

Nothing, I say. Nothing of my ego will survive. My body will dissolve itself into elements aided either by a consuming fire in the case of cremation or by the action of maggots in the event of burial. There is nothing that survives the material body. With the death of the brain my consciousness also goes and so I wouldn't know what occurs post mortem. There is no evidence for duality of body and mind as believed by many particularly after Descartes. No soul to go anywhere. No flicker of the dying flame that trots on to another womb.

For good or for bad the old man is done with. Let's celebrate his life, the goodness with which he spent it and the joy he had, hopefully, brought to others. Even if he had been a nasty fellow let's farewell him with: "Goodbye old friend!" Our brief and vulnerable lives do not justify vindictiveness or the arrogant judgment of others.

move over there. So what? It is the same with rebirth? Do you, reader, know what your former incarnation had been? Were you a deity, or a snake; or given you were unfortunate to have lived in a country like Sri Lanka were you a poor peasant being eternally deceived by politicians, a member of a ruling family that got away robbing the treasury, a member of the clergy of any given religion who had sexually abused kids, or a simple joker who hadn't two cents in his pocket? So why bother?

To believe in any claim for after life in a spiritual realm one must find evidence for it in the world we live in. Only a scientific investigation can do that. One cannot assert that science is not the only source of knowledge and that religion is another valid source and leave it at that. There cannot be two independent ways of knowing about the world. If no investigation has unveiled such a world why believe in it?

spiritual issue would have been resolved long ago.

Historically religion has always stepped in to explain gaps in human knowledge. At each instance, when the gaps are explained by science religion takes a retreat. Science grew out of the cocoon



elaborate rituals relating to the Dead, religion is doing a great job. These rituals have imposed uncomfortable costs on the living and priests, Mullahs and Kovils thrive on them. At the nearby Taiwanese Buddhist temple one has to pocket out valuable dollars to buy merit-transferring tokens for the dear departed.

The belief in an afterlife that religion extolls has helped make populations docile. Don't worry, they say, about injustice for the good are rewarded in Paradise. Slave for your fating master and don't think of revolt. It is your Kamma; so bear it until you wear it away in this unfortunate life ('Karumayagewennaoney'). Karl Marx was dead right here. Religion justifies useless slaughter in the name of some vengeful God. The murderous martyrs of 9/11 were infamously promised an eternity with numerous virgins as a reward.

Aren't such ridiculous beliefs cheapening the notion of human life and elevating the cult of death? Yes, they are.

Religion's hold in the area of death will continue as long as we humans are not strong enough to cope with available natural explanations about death and what happens thereafter. There is no doubt that the consolations that religions do offer in this regard are superior to any that a nonbeliever can offer at this stage. The consolation that faith-based communities receive in facing death is irreplaceable. The belief in after life is one ingredient of this. Attention to the bereaved is another. There is nothing to rival Mozart's Requiem in the Christian tradition or the prayer for a dead woman from the Songs of Solomon in the Jewish service or the alms-givings (Dhane) at periodic intervals to Buddhist monks who attend in saffron-clad robes and chant the great wisdom of the Buddha. All such ritualistic functions are attended by relatives and friends who gather around the memory of the dead and around the terrible grief of the bereaved.

To the rational mind the Buddhist version can be appealing provided one is not enjoined to accept any notions of a life hereafter.

WHAT HAPPENS TO ME AT DEATH?



I admit death is one of the most difficult situations for a nonbeliever to face. To stick by the belief that all is gone for good is hard. To most persons this is not a comfortable belief. Death haunts our lives and we dread it. For survivors to realize that their dear beloved is now nowhere and that all communication with him/her is disconnected is not a good feeling at all. On the other hand, a belief in an after-life can certainly give the latter a better coping strategy. All this cannot simply end like this way? Surely we must have some sort of postmortem life? Somewhere in a spiritual realm? Or be reborn in another life even as a snail or frog or python; if not as a king?

One task of religion whether theistic or nontheistic is to give most of us a more comfortable and "meaningful" avenue with which to cope with death. There is archeological evidence unearthed in France and Spain that shows that Upper Paleolithic people 45,000 to 10,000 years did believe in a supernatural realm. "People seemed always to have believed in two domains: the material world in which they conduct their daily lives and a spirit realm that they try to contact," states cognitive archaeologist David Lewis Williams.

It beats rational understanding to believe that even an afterlife would bring consolation to me, Shyamon Jayasinghe. Even if I enter a post mortal celestial realm it wouldn't be Shyamon Jayasinghe or anything that would resemble Shyamon Jayasinghe over there. My current conscious identity will not continue over there. Obviously my body will not physically

Religionists will scream that it is all there in the revealed word of God as reflected in the Holy Book or sacred scriptures. But then which 'revealed word' or which Holy Book are we to rely on? That of Islam? Hinduism? Christianity? Jewish? Zoroastrism? Even the Sutta or Abhidamma Pitaka of Buddhism? As noted in my previous article, Buddhism as philosophy has a respectful proximity to science; but not Buddhism as a religion that believes in Bodhi Pooja, the transference of merit to after life, the existence of deities floating in the air around us, or in the kind of Apaaya we saw at the Berwick temple at Wesak.

Furthermore, interpretations of the Holy Book have been so acrimonious that they have led to blood battles and wars that have and are destroying human lives and property. The many years of the Crusades between believers of the Koran and the Bible, the many years of the Protestant Reformation that led to religious persecution. The current slaughter between adherents of the Sunni and Shiya versions of Islam are ample testimony. To the man of common sense this all makes nonsense, isn't it? If religionists cannot have agreement about the Holy Word how do they expect non-religionists like me to receive any of their warring versions? Looking around for evidence science will tell that in all probability there isn't any evidence for heaven or hell, God or angels anywhere. Yuri Gagarin went right into space and jokingly asserted that he hadn't found evidence of God, hell or heaven. If he were interested in the Hindu tradition he would have said in extension that he didn't find evidence of any atman floating towards absorption in a mighty Brahma. Had he found any evidence of this 'other realm,' this

of religion and is taking away the sacred explanations found in scripture one by one replacing them with natural explanations. Although secularism is growing most people find the afterlife question a gap in their understanding.

Who else can fill it but religionists? With its multifarious, complicated and

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ජ්‍යෝතිෂය ASTROLOGY

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