Death in the Context of Tradition and Modernity

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the ways in which people belonging to the worldviews of modernity and tradition differ in terms of their death attitudes. Two studies were carried out. The first study was based on text analysis. Relevant pages and passages from Ashraf Ali Thanvi's Bahishti Zewar (Heavenly Ornaments), Imam Ghazali's Kimia e Sa'adat (The Alchemy of Happiness), Bertrand Russell's Why I Am Not a Christian and Sigmund Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle were taken and analyzed through grounded theory methodology. In the second study, three traditionalist scholars and three modernist scholars were interviewed through semistructured interviewing technique. Grounded theory was used for the analysis of the transcripts. The findings revealed that the major dimensions of traditional and modern death attitudes are widely at odds with each other. Two contrasting theoretical models are developed to illustrate the affect-behavior-cognition triad of death attitudes rooted in modernity and tradition.

Keywords: Death and Dying, Death Attitudes, Tradition, Modernity.

Introduction

The world and particularly the west today is in the middle of an exciting period in the history of human relationship with death that has been called a "renaissance of interest in endings" (Kearl, 1989, p. 24). This renaissance marks the end of the "great silence" (Ariès, 1974, p. 537) which seemed to have settled on the subject in the twentieth century. Indeed the silence has been replaced by loquaciousness. Death is being studied from virtually all possible angles within history, religion, cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology, medical science and archeology etc. and the rich assortment of contributions from these fields constitutes the thriving science of thanatology.

Among the multifarious aspects of the phenomenon explored is a historical-sociological examination of how attitudes toward death and dying change over time and as a function of the weltanschauung. The way death is viewed, emotionally responded to and made sense of has changed and continues to change through the ages (Filippo, 2006). If we trace this constant evolution (or, as some would argue, devolution) of death attitudes across periods of human history, we will see that in many ways the modern world's response to death stands in sharp contrast to the outlook of traditional societies. Ariès (1974) contends that the contemporary approach to death is so strikingly dissimilar from the premodern one that the change is tantamount to a complete "reversal of death" (p. 536). He goes on to skillfully elucidate this contrast between the modern and the traditional. In a similar vein, the present study aimed to explore death attitudes in the context of the modernity and tradition.

Some definitions are in order. It is possible to look at modernity in two ways: one, as a historical era and two, as a mindset or ideology. For the purposes of the present study, the concept of modernity is being used primarily in the second (ideological) sense. However modernity in the ideological sense cannot be divorced from the temporal connotation of the term since the modern ideology is largely a product of the historical changes that marked the shift from the medieval to the modern period.

Modernity, as an epoch in history, came after the middle ages and possessed a set of characteristic features that set it apart from the medieval period. The modern period is roughly understood to have begun around the 1500s. However as Toulmin (1990) has argued, there is little consensus among historians as to when modernity actually began. Depending on perspective, the onset of modernity is attributed to (or associated with) social and scientific developments occurring anywhere between 1436 and 1895 (Toulmin, 1990). The shift from the premodern to the modern period occurred as empiricism and rationality were adopted as the dominant modes of acquiring knowledge. This was coupled by a growing confidence in the ability of science to lead to unlimited and unprecedented development and a sense that humans can effectively engineer societal progress. This intellectual transformation was accompanied by other sweeping changes that were economic, political, social and technological in nature such as urbanization, capitalism, industrialization, secularism and a decline in commitment to religious and traditional ideas (Flew, 2002 as cited in Jiyan Wei, n.d.). This spectacular change called modernity originated principally in Europe and spread to other parts of the world, ultimately becoming a universal phenomenon. Some historians hold that modernity came to an end in the 1970s whereas others see it as continuing to the present.

For Hooker (1996) modernity as an ideology is "a sense or idea that the present is discontinuous with the past and that through a process of social and cultural change life in the present is fundamentally different from life in the past" (Modernity, para. 1). It is a perception of "the world as open to transformation by human intervention" (Giddens, 1998, p. 94). In the present study, the term modern will refer to an individual, group or mindset that subscribes to the worldview of modernity, irrespective of the period of history that they belong to. Central tenets of modernity as a worldview include the perception of science (as divorced from transcendental sources of knowledge) as the fountainhead of truth, a commitment to secularism and a denial of "the central role of spiritual life" (Nasr, 2001, p.47). The concept of modernity can perhaps be most clearly understood in the ideological sense if we contrast it with its antithesis: tradition.

Tradition has been defined as "an inherited, established or customary pattern of thought, action or behavior" and "the handing down of information, beliefs and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2009). In contrast to modernity, it is "the cultural sense that the present is continuous with the past and that the present in some way repeats the forms and meanings of the cultural past" (Hooker, 1996, Tradition, para. 1). In the relatively narrower sense, tradition is understood to refer to beliefs and practices originating from and rooted in revealed religions (Nasr, 2001). In this sense, tradition is a sacred and deeply important collective heritage. The term traditionalist will thus refer to an individual, group or mindset that perceives revealed knowledge as continuing and unfolding in the form of a religious legacy that is relevant to all times and upholds it. In the present study the inquiry will be limited to Islam and traditions rooted therein. Specifically, the purpose of the study is to explore whether modernists and traditionalists are dissimilar in the way they perceive, react to and deal with death and dying and if so, in what ways.

