

# **An Inquiry into how some Muslims and Hindus in Indonesia Relate to Death**

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*Doctor, Doctor shall I die?  
Yes, my child, and so shall I.*

Rhyme by unknown author

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# INTRODUCTION

Myths and rituals have existed since ancient times, and are the forerunners of religious belief systems and practices. They have held the function of helping people make sense of the world they live in, and the experiences they face. Death is the ultimate universal human experience. 100% of people across all continents and across all time, have been or will be confronted with death. In the modern era science has entered the scene and offered alternative modes of understanding the world, to that which is offered by religions. However, when it comes to death, science runs short of explanations and practices. The conceptions and practices regarding death is associated with religion and faith to a great extent. Not only do religions offer explanations to make sense of death, it also provides people with rituals and traditions to guide them through human processes related to death. For this reason I wanted to investigate how some individuals with different religious belonging related to death.

I chose to do my research in a culture different to my own. For many years I have questioned what seems to be, in my eyes, a prevailing grim and negative view on death in my culture. It seems to me that death is something to be avoided at almost any cost. It is not only dying that should be avoided, but also thinking and talking about death seems to be avoided to a great extent. There seems to be an uneasiness and gloominess attached to death. I started raising the question; why are human beings trying to avoid the unavoidable, and what would happen if we approached death and dying with acceptance instead? And more generally, what alternative ways of dealing with death are out there?

On a student trip to South-East Asia I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity of witnessing a Balinese Hindu cremation. This event sparked a curiosity in me which led me to do research for this thesis in Indonesia. The cremation ceremony was distinctly different to the funeral ceremonies I was accustomed to from my own culture. There was of course the obvious difference of the dead bodies being burnt on an open fire, rather than laying inside a coffin which is lowered into a hole in the ground. But it was the atmosphere, the attires and the behavior of the people attending the ceremony which really caught my attention. In my experience of this particular ceremony, there was an absence of the overhanging gloom, which I have come to

associate with funeral ceremonies. This triggered my interest in exploring how people in Indonesia relate to death.

This thesis is an inquiry into how some individuals from Indonesia, who identify as either Muslim or Hindu, relate to death. The aim of the research is to gain some new insight on this topic of interest. Within the scope of this study, it is not possible to present sufficient statistical evidence to make generalizations about the belief system of a collective group. This research is limited to shedding light on beliefs held by a small group of individuals, with either Muslim or Hindu background from Indonesia.

I used a qualitative research method in order to get a more in depth understanding of the complexity of thoughts and feelings people held in relation to death. I wished to openly explore what would emerge when respondents were asked to reflect on death. My wish to explore people's reflections about death with an open mind, led me to the Grounded Theory Method. This method opens up for the discovery of new frames of reference to the topic of investigation.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory has been applied in analysis of some findings. Applying Maslow's theory to this study, was decided after the data collection was finished, and did not inform the interviewing process. The theory is used in analysis of Muslim respondents' reflections on the afterlife, and it is also used in the final analysis of this thesis.

Abraham Maslow was a American psychologist who was active in the middle of the 20th century (Poston, 2009, p.348). He created the hierarchy of needs theory, which analyses human behavior in light of humans needs. According to the theory, human behavior is motivated by human needs. These needs are organized into five categories, arranged in a hierarchical order. These categories are; physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and need for self-actualization. *Physiological needs* being at the bottom level of the hierarchy, and the need for *self-actualization* being at the top level (McLeod, 2020). The needs hierarchy is often illustrated by a pyramid shaped model of the different levels of human needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory suggests that the human needs in the lower levels of the pyramid, have to be satisfied before humans attend to needs in the pyramid's

higher levels (Poston, 2009, p.348). The organization and importance of the different levels of needs, is however a complex discourse which I will not embark upon in this thesis.

This thesis will start by presenting the method used for this research. I will move on to give a brief overview of the religious landscape of Indonesia, where the research took place. Then there will be an introduction to some central dogmas on death found in Hinduism. These are meant to equip the reader with some reference, which may prove useful in order to comprehend the presentation of the findings. The findings from the interviews with Hindu respondents will be presented first. This material is organized according to different topics. These topics touch upon feelings, rituals, the afterlife, transcendental communication, and other issues that surfaced during the interviews. Information from literary sources is used to supplement some of the topics, where a comparison to preexisting research, other authorities or sources prove useful. On each of the different topics there will be some reflections and analyses of the data, as well as examples from the raw data in the form of quotes from interviews.

After the presentation of the Hindu material, there is an introduction to central dogmas on death found in Islam. This is followed by a presentation of the material gathered from talking with Muslim respondents. This material is organized in the same way as the Hindu material. Some of the topics are equal in the Hindu and the Muslim material. And other topics naturally vary as there were different issues which emerged between the two groups. Towards the end I reflect on findings by comparing material from Hindu respondents with material from Muslim respondents. Finally I discuss my application of Grounded Theory to this thesis, as this study was inspired by Grounded Theory, without being restricted to this method alone.

## **METHOD**

### **THE EMPIRICAL DATA**

This inquiry is based on 20 interviews of Indonesians, with either Hindu or Muslim identity. For the sake of this thesis I used an ad hoc definition of religious identity. Religious identity is here defined as self-proclaimed religious belonging. It is not

defined by membership to any religious organization. Interviews were conducted during spring of 2016, in a four weeks period, in Indonesia.

### **MOST-SIMILAR SYSTEM DESIGN**

This thesis is a case study of individuals with different religious identities, but being members of the same nation and political governing rule. The *most-similar system* design is used in this study as the focus is to investigate one particular variable; religious belief and how it relates to death. (Porta & Keating, 2012, p.214) In using the most-similar system design, variables which are not the focus of this study are minimized. This allows greater accuracy in studying how religious beliefs influence people in how they related to death. The design of this thesis will not provide adequate data for making generalizations, and this thesis is therefore limited to shedding light on beliefs held by some religious individuals in Indonesia.

In selecting to study two religious groups from the same country, I had to consider whether belonging to a religious majority vs. a minority would have a significant impact on the data. In this paper I am interviewing Muslims, who belong to a religious majority, and Hindus, who belong to a religious minority. The Hindu respondents I have interviewed lived on Bali, where Hinduism is the dominant religion. Bali is separated by sea from mainland Indonesia, where Islam is the dominant religion. So despite belonging to a religious minority, the Hindu respondents live in a secluded area where their own religious belief is mirrored back to them by their surroundings. For both Hindus and Muslims their environment would be one that mostly mirrors their own religious belonging. Therefore I expect the difference in belonging to the majority religion vs. the minority religion would not be significant in affecting the data collected for this thesis.

### **LANGUAGE CHALLENGES**

Language presented a challenge. Ten out of the twenty interviews were done by means of an interpreter, five of these being interviews with Muslim respondents, and five being interviews with Hindu respondents. Ten interviews were done with respondents who could communicate in English. Doing interviews in English was easier in practical terms, as I was not reliant on a third party to translate. It also had



the benefit of getting first hand answers from the respondents, minimizing the potential of meaning being lost in translation. On the other hand, using an interpreter had its advantages as I could expand the group of respondents to also include non-English speakers. As English is not the respondents first language, I have taken the liberty to correct some grammatical errors and ever so slightly adjust the language of the quotes in the writing process. Improving the language makes the material easier to read. I have taken care to refrain from any great alterations, so that the phrasing and content stay true to the original statements. Indonesian words and local terms were sometimes used by respondents during the interviews. From thorough conversations with respondents, and with the help of online dictionaries and online sources I have learnt the meaning of these words and terms. In this thesis I have shared some local terms with the reader, as translations of local concepts can be faulty. Whenever these are used I have added a translation or explanation in English.

## **DATA SAMPLING**

Data for this paper was gathered through *opportunistic sampling*. Opportunistic sampling is a sampling technique which selects participants who are readily available and willing to participate in research (Tracy, 2013, p.134-135). Participants are chosen based on easy access, and them meeting the criteria of belonging to the target group. Opportunistic sampling is efficient and therefore fitting for a research like this one, which had to adhere to time restrictions. It is also an inexpensive way to collect data, which is convenient for this research, not supported by funding (Tracy, 2013, p.134-135). As the goal was to collect information on an individual level, the sample group was not representative for any larger group. I approached people in the streets, or contacted people at their work place. It was easy to find people who spoke English in tourist related work arenas. Availability and practical considerations therefore led me to do interviews in English with people working in hotel receptions, restaurants, shops and spas. Accessibility to locals outside the tourist industry opened by using the interpreter. For example, using an interpreter gave access to an interview with a local imam, and also helped secure interviews with an older demographic where English speakers are more scarce. The age range of the respondents is age 19 to 62. Within both religious groups there is a spread of ages, so that a variety of ages are represented. Children were excluded as I did not expect children would have lived

long enough to have personal experiences and thoughts regarding death, and on top of that be able to articulate them to me. Also it would have presented further difficulties in getting consent from their parents. As well as representing a variety of ages, both religious groups represented both genders. I wished to pick up on diversity and variations intraculturally as much as possible.

## **INTERVIEW STRUCTURE**

Face-to-face interviews were conducted for this research, using a semi-structured interview guide. Semi-structured interviews allow the respondents to share personal life experiences, and for me as a researcher to follow up on such stories (Wengraf, 2006, p.5). The goal was to explore individual thought processes, feelings and actions in relation to death. In this way the semi-structured interview guide opened up to exploring and going into depth on individual experiences relating to the topic. By not following a strict structure, the respondents were given space to focus on the matters most important to them in relation to the topic. According to Sarah J. Tracy, American professor in Human Communication, this allows for the respondents viewpoint to be heard to a greater degree, and encourages greater emotional levels of response (Tracy, 2013, p.139).

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations have been applied in this research in a number of ways. I have used Tove Thagaard's three ethical guidelines for treatment of personal data. These are; informed consent, confidentiality and consideration of consequences of participation (Thagaard, 2013, p.25-26). Informed consents were granted from all respondents. Respondents were informed on the topic of the interview before agreeing to participate. They were also told that the interviews were conducted for a Norwegian university thesis. Getting informed consent abides by the principle of people's autonomy to be in control of what they wish to share with others (Thagaard, 2013, p.26). The interviews were anonymous, something the respondents were also informed of in advance. Codes were used instead of real names in the notes taken during the research phase.

Audio recordings were taken during the interviews, for the sole purpose of transcribing answers and quotes. Respondents were informed about the use of audio recording, and consented to it being used. Some notes were also written on paper during the interviews. Codes were used instead of real names on both the audio recordings and on the notes taken during the research phase. I made sure not to store any identifying information about the respondents, other than their voices on the recordings. These recordings were deleted after transcriptions were written down. The interviews took place in the spring of 2016, before regulations from the NSD (Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata) required an application for approval, for the use of audio recordings during interviews.

Interviews were conducted at different locations. Often the location was a familiar space for the respondents, such as their workplace, local cafes, or public spaces near by where they lived or worked. During the interviews we would retreat to a spot some distance away from other people, but a couple of times interviews were interrupted by curious onlookers in the vicinity. Interruptions were challenging as small pauses had to be made for interviews to remain anonymous. Interruptions also diverted the attention of respondents, and it took some effort to bring the focus back to the interview questions. In two interviews we had to take breaks in the interviews due to disruptions, but both interviews were resumed a couple of minutes later.

Three interviews were group interviews, with two or three people in each group. In these interviews the answers from respondents could be heard by the rest of the group. In the group interviews the tendency was that one person answered the questions on behalf of the whole group, or they would discuss amongst themselves in Indonesian and reach an answer as a group, before sharing it with me. Group interviews were conducted in cases where I asked a group of friends or colleagues to participate in this research. Respondents in these interviews knew each other, and were not introduced by me. It is possible that the presence of friends and colleagues had an impact on answers given during group interviews.

The real names of respondents were never registered anywhere at any point during the research. In the written text pseudonyms are used, replacing the codes. Age has in some instances been altered with up to five years from the respondent's actual age.

This was done to present readers with information on the age group the respondent belongs to, but without revealing the exact age of the individual. Gender and religious belonging was never altered. As the sample group is relatively large, the gender will not reveal significant information to uncover the identity of the respondent. Religious belonging is crucial information in this study, and is therefore revealed. The sample group from both religious belongings are large groups, and this information will not damage the anonymity of the respondents. Additionally I refrain from sharing specific information that can be revealing about the identity of the respondents.

