



# An Analysis of Religious Afterlife in Different Essays

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## Abstract

Religion, at least religious inquiry, is something that nearly all humans share in common. It is the human response to the sacred, the holy, the spiritual, or the divine. People have wondered about the meaning of life, how to make the best of it, and what happens after death. There are a number of religions in the world, this essay mainly describes three famous religions of the world Christian, Islam and Buddhism. This essay analyses different masterpieces that describe religions, and the afterlife of various religions are similar. Different types of followers believe that man should work hard and be good so that man can get a better afterlife.

## Subject Areas

Social Sciences and Humanities

## Keywords

Religion, Afterlife, the Vision of Mirza, Elbert Einstein

## 1. Introduction

Religion, at least religious inquiry, is something that nearly all humans share in common. It is the human response to the sacred, the holy, the spiritual, or the divine. In all corners of the world and in all eras of history, people have wondered about the meaning of life, how to make the best of it, what happens after death. There are a number of religions in the world, while, three famous religions of the world are Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Though they are different religions, the rules about afterlife are similar. Different types of followers believe that man should work hard and to be good so that man can get a better afterlife.

## 2. Afterlife in Buddhism

The concept of the afterlife has been a subject of fascination and speculation for

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many cultures and religions throughout history, and Buddhism is no exception.

### **2.1. Afterlife in Buddhism**

Buddhism began in India around 2500 years ago and remains the dominant world religion in Asia. There are over 360 million followers of Buddhism worldwide and over a million American Buddhists. Buddhist concepts have also been influential on Western culture in general, particularly in the areas of meditation and nonviolence. Buddhism is based on the teachings of a Nepali prince named Siddhartha Gautama who lived around 500 BCE. According to Buddhist tradition, the sheltered young prince was shocked by the suffering he saw outside his palace walls, so he left his life of luxury to seek answers. Eventually, he succeeded, becoming the Buddha—the “Enlightened One.” He spent the remaining 45 years of his life teaching the dharma which can be seen as the path to liberation from suffering and establishing the sangha, which is a community of monks. About afterlife, in Buddhist belief, the cycle of death and rebirth, known as samsara, is driven by the law of karma. According to this law, the actions and intentions of an individual, which is known as karma have consequences that affect their present and future lives. The quality of a person’s present and future lives is determined by the sum total of their past actions. If an individual accumulates positive karma through virtuous actions and thoughts, they will be reborn into a higher realm and may eventually attain enlightenment. On the other hand, if an individual accumulates negative karma through non-virtuous actions and thoughts, they will be reborn into a lower realm and will suffer in their future lives.

### **2.2. Buddhist Afterlife in *the Path of Beauty***

In Li Zehou’s book *The Path of Beauty*, he analyzed the reason why people turned to religion, which in ancient China was Buddhism. In Chapter Six, the author first came up with a statement that religious belief is just a kind of excuse to escape from the real world. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, which were full of unceasing wars, Buddhism spread a lot and won the favor of the ruling class. Later, it was taken as the state religion. The author analyzed different religious circumstances in different periods and in the Wei Dynasty, he represented why people need religion. According to Mogao Grottoes paintings of the Wei Dynasty, there were a number of horrible religious stories. One of them is Shibi jataka, which tells the previous incarnation of Sakyamuni, in which he was King Shibi, who offered his flesh to save a pigeon from a preying falcon. Shibi was the king of a great kingdom in ancient India. [1] The kingdom had fertile lands, well-established households, and adequately fed and clothed people. King Shibi was the ruler of eighty-four thousand smaller countries. He had twenty thousand concubines and maids, five hundred princes, and more than ten thousand ministers. King Shibi was a compassionate, benevolent, and rich king. One day, Indra, the ruler of the Trayastrimsa heaven was doubtful and to

test whether Shibi was a Bodhisattva, Indra decided to try him. Indra wanted to test Shibi by having the pigeon seek help from Shibi.