Literature Review

One way in which the tradition-modernity issue has been visible in death research is through the enormous amount of studies on death rites as practiced in culturally traditional ways and how these are changing with time. For instance, changing deathways have been studied in Korea, Japan, Netherlands, Russia, North America, Turkey and the modern West in general (Park, 2010; Shinya, 2004; Venbrux, Peelen, & Altena, 2009; Merridale, 2003; Walker & Balk, 2007; Yanik, Vahip, & Kose, 2004; Walter, 2005). Modern death

attitudes have also been studied within Psychology and elsewhere through the investigation of the trends peculiar to modernity such as the increasing medicalization of death, the hospice culture, euthanasia and impact of death education etc.

A broader discourse on death attitudes as a function of era and ideology has been offered by noted sociologists, historians, anthropologists, philosophers and other scholars. French historian Philippe Ariès (1914-1984) can be regarded as the leading authority on the topic termed as "the doyen of the historians of death" (Porter, 1999, p.83). After almost twenty years of intense investigation, he published his landmark work L'Homme Devant la Mort in 1977. In 1981, it was translated as The Hour of Our Death. The book identifies five main stages in West's relationship with death, with modern times coming off worst (as cited in Porter, 1999). For Ariès, it has been a downward spiraling cultural journey from death as tame and familiar to death as strange and forbidden. The forbidden-death attitude, the most modern of the ones discussed by Ariès, arose in the late nineteenth century. This was la mort inversé (the forbidden death). Death was no longer meaningful and dignified. It became scandalous and outrageous and was made to disappear from social and familial life. The emphasis was on concealing death and the dying. Therefore death occurred most often in isolation rather than publicly and while in mourning the display of emotion was discouraged. At no cost was death allowed to disrupt "normal" life. The formulation of this stage constitutes Ariès' unique contribution to the critique of modernity.

Geoffrey Gorer, the eminent British anthropologist, corroborates Ariès' contention that death in modern times has been cast out from our daily life. He declared in his well-known article, "The Pornography of Death" (1955) that while it was sex that was considered unmentionable in the nineteenth century, death has supplanted it as the major taboo in the twentieth century, becoming an unspeakable thing (as cited in Wells, 2000). Gorer attributes the change to lessened belief in the afterlife and increasing medicalization of death. In his classic book entitled Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain that came a decade later, he criticizes the decline in postmortem rituals in contemporary England. This denial of mourning is dysfunctional because it leaves the mourners confused about how to deal with their loss (as cited in Walter, 1998).

Within the United States, the central thesis put forward by psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton is in the same vein as he too makes a negative assessment of death attitudes in the last century (Lifton, 1979). Lifton sees the whole of human history as a process that is largely guided by a search for effective symbols that affirm human sense of continuity and connectedness. In other words, he believes that the main task confronting each society is to equip its members with ways of achieving symbolic immortality through theological or other modes (Four other modes have been identified namely the biological, the natural, the creative and the transcendent). This need for having an immortality framework is universal, deeply ingrained in the human psyche and is essential for coming to terms with our mortality. Wherever and whenever this symbolization process fails and the human symbol-hunger goes unsatisfied, the result is heightened death denial and anxiety. Lifton believed that the 20th century is experiencing one such symbolic collapse as older symbols have been undermined by science and the onslaught of rationalism without being replaced by other satisfactory symbolizations. The threat of large scale destruction due to nuclear warfare is among the most powerful factors that have threatened our ability to symbolize continuity of life beyond the threshold of death (Lifton, 1979).

In the beginning of his insightful book, The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life (1979), Lifton provides a very interesting comparison of Freud and Jung that has a direct bearing on our debate of modernity versus tradition. While comparing their stance on death (and immortality), Lifton argues that Freud represents, in a way, the modern approach as he insists that death is total annihilation, physical and psychic. Moreover all hopes of and faith in a continued existence and immortality of soul are in fact a reflection of a deep rooted denial of death. Freud advocated that we should rid ourselves of this self-deception and recognize death as it is: the end. In so arguing, Freud was being true to his secular-atheistic leanings.

Jung, on the other hand, takes an entirely different position. He notes that the idea of life beyond death is consistently encountered in all religions and mythologies in human history (as cited in Lifton, 1979). He calls for accepting the psychic wisdom contained in these inherited archetypical images. Jung asserts that even if the notions of immortality and continuity of life after death are myths, these myths have great value in terms of their potential for psychic enrichment and therefore deserve to be adhered to.

Jung is very ably representing here, the traditional stance on death and immortality and upholding "medieval imagination" as well as "premodern Christian hope" (Lifton, 1979, p. 16). One ingenious analysis of death in America is provided by James Hijiya (1983) who traced the changing styles of gravestones and interpreted these changes. He identified six broad styles of gravestones (as cited in Wells, 2000). The most marked transition occurred around 1800. Before this time, the theme of the markers was reminiscent of the hereafter and the importance of preparing for it. This was the prospective style. In the nineteenth century, markers grew to be retrospective, looking back toward the life that had ended. This, according to Hijiya, reflected the changes taking place in the broader western world where death had changed from a transcendental event to a social phenomenon. Similarly the most vital relationships had changed from vertical (between God and the human being) to horizontal (between the dead and those alive). The trend identified by Hijiya is basically the change from sacred to profane, a transition reflecting the rise of secularism in the modern West and the waning of Christianity.