Opinions and beliefs can not be traced back to the respondents as they are anonymous. According to Tove Thagaard, Norwegian professor emeritus in sociology, this has two benefits. Firstly it allows respondents to answer more freely and honestly without the cost of compromising their privacy. Secondly the publishing of answers and quotes will not cause negative consequences for the respondents who participated, if negative reactions were to occur amongst readers of the research (Thagaard, 2013, p.28).

During the interviews I tried to be sensitively aware regarding how my questions were received by respondents. Participation in research should not be harmful in any way, whether it be physical, emotional or psychological (Thagaard, 2013, p.30). Death was a sensitive subject for some of the respondents. The questions did at times bring up difficult memories or discomfort. I did, to the best of my ability, post questions in a non-threatening, non-aggressive manner. Whenever I could detect discomfort or unease from the respondent, I made sure to remind them that they were not obliged to answer any question they felt uncomfortable with. Additionally, I would ask them if they were comfortable with me continuing to ask questions regarding sensitive memories. After especially emotional interviews, I would always take time to ask them if they had any comments to my questions or wanted to air some thoughts regarding the interview. I did this with the intention of getting feedback if I somehow, unknowingly and unintentionally, upset people with my questions. Either by the content of the questions or by the way in which they were asked. This allowed me to gain new insight and raised awareness for interviews to follow. This also gave respondents a chance to add information or context to their answers.

## **GROUNDING THEORY**

This thesis is inspired by Grounding Theory Method. Grounding theory research aims at theory building. As opposed to research that seeks to verify or apply theory (Engler, 2011, p.256).

Grounding theory is used in qualitative research, emerging from the field of social science. It makes inquiries into phenomena and tries to explain social behavior (Haig, 1995, p.1). It is useful in cases where pre-existing literature is scarce or lacking. It can also be useful when the aim is to create new conceptual frameworks for already researched phenomena (Engler, 2011, p.256).

The method begins with focusing on the phenomena of investigation. Any emerging data that is perceived as relevant to the phenomena is included in the data collection process (Pandit, 1996, p.2). Data can consist of several sources, including interviews, field observations and documents (Haig, 1995, p.1) (Engler, 2011, p.257).

Analysis of data is done using codes, concepts and categories. Each term being more general and abstract. Coding data is the initial labeling of elements found in data. These codes, labeled elements, are then used to generate concepts and categories. Concepts are organized units of codes with shared characteristics. Categories are organized units of concepts with shared characteristics (Engler, 2011, p.257). The general idea is to start off with describing the raw data in great detail. Then organize these descriptions into groups, in order to map out the landscape of the data. It is a working process which moves from being in the actual terrain, which is very concrete and detail oriented, towards a more abstract map where an overview is more readily available, but where only information that is considered significant by the investigator is presented.

Since the 1960's, when sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss introduced grounding theory to the social sciences, the theory has developed in a number of different ways (Haig, 1995, p.1). From my review of literature I find that developments have stayed consistent with its original methodology, but variations in the use of terminology and different emphasis within the process can be found in the works of different researchers. Above, when introducing the terms codes, concepts

and categories, I used terminology from an article on Grounded Theory by Steven Engler, professor of Religious Studies and Methodology in Canada, when describing the process of analyzing data. The process is described in a similar way by Naresh R. Pandit, professor of International Business in Britain. Pandit works with the terms; concepts, categories and propositions when describing the elements of grounded theory analyses (Pandit, 1996, p.1-2). Propositions are suggested conceptual relationships. Originally the term hypothesis was used by Glaser and Strauss. However Pandit argues that the term proposition is more fitting for grounded theory as hypotheses require measured relationships (Pandit, 1996, p.2). Engler uses neither 'hypothesis' nor 'proposition' in his article on grounded theory. He uses the term 'emerging theory' (Engler, 2011, p.260). 'Emerging theory' is a useful term when one looks at the cyclic process of grounded theory, Engler argues. Data analysis and data collection is an ongoing process where the different stages overlap, rather than one step following the other. Analytical work from the first set of coding inform ongoing data collection, and new data inform further analysis. In this cyclic work process, theories can start to emerge. The emerging theories are under constant scrutiny/testing from further data collection and analysis. This process will end when the work reaches theoretical saturation; the point at which further data collection and analysis stop yielding new or different concepts and categories (Engler, 2011, p.260). Advocates of the theory have used theoretical saturation as a measuring tool to validate the success of grounded theory work (Engler, 2011, p.263).

One cornerstone in grounded theory is that interpretation of data is provisional. Research and theories should always be tested against new data and new contexts. A theory is seen as successful as long as it remains consistent and coherent in light of new research (Engler, 2011, p.266-267). This view on research makes the endpoint of the use of grounded theory unclear. A narrow view on the use of grounded theory, is that full use of it requires the production of a final theory. A more open view on grounded theory uses the general technique of theory building from data, without it resulting in a fixed end point of a final theory (Engler, 2011, p.264).

## METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

When I was seeking out respondents for this research, I stumbled upon something interesting that I consider relevant to make note of in this study. When approaching people I informed them that I was a university student from Norway, searching for Muslims and Hindus to interview on the topic of death. In asking people if they could take part in my research I was often turned down, especially by Muslims. The reason they gave me, for not wanting to participate, was that they felt they were not well informed on their own religion's beliefs and dogmas. I made it clear to them that I was not interested in the teachings of their holy scriptures or what any religious authority had to say regarding death. I only wished to know about personal thoughts and feelings. I told them that they held no accountability to represent any one else, or answer for the whole of the religious community they were a part of. Even then many turned down my request by labeling themselves as not being a "good enough" or "religious enough" Muslim or Hindu.

When it came down to the people I actually did interview I was expecting to get answers from a personal perspective. I set out to research peoples' own personal beliefs and feelings. And I wanted to hear their reflections as to why they believe and feel the way they do. However, I often got answers in the form of a collective sense of self or in the form of dogmatic teachings recited to me. I got the sense that respondents did not understand my questions, which sought to obtain information about personal reflections and beliefs. Coming from an academic background, I automatically make a distinction between religious teachings and personal beliefs. These are treated as two separate entities by me. Answers that started with " We as Hindus believe that..." or "The hadiths say that..." did not adhere to my expectations, as these were responses to questions aimed to elicit personal beliefs. Many respondents would recite what religious authorities said, or what they had learnt from their community. Personal reflections were not at the forefront in the majority of the interviews conducted. This was an interesting finding in itself. Respondents seemed to answer the questions from a different perspective than I had anticipated. This was one hurdle I came across during the research process.

Communication is off course a two-way street. It was not only the respondents who conveyed information about themselves to me. They were also at the receiving end of

information about me. Just from looking at me they could deduce that I am female, in my twenties and most likely not a local; this was revealed by a combination of my fair complexion, blond hair, blue eyes and my clothes. They also learned that I was a student from Norway, who spoke English, in their first immediate meeting with me. And that I was doing research on how Muslims and Hindus relate to death. Their meeting with me as the researcher is important to take into account when considering the respondents' choice in information shared, or even information withheld. Firstly it is worth taking a mental note of the fact that they were talking about their culture to an outsider, a person who was not a part of the in-group of the culture being discussed. Some respondent may have been cautious about how their culture is perceived by people who are not themselves apart of it. In short, respondents' perception of and speculations about me as a researcher might have influenced the answers I received. Also, in hindsight I have questioned whether my approach to getting hold of respondents might have played a greater part in forming this research than I anticipated at the start. I question whether informing respondents that I was interviewing Muslims and Hindus, in the opening conversations, set the tone of the interview. Perhaps revealing this information, unintentionally led respondent to feel as though they were representing their religious group. And in turn they gave answers in accordance to the group they felt they represented. Had I instead conducted the interviews without asking up front about religious identity, the interview may or may not have taken slightly different directions.

## **THE RELIGIOUS SCENE IN INDONESIA**

There is no official state religion in Indonesia (Vogt, 2018). The Indonesian constitution states that Indonesia has freedom of religion (World population review, 2020). However there are only six religions that are recognized as official religions by the state. These are: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Protestantism and Catholicism (Perkins, 2019). A little over 87% of the population is Muslim. Hindus only make up approximately 1.7% of the population. Almost 9.9% are Christian, around 0.7% are Buddhist and close to 0.6% belong to other religions (World population review, 2020).



The constitution of Indonesia was written in 1945, and by 1949 the country was fully independent (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020). Prior to the 1940s the country was not united as one nation. As a consequence, religions have developed regionally rather than nationally. Bali, among other regions, has its own distinct religious history (Perkins, 2019). Hinduism is the dominant religion on the island Bali, despite the religion's small percentage nationally (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020).

Religious identity is not a private matter in Indonesia. Identity cards, that are issued to all citizens of Indonesia, hold a space for religious belonging. Citizens are obliged to fill in one of the six recognized religions of Indonesia. This space can be left empty, but it is not allowed to identify as atheist or agnostic for instance (Perkins, 2019).

Hinduism came to Indonesia as early as the second or third century A.D. Indonesia was greatly influenced by Indian culture introduced by merchants. Around the fifth century A.D. Buddhism had also arrived at the scene alongside Hinduism. Both of these religions flourished as they were compatible with the indigenous belief systems of the locals (Perkins, 2019). Hinduism and Buddhism were dominant religions until the 14th century, when Islam surpassed them (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020).

Islam found its way to Indonesia through merchants and missionaries. By the 13th century Islam was firmly established in some of the regions (Vogt, 2018). When Islam was introduced to Indonesia it was merged together with elements of local religious traditions. Hinduism and Buddhism were some of the local religions that influenced the character of lived Islam as it developed in different regions of Indonesia (Vogt, 2018) (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020). Islam had a unifying effect for the country. And it played a key part in Indonesia's independence movement (Perkins, 2019).

# HINDU DOGMAS RELATED TO DEATH

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON HINDU DOGMAS

Hinduism as a religion does not fit into the same framework as the monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Obayashi, 1992, p.144-145). Structurally it consists of a compilation of cultural traditions and beliefs. Its origins stem from a population of people living along the Indu-river, from before 1000 years B.C.E. (Firth, 2005, p.682) (Obayashi, 1992, p.145). These sets of practices and traditions were not coined "Hinduism" from the beginning. The exact starting point of Hinduism is impossible to determine as it is not founded by one particular historic person or prophet. It started as an oral tradition being passed on from generation to generation. Written scriptures entered the scene at around 1200 B.C.E. They were the beginning of the Vedic literature. The Vedas are generally accepted as a scripture with authority by contemporary Hindus (Obayashi, 1992, p.145-146) (Walls, 2008, p.171-172). Perhaps not surprisingly, considering the formation of what we today call Hinduism, there are "many ways to Rome" in this religion. In other words, Hinduism teaches that there are several different paths to salvation. There is no single correct path that can guide all humans towards their ultimate goal (Obayashi, 1992, p.144-146)(Walls, 2008, p.171-172). Therefore it can be challenging to present an overview of central dogmas, as Hinduism is not foremost a dogma driven or book based religion (Firth, 2005, p.682). I will present some central principles found in Hindu philosophy, even though some of these dogmas may not apply to all Hindus. My literary sources are restricted to Norwegian and English publications, which may default to western interpretation of the religion. Therefore my references from this literature may result in a discrepancy from the actual lived religion in South-East Asia.

## PRINCIPLES REGARDING DEATH IN HINDUISM

The way in which one dies will impact the continual journey for the soul in the afterlife, according to Hindu dogmas (Parkes, Laungani, Young, 2015, p.45). Getting the death process right is therefore of utmost importance. Amongst Hindu cultures you can find pre-death rituals, time of death rituals and post-death rituals (Firth, 2005, p.683). How many of these and to what extent these rituals are performed will vary.

Factors such as the country's ability to facilitate rituals, personal beliefs and wishes, the element of surprise, and finances may all contribute to differences in rituals performed (Thrane, 2010, p.337-342).

