

What if we knew what happens after death?

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ABSTRACT

From time immemorial mankind is intrigued with the thought about what happens after death but the question is still unanswered. To answer it one has to die and come back to tell but it is not possible because the ticket is one way. But suppose we know scientifically about this. What then? How will our lives change, how will religions, cultures, and societies will get impacted? We dwell on this aspect in this paper. The paradox of learning about the mystery of death without actually dying will manifest one day as did the revelation of the mystery of the brain with brain researching brain. We either outlive death or we don't. Both scenarios are considered while discussing the changes our lifestyles will undergo when we know in scientific terms about what happens after we die.

Keywords: *Life After Death, What Happens When We Die, Death Survival*

Ignorance breeds fear and we are ignorant about what would happen after we die. So we fear death. From time immemorial, people are born, lead a life, and die but no one knows what happens to us when we die. We live with this fear in our minds till death takes us in its lap. Shakespeare has very aptly said, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; And have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages."

The famous lines by Shakespeare give a traditional view of life and death; **entry** signifying **birth**, **playing part** means living one's life and the exit is **death**.

It is intriguing that for millenniums; mankind could not uncover the secret "What happens to us when we die". It is mainly because of the paradox that to know this secret, we have to come back after death to communicate its secret whereas the ticket is one way. Generations after generations surface up and wither away but the question remains unanswered. Even now the question is unanswered. This paper does not attempt to answer this question either. In this paper, we cursorily view the different perspectives about death as believed by different cultures and religions and briefly discuss theories on the afterlife and then discuss what would happen if we knew in scientific terms what happens after we die. The survival theories which have emerged do not give a scientific explanation about what happens after death but just give some thoughts

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about what could be possible afterlife after death. We present this information because on this background we shall be presenting our thoughts on the main topic i.e "What if we knew what happens after we die." The paper discusses how our way of living will get impacted with possession of the above knowledge. The scenario will be built on our changed way of thought processes, our living styles, our ambitions and goals, and how emotions will undergo drastic changes.

Let us first understand what different religions think about “life after death” and the contemporary theories about life after death. Let us now view what we currently know about life after death:

Prevailing philosophical views on life after death

Religious explanations --Humans are thinkers, people have been thinking over the issue and they have come out with philosophical thoughts about death. Cultures around the world have been following philosophical beliefs about death.

Muslims and Christians do not destroy the dead bodies but preserve them in coffins and graves as they believe resurrection will happen one day and the dead shall come to life. In Egypt, the dead bodies are mummified and preserved.

Christian belief is portrayed in Britannica, "The delay of the imminent expectation brought about the question of the fate of the dead person in the period between the death of the individual Christian and the resurrection. Two basic views were developed. One view is that of an individual judgment, which takes place immediately after death and brings the individual to an interim state, from which he enters into the realm of bliss or that of perdition. The idea of an individual judgment, however, cannot be readily harmonized with the concept of the general Last Judgment on the day of the general resurrection of the dead. It anticipates the decision of the general judgment and thus deprives of its significance the notion of the Last Judgment.

A second view, therefore, also prevailed: the sleep of the soul—i.e., the soul of the dead person enters into a sleeping state that continues until the Last Judgment, which will occur after the general resurrection. At the Last Judgment, the resurrected will be assigned either to eternal life or eternal damnation. This conception, accepted in many churches, contains many discrepancies, especially the abandonment of the fundamental idea of the continuity of personal life.”

Thus, both views in Christianity believe in Heaven and Hell; only timing is taken to be different. The Last Judgment, as referred above is detailed by different religions. Christianity teaches that all will stand to be judged by God at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In early Christian art, the scene is one of Christ the judge, the resurrection of the dead, the weighing of souls, the separation of the saved and the damned, and representations of heaven and hell.(Britannica on final Judgment).

