

# RELI2732 Summary Notes

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Buddhist Parable of the Mustard Seed

- cosmological claim
  - souls “flow” for a hundred thousand ages
- Skinny Gotami
  - has a son so people respect her
  - son dies
  - sorrow to the point of madness
- desperately carries the body around begging for medicine
  - finally sent to the Buddha
- the Buddha tells her
  - find a family unaffected by death and get a mustard seed from them
  - Gotami eventually realizes everyone is affected by death
  - she finds enlightenment

## 1.2 Characteristics of Religious Ritual

- rituals
  - invariant
  - understanding of an act
- religious rituals
  - performed
    - real audience
      - ▷ sermon
      - ▷ funeral
      - ▷ wedding
    - imagined audience
      - ▷ prayer
  - formalistic
    - governed by rules
  - traditionalistic
    - appears to not change
    - any change occurs very slowly
- ritualization posits the existence of an **authoritative reality**
  - dictates the immediate situation during a ritual

### 1.2.1 Effects of Ritual

- forms/reinforces communities
- connects
  - actions
  - authoritative reality
- explanation of social realities
  - reverence of elders in Chinese religion
    - at a funeral, the youngest descendant pretends they are the deceased
    - they are shown the same amount of respect as the deceased elder
    - a preview of what's to come

### 1.3 Van Gennep's Rite of Passage

- always a **change in social status**
- three stages
  1. separation
    - taken out of typical social circumstances
  2. liminality
    - between two states
    - e.g., both a man and a boy at once
    - limited individuality
  3. reintegration
    - back to normal
    - often with a special sign of having completed ritual
      - wedding bands
      - etc.

### 1.4 Different Definitions of Death

#### 1.4.1 Traditional

- cessation of breath

#### 1.4.2 Veatch's Four Possibilities

1. irreversible loss of **flow of vital fluids**
2. irreversible loss of **soul**
3. irreversible loss of **brain function** (See Harvard Definition)
4. irreversible loss of **capacity for social function** due to **loss of brain function**

#### 1.4.3 Chinese

- Iron Crutch Li
  - visiting the gods
- perhaps the dead are just visiting the gods?
  - leave them out for a few days to make sure

#### 1.4.4 Harvard

- irreversible loss of **brain function**
  - even if life mechanically supported
  - brain death
- this is the contemporary definition

### 1.5 Issues With Comparative Study of Religion

- important to stay **objective**
  - subjective opinions lead to loss of focus
- keep things
  - phenomenological (See Table A.1)
  - epoché (See Table A.1)
- focus on **comparison and contrast**
  - how does a given religion handle death?

#### 1.5.1 E.B. Tyler

- "primitive cultures"

- somewhat pejorative
- implies inferiority

### 1.5.2 Essentialism

- assumption that there is **one initial religion**
  - all others would branch from it
- **zero evidence for this**

## 1.6 Reading 1

## 1.7 Millenium: The Art of Living (Video)

# 2 Indigenous Religions

## 2.1 The Role of Affect in Religion

## 2.2 Basilov's Characteristics of Indigenous Religions

## 2.3 Souls and Spirits in Indigenous Religions

## 2.4 Wari' Funeral Practice

## 2.5 The Melpa Understanding of Souls

## 2.6 Reading 2

# 3 Death in the Ancient World

## 3.1 The Egyptian View of the Soul

## 3.2 Three Textual Primary Sources of Understanding the Egyptian Views on Death

## 3.3 Death in "The Epic of Gilgamesh"

## 3.4 Babylonian Funeral Practice

## 3.5 Zoroastrian Funerals

## 3.6 The Divisions of the Underworld in Greek Thought

## 3.7 Early Human Perspectives on Death

## 3.8 What Constitutes a Burial

## 3.9 Reading 3

## A Definitions

**Table A.1:** A glossary of important definitions.

Term	Definition
<b>Week 1: Introduction</b>	
Memento Mori	The idea of reflection on mortality. Literally: remembrance of death.
Thanatology	The study of death.
Iron Crutch Li	One of the Eight Immortals in the Taoist (Ancient Chinese) pantheon. He left his body for up to a week at a time in order to talk to the gods.
Taphophobia	The fear of being buried alive.
Brain Death	The complete loss of all brain function, both voluntary and involuntary. Used as a legal indicator of death in many jurisdictions.
Phenomenology	A focus on consciousness and objects of direct experience. We want to look at the lived experience of religious people, rather than approaching from a faith-based perspective.
Epoché	The suspension of judgement. We don't worry about the truth of a story; instead we look at what it means to the discourse community that tells/told it.
Cosmology	A religious culture's view of the universe.
Soteriology	The study of religious doctrines of salvation.
Discourse Community	A group of people who share a common discourse. They share a set of basic values and assumptions which facilitates communication. In the past, discourse communities were a lot harder to form.
<b>Week 2: Indigenous Religions</b>	
The Psychic Unity Of Humanity	The idea that all humans across all cultures and all time periods have essentially the same cognitive ability; any differences can be attributed to culture.
Numinous	The feeling of a spiritual presence. Defined by Rudolph Otto in The Idea of the Holy.
Tupilak	A totem thrown into the sea by the Inuit; it sends a vengeful spirit to kill the enemies of the shaman.
Shaman	A religious professional who interacts directly with the spirits.
Near-Death Experience	A personal experience associated with death or impending death. Often cited as evidence of cosmological claims. A famous example is Even Alexander and his book, Proof of Heaven.
Commensal Community	A community that shares food together.
<b>Week 3: Death in the Ancient World</b>	
Osiris	
Isis	
Horus	
Anubis	
Ma'at	
Mummification	
Zoroaster	
Ahura Mazda	
Dakhma	
Fravshi	

## B Important Dates

**Table B.1:** Important dates.

Date	Time	Description	Location
Feb 11		Reflection Paper 1 due	
Feb 18		Last day to submit Reflection Paper 1 for credit	
Mar 02	4-6PM	Midterm covering weeks 1-6 inclusive	TBA
Mar 18		Reflection Paper 2 due	
Mar 25		Last day to submit Reflection Paper 2 for credit	
TBA	TBA	Final exam covering weeks 7-12 inclusive	TBA