## HINDU DOGMAS REGARDING THE AFTERLIFE

### ATMAN

A dualistic view of the human nature can be found in parts of the Vedic literature, called the *Upanishads* (Obayashi, 1992, p.149)(Walls, 2008, p.172). Here the distinction is made between the permanent and the ever-changing sides of the human. That which is permanent in humans, and survives death on earth, is called *atman* (Obayashi, 1992, p.149). Several words in English have been used in attempts at translating the term *atman* into western terminology. As it is a cultural and religious term that describes a philosophy rooted in Asia, it can be challenging to find an English word that can suffice in translating the meaning behind the word. Attempts I have come across have translated *atman* as; "self", "true personal self", "spirit" or "soul" (Eiseman, 1990, p.12) (Walls, 2008, p.172) (Firth, 2005, p.682). The *atman* is said to be pure consciousness, and it is identical to that which is constant in the world, called *Brahman* (Obayashi, 1992, p.149). *Brahman* is God with a capital "G" in Hinduism (McLoughlin, 2007, p.13). This God is without form, unlike the many manifestations and avatars of gods found in Hindu belief. *Brahman* is outside of time and space. Individual souls are *Brahman*, as *Brahman* is in everything and is everywhere (McLoughlin, 2007, p.13-14). *Brahman* is the constant moving force in the cosmos and is described as being the ultimate reality (Eiseman, 1990, p.12) (Firth, 2005, p.682). The *atman*, in essence *Brahman*, does not cease to exist when the body dies. It lives on and is reborn in a series of new bodies (Eiseman, 1990, p.12)(Walls, 2008, p.172).

### SAMSARA

The circular motion of death and rebirth is a process called *samsara* (Obayashi, 1992, p.150)(Chakraborty, 2014, p.192). This process will never cease to exist in the cosmos, so there is no focus on an eventual end time in the universal sense (Walls, 2008, p.171). An individual *atman* can however remove him or herself from this continual process. What keeps a human "trapped" in *samsara* is the attachment to worldly things (Obayashi, 1992, p.150). Attachment is caused by inappropriate

desires. Once the atman can free itself from all desire and attachment to worldly possessions and relationships, it is then freed from the cycle of rebirth (Eiseman JR., 1990, p.12). In practical terms there are many different paths that can help towards letting go of unwanted desire. The ultimate goal in getting rid of desire is attaining the full realization of one's true nature; the atman (Obayashi, 1992, p.150).

### **MOKSHA**

When the atman manages to rid itself of all desire, by reaching the state of enlightenment, and escaping the cycle of rebirths, the atman reaches *Moksha* (Eiseman JR., 1990, p.12). Attaining Moksha is the ultimate goal for Hindus (McLoughlin, 2007, p.14) (Thrane, 2010, p.339). Moving towards Moksha is done by working on your state of mind, which involve the practice of *yoga*. When the state of mind is no longer attached to pains and pleasures of life, then one has attained Moksha (McLoughlin, 2007, p.14). The atman is then reunited with the universal mover Brahman. Brahman encompasses both life bearing and destructive forces, both order and disorder within it's very nature of being. Brahman is the mover of everything there is, and can not be moved itself (Eiseman JR., 1990, p.12). Most people have to live through many rebirths before they reach Moksha. Rebirths allow people to work on their *karma* (McLoughlin, 2007, p.14).

### **KARMA**

The word *karma* originates from the Sanskrit word for *act* and *action* (Chakraborty, 2014, p.192). All actions done intentionally is karma. Karma is both mental thoughts and physical acts. In other words, karma covers everything a person does, everything a person thinks and also everything a person does not do (McLoughlin, 2007, p.14). All living beings on earth have karma. Decisions made and actions performed with intent will generate karma. It is therefore inevitable for earthly beings to have karma. It is also important notice that involuntary movement will not be registered as karma. Let's say for example that a person trips and falls on a mouse with fatal consequences for the mouse. And a different person stumped his or her foot purposefully on a mouse and kills it. These two events would have the same outcome for the life of the mouse. However, the first person who falls on the mouse will not have the killing of the mouse as his or her karma. But for the person who stumps on the mouse, the death

of the mouse will contribute to his or her karma. People being accountable for their own decisions and actions is integral to the concept of karma.

According to Poulami Chakraborty, Indian lecturer in philosophy, Karma has a causality aspect to it. It is both the cause and the effect of life on earth (Chakraborty, 2014, p.192). Karma works both at an individual level and at a cosmic level (Obayashi, 1992, p.149). At the cosmic level one action generates a reaction, which together with all actions takes part in the continual chain of cause and effect that amounts to the cosmic Karma. There is an individual accountability for one's own actions and thoughts (McLoughlin, 2007, p.14). Morals play a key role in this. Good moral deeds will generate positive results for the person performing them. Whilst morally wrong actions will return to you in the form of pain, suffering or disadvantages. Reward or punishment for actions can return to you in this lifetime or in a later lifetime (Chakraborty, 2014, p.192-193). The law of Karma is based on justice being paid for your actions (McLoughlin, 2007, p.14). As a result there is no such thing as predetermined fate or simple luck in the understanding of life events in Hinduism. Any discomfort or pain that comes one's way is a direct result of one's own doing. It may not be from the present lifetime, but nevertheless people only have themselves to blame for their suffering. It can seem daunting to accept the sole responsibility for every negative experience in life. On the other hand, every painful experience is an opportunity to improve one's personal Karma. Enduring pain can therefore be positive for a Hindu. It can help a person evolve and move forward on his/her spiritual path by canceling out past negative Karma (Thrane, 2010, p.339).

There are several types of Karma (Thrane, 2010, p.339). The Karma responsible for the rebirth into new physical bodies on earth is called *Sanchita Karma* (Chakraborty, 2014, p.193). This Karma is an accumulation of actions from all the previous lifetimes (Deutsch, 1965, p.3). Sanchita Karma represents the karmic debt that needs to be balanced out through new rebirths and fulfillments of dharma (Swain, 2014, p.10). Rebirths will only stop once Sanchita Karma has been cancelled out and reached zero. This Karma will determine the circumstances and challenges facing the soul during the next rebirths on earth (Chakraborty, 2014, p.193)(Deutsch, 1965, p.3).

Parts of the Sanchita Karma is called *Praarabdha Karma*. The Praarabdha Karma is the part of Sanchita Karma that directly influences the current lifetime (Srivastava & Misra, 2003). Both positive and negative experiences during a lifetime are direct results of Praarabdha Karma. Only parts of the Sanchita Karma will reveal itself at any given point during the many lifetimes. Praarabdha Karma is that revealed part of Karma (Swain, 2014, p.10). In other words, Praarabdha Karma is the karmic debt currently presented to you and readily available for down payment (Chakraborty, 2014, p.193). By working through Praarabdha Karma the Sanchita Karma will be reduced. And new opportunities for further down payment in karmic debt will arise. This can be balanced out by doing morally good deeds, or gaining new insight through suffering. Actions done in current lifetime can both reduce or add to the Sanchita Karma (Chakraborty, 2014, p.193).

The Karma created in current lifetime is called *Aagami Karma* (Sewell, 1907, p.104). This Karma will be added to Sanchita Karma and will affect the next lives. Aagami Karma is being created in the present life, but will contribute to set the conditions for future lives (Sewell, 1907, p.104). Whether a person ends a lifetime with a greater or reduced Sanchita Karma than what he/she entered it with, is decided by the sum total of Aagami Karma added to current Sanchita Karma, minus the down payment of Praarabdha Karma (Chakraborty, 2014, p.193). In other words; how much karmic debt, Praarabdha Karma, one manages to pay off in current lifetime, and how much Aagami Karma one ends up creating during a lifetime, makes up the total Sanchita Karma.

There is also a type of Karma that will bring about immediate consequences. This is called *Kriyamana Karma* (Chakraborty, 2014, p.193-194). Kriyamana Karma is created daily in actions and thoughts. Fruits of these actions and thoughts will have instant effect in life (Swain, 2014, p.10). This Karma can be corrected during a lifetime through appropriate attitude and rites. If however attitudes, thoughts and actions remain fixed, the Kriyamana Karma will also be added to Sanchita Karma and affect future lives (Chakraborty, 2014, p.193-194).

Apart from these different types of Karma which help to explain causality, there are two further categories of Karma to explore. These are separated by the true intent of

your action. Actions performed with the result as the main objective in mind is called *Sakama Karma* (Chakraborty, 2014, p.194)(Pal, 2001, p.217). When a person acts a certain way, in order to generate desirable results in life, then he/she is focused on desires. Attachment to desires, and actions performed with the mind frame of desire, is what creates and upholds samsara. The majority of people live life in the mind frame of Sakama Karma (Chakraborty, 2014, p.194). People work in order to get money, study in order to get a degree, work out to improve one's physical health or appearance. Actions are performed with the desired results in mind as motivation.

According to Chakraborty, *Niskama Karma* is when a person acts without expecting results (Chakraborty, 2014, p.194-195). These actions are said to be without desire (Pal, 2001, p.217). Actions are performed regardless of the results they bring. A person neither fears nor desires results from these actions. Niskama Karma also goes by the name Karma Yoga (Chakraborty, 2014, p.194). Selfless actions is at the core of Karma Yoga. People do actions because it is their duty, not because they are motivated by desire. They let go of desire, and the focus is on fulfilling one's duty. This will open the heart and the mind to the wisdom of God, according to teachings presented by Chakraborty. This wisdom will lead a person on the right path to oneness with God, according to teachings in the Bhagavad-Gita; a book containing important religious scriptures for Hindus (Chakraborty, 2014, p.194).

## **HOW HINDUS RELATE TO DEATH**

### **A HINDU PERSPECTIVE ON SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA**

Beliefs held about suicide in Hinduism is complex. Some Hindu authorities argue that only God can make decisions in matters of life and death (Firth, 2005, p.684). One belief held about suicide is that it creates large karmic debt, which will have a negative impact on many rebirths to follow (Thrane, 2010, p.340). Others say that under certain conditions it is acceptable to end your own life (Firth, 2005, p.684). It would be wrong for a young and physically fit person to commit suicide in an attempt to escape pain and anguish in life. However, if a person is very old, or ill to the point of no return to health, then it would not be a wrong act for them to take their own life or hurrying the process of death by religious fasting (Tharne, 2010, p.340). The same

logics have been applied to the discussion of euthanasia. One argument is that the Hindu principal of not taking lives also applies to questions regarding euthanasia. Pain and suffering should not be ended by humans, as it is part of a karmic cleanse (Thrane, 2010, p.339). And only God can take lives. Therefore euthanasia is seen as wrong regardless of the circumstances (Firth, 2005, p.683). Dying by either euthanasia or suicide is believed by some to cause many rebirths in a lower form of life. The karmic debt of the deceased is thought to be transferred to the person who assists in ending the life (Firth, 2005, p.684). For others the moral question of euthanasia is circumstantial. Taking a life in order to prevent the spread of a deadly disease could be one such case where euthanasia would be a morally good action (Firth, 2005, p.685). And when people are suffering from disease with no prospect of recovery it would be morally right to relieve them of a slow and painful death process. By taking charge of the moment of death and getting medical relief from suffering, people can ease into death in a peaceful manner (Firth, 2005, p.684). Their consciousness can be clear and in the right state of mind. Their face will be one of calmness and peace rather than agony and fear. This is important as the physical look and state of the deceased at the time of death will have significance for the journey in the afterlife (Firth, 2005, p.683). Motivation behind suicide and euthanasia determines whether it is a good or bad karmic action. In order for it to be good it ultimately needs to be selfless and used as a last resort when all other options, including medical treatment, has failed (Firth, 2005, p.685).

### **HINDU RESPONDENTS' VIEW ON SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA**

The majority of the Hindu respondents stated that euthanasia was wrong. A couple even described it as being a sinful act for both the doctor injecting the lethal medicine and for the person asking for it.

Euthanasia is a form of suicide. And committing suicide is a sin.  
(Ari, Hindu female, 30 years, Bali)

There were several respondents who voiced this opinion. And this response tended to come quickly without any ambiguity. They were adamant in their belief that suicide was a sin. And from this standpoint they then concluded that asking for assistance to



end one's life was equally bad. Another respondent raised concerns about the soul getting lost if a person died by means of euthanasia.