Zoroastrian view is outlined in Britannica as follows, “Zoroastrianism, founded by the Iranian prophet Zoroaster, teaches that after death the soul waits for three nights by the grave and on the fourth day goes to the Bridge of the Requirer, where his deeds are weighed. If the good outweighs the bad, even if only slightly, the soul is able to cross the bridge to heaven; if the bad

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deeds outweigh the good, the bridge becomes too narrow for the soul to cross, and it plunges into the cold and dark abyss of hell. This is not the end, however, for there will be a final overthrow of Ahriman, the prince of demons, by Ahura Mazdā, the "Wise Lord," who will resurrect all human beings, preside over the Last Judgment, and restore the world to goodness."

Thus, Zorashtrian faith also believes in heaven and hell, similar belief is held by Muslims as well—Britannica speaks about this, "Islam likewise is rich in its imagery and conceptual expansion of the doctrine of the Last Judgment. The Day of Judgment is one of the five cardinal beliefs of Muslims. After death, persons are questioned about their faith by two angels: Munkar and Nakīr. If a person has been a martyr, his soul immediately goes to paradise; others go through a type of purgatory. At doomsday, all persons will die and then be resurrected to be judged according to the records kept in two books, one containing a person's good deeds and the other his evil deeds. According to the weight of the book that is tied around a person's neck, he will be consigned to paradise or to hell."

Ancient Middle Eastern religions had also developed beliefs in a Last Judgment. In ancient Egyptian religion, for example, a dead person's heart was judged by being placed on a balance held by the god Anubis. If the heart was light, thus indicating a person's comparative goodness, the soul was allowed to go to the blessed region ruled by Osiris, the god of the dead. If the heart was heavy, the soul might be destroyed by a hybrid creature called the Devouress. (Britannica on Last Judgment)

But Eastern Cultures (Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism) do not believe in the Last Judgment. Instead, they believe in Reincarnation.

Hindus believe that the human body is composed of five earthly things and should be converted into them at death and they burn the body and immerse in waters of sacred rivers. They believe that there is an immortal soul in our body which is indestructible and it leaves our body at death and is in search of a new body and enters a new body at its birth i.e Reincarnation takes place and the birth-death-birth cycle goes on. The soul goes on refining in various births and goes on refining itself till it reaches a supreme stage when it gets final salvation by merging with God and then it does not get reborn.

The religions across the world have philosophical views in their faith about what happens after death.

Apart from the religious philosophical views, several theories have been presented for survival after death, we now move on to these theories--

Theories on life after death-There is no scientific theory detailing the facts of the afterlife after death. Though several theories have loomed up in parapsychological research on life after death. Briefly stated these are

- **Survival Theory**—this believes that there is life after death and we continue to live with all knowledge intact but we do not have physical bodies but can interact with the living world as evidenced through the experience of appearances of ghosts/ spirits/ apparitions

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- ***Super psi Theory*** (Braude 1992, 2003), (Sudduth 2009) believes that there is no life after death. Our existence ends with our death. The after-death communication which is being reported and experienced is not from ghosts or spirits (in fact no such things exist) but are being perceived through super psi means by mediums who possess the super psi ability to perceive things through extrasensory means.
- ***Radical Survivalism Theory*** (Storm, 2006) treads a middle path between the above two theories. It does not believe in spirits but says that after death, all features of personal identity comprising of all thoughts, values, and beliefs along with memories of all events experienced in life, get transferred after demise and are preserved or sustained as forms of knowledge or information (which become part of Absolute knowledge). The after-death communication experienced is the retrieval of information from this knowledge by psi means.
- ***Energy Survival theory*** (Naresh Kumar, 2020) states that our existence is comprised of two Energy forms -unique Individual Self Energy Form (ISEF) which can be identified by a unique identification number assigned to it and it is eternal and does not change, whereas a subset of it is SLEF (Self life Energy form) which undergoes changes in different births. At death, this SLEF becomes dormant and invisible to our world and reappears as another individual when it is reborn as someone else. Birth –death-birth cycle of the unique ISEF in form of different and distinct SLEFs continues and unique ISEF is seen as different SLEFs to the world. At death of a SLEF it assumes a dormant form with all accumulated knowledge and memories in its ISEF which gets passed on to the next SLEF of this ISEF when it is born again. The theory is based on the concept of Energy which cannot be destroyed but can be transformed into different forms.

