
The life after death differs in the bible and ancient epic of Gilgamesh.

Questions like these that baffle the human mind, and have done so for centuries: what happens after we die? Is there truly life after death? Such riddles can never be known to those who have not crossed over “to the other side”, so to speak, and the only ones that do know the answer can never reveal it. As the saying goes, dead men tell no tales. It is a question central to the identity of every civilization, dating back before the common era. In the ancient epic of Gilgamesh, the afterlife is nothing but darkness and dust. In the Bhagavad-Gita, there is only a cycle of reincarnation that may or may not lead to “enlightenment”. And in the book of Job, there is a belief that God-fearing, righteous people may one day enter paradise.

Gilgamesh was a man scared to death of dying. He felt like this since his beloved friend Enkidu had a vision of the underworld on his deathbed. Enkidu describes it as “the house whence none who enters come forth” (Tablet XII, line 134) and “the road from which there is no way back” (line 135). Both of the descriptions haunt Gilgamesh severely. Furthermore, Enkidu sees “crowns in a heap” (line 142), the crowns of past kings. Not even a royal bloodline can save Gilgamesh from the one certainty in life. Gilgamesh is deeply distressed, and cries out, “Shall I not die too? Am I not like Enkidu?” (Tablet 8, line 3). He begins a frantic search to find a source of immortality, to stay the hand that all man are dealt. He fails...but, in an ironic sense, he also succeeds. No, he does not live on forever, but in a way he does. He lives on through his his accomplishments, such as his wall that be built and his story, which has been passed down through the ages. In the culture of his day, that is the closest anyone could come to being immortal.

Arjuna was a confused man . His everyday quest to fulfill the wishes of the gods and achieve enlightenment was under attack by his morality and opposition to war. He speaks to Krishna and cries out, “I foresee no good resulting from slaughtering my kin in war!” (Chapter 1, stanza 31). He, like many of his day presumably, has no desire to engage in war and conquest because he sees no benefit from killing his kinsmen and countrymen. He dreads the bad karma that is associated with such acts. But Krishna tries to relax him, saying that “Death is assured to all those born, and birth assured to all the dead; you should not mourn what is merely inevitable consequence” (Chapter 2, stanza 27). In essence, death and birth and just two sides of a never ending cycle. Krishna also says to Arjuna “Nor should you tremble to perceive your duty as a warrior” (Chapter 2, stanza 31). It is Arjuna’s “sacred duty” to be a warrior and to kill his enemies, family or not. In effect, life is just one constant reincarnation after another, with “enlightenment” being the only true afterlife. Krishna goes on to say that “When, unvexed by

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revelation, your higher mind is motionless and stands fixed in meditation, then you will attain discipline” (Chapter 2, stanza 53). In other words, enlightenment is only attainable by those who have learned to act without any feelings. This is the duty of all.

Job was a submissive man, and a righteous one. The writer of Job said that he “was blameless and upright and feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). He was the best example of a “man of God” of his day. Even when God allowed Satan to come and destroy Job’s family, possessions, and health, he did not sin. After his wife told to him to curse God and just die, he replied, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” (Job 2:10). His whole world revolved around honoring God, whether with having plenty or nothing. Job acted the way he did because of his respect for God and his vision of the afterlife, or heaven. He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (Job 1:21). Whats the point of holding on to the things in this life if, in the end, we have to give them up anyway? Only one thing is eternal: God. Job is remembered to this day for realizing that possessions mean nothing without the One who gives them to you. This is the ideal Jewish and Christian way of thinking about life after death.

The three cultures discussed above have three very different views of the afterlife. One was trying to immortalize oneself in actions and monuments, one was about reaching action without feeling and enlightenment, and one was about giving up the things of this world to focus on the God from whom all things come. Maybe we, as humans, can never truly understand the concept of life after death. But, then again, maybe we should be more focused on the things we do in life instead.

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