Assisted suicide is the same as killing. The soul gets lost, so it is not good.

(Ketut, Hindu female, 35 years, Bali)

It was also thought a sin for a doctor to perform euthanasia. The doctor was at fault for interfering with the works of God.

Euthanasia is totally wrong. Only God should decide in matters of life and death.

(Adi, Hindu male, 40 years, Bali)

Two of the respondents struggled with the moral question of euthanasia. For them it was circumstantial. According to them euthanasia could be morally good if a person was ill to the point of no return to health.

Suicide is not okay, but if it is God's will for a doctor to assist in ending the life of an ill person, then it is a good deed.

(Gede, Hindu male, 20 years, Bali)

Respondent Made sat thinking for a long time on this topic. He kept repeating that he found the topic difficult. After reflecting out loud with himself he came to this conclusion;

Euthanasia presents a difficult moral dilemma. If a patient wants to be euthanized, then it is okay for the doctor to perform it. But only if the patient has been ill for a long time, no medical cure is available, and there is no chance of recovery. Under these circumstances euthanasia would be good karma for both the doctor and the patient. But I am not certain of this.

(Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali)

## **A HINDU PERSPECTIVE ON GOOD DEATH**

People can support a dying person in several ways. It is supportive to give space for the dying to meditate without interruption prior to death (Thrane, 2010, p.339). It has also been argued that giving a dying person medicine which helps towards achieving a calm and peaceful state is beneficial, as long as it does not interfere with the consciousness of the patient (Thrane, 2010, p.340). It is a Hindu custom to have a dying person stay at home during his or her last days. (Marant, 2015) When the time of death approaches, the person is placed on the ground. This symbolizes the body getting close to earth. It is also believed that it will be easier for the soul to exit the body if the body lies on the floor rather than in a bed. (Firth, 1997, p.1) The direction of the head is also significant in the death rituals. These are thought to get the body aligned with the Hindu teachings on cosmic energies and the world's magnetic field to help the soul on its death journey. (Gernady, 2020) Water, from the river Ganges, and a basil leaf is placed in the mouth of the dying person (Parkes, 2015, p.54).

When a Hindu knows in advance that death is right around the corner, there are certain rituals and actions he or she can do to prepare him or herself (Thrane, 2010, p.339). There are traditions where elderly people or ill people will spend their last time in prayer and meditations (Firth, 2005, p.682). During this time some remove themselves from the material aspects of the world. This can include letting go of personal possessions or changes made to the diet. There is also a Hindu tradition of fasting and starving oneself to death. This tradition is for Hindus on a particular spiritual path (Firth, 2005, p.684). Fasting is seen as an act of detachment to the material world. This will advance the person on his or her spiritual journey towards liberation from samsara (Thrane, 2010, p.339). Fasting will also lead to empty bowels. This is desirable as vomit, faeces and urine are seen as signs of bad death. This extreme type of fasting is a form of suicide (Firth, 2005, p.682-685).

A good death entails dying at an old age, at home, with full consciousness and willingness to pass on (Firth, 2005, p.683) (Marant, 2015). All family affairs should have been taken care of prior to dying. Conflicts should have been solved. And children should not be reliant on their parents anymore, often meaning that they should be married. Arrangements regarding inheritance should also be settled. Ideally the dying person has prepared all of these things before passing away (Firth, 2005,

p.683). Parting with family and friends through last words and goodbyes is highly valued (Firth, 2005, p.683) (Marant, 2015). At the time of death it is good for the person to focus his or her energy on Brahman. It is said that by thinking of Brahman and paying attention to the top of your head, you will ensure that the soul is in a high state when it leaves the body (Thrane, 2010, p.340). If a person is not conscious or lucid at the time of death, family members can help navigate the soul. They do this by singing and praying. Often they say prayers directly into the dying persons ear (Thrane, 2010, p.340). These last rituals during the time of death are crucial for the soul to begin it's next journey. If these are not done correctly the soul may be trapped and start haunting people on earth (Firth, 2005, p.683). In the Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna, avatar of the God Vishnu, gives a promise to the people who hold Krishna consciousness at the time of death.

And whoever, at the end of his life, quits his body remembering Me alone at once attains My nature. Of this there is no doubt.

(Prabhupada, 2012, p.370)

Here Krishna gives away the key to unification with Brahman's nature. Which is a goal for Hindus. At the moment of death your thoughts must be on Brahman only. And secondly you must be willing to leave your physical body behind. Being in control of your thoughts sounds easier than it really is. Managing to keep your attention on Brahman and Brahman alone, without letting fluctuating thoughts and memories enter your mind, requires a long tradition of work. Meditation and chanting the name of God during your lifetime, will serve to obtain this goal at the time of death (Firth, 2005, p.682-683). This is explained in the Bhagavad-Gita:

Of course, one's thoughts during the course of one's life accumulate to influence one's thoughts at the moment of death, so this life creates one's next life. If in one's present life one lives in the mode of goodness and always thinks of Krishna, it is possible for one to remember Krishna at the end of one's life.

(Prabhupada, 2012, p. 371)

## **HINDU RESPONDENTS' VIEW ON GOOD DEATH**

There were several different beliefs held amongst the Hindu respondents on what a good death looked like. Four respondents said that there was no particular way of dying that was better than other deaths. One of these, a mother of young children, wished to fulfill her duties as a mother before dying.

I am scared for my sons if I die. They are young and need me to provide for them. But other than that I am ready to die at any time. It is fine for me to die. My only concern is for my sons to manage to take care of themselves before I die.

(Ketut, Hindu female, 35 year, Bali)

In the same interview I could also detect a second concern of hers. Ketut did not want to be a burden for the family. For her it was better to die before old age or sickness forced her to rely on her family for support. She also wished to avoid a slow death process in pain and suffering.

I want to die in an accident, so I don't feel sick. And I also want to die in an accident so that my family doesn't have to look after me. I just want to die quickly.

(Ketut, Hindu female, 35 years, Bali)

Ketut's focus when it came to dying was all concerned with the impact her parting would have on the lives of her family members. In other words, her focus was on the life on earth, rather than her soul's journey in the afterlife. Ketut was not the only one mentioning death by accident. According to respondent Ayu it was really bad to die in an accident. Ayu, unlike Ketut, focused on the afterlife for people who passed away following an accident. She believed it would have a negative impact on the soul.

When a person dies suddenly in an accident, the soul does not understand that the body died. Sometimes the soul can get stuck here on earth, which is really bad.

(Ayu, Hindu female, 56 years, Bali)

Half of the respondents mentioned that it was up to God to decide when it was their time to die. It was something they accepted. God would decide whether they died young or old, and it was not something they sought to fight, or felt was unfair. However, three respondents mentioned specifically that they wished to die at an old age.

I want to die when I am old, when God plans it.

(Gede, Hindu male, 20 years, Bali)

Dying at an old age would have the benefit of more time to better one's karma before death. This would improve one's chances of getting a better rebirth, according to respondent Ari.

I have done many sins. My wish is to do good deeds to pay for my sins. I am scared that if I die with lots of sins attached to me, then I will be reborn as an animal rather than as a human.

(Ari, Hindu female, 30 years, Bali)

Three people mentioned wanting to die at home. Reasons for this wish was that it was a peaceful way of dying.

I would like to die after I finish praying. Ideally I wish to be old. I would like to visit the family temple, give some offering, do some meditation, fall asleep and die at home. That would be nice.

(Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali)

Made shared the same concern as Ketut, he specifically said that he did not want to be a burden for his family in his death process.

I don't want to go to hospital when I die. I don't want to be a burden for my family. I am looking forward to my own death, it will be nice. Life is hard. It is better to be dead, because then I will be free.

(Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali)

During the interview with Made, he told me that he expected his next rebirth to be good. He gave me many examples of good deeds he had done, which he meant would result in a positive reincarnation. He told me it was hard work fulfilling his many duties as a family man, husband and father. When he reflected on his own death to come, he lit up with excitement. He was positively gleaming with a huge smile on his face when he exclaimed that dying would be 'nice'. Made saw death as liberation from life's many challenges.

### **A HINDU VIEW ON FEELINGS WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES**

Mourners, in particular women, will openly cry and show sorrow in a ceremony with the body of the deceased (Parkes, 2015, p.47) (Marant, 2015). There are differences in tradition regarding to what extent this crying should be displayed or controlled. It is common to cry and show sadness, but many refrain from hysterical displays of emotion (Parkes, 2015, p.47-48).

### **HINDU RESPONDENTS ON FEELINGS WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES**

Sadness was mentioned by most Hindu respondents when asked about feelings towards a loved one passing away. All of the respondents attributed their sadness to their own loss of the person they loved. No one mentioned feeling sad on behalf of the deceased person. On the contrary several said they felt happy for the person who passed away. One reason respondents gave for feeling happy was that they believed that their loved one was united with God.

My mum died. It was sad for me, but good for her. In the ceremony you have to be happy for the deceased, because that person is with God.

(Gede, Hindu male, 20 years, Bali)

Not only did the respondents share how they actually felt about losing a beloved person. Some of the respondents also mentioned social expectations of how one *should* feel, and for how long one is expected to feel this way.

We usually feel sad when our family members die. It is the loss of someone close to us that makes us feel sad. And the fact that they are gone so quickly.

But this feeling goes away quickly as the process is fast. We are not scared for them, they are in a good place. It is not bad for the deceased to die. They don't feel any pain like we do here in the world. We must be sad for a week or a month. After this period of grief, everything is okay.

(Ketut, Hindu female, 35 years, Bali)

Mixed feelings or inconsistencies were apparent in some of the respondents' replies to my questions. This seemed to occur in attempts to fuse together feelings from personal experience with cultural expectations of what one should feel. Not all respondents were clear about attributing different feelings to different aspects of the situation. Some respondents ended up contradicting themselves.

In Bali when someone dies, we smile. We are hopeful, not tearful. We cry a little, but not much. This is because we believe in reincarnation, and that it is that person's time to die. We all have a time to die, so why cry?

(Agug, Hindu male, 62 years, Bali)

We pray for the wellbeing of the dead. We should not have fear about them being in a bad place, or feel anxiety. We should leave everything in God's hands, because God makes the decisions.

(Ari, Hindu female, 30 years, Bali)

There were many explanations for feeling happy about the death of a loved one. The deceased being in a good place is mentioned twice above. Belief in reincarnation was also given as a reason for feeling hopeful. Also when respondent Agug stated above that; when a person dies it is his or her time to die. There seems to exist a belief in a greater plan beyond human control. Letting go of control and trusting in a greater power was mentioned by some respondents as the right thing to do when a person dies.

## **POST DEATH RITUALS IN HINDU COMMUNITIES**

Rituals after a death has occurred, will vary from one community to another. Even inside one single community variations will be found between families. Therefore I do not attempt to cover all post death rituals that can be found in Hindu populations. I am going to present some practices described in literary sources. These are not all specific to Hindus living in Bali. This literature contains descriptions of Hindu practices from all around the world. Afterwards I will present what Hindu respondents say regarding rituals that take place following a death in their community.

After a death in the family there will be an approximately 12 days period where the core family follows rituals and performs symbolic actions to pay respect to the deceased person. They are in mourning and may stop participating in everyday activities like work and socializing during this period. The community will often provide the mourning family with food (Parkes, 2015, p.42-60). The corpse will be washed and dressed in cloth by family members. Songs and prayers will be heard in the house (Firth, 2005, p.682-685). Hindus cremate the corpses of the dead. Ideally cremation should take place in the following days after death occurred (Cremation Institute, 2020). However there are some traditions of burying corpses for a period of time before cremation is performed. This comes down to practical matters and money (Balispirit, 2020).

## **HINDU RESPONDENTS EXPLAIN POST DEATH RITUALS**

### **PRAYING**

In the interviews I asked respondents about common rituals and practices following the death of a Hindu person in Indonesia. Some traditions mentioned by respondents matched descriptions from literature on Hindu traditions. One of these traditions was praying. Praying could, according to the respondents, help the deceased in his/her transition process. Respondent Suasti explained how prayers could help.

The living pray for the souls of the dead in the house temples. These prayers will help the dead people's souls to get to a good place. Praying also helps the souls to get forgiveness for their sins.

