

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

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
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 Eben 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