Thus, we know nothing about life after death scientifically, we can only weave vivid pictures about it. But the fact is that either our existence ceases at death or we outlive our death.

Armed with the assumption that we know scientifically which of the above two facts about status after death is true. What then? How our way of living will get impacted; how our thought process will undergo change, how our ambitions and goals will get impacted, and how emotions will undergo drastic changes?

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Scenario1—we know that there is no existence after death--- Suppose we know in scientific terms that our existence terminates when we die. This means that we are no different from machines that live their lives and then are scrapped. We get scrapped as coffins in a grave or our existence is burnt and destroyed. What remains is our memories and the contributions that we made to this world.

If we are perceived as machines (with an additional feature of the capability of thinking), then the cause of death could be due to aging or poor maintenance of our body. Illness is cured by treatment (repairs if we term it in a machine perspective). The prediction of machine life is approximate and so will be the prediction of human life. In this section of the paper, we are assuming that we know that there is no life after death and death is the ultimate end, then the body becomes useless and gets scrapped. The realization that death is certain to happen and that

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our existence ceases at its occurrence and there is no afterlife after death will bring following changes in the lifestyles of people.

Impact on the way of living—we started the paper with a comment that ignorance breeds fear and we are ignorant about what happens when we die. Now that we know that our existence ceases at death, the ignorance is gone and so goes the fear. The fear was because of the trauma to be experienced in the uncertain event of death which got further aggravated with our anxiety about our journey in case of existence of life after death. Our fear is for an unknown journey to be taken and to get adjusted in a new life in a new environment after death. All these fears get eliminated when we are knowledgeable that there is no continuance of life after death.

Assuming that it is scientifically established that like the machine we stop and get scrapped at death, the fear will, no longer, torment us. We would accept death in a casual manner just as a stage of progress in life where the body undergoes transformations-just as we grow from child to teenager to attain puberty to experience changes in the body be it male or female and further on; experience changes in body on becoming old when our skin loses smoothness and is wrinkled and hair become white and we lose many of our physical capabilities. Ongoing changes in the body then ultimately reach a stage where the loss of physical capabilities escalates further to its peak and all parts stop functioning and the body dies. Thus, death would just be a stage in the progress of the life of a person. So there will be no fear of death and our mind will reconcile and become ready to accept it as the ultimate stage where the body stops functioning in the manner as we accept losing some of the physical capabilities at old age and we shall have no fear to meet our end as it is the last stage of our life which started as an infant to the ultimate state of a dead body. This will change our way of thinking as philosophizing for the afterlife will vanish. Like machines, our life will become more mechanical and we shall be living in present and shall be dreading the future old age. We shall be tempted to seek pleasure and avoid pain. This urge will gain more and more intense with the advancement of age. Contrary to the current way of living when people at old age spend more time in God's worship and less on enjoying worldly pleasures, they will be tempted to get immersed in acts which will give them pleasure even with their diminished physical capability because of the approaching end after which there is no continuance into next life. With the fear gone for the unknown journey, they will stop doing noble deeds to improve their future second life. The greatest impact on thinking and way of living will come in the old age when the body will not be in a position to enjoy worldly pleasures but the urge will be at its peak due to the natural compulsion of seeking maximum pleasures as the end approaches. At a younger age, the impact will not be that severe as even currently we do not think much about the afterlife as we are busy shaping our career and enjoying our youth with full vigor.