The mural painting completely depicts the five episodes of the story: the falcon chasing the bird, the bird seeking refuge in King Shibi's arms, the guard cutting off King Shibi's flesh, King Shibi sitting on a scale, and King Shibi recovering into his original body. The painters focused on the flesh-cutting scene to make the story easily recognizable and to emphasize the Buddhist theme of self-sacrifice. But if King Shibi needs to sacrifice himself, not to say ordinary people. For Buddhism had been seen as state religion, it was used as a tool by rulers to make people know it was necessary to experience sorrow, to sacrifice themselves, to accept the bitterness of war. Only in this way could they get a better life in the afterlife, which is similar to Christianity and Islam, for people should behave well in this life and they can get a better afterlife. The authority took religion as a pretext to cover their inability, to numb people. The reason why people chose to believe religion is an unfair experience could not be explained through Daoism or Confucianism, so they could only use Buddhist theory to comfort their miserable lives.

### 3. Afterlife in Islam

In Islamic tradition, death is the separation of the soul from one's body and the beginning of one afterlife. There are various elaborate discussions about the process and the schools of thought have different conclusions about it.

#### 3.1. Afterlife in Islam

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity, with about 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide. As one of the three Abrahamic religions, the others being Judaism and Christianity and it too is a monotheistic faith that worships one god, called Allah. The word Islam means "submission" or "surrender," as its faithful surrender to the will of Allah. Although its roots go back further in time, scholars typically date the creation of Islam to the 7th century, making it the youngest of the major world religions. Islam started in Mecca, in modern-day Saudi Arabia, during the time of the prophet Muhammad. Today, the faith is spreading rapidly throughout the world. Widely practiced in the Middle East and North Africa, it also has many adherents in South Asia. In fact, has the largest number of followers of the Islamic faith. About the afterlife, Akhirah is the term for life after death in Islam. It is believed that Allah decides when an individual dies, and the deceased remains in the grave until the Day of Judgement or Yawm al-din, which is the last day when Allah judges them according to the way they lived (Humphreys, 1911) [2]. That day, the person is lifted from the grave and is brought before Allah to be judged for their deeds. This belief is called the resurrection of the body.

#### 3.2. Islamic Afterlife in the Vision of Mirza

The Vision of Mirza is an allegory written by Joseph Addison. [3] Joseph Addi-

son was an English essayist, poet, and dramatist. He as well as Richard Steele, was a leading contributor to and guiding spirit of the periodicals. The Tatler and The Spectator. His writing skill led to his holding important posts in government while the Whigs were in power. The Vision of Mirza is one of his masterpieces. The word Mirza holds a rich and captivating history and spans different cultures and geographical religions. In Persian, “Mir” means prince or noble, evoking images of regal splendor and aristocratic lineage. The suffix “za” adds a touch of elegance and signifies an association or lineage. Thus, when combined, Mirza can be translated as “descendant of a prince” or “princely lineage”. The significance of the name of Mirza goes beyond its literal translation. It is a title that carries immense cultural weight and symbolizes a sense of prestige, honor, and social standing.

Throughout history, Mirzas held positions of power and influence. They were often entrusted with important roles in governance, diplomacy, and cultural affairs. Their noble lineage and prestigious title commanded respect and admiration from those around them. The royal identity of this essay has one similarity with Tragedy, both of the hero comes from the royal family. At the end of the essay, the author mentions “the long valley of Baghdad”, and Baghdad is the capital of Iraq, from which we can know this essay talks about a non-Western story, though the author is English. The essay talks about several oriental manuscripts. A man washed himself after offering devotions and ascended the high hills of Baghdad in order to do meditation and prayer. At this time, he noticed a shepherd with a musical instrument. The music was extremely sweet. The shepherd talked to Mirza to come with him and they came to the highest pinnacle of the rock. From here, the vision began. There is a valley, which is “the Vale of Miser” and the tide of water is the tide of eternity, which is called time measured by the sun’s rotation. There is a bridge standing in the midst of the tide, which is human life. The bridge consists of a thousand arches and multitudes of people passing over it. And the valley opening at the farther end and the huge rock of adamant running through the midst of it, and dividing the valley into two equal parts. The place is gorgeous, there are innumerable islands covered with fruits and flowers, singing birds, falling waters, and musical instruments, but the only way to the place is death. People who work hard can get into this delightful place after their death. And there are also different mansions according to their behaviors, not all the man can enjoy this beautiful place.

