

Death and Eternity

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

You are familiar with some of life's ultimate questions. In this tutorial, you're going to look at some of the questions that get stirred up when you think about death and eternity. You're also going to look at these ideas from a more collective perspective. This will include perspectives from an Eastern religion and a Western religion. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Death and Motion](#)
2. [Death in Buddhism](#)
3. [Death in Christianity](#)

1. Death and Motion

If you are a film buff you may know a famous scene from an Ingmar Bergman film called *The Seventh Seal*. In it, there's a knight—a crusader—who's pausing his busy, hectic, violent, and confusing life. He's sitting on a rock, and seated across from him is a figure cloaked in black. In between them is a chess set. At some point, the figure across from the knight, Death, says to him, "your move."



THINK ABOUT IT

What is action in relation to death?



If you have stopped and thought about it, even just for a moment, you consider the dilemma of time. Time is something that's so associated with motion, and no living person has an experience or reference with stopped time.

The words used to speak of death are action words. They're verbs: He/she passed, he/she went away, or he/she is gone. So the question this then leads to is: where are they? Where has this person gone? To someplace or somewhere? It is not possible to grasp a place that has absolutely no movement.

2. Death in Buddhism

Conceptions and experiences of space are so intimately linked with time and motion. The contradictions and the confusions and the mysteries that erupt with all of this naturally lead many people to ask questions about divinity, the **afterlife**, and the purpose of life. There are many religious conceptions that deal with these issues and these predicaments.

Buddhism has a very long and rich history and has many variations within it. In Tibetan Buddhism, there's an idea called bardo and the bardo state. It refers to a period of transition in between death and rebirth.

It's considered a very significant time for insight and potential liberation from the endless cycle of reincarnation. In most schools of Buddhism, the term nirvana refers to the state of ultimate release from suffering and from the cycle of reincarnation. While there is some implication that things stop, it's not in the way that we usually understand stop or end.

In Sanskrit, nirvana means “cessation” or “an extinguishing.” In Pali, that means “blowing out,” like a candle. All of these are active verbs. The idea in both cases is that the suffering caused by desire, greed, aversion, and ignorance is no longer experienced. It's a release from suffering. The preposition for the English word comes from the Old English “faran,” which means “to go.”



DID YOU KNOW

You might want to associate extinguishing and blowing out with some kind of end, but in Buddhism, nirvana refers to another state of being. There is the movement of peace.

Whether nirvana is reached depends on the actions taken in life. In Buddhism, it's referred to as the law of karma or action. One's actions determine one's placement on the wheel of suffering. A person will either experience a release from suffering or a return to that wheel of cyclic reincarnation.



TERM TO KNOW

Afterlife

In many religions, either the place or the experience of life after death.

3. Death in Christianity

In the West, Christianity also is very rich with images, stories, and depictions of the afterlife, such as the concepts of Heaven and Hell. Heaven is referred to as a return to the Garden of Eden here on Earth or paradise. It's also referred to as everlasting spiritual life in the presence of God.

Hell, on the other hand, is often translated from Hebrew “Sheol,” which means “pit” or “subterranean retreat.” It's also translated as eternal torment, where there's a gnashing of teeth. **Eternity** could be a rocky road, or it could be some kind of amazing, beautiful, crazy superhighway. In both Buddhism and Christianity, it's often believed that the road one ends up on depends on one's actions in this life.

In Christianity, there are many interpretations of what the Buddhists would call right action. One's fate, in some denominations of Christianity, is generally based on the idea of righteousness in accordance with the scriptures and God's will. The other road is sin and corruption.



TERM TO KNOW

Eternity

A state in which time is either never ending or does not exist.



SUMMARY

There seems to be a link between **death and motion** if you look at the words used to describe it. This motion is a movement outside of time, and this is something for which living humans have no frame of reference. Many religions have beliefs about death to aid in the understanding of it. **Death in Buddhism** brings a person to the bardo state. From here they will either be reincarnated or they will reach nirvana. This is dependent on their actions in life. **Death in Christianity** offers a similar yet different idea. Christians believe that after life people will go to heaven or hell depending on their actions in life.

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY TED FAIRCHILD FOR SOPHIA LEARNING. Please see our [Terms of Use](#).



TERMS TO KNOW

Afterlife

In many religions, either the place or the experience of life after death.

Eternity

A state in which time is either never-ending or does not exist.