Another factor that will impact our way of living will be the definite erosion of the concept of religion. Currently, we believe that our life story is written by God and he decides about our future journey when we shall die. Once we have the knowledge that there is no future journey, the concept of religion will become irrelevant. With the disappearance of religious belief which is the disciplining factor, our lives will undergo a dramatic change as religions will become irrelevant. Our living styles will not be guided by virtue or sin but will be guided by only Pleasure and Pain. As we will reconcile to a new faith that there is no heaven or hell so our mind will become attuned to work without the fear of going to hell and will not have an incentive to

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work nobly with a hope to go to heaven because we would know that there is no hell/ heaven, hence, the compulsion of keeping a distance from evil deeds will no longer remain a guiding force to our lives. Instead, we shall be tempted to do things that give us pleasure (be it virtuous or evil as per current beliefs) and would try to avoid actions that give us a sensation of pain. We would not even resist inflicting pain to others if it gives us pleasure. We would refrain shedding tears even over incidents that harmed our near dear ones i.e., empathy will be lost. In fact, even the definition of near-dear ones may also undergo a change. People giving us pleasure may become dear and people putting us in situations of pain would become enemies even though such persons could, in fact, be our well-wishers. Pleasure and Pain will be the only guiding force in a person's life, current culture and morality will vanish. The discipline imposed by religion and culture will not remain in force which may cause loss of empathy and life may become difficult to live. The most dangerous thing will be loss of empathy and the world will, no longer, be a pleasant place to live. There will be a chaotic situation where there will be no restraining factors, crimes may escalate when people chase pleasure without worrying about how others feel. The absence of empathy will be a very dangerous thing leading to chaos. This change will increase with the advancement of age and will reach its peak when we become old.

In our lives, we need an anchor to prevent us from drifting aimlessly- currently, this belief is provided with religious belief and belief in God. We cannot remain drifting aimlessly without an anchor, hence, gradually we shall invent an anchor to prevent our drifting aimlessly in pursuit of pleasure alone. Innovative as the human mind is, it may invent an anchor to prevent aimless drifting –may be that humans will invent the anchor in Self-Conscience which may become the only hope to bring a meaningful guiding factor. After all we, even now, say that God resides in each of us--- self-conscience will be the God that will work as an anchor in the changed scenario. Our actions will be guided by our inner conscience and it may prove as a boon in face of the then chaotic way of life. The inner conscience may give rise to a new set of values which may be an additional factor apart from pleasure and pain to guide the humans for their actions and thoughts. In a sense, I feel, it would be a better option compared to letting an imaginary concept of God affecting our living. The inner self-conscience existing in each of us is a strong thinker and it will guide us to the right path. The conscience will create a needed balance between pleasure and pain which is currently being created by a belief in God/religions. Thus God/ religions will get replaced by our inner conscience.

The Living Legends who do exemplary work during their lives (which is not achievable by average humans) will be respected during their lifetimes and after their passing away, they may occupy a special space in memories of mankind and maybe worshipped as Gods after some generations. They may serve as inspirations and eventually they may provide anchors to human lives as is the case with imaginary Gods in our current lives.

However, the greatest blow on societies will be on Culture and Religions.

Impact on cultures and religions will be profound. Assuming that science would have established that body works and ends like a machine, the beliefs of religions will get a big jolt as the continuance of life after death is central in religious beliefs wherein heaven/ hell exists where we go after death. At the time of the discovery of scientific discovery that there is no afterlife, there will be the toughest and severest brutalism from temples/ churches and mosques and it will be much more profoundly brutal than we experienced when Galileo discovered that earth is not

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stationary but moves around the Sun. The person making the scientific discovery about the ceasing of our existence at death will be severely condemned by one and all and may meet the worst fate that would be unthinkable. But the truth will ultimately prevail as it did with the discovery of the planetary system. The societies will eventually feel that the religions have become obsolete and irrelevant and will ultimately get eroded from the minds of people. Churches / Temples/ Mosques will become irrelevant as worshipping will stop and these will remain barren and of no consequence as no one will ever visit them.