In this essay, the author (1711) didn’t mention Islam, but used a vision of a prince to explain the religious afterlife. First, he affirmed the existence of the afterlife and showed the different places where dead men would go to confirm that man was not made in vain, they would get the reward after their death if they behaved well when they were alive. The essay is located in the Mid-Eastern country and the religion probably is Islam. We know that it’s the same with Buddhism and Christianity, which both affirm the afterlife. In another view, an English writer wrote about Islam from the Western perspective, and probably he

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just wrote Christianity in other words. It also can be seen as the similarity among different religions of the world.

## 4. Afterlife in Christianity

Christian beliefs about the afterlife vary between denominations and individual Christians, but the vast majority of Christians believe in some kind of heaven, in which the deceased enjoy the presence of God and loved ones for eternity. Views differ as to what is required to get to heaven, and conceptions of heaven differ as well.

### 4.1. Afterlife in Christianity

Christianity is a major religion stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth in the 1st century CE. It has become the largest of the world's religions and, geographically, the most widely diffused of all faiths. It has a constituency of more than two billion believers. Its largest groups are the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and the Protestant churches. The Oriental Orthodox churches constitute one of the oldest branches of the tradition but had been out of contact with Western Christianity and Eastern Orthodoxy from the middle of the 5th century until the late 20th century because of a dispute over Christology. Significant movements within the broader Christian world and sometimes transcending denominational boundaries are Pentecostalism, Charismatic Christianity, Evangelicalism, and fundamentalism. In addition, there are numerous independent churches throughout the world. About the afterlife, many Christians, believe they will leave their life on Earth and enter paradise. The Bible (1816) [4] says that God dwells in Heaven on his throne. God is surrounded by angels there. The book of Revelation also reveals a description of Heaven as a place where the streets are paved with gold, the gates are made of pearl, and the walls are made of precious jewels. Only by working hard when they are alive can they have access to heaven after their death, according to the Bible (1979) [5].

### 4.2. Albert Einstein's Idea in Christian Afterlife

Albert Einstein was a German mathematician and physicist who developed the special and general theories of relativity. In 1921, he won the Nobel Prize in Physics for his explanation of the photoelectric effect. In the following decade, he immigrated to the United States after being targeted by the German Nazi Party. His work also had a major impact on the development of atomic energy. In his later years, Einstein focused on unified field theory. He died in April 1955 at age 76. With his passion for inquiry, Einstein is generally considered the most influential physicist of the 20th century. Albert Einstein is best known for his equation  $E = mc^2$  which states that energy and mass are the same thing, just in different forms. He is also known for his discovery of the photoelectric effect, for which he won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1921. Einstein developed a theory

of special and general relativity, which helped to complicate and expand upon theories that had been put forth by Isaac Newton over 200 years prior. Though he was a mathematician and physicist, he still wrote a numbers of essays about religion, such as Religion and Science. In the essay, he came up with a statement, cosmic religion. In his mind, religion has got three layers, taking Christianity as an example (Jammer, 2002) [6]. First, religion is just a sense of fear. Feeling and longing are the motive force behind all human endeavor and human creation. With primitive man, it is above all fear that evokes religious notions, such as fear of hunger, wild beasts, sickness, death and the afterlife. They haven't got any access to escape from the fear, but turn to God, ask for God's pity. If they have a miserable life, the only thing they can do is to except better afterlife, for they've behaved well. They attribute all sorrows to afterlife, to the religion, which is God. Second, religion can be related to moral conceptions. For the first layer is just about fear, which is low level of social life. In the higher levels, people have a sense of morality. Civilized people may not focus on the feeling of fear, which is much more important to primitive people, in a better society, people view religion from moral perspective, such as no stealing, no lying and so on. The third layer, which is Albert Einstein's thought, individuals of exceptional endowments matter a lot in religion. In this sense, religion should work for the endowments of people. Religion and Science should not be opposite, they can get into each other, for the education of religion, should add more scientific factors. Those are the three layers of religion in Elbert Einstein's mind. In the first layer, religion is just an option for people in their miserable time, the only way to explain their unfair statement. And working hard is also the only way to go to heaven after their death. The fear of the afterlife makes Christian to behave well. It's the same with Buddhism's and Islam's rule about fear and the afterlife.

## 5. Conclusion

When we talk about Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, though they are different religions, the rules about the afterlife are similar. Different types of followers believe that man should work hard and be good so that man can get a better afterlife. That's the same character of religions, which is to support people's beliefs and let them be a better man.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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