Another interesting historical overview is provided by Andrew J. Schopp (2003) who uses literature to trace the changing human response to mortality. Schopp has identified four general patterns in literature that, he observes, are generally in agreement with Ariès' theory. From classical literature to contemporary writings, death was variously depicted as an inevitable part of the human condition, as a critical event that determined one's salvation or damnation, as an object of fascination and lastly as an irrational happening whose meaning is hard to grasp. Schopp shares with the scholars mentioned above a belief that man in modern times has fewer psychological resources at his disposal to effectively negotiate death.

A rich exposition of the traditional perspective on death is found among Muslim and Orientalist writers. The perspective derives from the Qur'an, sayings and the sunnah (conduct) of Prophet Muhammad May Peace Be Upon Him, the fiqh (Islamic Law), the lives of the companions and the Sufi tradition among other sources. There are certain aspects that are conspicuous in the discourse. One, in contrast to the modern worldview which sees death as primarily a biological occurrence, having social, psychological, legal and religious aspects (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2001), Islam sees death as first and foremost a spiritual event that has biological and other aspects as well. It is a process whereby the spirit is severed from the body. Two, Death is not annihilation, rather a transition from one world into another while existence remains essentially unimpaired. Thirdly, the traditional Islamic perspective encourages familiarity with death and frequent remembrance of it rather than avoidance of the topic. Abu Hurayrah reports that the prophet (MPBUH) said, "O people, remember much the destroyer of pleasures, death." (as cited in Nomani, 1982) This is a clear way in which tradition disagrees with modernity, since many scholars have spoken of the modern alienation of death.

Fourthly, death, from the traditional Islamic perspective, can be either blissful or calamitous, depending on the kind of life that preceded it. Islam sees the life of this world as but a preamble to that of the next world, the hayat-al-akhira, which is eternal and everlasting. If the person lived in a state of God-consciousness and piety, death will be as benign as meeting a dear friend. The Quran talks of how the angels will greet the pious at the moment of death with salutations of peace and glad tidings of paradise (Al-Qur'an 16:32).

On the other hand, if one lived a life of heedlessness and died while estranged from God, death will be the worst of misfortunes. The angels, in their case, will smite their backs and faces while pronouncing that they will now taste "the punishment of the blazing fire" (Al-Qur'an 8:50). Murata and Chittick (1994) have discussed these two ways of dying in detail with reference to a long hadith. The hadith draws a sharp contrast between the modes in which the faithful and the truth-concealers leave the world. This difference is borne out of the different modes of being that they chose for themselves. The faithful are received by the

angels with the balm and the aroma of paradise and ascend to the first heaven since "they have actualized, during their life in this world, the attributes of the heavenly things which are identical with the attributes of the spirit blown into the body" (Murata & Chittick, 1994, p. 231).

Death, then, is a mirror that reflects the life lived and is not in itself a negative entity. What is to be dreaded then is not death itself but rather dying in a state of disbelief and disobedience. The Qur'an cautions, "O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared and do not die except in a state of submission" (Al-Qur'an 3:102).

What follows from this paradigm is a negation of the fear of death as an entity since death in Islam is understood as not repulsive in its essence or by its nature. So while one might fear death as a universal doom that cannot be avoided, Islam's message is that death need not be a doom if we are spiritually ready to receive it. So (passive) fear and anxiety are replaced by a strong need to act. The Islamic paradigm of death centers on the supreme importance of acting in the here and now in order to prepare for death (Al-Qur'an 63:10).

In the context of Ariès' theory, we can say that Islam perceives death as a beast that can and should be tamed. This paradigm has profound implications for the way one lives one's life. The philosophy of life is shaped by the philosophy of death as the phenomenon of death provides direction, purpose and impetus to one's actions.

If Islam does not perceive death as undesirable in itself and only asks us to beware of death in a state of estrangement from God (evoking images of horrors of the grave and the doomsday), similarly it does not uphold life as the ultimate good. This is in contrast to the modern medical model that stresses life preservation as the ultimate value (Price & Cheek, 2007). Islam would consider that to die in obedience is better than a life of disobedience. What matters is the spiritual quality of the life or death rather than the physicality of it.

Literature, on the whole, points to a general schism between the traditional and modern paradigms. The present research was a qualitative, grounded theory based exploration of this schism.

Theoretical Framework

The present theory is a qualitative, grounded theory based exploration of moderna and traditional death attitudes. Grounded theory is a particularly good fit with death research as it was death research that contributed to the very inception of grounded theory. It grew out of Glaser and Strauss' study (1967) on dying in Californian hospitals. Grounded theory stresses "the inductive discovery of theory grounded in systematically analyzed data" (Haig, 1995, Grounded theory, para.1). The process essentially involves creating codes to capture the meaning of the data, raising those codes to broader conceptual categories that further synthesize the data and ultimately (but not always) arriving at a theory (Charmaz, 2003). This inductive approach reflects a distaste for deducing hypotheses from already existing theories and calls for generation of new theories.

Method

Study one was based on text analysis. The purpose was to explore the differences between the traditional and modern outlook toward death.

Sample

The following texts were selected as adequately representative of the traditional and modern stance on death:

1. Pages from Ashraf Ali Thanvi's Bahishti Zewar (Heavenly Ornaments) including an appendix taken from Thanvi's Bahishti Gauhar (Edition: 2001; pp. 42-44, 118-121, 207-209, 334-337, 344, 381-383, 389-392, 640, 692-704, 736-741).