The realization that there is no heaven or hell our mind will no longer guide us to a noble path so that we would not go to hell. In fact, the fear of GOD will disappear as the concept of GOD will get eroded. A person will not be guided by religious faith--- rather there will be no religions because its basic foundation i.e., “the concept of life after death” will get demolished. There will be no compulsion to go to temples /churches or places of worship as these will not be relevant and would lose their presence.

It is unthinkable about a world without religion and faith in God. There will be utter chaos in the world. As mentioned above, Pleasure and Pain will be the only guiding factors for humans and there will be great instability in societies that may tend to disintegrate. We would have lost fear about death but another type of fear may surface where the weaker sections of humans will always be in pain at the cost of pleasure sought and achieved by the stronger section and their sufferings will be permanent till they die. The fear of death will go on escalating with aging and as discussed above the old age will be crippled with the strongest desire of seeking pleasure and the body becoming incapable of enjoying the pleasure. Empathy will disappear making the old age the worst period of one's life.

So much so for the scenario where we know scientifically that death is the end and there is no afterlife. Let us have a peek at Scenario 2 where we assume that the science proves that there is life after death, what then??

Scenario 2—we know that there is the existence of life after death— As we saw at the beginning that ignorance breeds fear and since we are ignorant about what happens when we die, we are afraid of death. But with the ignorance gone, the fear also vanishes.

Impact on our lives in Scenario 2- Backed with the awareness, we would become bolder and more confident in our outlook as was the case in scenario 1. But, in Scenario 2, our thinking will be at variance compared to scenario 1 because we shall not be afraid of on-coming death because it will be considered an extended phase of life as there will be a continuance of life and we have something promising to look forward to even after death.

Unlike in Scenario 1, our lives will not get destabilized but will remain balanced as is in the current life. The urge to do noble deeds will still remain strong as it will be a belief that it will lead to an improved life after death. Certainty about life after death will serve as an incentive to keep doing noble deeds to deserve a better life after death.

In Scenario 2, our lives will be richer in content because of our boldness and enhanced confidence with knowledge of the afterlife. We shall enhance our present way of thinking by

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assimilating the knowledge of the afterlife. We shall face death with confidence without any fear as we are knowledgeable that it is a progressed stage of our current living and there is nothing to be afraid of because of an enlightened awareness. Unlike great upheaval in our way of thinking relating to scenario 1, in this scenario, there will not be any significant changes; the ethical views and value system as in our current life will continue to hold. On the other hand, there will be improvements when compared to our existing life.

The bereavement on the death of a near one will not be as profound as experienced today. Today even a belief that there is a continuance of life after death serves so many good purposes as detailed below,

The belief serves as positive reinforcement in current life-Nirvanic beliefs about the transcendental-future and makes present inequities less painful and the bereavement on the loss of dear ones is reconciled in a painless manner. The belief on after-death communication (ADC) with discarnate loved near-dear ones comes as a big sympathetic help on bereavement. Parapsychological researchers hold strong views; Krippner (2006) narrates Surveys that indicate a positive effect of ADC on experients of ADC after connecting with the deceased loved ones. Devers (1994) in his study, claimed that the pain of the loss of dear ones was greatly reduced with the belief of survival after ADC. Berger (1995) found that the experients, who believed in survival could easily come to terms with the loss of deceased loved ones and they return to normalized routines quickly.

The purposes served by this belief is summarized by Naresh Kumar (2020):

“It is found that the belief in survival after death serves following purposes in the life of experients of after-death communication from discarnate near-dear ones

- ADC gives comfort and reassurance that the relationship continues even after death.
- The experients feel that they get protected from oncoming dangers because the deceased could pre-warn them about the same.
- ADC provided them a sense of life purpose and meaning.
- ADC confirmed the hope that there is life after death; e.g., the self is immortal and removed the fear of death.
- Sometimes ADC helped to complete unfinished business giving great relief.
- ADC changed the way of looking at life through reduced anger, guilt and/or anxiety against the deceased.
- The belief of survival gave a good feeling that the deceased loved him/ her and had not forgotten even when passed away.
- ADC provided information hitherto unknown.
- Helped survivor to make his /her own exit from the world easier and less painful.”

