

RELI2732 Summary Notes

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January 23, 2019

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	The Buddhist Parable of the Mustard Seed	1
1.2	Characteristics of Religious Ritual	1
1.2.1	Effects of Ritual	1
1.3	Van Gennep’s Rite of Passage	2
1.4	Different Definitions of Death	2
1.4.1	Traditional	2
1.4.2	Veatch’s Four Possibilities	2
1.4.3	Chinese	2
1.4.4	Harvard	2
1.5	Issues With Comparative Study of Religion	2
1.5.1	E.B. Tyler	2
1.5.2	Essentialism	3
1.6	Reading 1	3
1.7	Millenium: The Art of Living (Video)	3
2	Indigenous Religions	3
2.1	The Role of Affect in Religion	3
2.2	Basilov’s Characteristics of Indigenous Religions	4
2.3	Souls and Spirits in Indigenous Religions	4
2.3.1	Multiplicity	4
2.3.2	Mobility	4
2.3.3	What Happens After Death	4
2.3.4	Materiality	5
2.4	Wari’ Funeral Practice	5
2.4.1	Wari’ Mortuary Cosmology	5
2.4.2	Death and Mourning	5
2.4.3	Role of Affect in Wari’ Funeral Practice	5
2.5	The Melpa Understanding of Souls	6
2.5.1	What to Take Away Here	6
2.6	Reading 2	6
3	Death in the Ancient World	6
3.1	The Egyptian View of the Soul	6
3.2	Three Textual Primary Sources of Understanding the Egyptian Views on Death	6
3.3	Death in “The Epic of Gilgamesh”	6
3.4	Babylonian Funeral Practice	6
3.5	Zoroastrian Funerals	6
3.6	The Divisions of the Underworld in Greek Thought	6
3.7	Early Human Perspectives on Death	6
3.8	What Constitutes a Burial	6
3.9	Reading 3	6
A	Definitions	7
B	Important Dates	8

List of Figures

List of Tables

A.1	A glossary of important definitions.	7
B.1	Important dates.	8

List of Listings

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)

- Dogon of Mali
- they carry the dead up to a tomb
 - throw what they used to carry him from a high place
 - bring the shroud down to lie in his house
- always carry the death blanket your whole life
 - only use it as a shroud when you die
- after the deceased is in the tomb
 - dance around with the blanket
 - firing guns
 - playing music
- they all gather around and thank the deceased
- the whole affair takes several nights of dancing, chanting, speaking
 - on the third night they sing a song of mourning
- ancestors become bushes
- wear masks and dance to reconnect with ancestors in the bush
 - masks are animal/tree themed
 - life vs death
 - the idea is to make life win by dancing and celebrating

2 Indigenous Religions

2.1 The Role of Affect in Religion

- affect
 - the way humans **respond to phenomena**
- Rudolph Otto
 - “The Idea of the Holy”
 - assumes there is only one relationship between humans and spirit world
 - there can be multiple
 - duality of souls
- early Japanese religion (Shinto)
 - *kami*
 - based on affect
 - kami came into existence through stories
 - stories told based on impact
- local cults develop
 - continued existence is based on
 - perceived efficacy
 - efficacy can be determined through stories

2.2 Basilov's Characteristics of Indigenous Religions

1. animism
 - animation of surrounding world
 - spirits inhabit objects
 - sometimes it depends on how important the object is to a culture
2. connections in nature
 - all nature is connected
3. no separation from the surrounding world
 - spirit world is not discrete from physical world
4. the cosmos is accessible
 - spirit realms can be accessed
 - shamans
5. religion as a social consciousness
 - meaning in the bonds we have with each other

2.3 Souls and Spirits in Indigenous Religions

2.3.1 Multiplicity

- ancient China
 - two types of souls
 - **hun** soul
 - breath
 - animates the body
 - leaves on death
 - **po** soul
 - in the bones
 - remains after death
- Tibet
 - souls in various body parts
 - soul = internal protective deity
 - protection from illness
- Inuit
 - souls in
 - larynx
 - left side of body
 - souls in limbs (size of finger joints)
 - animate the body
 - a soul leaving the body can explain pain

2.3.2 Mobility

- souls can leave the body
 - ancient China
 - Inuit
- not always the case
 - hun vs po
 - hun can leave, po remains
- souls can be
 - lost
 - earned

2.3.3 What Happens After Death

- utopian vs locative destination

- utopian
 - a perfect place
 - like heaven
- locative
 - remains in this world
 - Gurung people of Nepal

2.3.4 Materiality

- specific soul shapes
 - Inuit
 - size of sparrow
 - shaped like little people
- interventions
 - ancient China
 - dead honored at feast
 - the deceased can become drunk!
 - Inuit
 - attacked by magic
 - spirits can be used to attack people
 - Soyot (Siberia)
 - dip a soul in hot/cold water
 - causes fever/shivers
 - Hagen (Papua New Guinea)
 - dead called to help with sickness
 - if you forget to mention a spirit, it can get angry
 - ▷ you will be the next to get sick

2.4 Wari' Funeral Practice

2.4.1 Wari' Mortuary Cosmology

- locative
 - ancestral realm is below deep water
- ancestors emerge as boars to be hunted
 - the dead provide for the living

2.4.2 Death and Mourning

- everyone screams
 - from death to end of funeral
- family
 - keep the body company
- friends
 - all other ritual obligations
 - prepare food
 - build pyre
 - ritual piling
 - lay on top of deceased until those on bottom pass out
 - in this way, they “join” the deceased
 - dismember body and prepare to cook it
 - eat the body

2.4.3 Role of Affect in Wari' Funeral Practice

- detachment from the dead

- eliminate “the negative experience of nostalgia”
 - destroy all evidence a dead person’s existence
 - change social norms every time someone dies

2.5 The Melpa Understanding of Souls

- eldest brother won’t sacrifice pig for dead parents
 - dead father angry
- sister spies on meeting of spirits
 - dead father is angry
 - suggests the eldest brother should be the one to die in battle
 - dead mother is upset but the vote passes
- sister tries to warn brothers
 - brothers don’t listen
 - eldest dies

2.5.1 What to Take Away Here

- spirits are vengeful
- the sister was able to bring back sacrificial meat as proof
 - materialism
- sacrifices are important to
 - keep the spirits happy
 - they can exact revenge OR watch over you
 - the choice is yours

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
Week 1: Introduction	
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.
Week 2: Indigenous Religions	
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.
Week 3: Death in the Ancient World	
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