(Suasti, Hindu female, 45 years, Bali)



According to Suasti the rituals performed by the living have a direct impact on the soul's journey in the afterlife. Her explanation indicates that the ritual of praying is for the benefit of the deceased. Nobody mentioned praying having an effect on the living. I would imagine that such a ritual could have a soothing effect for people in mourning. However, none of the Hindu respondents focused on the prayer's benefit for the living. Two implications came to mind when respondents said that the actions of the living could impact a loved one's afterlife. Firstly it means that the living are not helpless with regards to the wellbeing of the deceased. Secondly it means that the living have a responsibility for the afterlife of the deceased.

The respondents were also asked about the content of the prayers for the dead. I was curious to know whether they used pre-existing prayers found in their holy scripture, or if the prayers were individual. According to their answers, the prayers and the content within were all created by the individual doing the praying. There was not any specific text used in this ritual. Respondent Ari explained it to me like this;

We pray for the dead from our hearts, there is no standard set of prayers.  
(Ari, Hindu female, 30 years, Bali)

This indicates to me that the ritual has a personal character as opposed to a dogmatic one. Not once did I hear of a right or a wrong way of praying for the dead. Praying from the heart, as Ari stated above, suggests that this ritual demands of people that they search inside themselves for helpful words.

### **CREMATION**

Cremation was also mentioned by the respondents as an important ritual to help the deceased on his/her journey. Cremation was described as a catalyst for the soul's reunification with God. It was also described as a cleanse for the soul of the deceased. Ari described it like this;

The soul leaves the body during cremation. Cremation acts like a cleansing for the soul. After cremation the soul is united with God.  
(Ari, Hindu female, 30 years, Bali)

Cremation works as a purification process for the soul, according to Ari. Another respondent explained the purpose of cremation in this way;

In Hinduism the body of the deceased is burned (cremated) in order to free the soul from the body, and lets it reunite with God.

(Adi, Hindu male, 40 years, Bali)

Cremation has the function of liberating the soul from the physical body, according to Adi. Both Ari and Adi stated that the soul remains in the body after the body has died. I asked for details about the experiences for the soul during this time in the dead body and during cremation. And this is what Ari said;

The existence in the dead body before cremation is good and positive. Neither the existence in the corps, nor the existence during cremation itself is anything to be frightened of. Both are positive experiences.

(Ari, Hindu female, 30 years, Bali)

As cremation is believed to hold the function of freeing the soul from the physical body, a dilemma presents itself. What happens to the souls of those who do not get cremated? Will souls be stuck in corpses for eternity if cremation is not used to set them free? In the interview guide I only asked about cremation, and not consequences for cases where cremations do not occur. However, I happened to touch upon the subject in one of the interviews. Respondent Made told me about different types of cremation.

We have two types of cremation. One is direct cremation, the other is communal cremation. In the direct cremation we put the dead body in a Hindu compound and wait for a good day to do the cremation. Then the body is burnt to ash, and the ash is taken to the ocean. In the communal cremation the body is first buried in the graveyard. Every five years, we dig up the bones from all the bodies that have been buried. In large villages it is normal to do cremations together, because cremations are expensive. When the body is buried we only

cremate the bones, as they are the only thing left. Then the ashes from the bones are taken to the beach.

(Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali)

Made explained that the time period between every communal cremation might differ from one village to the next. In his village it was every five years. This means that a dead person could wait several years before being cremated. As stated earlier in this chapter, the body and soul are said to be connected until the time of cremation. This poses the question of whether the soul is in the grave until the bones are cremated? I asked Made what happened to the soul when the body gets buried.

The soul has already left the body and bones when it is buried. The soul is in the air. The soul reincarnates to the family.

(Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali)

Made's account of events is inconsistent with Adi and Ari's view on cremation as the catalyst for the soul's departure. If the soul leaves the body before cremation occurs, like Made said, then the soul is not set free from the body by means of cremation, like Adi and Ari explained. Or at the very least, cremation is not the sole catalyst for separation of soul and body. Nevertheless, there was one clear and unanimous viewpoint about the soul's experience after the death of the body. Whether the soul was in the air or experiencing the cremation, it was always described as a pleasant experience. Not once was the grave depicted as a suffocating entrapment, nor was the cremation described as torturous flames.

### **SHOWING SOLIDARITY**

According to respondents, there are many preparations for several ceremonies in the days following a death in their community. The corps is tended to by the family, and is stationed in the family home prior to cremation. Much effort goes into preparing offerings and organizing the different ceremonies. Respondent Made gave examples of some of the tasks at hand, and how important it was that the whole community helped out.

We prepare offerings and wash the body. Leafs and white cloth is wrapped around the body. A traditional costume is placed on top of the body, but not on the body. The body is taken from the home to the cemetery on the good day. The priest will let us know which day is good to do cremation. In Bali the whole community helps with the preparations and the cremation. We help each other, so that we get help in return.

(Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali)

I was told of many more tasks following a death. And how the sum of these was overwhelming for any family to do all by itself. Every family relies on practical support from the community. These rituals and ceremonies therefore bring the death of a family member out from being strictly a family matter, into being a community issue. Made explains it as practical help. He does not assign any layer of emotional value to the help. My perception is that these are not merely practical structures. The aftermath of a death becomes a community project, rather than a family affair. I would propose that with the practical help there is a symbolic message that reminds the bereaving family that they are not alone during this difficult time. They have the support of the community to back them up, manifested through practical help. I wanted to know who, in Made's opinion, benefitted from all the hard work. Who was the offerings for?

If a priest, royalty or a rich person dies, we do direct cremation for him/her. Some families even do direct cremation just to show that they have money. There are three categories of expenses for cremation and offerings; low, middle and high. Expensive ceremonies are more 'wow', but the meaning for the dead person is the same regardless of how much money is spent. It only makes a difference for the people who are alive and attending the ceremony. We have different offerings, but they are all made of coconut leaves and cakes, amongst other thing. These offerings are for the spirit of the dead body.

(Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali)

From his answer we can see that the offerings have two functions. They are both for the people attending the ceremony and for the deceased. Made says the offerings are for the spirit of the deceased. However, the offerings are also used to signal wealth

and status amongst the living. Ceremonies and offerings for deceased people with high status or wealth are more extravagant, than for those from lower socio-economic background. Again this is an example of the ceremony being a communal event, and not just for immediate family and friends. Large parts of the community is present at the ceremony. According to Made some families use this occasion to display their wealth to the rest of the community. When Made and I talked about the different ceremonies, I was curious to find out about appropriate attire for people attending them. And this is what I was told;

People attending the funeral wear sarongs, mostly black. Black sarongs show respect to the family of the dead person. It lets them know that we are together with them in their grief.

(Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali)

In the quote above Made expresses that they have a tradition in place, which lets people know that they are not alone when grieving a death. By dressing a certain way, people convey a symbolic message of unity and support.

### **THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF THE BODY**

In Balinese Hinduism one purpose of the cremation is to return the body back to its five original elements. These elements are called Panca Maha Buta and consist of; fire, water, earth, wind/air and ether. (Ayurveda Amritvani, 2014) (Balispirit, 2020) Ashes left from cremation is often returned to nature, commonly spread at sea or in a river. (Firth, 2003, p.25)

Before starting my work on this thesis, I was well aware of the cyclic nature of the soul's journey, found in Hinduism. I was less familiar with the Hindu belief in a cyclic process for the body. In the interviews I asked respondents about what happens to the body after a person dies. And almost all of the respondents replied by explaining the concept of Panca Maha Buta.

In Hinduism we believe that human bodies come from the five elements; water, air, earth, wind and fire. We cremate the dead bodies so that the bodies can return to the five elements.

(Ketut, Hindu female, 35 years, Bali)

Ketut started her explanation of what happens to the body after death, by explaining where the body comes from. My understanding of this was that the post death process for the body has to be understood as part of a larger process. And it should be seen in light of this process as a whole. According to Ketut, the body is made from the union of these five elements. When the body dies this unification is broken up. The body disintegrate and these five elements making up the body will separate and return to the world in their pure elementary form. The body does not move on to a different place, nor does it cease to exist. It continues to exist on earth, but in a different form/ anatomical compilation. This process of the body returning to the five elements is described as being positive for the deceased.

We cremate the body after a person dies. The corpse does not wear clothes. It is put in a box and burnt. Cremation speeds up the process of the body returning to the elements, which is good for the deceased person.

(Ketut, Hindu female, 35 years, Bali)

Ketut explains that the process is speeded up by cremation, but this does not mean that cremation is necessary for the process to occur. According to Made the disintegration of buried bodies also starts the process of the body returning to the elements.

We believe in Pancha Maha Buta; the five elements of the body. When you bury the body the air inside the body will return to air on earth. The water inside your body will return to water on earth. The meat on your body will be eaten by animals and insects, and therefore be lost. Only the bones are left in the grave. The bones will be cremated and return to being ash.

(Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali)

Despite most of the body having returned to the five elements through various processes in the grave, the bones need help by cremation to return to ash, according to Made. The attention to detail strikes me. The rituals related to the concept of Panca Maha Buta are very thorough. It is important for every last trace of the bodily remains to be broken down into such small particles that it can no longer be recognized as remains of a human body. Rituals are also in place to ensure that the last remains, such as ashes, are filtrated back to the world through spreading of ashes. Above Made explained how bones left from burials are cremated. But even bones left after cremations are broken down further according to Ari.

The body gets cremated and around one week later the ashes are spread around. It is common to spread the ashes at sea. Pieces of bones that are left behind after cremation get grinded up. There is a separate ceremony in which the grinded bones are thrown at sea.

(Ari, Hindu female, 30 years, Bali)

According to the respondents, the whole body is composed of these five elements found in the world. And the whole body is returned to these five elements relatively quickly, due to the speedy disintegration of the body, helped along by Hindu rituals. From what I have gathered from respondents, there is a clear distinction between the body and the soul. The body is made of a composition of earthly matter. The body has a different quality from the soul, which is made of Godly/divine material. The body comes from the earth's cosmos and returns to the earth's cosmos. Whilst the soul comes from God, returns to God, and is not broken down, but remains intact and constant. When a person is dead, both the body and the soul return to the material or essence they came from prior to birth.

### **HINDU BELIEFS ON TRANSCENDENTAL COMMUNICATION**

A Dukun has the functions of a healer, a medium and a priest in Indonesian culture. Problems of either physical or psychological natures can be solved by the help of a Dukun. (Mahony, 2002, p.1-3) The role of the Dukun is complex. There are additional functions tied to the term Dukun in local areas. Dukuns have their roots in local beliefs and practices in Indonesia. In broad terms a Dukun is a person who

works in the field of magic and supernatural. (Foley, 1984, p.52) People's assertion of a Dukun's great power also entails a negative flipside. As in most cases where great power is held by a small group of people or individuals, it can create mistrust and fear of misuse of power. Black magic used to harm people is in some circles believed to be part of the practices of the Dukun. (Sartini, Ahimsa-Putra, 2017, p.46) For some people the term Dukun will therefore have negative connotations. (Nourse, 2013, p.400-422)

### **HINDU RESPONDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON TRANSCENDENTAL COMMUNICATION**

Many of the respondents used the services of the Dukun as part of their rituals when someone had passed away. The Dukun acted as a medium and conveyed messages from the soul of the deceased, according to the Hindu respondents.

If the deceased had any wishes regarding his or her cremation, it was important to get in contact with a Dukun in order to grant these wishes. Four of the respondents told me about personal experiences in seeking information from a Dukun regarding wishes from the deceased.

One week before cremation we speak to the priest. In Bali we call him Balian - medicine man, but it is the same as a Dukun, which is the name they use in Java. We ask him to get information from the dead person about what they would like for their cremation.

(Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali)

It is interesting to notice that Made believes that the deceased person is still invested in matters concerning this world, like his or her cremation. He was not alone in believing that the deceased had attachments to business of this world. Ari said that the dead often conveyed messages to their families through a Dukun.

After someone has died, it is a tradition in Bali to ask a Dukun which day would be good to do the cremation. We also ask a Dukun for messages from the dead to their families.