2. Pages from Al-Ghazali's Kimia e Sa'adat (The Alchemy of Happiness; trans. 1973; pp. 1154-1182).

3. Key passages from Bertrand Russell's Why I Am Not a Christian (Edition: 2003; pp. 33-34, 44-47, 70-73).

4. Pages from Sigmund Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle (trans. 1963; pp. 65-110)

The texts were analyzed through grounded theory methodology, specifically the constant comparative method of analysis. The process entailed taking each little bit of data, comprehending the essence of what was being conveyed and labeling it appropriately. Subsequently these bits and pieces (codes) were brought together on the basis of shared meaning to form broader and more abstract meaning units (subcategories).

The analysis then moved to the development of main categories that serve as large meaning units subsuming several codes and intermediate categories. These major categories encapsulate the main themes in the data while addressing the research questions. Analysis continued toward greater levels of abstraction toward theory formulation.

The purpose of Study Two was to acquire further understanding of how the traditionalists and modernists view, make sense of and react to death and dying. Six scholars (three modernists and three traditionalists) were selected through purposive-convenience sampling. Their selection was made on the basis of their being self-proclaimed and known subscribers to the two worldviews.

Scholars, rather than lay persons, were taken because the former have stronger ideological ties with the belief system that they identify themselves with and also a deeper and more elaborate understanding of the various facets of their worldviews than lay persons. Two scholars belonged to Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore, two were associated with Government College University, Lahore and two belonged to Iqbal Academy, Lahore. The names are being kept confidential.

Semistructured interview technique was used in this study. On account of its characteristic features such as flexibility, fluidity and potential for procuring thick data, the semistructured interview is a favorite with qualitative researchers.

For this study, interview questions were developed in the light of the findings of study one. After obtaining consent, appointments were taken. The participants were interviewed at their workplaces. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Grounded theory was used to analyze the interview transcripts.

Results and Discussion

Synthesizing the main categories from texts and transcripts, core facets of the traditional and modern death attitudes were identified. As a final step, these facets were subsumed under three superordinate dimensions for tradition and modernity. These dimensions encapsulate the ABCD (The Affect-Behavior-Cognition triad associated with Death) of tradition and modernity (see Figures 1 and 2).
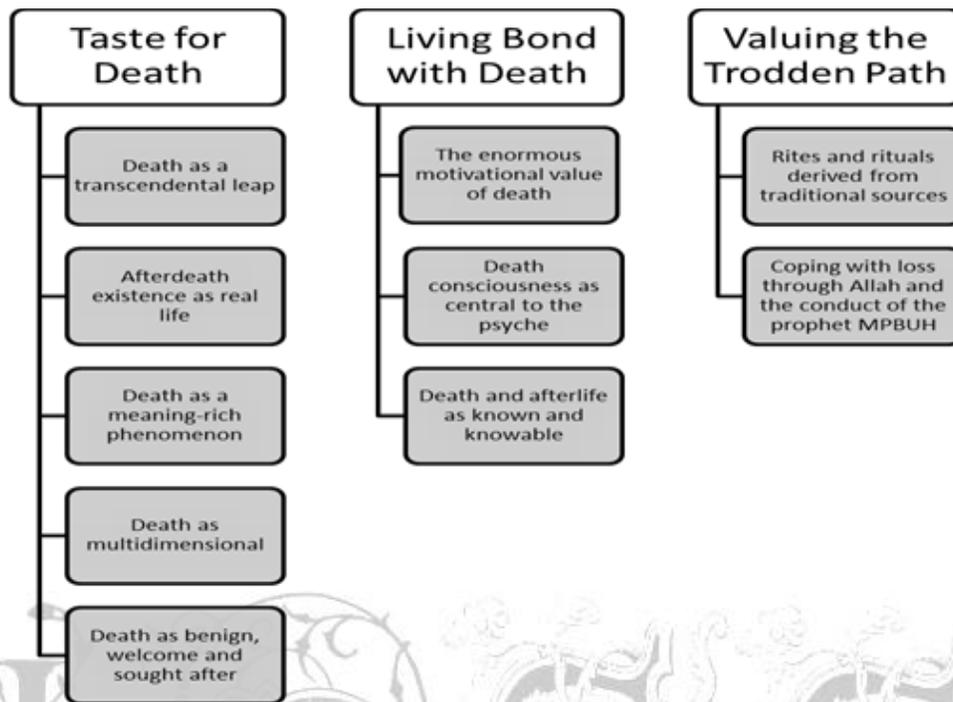
Figure 1. Facets of traditional death attitudes organized into three superordinate dimensions of taste for death, living bond with death and valuing the trodden path
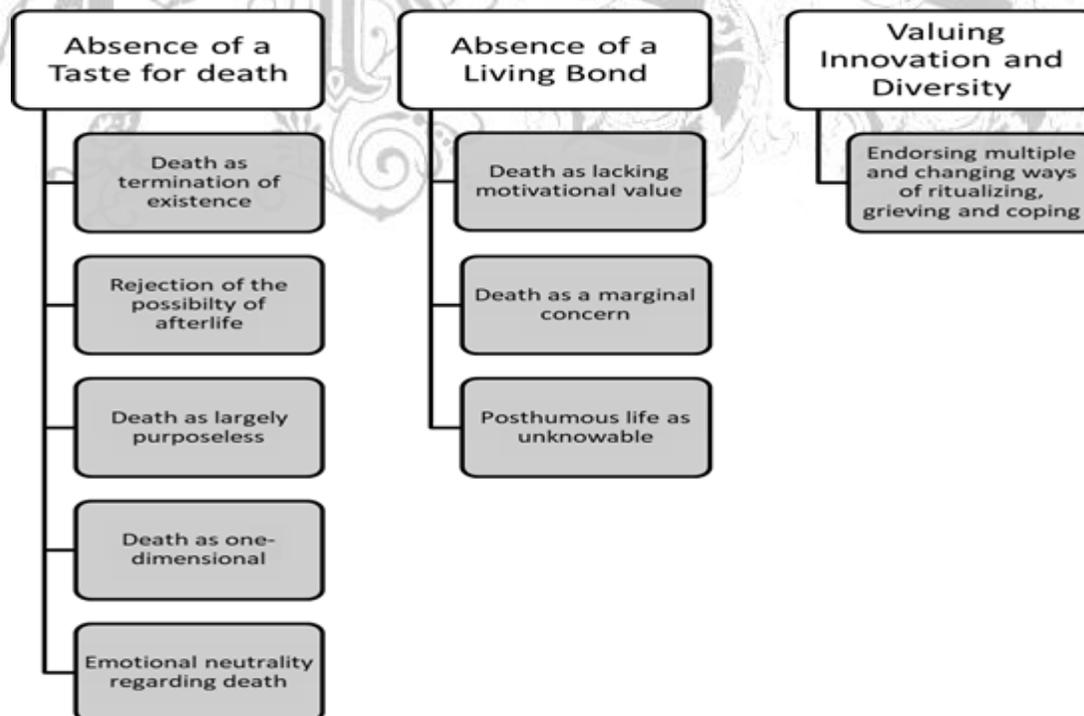

