate religion from Judaism as well as contributed to the spread of Jewish diaspora, as they were dispersed or sold into slavery after their defeat.

Fiqh [M] The theory or philosophy of Islamic law, based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad.

Fitna [M] Unrest or rebellion, especially against a rightful ruler.

Gemarrab [J] Commentaries of the Babylonian Talmud.

Gematria / gimatria [J] A system of assigning numerical value to a word or phrase, in the belief that words or

phrases with identical numerical values bear some relation to each other, or bear some relation to the number itself as it may apply to a person's age, the calendar year, or the like. It is likely that the term derives from the order of the Greek alphabet, *gamma* being the third letter of the Greek alphabet (*gamma* + *tria*).

Great Revolt [J] The first (66-73 CE) of three major rebellions by Jews against the Roman Empire. The revolt was put down by the Roman legions who left Jerusalem in ruins and looted and burned the Temple of Herod.

Hadith [M] Lit. "narrative". § A collection of traditions featuring sayings of the prophet Muhammad which, along with narratives of his daily life (the Sunna, see), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Qur'an.

Halakha [J] The collective body of Jewish law, that includes biblical law (the 613 *Mitzvot*) and later talmudic and rabbinic law, as well as customs and traditions.

Haredi [J] A member of any of various Orthodox Jewish sects characterized by strict adherence to the traditional form of Jewish law and rejection of modern secular culture, many of whom do not

recognize the modern state of Israel as a spiritual authority.

Hasidism [J] The term has been applied to movements at three distinct times, but refers here to the mystical Jewish movement founded in Poland in the 18th century in reaction to the strict academicism of rabbinical Judaism. The rapid spread of Hasidism in the second half of the 18th century troubled many traditional rabbis who saw it as a potentially dangerous opponent to mainstream Judaism. The movement declined greatly in the 19th century, but fundamentalist communities emanated from it, and Hasidism is still significant in Jewish life, with large communities in Israel and New York.

Haskala [J] The Jewish Enlightenment, a movement among European Jews in the 18th-19th centuries that supported adopting enlightenment values, pressing for better integration into wider European society, and increasing education in secular studies, the Hebrew language and Jewish history.

Hiloni [J] Term used in Israel for secular Jews. The Hiloni of Israel are embroiled in many disagreements with the religiously observant, or Haredi (see), population.

Hummah [M] The whole community of Muslims, bound together by the religion.

Ijma [M] Term referring to the scholarly consensus of the Muslim community; the concept is attributed to the *hadith* (see) of Muhammad stating “My community will never agree upon an error”.

Islab [M] Lit. “to repair” or “reform”. § Also the name of several reform parties.

Jihad [M] Lit. “struggle”. § An important religious duty for Muslims, it can refer to three types of struggle: an internal struggle to maintain faith; the struggle to improve Muslim society; and the struggle in a holy war.

Kabbalah [J] The Jewish tradition of mystical interpretation of the Bible, first transmitted orally and using esoteric methods, including ciphers (*gematria*, see). It reached the height of its influence in the later Middle Ages and remains influential in Hasidism (see).

Karaites [J] Jewish movement characterized by the recognition of the *Tanakh* (see) alone as its supreme legal authority in *Halakha* (see), as well as in theology, as opposed to Rabbinic Judaism which considers the oral law of the *Mishnah* (see) or Talmud (see) to be authoritative interpretations of the Torah.

Mabdi [M] The spiritual and temporal leader who will rule before the end of the world and restore religion and justice.

Milbemet mitzvah [J] Lit. “War by Commandment”. § The term for a war during the times of the *Tanakh* when a king of Israel would go to war to fulfill something based on, or required by, the Torah. These tended to be defensive wars, such as a war against Amelek (see), that did not require approval from a Sanhedrin because their mandate derived from God.

Milbemet reshut [J] Discretionary war, which requires the permission of a Sanhedrin (see). These tended to be fought to expand territory or for economic reasons.

