

Blessed Future: Death and Immortality

“With the best you arrive at the best”

By Nicholas Roerich – Inner Culture Magazine

Let us recall the wise words of the Omaha tribe about death: “No one can avoid, and no one must fear death, since it is unavoidable.” Likewise the ancient Mayans calmly said, “I go to rest.” If we remember the words of Socrates before his departure, before draining the cup of poison, or the thoughts of Plato about death, or even Epicurus, not to speak of the lofty attitude towards this act in the teaching of (the East), we see the same reasoned, wise consciousness about death as an alteration of existence. We see the same consciousness of eternal life which is so clearly enjoined by the sacred covenant.

Many are not aware of the varying conceptions of the future life which different religions give, and it is well for us to direct our attention toward some of the conceptions of the religions of the world.

Christianity affirms:

“In my Father’s house are many mansions.”

“When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’.”

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

“God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave; for He shall receive me.”

“Man goes to his everlasting home. The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit, returns unto God who gave it.”

Islam declares in the Holy Quran:

“They are sustained alive with their Lord. Those who fulfill God’s covenant, and break not the compact; and those who attain what God has bidden to be attained; and those who are patient, craving their Lord’s face; and are steadfast in prayer; and secretly and openly expend in alms of what We have bestowed upon them; and ward off evil with good—these shall have the recompense of the Abode. Such as repent, and believe, and act aright—these shall enter Paradise.”

Buddhism says:

“Earnestness is the path of immortality;

Thoughtlessness, the path of death. Those who are in earnest do not die; those who are thoughtless, are if dead already.”

That individual in this world who reflects right thoughts, who utters right words, who does right acts, and who is learned and virtuous here in this brief life—he after the dissolution of the body, goes to heaven.”

Confucius also pointed out that the spirit lives on and achieves a greater state of happiness. In his writings we read:

“All the living must die and, dying, return to the ground. The bones and the flesh molder below and, hidden away, become the earth of the fields. But the spirit issues forth and is displayed on high in a condition of glorious brightness.”

In Hinduism we find the keynote directing man is that virtue is to be obtained, that ignorance must be broken, and then man can reach a place where physical limitations no longer exist. The following exemplifies these points:

“As a goldsmith, taking a piece of gold, reduces it to another newer and more beautiful form—just so this soul, striking down this body, and dispelling its ignorance, makes for itself another newer and more beautiful form.”

“In the heaven-world there is no fear. Leaving behind both hunger and thirst, and out of the reach of sorrow, all rejoice in the world of heaven.”

In Taoism we find a theory of eternal life that death is the means of reaching our true home. This is told as follows:

“To know eternal law is to be enlightened. Not to know it is misery and calamity. He who knows the eternal law is liberal minded. Possessed of the eternal, he endures forever. Though his body perishes, yet he suffers no hardship. Life is a going forth. Death is a returning home. To recognize one’s insignificance is called enlightenment. To keep one’s sympathy, is called strength. He who uses the Eternal’s light returns to the Eternal’s enlightenment, and does not surrender his person to perdition. This is called ‘practicing the eternal.’ To know the Eternal is called enlightenment. Whatever is contrary to the Eternal soon ends. Look on death as going home.”

Zoroastrianism states:

“The world hereafter shall be the worst world for the wicked, but the best thought for the righteous. The wise Lord with dominion and piety shall give us welfare and immortality..”

Confused Minds

Meanwhile in the confused minds of the West, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, when negation laid its dark path, we see a sort of animal terror in the face of the natural change of existence. Even recently this could be written about, as the intellectual de Sevigne expressed herself: “Death is so fearful, that I hate life more for the reason that it leads to death, rather than for the thorns with which the path of life is strewn.” The idea of death poisoned life for Alphonse Daudet, Zola, Goncourt, Maupassant and other apparently fearless and broad thinkers.

At the same time among people living close to nature, the word death is not generally employed. They say “he has departed” or “he has passed away”, that he is terminated for this expression of existence. People in contact with nature are in contact with the basic teachings of truth: people, being made natural thinkers, likewise naturally understand the significance of change of being. Fear of death it would seem could arise only in malefactors who darken their consciousness with crimes and intentional wrong-doing.

It is fully understood that each traitor suffers such a striking change of existence. Indeed within himself he entirely understands that he is being plunged not into non-existence but into some other form of existence. If in his present existence he has overburdened his heart with quantities of dark purposes and actions, then indeed he does not know if it will be easy for him in some conditions unknown to him. Doing unworthy deeds yesterday, man tries to avoid responsibility for them. Such terror at the unavoidable passage into the unknown world is fully understood by people who have darkened their earthly existence with heinous deeds either material or mental. Surely it is not necessary to repeat again, that thought will be even more potent than word or muscular movement.

Does it not seem strange that, along with criminal beings, certain apparently broad thinkers have also fallen into animal terror before a change of existence? One would like to know if they easily changed their earthly homes. Perhaps too on the earth some of them were not easily moved about. It is well-known that some people believe that they can create and think only in their long-occupied domestic environment. Each unusual surrounding already hinders them in expressions of their creativeness. But surely it would seem that precisely diverse impressions and unforeseen experiences and dangers must sharpen thinking, resourcefulness and boldness. According to courageousness you can form an opinion about many other qualities of a man. But courage is tested not by sitting by the stove, but there where conflict is encountered with the elements, with darkness, and with ignorance.

Joyous Responsibility

He who knows about eternal life by that very fact knows also his joyous responsibility for each action, mental and muscular. In prayers is introduced this great significance of the words “eternal life.” He who thinks upon this, understands that life is always multiform, both in a horizontal and vertical sense. Even according to primary physical laws he understands that each minute everything is altered and never arrives again the former state. In this movement is contained the greatest creative generosity. And how joyfully beneficent the obligation to participate according to one’s strength in this all-inclusive creativeness.

The Apostle said clearly and briefly: “We do not die, but are changed.” Here in a few words is contained the attestation of eternal life. And remember the words of the *Bhagavad Gita* about the invisibility, unchangeableness and eternity of Being. In all the ends of the world has eternal life been solemnly and triumphantly confirmed.

There must have been some unnatural violent frightening to lead humanity into such an ignorant understanding of the act of change of existence. At the same time people begin to speak about life on other planets about which only recently even notable astronomers merely shrugged their shoulders. We remember that for such affirmations Flammarion was threatened with loss of scientific standing and with being placed in the class of amateurs. But already now the better scientific authorities refer far less cautiously to such recognitions of eternal life.

Indeed such a basic concept may be perceived only in affirmation. Each ignorant doubt imposes on this clear affirmation well-nigh incurable cleavages. It is deplorable to see otherwise intelligent thinkers fearing death and thus infecting the ignorant masses. Why are they not imbued with that luminous knowledge which composed the most ancient wisdom, confirmed by the best thinkers of all ages? In accordance with the best you too arrive at the best.