Figure 2. Facets of modern death attitudes organized into three superordinate dimensions of absence of a taste for death, absence of a living bond and valuing innovation and diversity.

A discussion of the dimensions and the facets they subsume is being presented here, highlighting the differences between the traditional and modern worldviews in terms of death attitudes.

Taste for Death vs. An Absence of Taste

The first dimension for the traditionalists is labeled taste for death, a phrase borrowed from the fifth interview. Tradition and traditionalists harbor a taste for death. This can be defined as a state of being favorably inclined toward death, a tendency to view it in a favorable light, an emotional positivity and an aesthetic appreciation for it. This taste for death has several layers to it. It includes the perception of death as a transcendental leap i.e. an evolution into a higher life form and a transformation of the sptaio-temporal matrix.

"My current physical existence cannot contain my passion of being. I need to extend or transcend the limitations of my worldly existence to pursue my aspirations of being. Death (therefore) is the first building block toward my ideal structure of being" (Interview 5).

"This realm (afterlife)is governed by a radically different matrix of time and space" (Interview 4)

This view of death as transcendence has been very eloquently phrased by Rumi in the following verses:
I died from the mineral kingdom and became a plant;
I died to vegetative nature and attained the animal state.
I died to animality and became a man. So why should I fear?
When did I ever become less through dying?
Next time I will die to human nature,

So that I may spread my wings and lift up my head among the angels. (as cited in Chittick, 1987, p.42)
As a direct antithesis to this perception of death as transcendence, we see death as the termination of life, existence and experience in the modernist discourse.

". . .it seems scarcely possible that the mind survives the total destruction of brain structure which occurs at death" (Why I Am Not a Christian, p. 71)

- Brain death leads to the end of psychological experiences (Interview 1).
- Death (is)the termination of life (Interview 3).

In fact, rather than being a progression or development into a higher plane of being, Freud postulates in Beyond the Pleasure Principle that it is a regression to an earlier, more primitive condition: a return to the inorganic state that preceded life.

Taste for death also involves viewing after-death existence as real life. To the traditionalist, we are actually more alive when we are dead than we ever were while we were living. Death brings about not the termination of life but the enhancement of it. This is what the Qur'an implies when it refers to afterlife as Al-Hayawan: life indeed! (Al-Qur'an 29:64). An enhanced life naturally includes enhanced awareness. Whereas the life of this world is a dream or a delusion, a state of slumber, death is the awakening (Interview 6; Kimia e Sa'adat, p. 1164); the direct confrontation with reality whereby much of what was al-ghayb (absent) for the human being with his limited sensory capacities becomes al-hazir (present). The Quran speaks of this when it states, "We have removed from you your covering so your sight today is piercing" (Al-Qur'an 50: 22). This perception of afterlife as wakefulness and the greater clarity of vision that it brings about has been discussed by Chittick (2001) in his excellent summarization of Ibn al-Arabis's teachings, Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity, in the following words:
One of the similarities between the resurrection and the barzakh is that in both of them, the realities of things shine forth more clearly than they do in this world. Thus, when the souls enters the barzakh, it grasps

its own situation and comes to understand that the body it has discarded was but a veil….In this context the Shaykh likes to quote the famous saying attributed to the Prophet: "People are asleep, but when they die they wake up". However the awakening through death is only the first awakening. At the resurrection, people will wake up once more. (p. 103).

In contrast to this view of the afterlife as real life, we find a rejection of the possibility of any afterlife in the modernist paradigm and wherever there is not an outright rejection, we see a refusal to commit.

- It is not rational arguments, but emotions, that cause belief in a future life (Why I Am Not a Christian, p. 71).
- No comments on personal beliefs about afterlife (Interview 3).
- Hard to say whether there is an afterlife or not (Interview1).
- No clear concept of afterlife; We can "know" something only if we have first hand experience of it (Interview 2).