Furthermore, the most important purpose of belief in life after death is the therapeutic application of the belief to cure patients undergoing the trauma of bereavement-

Thus we have seen above that just a belief that life exists after death serves many purposes to alleviate our sufferings. When it is scientifically established that life exists after death, these impacts will get even stronger. There will, in fact, be no bereavement because death will get

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considered as an extended phase of life and no one will become sad if a near dear one meets death. In fact, there may be ways and means available to keep communications with discarnate near and dear ones. So, the trauma of separation on death will get vanished and there will be no phase of bereavement.

The scientific knowledge that life continues after death will give comfort and assurance that our relationships do not end but continue even after death. The sufferings of people from traumatic illnesses arising out of bereavement will no longer be there as even the bereavement will not be felt by people.

The awareness that we shall continue to live after death will impact society at large as people will be strongly motivated to control our actions and behavior and will be guided to do more and more noble deeds to reserve a better place in life after death.

Impact on religion and society-Since there will be no surmising about what happens when our bodies stop functioning, we shall not be inclined to do prayers for a better unknown destination (heaven) at death and our belief system will undergo a change. With scientific knowledge about the afterlife, the people will continue to go to temples, churches, and mosques but for a changed prayer wishes (not seeking a better destination of heaven after death). The people who currently pray for going to heaven at death will, now, pray for continued happiness and prosperity in afterlife. The act of praying and the religion will continue to be relevant (Unlike scenario 1) because even though we know about the continuation of life but we do not know about the quality of life that we shall have in the extended phase of life. The religions and belief in God will continue but with changed orientation. The generations will be more confident than the current generation with the enlightened fact about what happens after we die.

So, these are the events pertaining to scenario2 when there will be a continuation of life after death.

Impacts on us which will be common to both the scenarios

The impacts on the lives of people and our societies common to both the scenarios will be a loss of fear of death. Our societies will agree and will propagate the idea that there is nothing to be afraid as there is awareness about what happens after we die. The elimination of the fear will make people more confident in their outlook and will be able to face death without any fear and there will be no bereavement trauma when death occurs.

There will be no rituals to be performed after death as we do now for the benefit of the departed soul. The religions and culture will certainly get affected in both scenarios but the intensity of impact will be different. The same holds true on faith in God.

We shall now summarize our discussions and shall conclude.

CONCLUSION

We had chosen an intriguing topic to discuss the impact of knowing scientifically about what happens after we die. There could be two aspects—Either there is no life after death (Scenario 1) or there is life after death (Scenario 2). We discussed both scenarios.

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The impact on our lives, society, culture, and religions will be very profound if science establishes that death is the end and there is no continuation of life after death. The religions will become redundant and would become irrelevant as the main belief in religions is the continuation of life after death and they preach to hold prayers and believe in God in pursuit of a divine life after death. The concept of God will also get jolted and human life would start wandering aimlessly in pursuit of pleasures and avoiding pain. The anchor provided by God and the religions will get demolished to make lives flow aimlessly. The anchor may get evolved gradually in form of our inner self-conscience which will guide our actions. There will be no temples/ mosques and churches as these will become irrelevant. The worst impact will be the loss of empathy in the people.

However, people will face death bravely; this will happen in both the scenarios because there is no ignorance about what happens when we die. The awareness will remove the fear of the unknown last journey. In scenario 2, there will be a minor impact on religions and cultures that rituals after death will vanish because death will be considered as an extended stage of life which moves from infancy to adolescence to youth to old age and then to the next life. God and the religions will remain relevant but with a different orientation.

The fear of death and resulting bereavement trauma will get eliminated in both the scenarios. We shall not bother about death nor will await it and it will come and we shall meet it in a casual manner. So, this is what if we knew what happens after we die!! But will this happen, will there be a day in our current life that science will advance to a stage to unfold this mystery—this remains to be seen and I for one would cherish the day if it happens in my lifetime.

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