Midrash [J] Lit. “to investigate” or “study”. § A homiletic method of biblical exegesis. The term also refers to the whole compilation of homiletic teachings on the Bible. It is a way of interpreting biblical stories beyond simple distillation of religious, legal or moral teachings.

Mitnagdim [J] Refers to European Jews who opposed the rise and spread of the early Hasidism (see).

Mitzvot [J] It refers to the 613 commandments provided in the Torah and the seven later rabbinic commandments. It can also refer to an act of human kindness.

Mujtabid [M] A person accepted as an original authority in Islamic law. Such authorities continue to be recognized in the Shī'a (see) tradition, but Sunni (see) accord this status only to the great lawmakers of early Islam.

Psbarah [J] Process of mediation.

Qur'an [M] Lit. “a recitation”. § The central religious text of Islam, which Muslims consider the verbatim word of God and the Final Testament, following the Old and New Testaments. The Qur'an is divided into 113 *suras* (see) of unequal length classified either as Meccan or Medinan depending upon their place and time of revelation.

Qiyas [M] Analogical reasoning as applied to the deduction of juridical principles from the Qur'an and the Sunnah (see) (normative practice of the community); the extension of precedent to new situations by means of analogy. Along with the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and *ijma* (see), it constitutes the four sources of Islamic jurisprudence.

Rabbinite [J] One who adhered to the Talmud (see) and the traditions of the

rabbis, in opposition to the Karaites (see), who rejected the authority of rabbinical tradition.

Sanhedrin [J] The highest court of ancient Israel comprised of 71 members and had powers that lesser Jewish courts did not have, such as the ability to try the king and extend the boundaries of the Temple and Jerusalem.

Shariah [M] Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, deriving from the Qur'an, *hadith* (see), *ijma* (see), and *qiyas* (see).

Shī'a [M] One of the two main branches of Islam, followed by about a tenth of Muslims, particularly in Iran, that rejects the first three Sunni (see) caliphs and regards Ali, the fourth caliph, as Muhammad's first true successor.

Sunnah [M] Lit. “clear, well trodden, busy and plain surfaced road” and “habit, usual practice”. § In the discussion of the sources of religion, Sunnah denotes the practice of Prophet Muhammad that he taught and practically instituted as a teacher of the *shari'ah* (see) and the best exemplar. Sunnis (see) are also referred to as *Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah* (“people of the tradition and the community (of Muhammad)”) or *Ahl as-Sunnah* for short.

Sunni [M] One of the two main branches of Islam, commonly described as Orthodox, and differing from the Shī'a branch in its understanding of the *Sunnah* (see) and its acceptance of the first three caliphs as legitimate successors to Muhammad.

Torah [J] Lit. “instruction”. § The Five Books of Moses (*Bereshit*, Genesis;

Shmot, Exodus; *Vayikra*, Leviticus; *Bamidbar*, Numbers; and *Dvarim* Deuteronomy. The entirety of Judaism's founding legal and ethical religious texts.

Talmud [J] The collection of ancient Rabbinic writings consisting of the *Mishnah* (see) and the *Gemarah* (see), making up the basis of religious authority in Orthodox Judaism.

Tanakh [J] The sacred book of Judaism, consisting of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings; the Hebrew Scriptures.

Tzedakah [J] Charity or the giving of charity, usually seen as a moral obligation.

Zakat [M] A tax, comprising percentages of personal income of every kind, collected as almsgiving for the relief of the poor. As the third of the Pillars of Islam, it is a duty for every Muslim and a right of the poor.

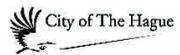
Zionism [J] A Jewish political movement that supports the self-determination of the Jewish people in a sovereign Jewish national homeland.





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LAAN VAN MEERDERVOORT 70 ~ 2517 AN THE HAGUE ~ THE NETHERLANDS
T. +31 (0)70 362 65 23 / 362 65 22 ~ F. +31 (0)70 362 98 48
INFO@SPANDA.ORG ~ WWW.SPANDA.ORG