(Ari, Hindu female, 30 years, Bali)



Mostly respondents talked about communication with the dead as messages and wishes coming from the dead to the living, and not the other way around. There was no specific mention of using a Dukun or any other tool for transcendental communication in order for the living to convey messages and wishes to the dead. Respondents did not say that communication could only go one way, but from the data I gathered this seems to be the tendency. The only statement that could potentially signify communication going both ways, was a vague description of "talking" with the deceased.

Before my Grandma was cremated I talked with her through a Dukun twice.

(Ari, Hindu female, 30 years, Bali)

Talking with someone usually entails two or more parties all participating in receiving and conveying information. As I did not get specific examples demonstrating what Ari meant by "talking" with a dead person, I can not draw any conclusion as to whether she meant information going both ways or not.

## **MUSLIM DOGMAS RELATED TO DEATH**

### **THE BASIS ON WHICH THIS INTRODUCTION IS MADE**

It is near impossible to give a full coverage of all the doctrines and beliefs held by all Muslims in the world. Any attempt at this would go way beyond the scope of this paper. I do however find it useful to present some general doctrines one will likely come across in a search for understanding Muslims' beliefs about death. By giving a short introduction on the Islamic understanding of death, I wish to provide my readers with some contextual background before they embark upon the task of reading beliefs held by my respondents. Due to the limitations of this format I will only scratch the surface on the broad variety of beliefs that actually exist within the many affiliations within the collective group of Muslims. My sources are also limited to western publications on this topic, more precisely publications written in either English or Norwegian. Most of the literary sources used in this paper is written from a Western

and academic perspective, which might offer a different perspective to the perspectives of respondents from South-East Asia.

## **PRINCIPLES REGARDING DEATH IN ISLAM**

The underlying premise that all Muslim dogmas are based on, is the belief that there is life after death in this world. This belief is at the core of the Islamic belief system. The afterlife is mentioned several times in both the Qur'an and the Hadiths (Obayashi, 1992, p.125). Another central teaching in Islam is the existence of different realms besides the one we live in on earth. Hell and Paradise are lavishly described in the Qur'an (Walls, 2008, p.134). The Hadiths elaborates on the life in between death on earth and eternal life in Hell or Paradise (Eidhamar, 2017, p.215-216). So what exactly is it that lives on after we die? In order to answer this, we must first look at the components of the living human. According to Islam, the human makeup consists of three different components. Firstly there is the body. God used clay to mold the first human body, namely Adam. Adam and all humans to follow, are created in the image of God (Obayashi, 1992, p.128). The second component that makes up the human being is the Spirit. This is God's spirit which was breathed into Adam. The spirit is divine and consists of pure light. The third and last component is the soul. The soul is the component of the human which differentiates us as individuals. The body is the outer layer of the human, the spirit is at the core of the human, and the soul is in between the two. Each soul can connect to aspects of the spirit and the body in a unique way, which makes no two humans alike (Obayashi, 1992, p.132). So prior to death, human beings consist of matter, spirit and soul.

## **HOW MUSLIMS RELATE TO DEATH**

### **BARZAKH**

When the human dies the body and the soul live on in the grave. This period in the grave is called *Barzakh*, and will come to an end at *Judgment day*, which also goes by the name; *the day of resurrection* (Walls, 2008, p.133). There are different accounts of the exact timeline and the order of events that take place in Barzakh. However, there are some events and elements that seem to be reoccurring in literature on this topic. One such event is that the soul is separated from the body (Eidhamar, 2017,

p.215). This is generally described as an event taking place in the early stages of Barzakh. Some Islamic scholars say that God himself takes the soul from the body, whilst others say that he sends the angel of death to remove the soul from the body (Walls, 2008, p.133). Either way, the soul is taken to the heavens, whilst the body remains in the grave. Here the soul faces acceptance to enter into higher realms or rejection, before it is sent back to earth again (Eidhamar, 2017, p.215). Some scholars say that the soul reunites with the body, and some just establish that the soul reenters the grave where the body lies (Eidhamar, 2017, p.215). Another event that takes place early on is an interrogation by the two angels *Munkar* and *Nakir*. This event takes place in the grave with both the soul and body present. Munkar and Nakir asks the deceased a set of questions. Amongst these questions are; *Who is your God? Who is your prophet? What is your scripture?* (Walls, 2008, p.133)(Obayashi, 1992, p.136-137). Determined by the outcome of this interrogation, the rest of the stay in Barzakh will either be pleasant or unpleasant (Obayashi, 1992, p.136-137).

### **MUSLIM RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTION OF BARZAKH**

Similar to the academic literary sources regarding Barzakh, the respondents gave a variety of different details regarding the exact events taking place in the afterlife. The location of the soul was one such topic where multiple explanations were given. In all accounts there is a separation of soul and body after death. Where the answers start to differ is in the descriptions of the timeline and places the soul is located after death. One respondent stated that the soul is located in close proximity to the body.

The soul is taken out of the body. The soul stays close to the body and registers what is happening to it. When the body is in the grave, the soul is also in the grave, but it is not inside the body.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

Most of the respondents stated, like Suprpto did, that the soul enters the grave where the body lies, at some point. Unlike Suprpto, several other respondents said that the soul also goes back into the body.

The soul is around us on earth after death. At the funeral, the soul reenters the body. At the moment the funeral guests leave the grave, Munkar and Nakir start interrogating the deceased.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

After death, the soul goes up some place. It will reenter the body before the interrogation in the grave starts. The interrogation begins when the guests are leaving the funeral site. Both the soul and the body will be interrogated.

(Siti, Muslim female, 46)

Both Siti and Nur said that the soul entered into the body, in the grave, during the funeral. Respondent Fathoni also mentioned the soul being in motion at the time of the funeral. But according to him the soul did not enter the grave at this time. Quite the opposite, according to Fathoni, the soul was already located in the grave, and traveled out of it during the funeral.

After the guests leave the funeral, the soul leaves the grave. The soul goes to the sky to wait for judgment day.

(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

So there is a common perception amongst several respondents that there is some sort of translocation of the soul that takes place at the time of the funeral. However, the accounts are not coherent with each other as to where the soul is at what point during the funeral. There are also differences as to whether the soul is actually inside the body or next to the body when it does enter the grave. One belief that is consistent in all the answers is that there is movement of the soul in the afterlife. One destination of the soul's movement is the grave, another destination mentioned by some of the respondents was the family house.

The soul is in the family house for nine days. During these days the soul will go back and forth between the grave and the house. The body is being interrogated in the grave and the soul is around the house.

(Siti, Muslim female, 46)

The soul is 5 days in the body, then it visits the family.

(Annisa, Muslim female, 19 year)

One thing that stood out to me in Siti's answer is that the soul is going back and forth between places. In her explanation the soul is not restricted to one location during the time in Barzakh; the time in the grave. She also spoke about the interrogation taking place in the grave. The first time she mentioned this in the interview, she said that the soul goes into the body before the interrogation starts (as stated in her earlier quote). Later she also said that the soul is not with the body during the interrogation. In other words, it is not the soul, only the body that is being interrogated. Her answer was not logically consistent with respect to whether the soul is taking part in the interrogation by reuniting with the body, or whether it escapes it by leaving the body whilst this is taking place. Other respondents also shared thoughts on the interrogation in the grave.

Munkar and Nakir ask you about good and bad actions in the grave. They start asking questions after all the funeral guests have taken 40 steps away from the grave. The soul is both in the grave and with God at the same time. Munkar and Nakir asks about how you earned your money, if your income was earned in a halal way (earned in keeping with religious rules).

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

Again a respondent states that the soul is in the grave at the same time as it is somewhere else. Aisyah explained that the soul was both places at the same time. She did not attempt to give a logical explanation of how this was possible. It did not seem to be a problem for her to accept this explanation which does not abide by the rules of logic. Aisyah, along with all the other respondents, said she was familiar with the angels Munkar and Nakir when she was asked about them. She said that Munkar and Nakir asked people if they made a living by doing halal work. This exact question concerning work was never mentioned by other people than her. However, questions that were concerned with people doing good or bad deeds in general was mentioned by most respondents.

You get asked about the good and bad things you have done. Munkar and Nakir asks about what have you done in the world, who your God is, and what

your religion is? When they ask you, your mouth can not answer, only other body parts give away the answer.

(Bilqis, Muslim female, 19 years)

The interrogation consists of the same set of questions. These questions are; Who is your prophet? Who is your God? In which direction do you pray? Which holy scripture do you own?

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

As well as general questions regarding actions performed during life on earth, both Bilqis and Suprpto mentioned questions regarding religious belonging. Suprpto also said that all people get asked the same set of questions, and these questions are all related to religious belief and practice. This suggests an emphasis on religious belonging being important in the afterlife. Suprpto says that you cannot escape torture in Barzakh purely by being Muslim. Everybody, including Muslims, will be tortured for their sins. But when he spoke about being cleansed from past sins, this opportunity seemed to be available for Muslims only.

It is the body which is being interrogated by the angels, not the soul. However, the soul witnesses the torture of the body and feels its pain. If people have done good deeds they are able to respond well to the questions. If people have committed sins, they will have a difficult time when being interrogated. The torture in Barzakh works as a cleanse, so that Muslims can enter Paradise afterwards.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

Torture in Barzakh was spoken about in almost all of the interviews. Some respondents gave general statements about torture occurring in Barzakh as a result of sins committed. Others gave specific examples of how people are tortured.

"They (Munkar and Nakir) torture people for the sins they have committed."

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

You cannot lie to Munkar and Nankir in the grave. You are only responsible for your actions after you turn six years old. Hammer will be used until you start telling the truth.

(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

"The body has to tell the truth to Munkar and Nakir. They hit you for your mistakes made in life."

(Annisa, Muslim female, 19 year)

One issue that was brought up by respondents many times was people's inability to lie to Munkar and Nakir. This inability takes a very concrete form according to some of the respondents. Bilqis said that the mouth is unable to deliver the answers, and that other body parts will take over this function. Annisa also said that it is the "body", rather than the usual mouth or tongue which we associate with speaking, that responds to the angels. I find it noteworthy that an intangible concept, such as a lie, is given a concrete form. As we humans are able to lie using our words spoken with our mouth, the lies are logically linked to the physical mouth. The underlying logic in the explanations given by respondents is that lies are stopped by disabling the mouth.

## **JUDGMENT DAY**

*Judgment day* puts an end to both life on earth and life in Barzakh. The transition into this new period is initiated by an angel blowing a trumpet. At judgment day all people who have ever lived on earth, from the time of Adam until that day, will be resurrected. Hence this period also being referred to as the *Day of Resurrection* (Walls, 2008, p.133-134). Vivid descriptions of the state of the body and the place in which they enter can be found, but one detail I have come across several times is the fact that all the bodies are naked after resurrection (Walls, 2008, p.133-134). All the people are gathered together and have to face God's judgment (Eidhamar, 2017, p.215). Scales will measure good deeds against bad ones, from the time spent on earth, of every person there (Walls, 2008, p.133-134). This period is said to have a duration of thousands of years, so calling it a *day* is somewhat misleading (Obayashi, 1992, p.137). Once the judgment is final, people are divided into groups. Good Muslims are sent straight to Paradise to live there for eternity, and sinful people are

sent to Hell for eternity. A third group of people will enter Hell for only a limited period, before being taken up to Paradise for eternity (Eidhamar, 2017, p.215)(Walls, 2008, p.133-134). To what extent this third category is broad and inclusive, or has strict admission requirements is not always made clear. However, some sources say that this third group is restricted to Muslims and children only (Eidhamar, 2017, p.215).

### **MUSLIM RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTION OF JUDGMENT DAY**

All the respondents believed in the concept of Judgment day. Respondents brought up the concept of Judgment day when asked to elaborate on events taking place in the afterlife. In all the accounts Judgment day was a period that followed after life on earth and life in Barzakh, and was prior to life in Hell and in Paradise. Judgment day both represents a time period and a place according to respondents. This place was referred to as Padang Mahsyar by respondents in most of the interviews.