The third layer of having a taste for death involves seeing death as a meaning-rich phenomenon having a clear identifiable, cosmic purpose that applies to all human beings across time and cultures. This is consistent with the wider traditional discourse in philosophy, theology and mysticism. It is interesting to note that whereas life for the traditionalist is teeming with cosmic meaning, death for him is doubly meaningful. It is meaningful in itself and gives meaning (and a particular theme) to life.

- Purpose of life is tribulation (Interview 4).
- The purpose of life is to humanly actualize Divine Ideals (Interview 5).
- The highest purpose of life is to know God (Interview 6).
- The purpose of death is to give purpose to life (Interview 6).
- The particular purpose of life could not have been possible without death (Interview 6).

Since life and death are both purposeful and the purpose originates from a supra-human source, traditionalists advocate taking existence seriously rather than having a frivolous attitude. Both traditional texts reflected the philosophy that life and death have an essential earnestness to them and should be approached with an earnest attitude. Since life can end abruptly and unpredictably, we should be in a state of ever-readiness for The End. We should seize the present moment to begin to fulfill the object of our existence and to prepare for death. This means that there is an essential urgency to life as well (a concept most conspicuous in Kimia e Sa'adat). This is an urgency lent to it by death since in rendering life finite, death necessitates the active and urgent use of time and energy to work toward realizing the goal(s) of existence.

Two sub-concepts related to the essential urgency emerge from Kimia e Sa'adat: those of tool- e-amal (literally, the prolonging of hope) and kotahi –e- amal (the curtailing of hope). Tool-e-amal involves seeing death as a far off distant phenomenon. In this case, one puts off any religious or spiritual pursuits, thinking that one has a long time to live and one will turn to them at some later point when he will get faraghat (spare time) from worldly tasks, goals and plans but the faraghat never comes as the tasks proliferate, becoming more and more numerous with time. This attitude includes catering to delusions such as the idea that one cannot die while young. On the other hand, kotahi-e-amal is the contrary attitude of seeing death as imminent and so not making long term plans. Each moment of life is thought of as ghaneemah, extremely precious, and valued and made use of. Life, youth, health, leisure and affluence are treasured before the arrival of death, disease, old age, poverty and a state of being over occupied. We find here the traditional equivalent to the notion of life expectancy. In spiritual terms, life expectancy would mean how near or far off death is seen, with the more spiritually ripe having the least expectancy.

We noted that life and death are both meaningful for the traditionalist with death being doubly meaningful. Again we encounter an interesting antithesis in the modernist thought. While death and life both are largely

meaningless to them, death is the more meaningless of the two. Life has no cosmic (macro) meaning. People in their individual lives may ascribe different micro-meanings to it. This is what they have to say about the meaning of life. But we find them having a harder time giving meaning to death.

- The purpose of life is the purpose we create for it. (Interview 2).
- The world in which we live can be understood as a result of muddle or accident; but if it is the outcome of deliberate purpose, the purpose must have been that of a fiend (Why I Am Not a Christian, p. 73).
- Death has no purpose as such (Interview 2).

In contrast to Russell's acrid and direct denunciation of purposefulness in existence, Freud's rejection is indirect and rather "circuitous" to use his own term (Beyond the Pleasure Principle, p.71). On the one hand, he makes the grand and sweeping assertion that the aim of all life is death; There is an overwhelming instinctual urge in living matter to become inorganic again. On the other hand, he does not concern himself with what purpose death is serving. So we encounter the interesting paradox where death is the Overarching Goal of all organismic activity and yet that goal is devoid of any meaning.

When we look at the perceptual-cognitive component of the death attitudes of both groups as a whole, we see that modernists have a perception of death that is more or less one-dimensional. Death for them is a chiefly biological phenomenon that marks the end of human life. What follows, if anything, is Nothing or nothing knowable. For the traditionalists, on the other hand, death is a multidimensional and many- faceted phenomenon. Death for them is "a threshold of a different realm" (interview 4), "the emancipation of the soul" and "acquisition of a new self" (interview 6), "the first building block toward. . .ideal structure of being" and the partaking of the "experience of intimacy" (Interview 5).

One dimension that the traditional view of death has is that of depth. Death has more to it than meets the eye or appears at the surface. If at the surface it is the cessation of life, at another (deeper metaphysical) level, it is continuation of the saga of existence, in fact in certain ways, an intensification of existence. Death for the modernist does not have depth as such. It is what it appears to be at the surface: a cessation of life in the physical sense. Freud defines death as "an abolition of chemical tensions" (Beyond the Pleasure Principle, p. 97) and a return to inorganic state. This is quite a "flat" definition.

The last layer of the taste for death is seeing death as benign at the first level and then even attractive and sought after.

- Death is not frightening; Everybody treads this path (Interview 4).
- The Ruh (spirit) is always in a state of gham (grief) as it yearns to go back to its original abode (which is God); There's always sadness to life itself; If this be true, then death is to be celebrated (Interview 6).
- I am like a nail, death is like a magnet; The nail is rusted and therefore it's taking time reaching the magnet (Interview 5).