When the Day of Judgment comes, all the dead people will arise from their graves. Angels will blow their trumpets in order to wake up the dead people. The living people will die, without being buried, on this day. All people will gather together at the place called Padang Mahsyar. Peoples' actions will be evaluated there.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

Everybody dies on Judgment day. People who recently died will enter into Barzakh at this point. The sense of time is different in Barzakh compared with our sense of time on earth. So even if you die on the day of judgment, your time in Barzakh can be experienced as a long time. Everybody is gathered together on Judgment day. Muslims get sentenced first, then everyone else gets his or her sentence.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

There are many levels after death. The soul waits for the end of the world (Judgment day). After judgment day you will go to Neraka (Indonesian word for Hell) or Surga (Indonesian word for Paradise).



(Annisa, Muslim female, 19 years)

According to respondents Judgment day marks an end to the world as we know it. There are no other levels of life that coexist or run parallel to Judgment day. Padang Mahsyar is the place all people are gathered in this transitional phase. There was no mentioning of people doing any sort of action, or having anything done to them during this period. The only thing that was said to take place during this time period is judgment of peoples' past actions.

Good and bad actions are weighted up against each other. If the heaviest are good action, you will go to Paradise. If the heaviest are bad actions, you will go to Hell.

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

For the most part people just stated that an evaluation of actions took place, but a few respondents also specified that it was God who worked as the judge. Respondent Reza also mentioned angels having the function of being God's secretary, by registering all actions done on earth.

On Judgment day your good actions will be weighed up against your bad actions by God. God will decide whether you are good enough to enter into Paradise, or whether you need to go to Hell first to be cleansed.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

Two angels document good and bad actions done during a lifetime. And after you die, there will be consequences for your actions.

(Reza, Muslim male, 21 years)

Respondents said that actions are evaluated for the purpose of deciding on the next destination. There are only two possible outcomes from the judgment; you will either enter Paradise or Hell. It was clear from all the interviews that everybody wishes to enter Paradise. It was also clear that once you got there, you were there for eternity. However, it seemed to be very few people who were actually able to enter Paradise directly from Padang Mahsyar. I was told that most people have to go to Hell to

undergo a purification process first. This was the general agreement amongst all the respondents. Unlike people going to Paradise, the people going to Hell will not necessarily be in Hell for eternity. Most of the respondents said that this might be the situation when it came to themselves. They explained that people have to pay for their sins by spending time in Hell, but can be taken from Hell to Paradise after they have taken their fair share of punishment. I asked if everybody eventually ends up in Paradise, and this question caused a divide in reported beliefs. A couple of respondents, like Bilqis, gave answers that conveyed a level of uncertainty about the matter.

We all hope to go to Paradise, not Neraka (Hell). Most people go to Neraka first. Maybe you can go from Neraka to Paradise, if you pray for forgiveness. But you can not go from Paradise to Neraka, only look down.  
(Bilqis, Muslim female, 19 years)

As well as giving answers that conveyed uncertainty, some respondents only shared beliefs regarding Muslims, and did not share thoughts regarding people who are not Muslims.

Perhaps Muslims have to stop by Hell before going to Paradise. That is, if they have done a great deal of wrong actions on earth.  
(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

Every Muslim can come to Surga (Paradise).  
(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

This begs the question; is avoiding talking about non-Muslims on this topic intentional? If so, is it due to the fact that they are responding to me, a European who is not a Muslim? Even though Suprpto and Fathoni did not directly answer whether everybody eventually ends up in Paradise, they explicitly stated that Muslims can come to Paradise. Whereas they said nothing about non-Muslims being able to enter Paradise. Only a couple of respondents stated, without uncertainty, whether it was possible for everyone to enter Paradise.

Most Muslims have to go to Hell before they get to Paradise, in order to go through a cleanse. According to Islam only Muslims come to Paradise.  
(Reza, Muslim male, 21 years)

There was no doubt in Reza's answer as to whether non-Muslims could come to Paradise. However he deflected from talking about his personal belief on the matter, and diverted the attention towards what the dogmas say. Respondent Hartono shared a different point of view to that of Reza's. At first Hartono expressed some uncertainty.

God created us with limitations. Knowing what happens with our souls after death is beyond human limitation of knowledge. But I believe that if I do good in life I will get good reward, and if I do bad in life I will get punished after death. Even Muslims go to Hell for bad things they have done, then later they come to Paradise. I don't know about everyone coming to Paradise.  
(Hartono, Muslim male, 35 years)

At this point in the interview, Hartono takes a pause to think. He turns to a Muslim friend standing behind him, and starts talking in Indonesian. After his discussion with his friend, which I have no translation off, he turns to me and says;

It (who can enter Paradise) depends on your good actions. If you do good to other people, even if you are not Muslim, you can come to Paradise.  
(Hartono, Muslim male, 35 years)

At the beginning of my dialog with Hartono, he initiated explaining to me that Islam was all about peace. From there he went on to explaining what it means to be Muslim and what true Islam is all about. Depictions of Islam in the media was a topic he wanted to talk to me about. He told me that Islam being related to war and terror is a distortion created by people who wrongly call themselves Muslims, and by the media which focus on these groups. Me being non-Muslim did seem to affect our communication greatly. He was eager to get across to me that "*true Islam is all about peace*". This led me to believe that he wanted to portray Islam, in what he believed to be, a positive light in the eyes of a non-Muslim. I question if this influenced our

dialog. Would he have answered that non-Muslims can enter Paradise if a Muslim had asked him the same question?

Padang Mahsyar was not described much in the interviews, in terms of how the location looks and feels. Some respondents picked up their phone and googled Padang Mahsyar to show me pictures online. Most of the pictures that came up on the Google search showed masses of people standing shoulder to shoulder in an open space under the sun. The sunlight was bright red and yellow, almost like the colours of fire, and the landscape looked like a desert (see images in appendix). The appearance of people at Padang Mahsyar was however described in several interviews. Appearances in Padang Mahsyar was contingent upon people's past actions. In other words, according to respondents, you could tell by looking at people whether they had committed many sins or done many good deeds in their life on earth. Many respondents told versions of this, but with some variations in the details. One such detail was whether people wore clothes or not.

Past actions will determine what clothes you wear in Padang Mahsyar.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

At Judgment day you don't wear clothes, but you are only concerned with yourself, not the people around you. You don't recognize the people you know around you. You are very scared at Judgment day.

(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

Everyone is naked on Judgment day, but no one feels any sexual lust. Nor does one feel any shame or shyness about being naked. People who have done bad things look ugly, they look like animals. Those who have done good deeds are beautiful, this is true regardless of religious belonging.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

According to all the respondents; people have a physical body at Judgment day. Not only is there a belief in a physical form for humans at this stage in the afterlife, but there seem to be a great deal of focus on the physical form being revealing. Firstly, the body is naked in many accounts, it is not covered up or hiding underneath clothes.

Secondly the physical appearance, either in terms of clothes worn or the actual body itself, reveals some truth about your character through displaying the result of previous actions. Could this be a visualization of an abstract teaching? Is it possible that these descriptions tell a narrative of people's true nature being visible in the eyes of God? Similar to not being able to lie to the angels in Barzakh, here one is not able to hide one's flaws or faults from God. It is not only the physical state of people being described by the respondents. Several people said that you fear receiving your sentence. This fear is so all-consuming that you pay no attention to other people or other feelings.

## **HELL AND PARADISE**

Sinners who enter Hell will experience torture and torment. The Koran, the Hadith literature and Muslim authorities give graphic descriptions of the harm hell will cause to the physical body (Walls, 2008, p.134). Perhaps the most common description is that of fire which swallows people (Obayashi, 1992, p.137-138) (Caner & Caner, 2009, p.148) (Walls, 2008, p.134) (Qur'an, 37:68). We can also find descriptions of limbs being torn off, boiling water melting away the bodies' organs, and iron rods piercing through the body (Walls, 2008, p.134) (Qur'an, 18:29) (Qur'an, 56:54-55) (Qur'an, 78:21-25). This torment does not stop once the organs or the limbs are destroyed. New body parts will grow back out again only to go through new rounds of torture (Caner & Caner, 2009, p.148). Some accounts portray Hell as a place of cleansing (Walls, 2008, p.134). Sinners will get rid of all their sins by paying the price of torment in Hell. Once this price is paid they are cleansed and welcomed into Paradise. Paradise contains all that the heart desires (Walls, 2008, p.134) (Qur'an, 18:31). Worldly beverages will be found there (Qur'an, 37:45-46) (Qur'an, 56:18) (Qur'an, 78:34). Food of your choice will be available in plentiful (Qur'an, 56:20-21) (Qur'an, 56:32-33) (Walls, 2008, p.134). Paradise will be filled with enjoyable scents, beautiful clothes and perfect relationships, all without shortages or pain (Qur'an, 18:31) (Qur'an, 37:41-49) (Qur'an, 56: 12-37) (Walls, 2008, p.134). Family, friends and spouses from the world may also accompany you in Paradise (Walls, 2008, p.134). Also sexual desires will be fulfilled in Paradise (Walls, 2008, p.134) (Qur'an, 56:35-37) (Qur'an, 78:33). There are some accounts of Paradise and Hell where the focus is not only on the intense pain and pleasures of the body, but also on visions of

a more abstract nature. Here Paradise is portrayed as clearly perceiving the full glory of God's presence (Obayashi, 1992, p.137-138). Whilst Hell is described as seeing God through a tainted vision, as barriers between oneself and the full disclosure of God's presence, is essentially what causes the agony of Hell (Obayashi, 1992, p.137-138).

### **MUSLIM RESPONDENTS' VIEW ON PARADISE AND HELL**

Respondents were asked to describe Paradise to me. It was easy to get a clear sense of what Paradise is like, from what they told me. This was due to the fact that Paradise was described by appealing to the same sensory systems and needs that humans have on earth. Their answers also gave illustrations of objects known to us from earth, making it easy to paint an imaginary picture of what Paradise looks like.

In Paradise there is clean water, rivers, gardens and every beautiful thing imaginable.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

In Paradise you can get all the food you want. You can find noodles, burgers and cheese there. You can get nice clothes, nice shoes, you can get everything you want there. It is perfect, there are no problems in Paradise.

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

In Surga (Paradise) everything is easy, there is food for you there.

(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

Everything in Paradise is better than what it is like on earth.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

Many basic needs for human beings seem to be fulfilled in respondents' descriptions of Paradise. According to American psychologist Abraham Maslow's famous model of the human hierarchy of needs, the most basic needs we humans have are our physiological needs (Mørch, 2019) (McLeod, 2020). These include the human race's

need for air, food, water, warmth, clothes, shelter, sleep and sex in order to survive as a species (McLeod, 2020). Some of these needs were explicitly brought up by respondents. Food, water and clothes were all reported to be available in Paradise. Gardens, mentioned by Nur, also signify fresh air. At least gardens on earth have the function, in our ecosystem, of providing humans with essential oxygen in the air we breath.

When our physiological needs are met to some degree, new needs will present themselves, according to Maslow's model. These are our needs relating to safety (McLeod, 2020). Safety can be experienced through predictability and having control. Societal structures and family structures can fulfill humans' need for safety. Also good health and emotional safety, through the absence of sickness and fear, are important factors for humans to feel safe (McLeod, 2020). Safety needs were also brought up by respondents. Several people mentioned good health and strength when describing the physical bodies of people in Paradise.

In Paradise you have a body, that is the same as on earth. Everybody in Surga (Paradise) is young, maybe around 17 years old.  
(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

Everyone (in Paradise) is the same height and the same age. Everyone is young and beautiful.  
(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

In Paradise you will be same age as when you died on earth, but you will be strong in Paradise. You will not have any health problems.  
(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

Health was brought up when respondents talked about life in Paradise. Firstly it is worth noticing that respondents all talked about there being a physical body for humans in Paradise. And that this body is in a human form. In other words; it has the same form as it has on earth. Many respondents described the bodies as being young. Youth is often associated with good health, and is therefore an efficient concretization of health. Only one respondent said that there are people of all ages in Paradise.

However, this statement was quickly followed by the additional information that regardless of age, everyone in Paradise have healthy bodies. Although only some respondents explicitly said that bodies in Paradise are healthy, all the descriptions of the bodies correlated with the image of health. Adjectives such as young, strong and beautiful were used numerous times when respondents talked about the human bodies in Paradise.