It is important to note that even though death is construed in these positive ways, it still retains its essential seriousness for the traditionalist. Fear is also part of the acceptable emotion-spectrum we find in tradition. For instance in Kimia e Sa'adat fear of death's premature arrival before one is spiritually ready to receive it is seen as healthy. According to Bahishti Zewar, the righteous are ambivalent toward death: They fear it but hope surpasses the fear. While illustrating this intermingling of hope and fear, and differentiating fear from hopelessness, Smith and Haddad (1981) note:

With the transition from impersonal fate to Divine direction, then, came a lifting of the dread of inevitable demise. Not that the element of fear is absent from the Qur'an; verse after verse enjoins the hearers to fear the day of the Lord and the recompense to befall wrongdoers and hypocrites and those who reject the

message of God. But fear is different from an unmitigated pessimism in which one sees no alternative to the destruction of individual existence. The opposite of fear is hope, and as abundant as the Qur'anic references to take heed are those promising not only eternity of existence, but also eternity of felicity to persons who have faith and manifest the fruits of that faith. (p. 3).

On the modernist end, we find an emotional aloofness or blunting regarding death, the flat affect. Freud's discourse on death has a cool, intellectual impartiality. Russell, too, does not express any strong emotions. We find him scorning the fear of death and encouraging a valiant defiance in the face of death. In the second interview, death is spoken of as "neither positive nor negative". In the first it was said, "No feelings about death because death means being no longer there". This emotional aloofness is consistent with their acceptance of death as a "natural" phenomenon. Death is natural since it is subject to the laws that govern the material universe, and according to Freud, a result of the forces of nature inherent in the living substance itself (rather than any force [s] originating from the outside).

Tradition and modernity are differing in this domain in terms of the presence or absence of a taste for death. We don't find anything equivalent to or at par with the taste for death in the modernist thought except for some appreciation of personal mortality as a philosophically enriching experience (Interview 3). The first dimension for the modernists comprises not so much an active distaste as the absence of taste.

Living Bond with Death vs. An Absence of a Living Bond

The second major dimension is labeled as a living bond with death. Again the traditional and modern attitudes are set apart by the presence and absence of this living bond respectively. The living bond can be defined as an ongoing engagement with death whereby it is constantly a part of one's mental space and inherently linked with the experience of life itself. One of the reasons that traditionalists feel it is crucial to have this living bond is that they see the awareness of one's mortality as the very foundation of morality.

- It is necessary for the execution of all moral acts to remember one's death (Interview 5).
- We veer off the straight path when we forget death and the posthumous consequence of our actions (Interview 6).

This is an affirmation of the enormous motivational value of death and its role in energizing, sustaining and shaping behavior. The traditional texts are in agreement with the traditionalist scholars in asserting that it is the prospect of death (and accountability in the afterlife) that gives direction to behavior. Actions are performed (or not performed) keeping their final (postmortem) outcome in mind. Death as one's personal future therefore is relevant in the here and now, influencing the choices we make in the present. It is the Master Motive for all spiritual accomplishments.

- Death remembrance produces two kinds of moral consequences; One is prevented from sinning; Almost all of the deterring force that keeps you from sinning is derived from death consciousness; The other moral consequence is progressing in good deeds (Interview 5).
- I should keep my final destiny in mind; And should think about how I should arrange my affairs in relation to my final destiny. (Interview 4).

Modernists do not endorse the motivational value in death. Russell directly challenges the motivational value of death and afterlife by declaring that the ethicalness of an action should be determined by looking at its beneficial value for mankind in this life (public utility) rather than some other-worldly benefit to be made in an illusory hereafter (Why I Am Not a Christian, p. 33). In Freud's case we see that although death is posited as the supreme motive (Death instinct is a manifestation or rather a culmination of the pleasure principle. Whereas the pleasure principle is a tendency to reduce excitation, the death instinct seeks to rid the mental apparatus of excitation altogether), its operation takes place at an entirely unconscious level. At the conscious level, the death instinct does not motivate, influence or channelize human behavior.

Since one's sense of mortality is regarded as the very basis of one's sense of morality and considering that death is seen as rendezvous with Allah (Interview 6), it is no wonder that death is accorded a special (central) place in the minds of traditionalists. Their living bond with it involves being almost always aware of it.

- We should be conscious of death at every moment; Its always on my mind (Interview 6).
- Remembrance is crucial (Interview 4).

Death enjoys a salience in the traditional psyche. Both traditional texts emphasized that death should be given a prominent place in one's psychic life in terms of frequent death consciousness, remembrance and reflection. Ghazali employs the "sunlight analogy" in Kimia e Sa'adat to highlight the fact that death is a glaring reality that we need to confront rather than looking away. It is interesting to note that Yalom (2009) used the same analogy when he titled his book, Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death. We are reminded by this that existentialists have an affinity with tradition when it comes to acknowledging death's centrality.

The traditionalist's experience of death moves beyond the cognitive level to the experiential whereby death becomes not just a thought but a living reality.

- Thinking about one's death is a superficial thing; Death for me is a living experience; I don't merely think about death, I consider myself dead. (Interview 5).
- A true religious self keeps the feeling of nonbeing dominant over the feeling of being (Interview 5).
- Already thinking of ourselves as dead as The Promise shall surely be fulfilled (Kimia e Sa'adat, p. 1161).
- The prophet MPBUH also said, "Die before you die"; This kind of symbolic death means that the love of the world in the heart should die; Symbolically dying would render us invulnerable to death (repulsion) because we will embrace it by our own will (Interview 6).

In contrast we find a marginalization of death on the modernist side. They express an indifference to it as it is viewed as largely irrelevant to their lives. Consider the following statements:

- Death is a part of my awareness to the extent that I am careful about my safety; Otherwise I don't consciously think about what will happen when I die (Interview 2).
- Why should we concern ourselves with anything that we do not know much (or anything) about (Interview 2).
- I will be conscious of death if I am about to fall off the balcony (Interview1).

This marginalization of death and indifference to it has several reasons. The existence of posthumous life cannot be determined empirically, this being one of the classic unsolvable problems that science chooses not to deal with. Since all modernists take science as the high arbitrator for deciding what is important and what is not, death is pushed aside as unknowable and therefore unimportant. While the experience of death (apart from the biological side) and whatever happens beyond it is "out of bounds" for the modernist, tradition has a clear vision about the nature of death and posthumous life, as evidenced by the discourse of the traditionalist authors and scholars. Rather than curiosity, obscurity or absence of knowledge, there is clarity about what will happen as we die and afterwards. Traditionalists draw from a wide variety of knowledge sources to understand the experience and phenomenon of death (the agonies and ecstasies therein) and the events of afterlife. This knowledge is characterized by a wealth of detail, conceptual richness and imagery.

The second reason for the modernist marginalization of death as noted before is that they see it as bereft of motivational value. To them, there is no need to act for what will follow death since, for them, nothing will

follow it. Therefore death does not figure into their day to day actions. Thirdly, since death is essentially absurd for them, they are unable to give value to a meaningless thing.

In this domain, as in the first, the difference between the two paradigms centers on the presence and absence of a particular way of relating to death and mortality. It is important to note that these findings are consistent with the modern marginalization of death as explicated by Aries (1977) and others (see literature review section).

Valuing the Trodden Path vs. Valuing Innovation and Diversity

The third dimension for tradition is labeled valuing the trodden path. The contrary dimension for modernity is valuing innovation and diversity. Tradition upholds the trodden path i.e. traditionalists deem it important to adopt and adhere to funerary practices and customs originating from traditional sources, those followed by the prophet MPBUH and his followers. The guiding principle is to retain and not go against the genuine shari'ah (the Sacred Law) based practices (Interview 5; Interview 4).

In the subcategory of authentic vs. pseudo-tradition, Thanvi highlights the need to purge practices surrounding death and dying of new things that are a product or reflection of a decadent morality or man's baser nature such as holding large gatherings for the sake of "name", reputation and social desirability. Tradition is to be followed because it produces benefits (barakah). Pseudo-traditions on the other hand feed the baser needs. In all three traditionalist interviews, the importance of shari'ah based rituals is affirmed.

- These rites should be carried out according to tradition; Rites should be mathoor, not made up (Interview 4).
- All death rituals are natural and moral as long as they do not clash with the scheme of things of religion (Interview 5).
- Death must accompany rituals because dying is meeting Allah who is the king of all kings and we have to observe certain a'dab (etiquette) to meet a king; Regarding death rites, the bare minimum must be done which is in the tradition; There's no maximum. Beyond the minimum you can continue to invoke the name of God for as long as you want (Interview 6).

In the modernist interviews, we see both an affirmation of the value (albeit worldly value) of traditional rites and at the same time the view that the process of change in death rites should be allowed to take its course with time independent of any guiding principle. In interview one, diversity, innovation and commercialization in death rites is endorsed. On the whole, we can say that in the traditionalist paradigm, death rites are more rooted than in the modernist one.

For the traditionalists, the primary vehicle of coping with loss is Allah and supplicating. The example of the prophet MPBUH and the pious should be followed while grieving.

- My role model (for how to behave in grief and generally) is the prophet MPBUH (Interview 4).
- Somebody's death creates a vacuum in my system of relationships; This vacuum causes pain; One fills this vacuum with (one's bond with) Allah by saying "To Allah we belong and to Him we return" (Interview 5).
- The only way to deal with loss is through God; God is the only agent in us and outside of us who enables us to deal with life and death; While dealing with loss, the sunnah of the prophet MPBUH should be our guide; We must deal with the death of our loved ones, as he dealt with the death of his loved ones (Interview 6).

Modernists recommend a more multiple approach in which various modes of coping are encouraged.

- There's no single best strategy. Different things work for different people (Interview 1).
- (What helps in bereavement is) support from other people (Interview 2).
- Time heals; the sweep of the processes of life forces you to return to normal life (Interview 3).

Again, ways of grieving and coping are more rooted for the traditionalists than they are for the modernists.

Conclusion

It is concluded that modernists and traditionalists differ considerably in terms of the overall relationship that they have with death including how they view death, its place in their lives and their mode of response to it. Perhaps the most important discovery made while exploring death through the eyes of tradition was the finding that within and through tradition a great metamorphosis takes place whereby death and life exchange identities and (physical) life in essence becomes a death in terms of its poverty, its boundness, its transitoriness and its finitude and death and afterdeath become life in its most genuine form in terms of the loosening of the time-space matrix, freedom of the spirit, enhanced awareness, perpetuation and infiniteness.

Thanatology is an area that has hardly been explored in Pakistan. Most people regard death research as dry, depressing and even bad omen. It is time for researchers in Pakistan to move beyond these misconceptions and turn their attention to this important area since it addresses issues that lie at the heart of the human condition. This study is a step in that direction. Moreover, it points to the importance of studying death and dying and the related spectrum of concepts with methods that are not restricted to quantitative tools. Qualitative thanatology is a promising field that has much to offer regarding the crisis of the modern man, existential enrichment and the essence of life in general. The findings have important implications for the areas of health research, counseling and gerontology.

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