Respondents were asked if there was any reunification with loved ones in Paradise. All the respondents answered that it was possible to meet loved ones in Paradise. Almost all of them said reunification was contingent upon both or all parties being in Paradise. If someone was stuck in Hell, they would not be able to spend time with loved ones in Paradise. I noticed that the majority of respondents only focused on being reunited with their marital partner, even though the question posted to them included family, friends and anyone else dear to their hearts.

If both me and my husband do good actions in life maybe we can meet in Paradise.

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

If you are single, you will get several partners in Paradise. If you are married, you will get your life partner in Paradise, unless your partner is in Neraka (Hell). If your partner is in Neraka (Hell), you will get a clone of your partner.

(Annisa, Muslim female, 19 year)

We can pray, so that hopefully we can talk to each other in Surga (Paradise), in the same way as on earth. But there is no contact between Surga (Paradise) and Hell.

(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

Regardless of marital status in life, everyone who enters Paradise would be paired up in one way or another, according to respondents. Annisa mentioned three alternatives for partners you could get in Paradise; new partners, the partner you were previously married to, or a clone of your previous husband or wife. Other respondents also talked



about being reunited with their lifetime partners or with new partners which they referred to as Paradise virgins.

After being tortured in Hell for sins committed, people come to Paradise. If you and your family come to Paradise, then you can meet each other and be together there. In Paradise there are also Paradise virgins for people to be with. I personally wish to be with my husband in Paradise, and he wishes to be with me. We have talked about this and neither of us wants to be with anybody else. This decision is not related to jealousy in any way, as jealousy and other hurtful things are non-existent in Paradise.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

If you are not married on earth you will get a Bidadari (Paradise virgin) in Surga (Paradise). And if you are married on earth, you will get your wife in Surga (Paradise).

(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

Both women and men can be together with Paradise virgins.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

The focus on everyone having one or more partners in Paradise can also be related to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model. When physiological and safety needs are met to some extent, the need for love and affiliation arises in humans (McLeod, 2020). This is the need for social belonging. Humans are social creatures and have the need for relationships with others. In these relationships we seek to fulfill our need for things such as; intimacy, affection, love, trust and acceptance (McLeod, 2020). The focus on Paradise fulfilling so many human needs beg the obvious question whether humans have these same needs in the afterlife?

Respondents were also asked to give a description of Hell. There were fewer descriptions of what Hell looks like, and how people in Hell look, compared to elaborate stories of Paradise. All the accounts made it clear that Hell was an unpleasant place. One concrete description of the place, mentioned several times, was that Hell contains fire. People in Hell also have physical bodies, although details of

the bodies' appearances was not talked much about. The only information I gathered from their answers was that the bodies were human bodies, same as on earth, and that they were naked.

Hell is a lot worse compared to the world we live in now. Everyone is naked there. People can see and recognize each other in Hell. However, they are not able to help one another.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

Hell is very bad. There is fire in Hell, and you get burnt there.

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

In Neraka (Hell) you must take punishment for your actions.

(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

There is serious torture taking place in Neraka (Hell).

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

When respondents were asked about the topic of contact with loved ones in Paradise and Hell, most respondents focused on the reunification with their life partner in Paradise. Only a few people talked about the contact between people in Hell. According to Suprpto the contact within Hell is restricted to observing each other. There seems to be little or no interaction amongst people in Hell, according to answers given by respondents. Perhaps not very surprising as all the respondents believed that people in Hell were being tortured. Although appearances of peoples' bodies was not talked much about, the torture done to the bodies was expressed in graphic detail.

There is boiling water and fire used to torture people. For women who have committed sexual sins a glowing hot iron rod will be pushed up the woman's vagina, through the entire length of the body, and pierce through the top of the head. Men who have committed sexual sins will have their penis chopped off.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

If you have sex before marriage, they will cut your body parts off. If you don't wear hijab, they will take away your hair. And if you don't cover your arms, they will cut them off. Your arms will grow back out, only to be cut off again.  
(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

Your tongue will be pulled out and cut off, if you have used filthy language. The tongue will grow out again, and be cut off many times. Women who have cheated on their husbands, or committed sexual sins such as sex before marriage, will get hot iron shoved up their vagina, all the way up to their head. Men also get iron rods pierced in them, and they get their penis chopped off. One day on earth is equal to 1000 days in Hell. Punishments in Hell will be repeated continually.  
(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

Most of the respondents chose to share specifics about the torture awaiting those who commit sexual sins, even though I did not ask about sexual sins in particular. I only asked for elaborations or examples when respondents mentioned people being tortured in Hell. As can be seen in the quotes above, the narrative for punishments of sexual sins is highly consistent. The fact that most of the people I talked with decided to focus on consequences for sexual sins, together with the fact that descriptions were unambiguous on this topic, might suggest that this is a well-known teaching in their community.

### **MUSLIM RESPONDENTS' BELIEFS ON TRANSCENDENTAL COMMUNICATION**

When asked about communication between the living and the deceased, all the respondents immediately answered that it was impossible for the living to have any contact with the dead.

There is no contact. You cannot talk to someone who died. Zirics or Dukuns (mediums) tell you things that are false.  
(Hartono, Muslim male, 35 years)

There is no contact between living and dead people. Dukun (medium) do not represent a clear science, they cannot talk with the dead.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

It is completely impossible to have contact with the dead. They live in a different world.

(Reza, Muslim male, 21 years)

Despite initially stating that there is absolutely no contact between the living and dead, several respondents said that the deceased could visit and observe the living at times like Ramadan.

There is no contact between the living and the dead. The dead can observe the living, but the living cannot hear or see the dead.

(Annisa, Muslim female, 19 years)

During Ramadan the souls of the dead are allowed to leave Barzakh, and visit their family. The souls can see and hear their family, but the living cannot see them. The souls cannot influence the lives of the living. These visits continue until Judgment day. This includes visits from all of the past generations, and from all religions.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

At Ramadan the souls of the dead are able to hear us, but we cannot hear them.

(Reza, Muslim male, 21 years)

The souls of the dead are able to travel out from Barzakh during Ramadan.

They leave Barzakh to visit their family.

(Siti, 46 years and Anita, 52 years, Muslim females)

Four respondents also mentioned the possibility of receiving information and messages from the dead through dreams.

There is no contact with the dead, but information from the dead can be received. It is possible to get information about the existence of the dead through dreams. Dreams can reveal whether someone has a pleasant or unpleasant existence in the grave.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

We can not have contact with the dead. The dead can see their funeral, but we can't see them. Some people believe that it is possible to meet dead people in your dreams.

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

Our late husbands visit us in our dreams. They (the late husbands) are fully conscious. It is their choice to visit us.

(Siti, 46 years and Anita, 52 years, Muslim females)

The way in which they described this form of transcendent contact, the living were not active agents in the communication. They were solely passive receivers of messages from beyond. The general idea in all their answers regarding transcendent communication was that the living had no control or ability to achieve any form of contact with the deceased. However, there were some barriers between the different realms that were broken down by actions of the deceased souls. I was given several different accounts of how the souls of the dead could observe or listen in on us living, even though we could not sense them by any means. The deceased souls were also in control of the information people received in their dreams. All accounts of contact were one sided and not within the control of the living. However, Suprpto stated that the souls could not intervene in the lives of the living. The information conveyed by the souls, through dreams, was always regarding the wellbeing of the soul. The two widows I interviewed, Siti and Anita, both told me they had experienced visits from their late husbands in their dreams. And that their dreams revealed that all was well with their late husbands.

## MUSLIM RITUALS RELATED TO DEATH

It is preferable for a Muslim to die at home. But whether a Muslim dies at home or in the hospital, it is common for many visitors to surround a dying person (Gatrad, 1994). The dying person should ideally ask for forgiveness for his/her sins, and his/her attention should be focused on commitment and dedication to Islam. Holy water is given to a dying person, for him/her to drink. And family members recite verses from the Qur'an when a person is nearing death (Gatrad, 1994).

Muslims are buried when they die (Funeralguide, 2019). Cremation is forbidden as Muslims believe in the resurrection of the body at Judgment day (Burialplanning, 2020). Funerals are held as soon as possible after death, normally within a couple of days (Burialplanning, 2020).

Prior to the funeral, the body of the deceased is washed several times by family members of the same gender (Funeralguide, 2019) (Gatrad, 1994). After the washing, the body is then draped in cloth. Traditionally the men are wrapped in three sheets of cloth and women are wrapped in five (Funeralguide, 2019).

Normally the funeral starts with people gathering outside the mosque to recite prayers (Funeralguide, 2019). These prayers are led by the Imam (holy teacher) (Burialplanning, 2020). During the prayers people face the direction of Mecca (Funeralguide, 2019). Mourners are permitted to cry and show signs of grief at the funeral. Dramatic and hysterical displays of emotion, however, is not seen as acceptable behavior (Burialplanning, 2020). The body of the deceased and the coffin is also placed according to the direction of Mecca (Burialplanning, 2020). After the funeral prayers, the coffin is brought to the graveyard. Traditionally only men attend the burial. This is due to the belief that women will be emotionally overwhelmed and have a melt down (Gatrad, 1994). More prayers are recited when the coffin is lowered into the grave, and a handful of soil is thrown on top of the coffin by each participant (Funeralguide, 2019).

After the burial it is common to spend time together at the house of the family (Gatrad, 1994) (Burialplanning, 2020). In the following days it is common for people to show support to the family and to bring them food. The mourning period for the

family is traditionally 40 days, and for widows it is often a little longer (Funeralguide, 2019) (Burialplanning, 2020).

### **MUSLIM RESPONDENTS' EXPLANATIONS OF RITUALS**

Respondents were asked about rituals related to someone dying, and specifically to describe what takes place at funerals. Almost all the respondents spoke about praying being an important ritual. Several specified that they prayed for the soul of the deceased. A few also mentioned that they asked for forgiveness for the sins committed by the deceased.

A religious authority will speak on behalf of the family at the funeral. Afterwards the family give an apology to the people who are present, on behalf of the deceased. In the evening people pray at home for the deceased who is being interrogated in the grave. People pray for the soul of the deceased for nine days.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

We pray at the funeral.

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

They were also asked about the preparation and attire of the body prior to the funeral. Respondents gave very similar answers, mainly that the bodies are washed and dressed in cloth. This is parallel to what, previously referred to, online sources describe as traditional preparations of a deceased Muslim. One respondent explained that the cloth around the body is useful in the afterlife, as it signals to others that they are Muslim.

The body of the deceased is washed. The body is wrapped in white cloth before it is carried to the grave. We pray for seven days for the deceased.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

The body is buried in the grave. People pray. Dead bodies are dressed in white cloth so that Muslims will recognize each other as followers of Mohammed.  
(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

Five layers of cloth on women, three layers for men in the grave.  
(Bilqis, Muslim female, 19 years)

### **MUSLIM RESPONDENTS' VIEW ON A GOOD DEATH**

When asked to describe a good way to die, every single one of the respondents answered that it was good to die during prayer. Several said that it was good to die whilst doing good deeds. Praying was one such virtuous action, but it could also be other religious acts.

A good way to die is to die when you are praying.  
(Annisa, Muslim female, 19 years)

It is good to die whilst doing good deeds. A good deed could be praying, visiting the mosque, reading the Qur'an or doing the hadj (Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca).  
(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

When doing something good, like praying.  
(Bilqis, Muslim female, 19 years)

It is best to die on a Friday, while praying.  
(Siti, 46 years & Anita, 52 years, Muslim females)

Friday was mentioned as the ideal day to die by several respondents. When I asked for an explanation as to why Friday in particular was a good day to die, the respondents told me that they had read it in the hadiths. Many respondents also stated that the way a person dies directly affects the afterlife. Some said that consequences in the afterlife would be very bad for people who die whilst committing a sin. Others explained that people who died whilst engaging in Islamic rituals or practices would



benefit from this in the afterlife. And one respondent stated that dying, as a result of being murdered, was a good way to die. His statement was based upon his belief regarding the results this would generate in the afterlife. Thoughts on consequences in the afterlife seem to greatly affect respondents' views on what they considered to be a good death.

It is best to die during prayers. And it is really bad to die whilst committing a sinful act. According to the hadiths, it is best to die on a Friday. But most importantly, you should have Islam in your heart when you die. The way you die will affect what happens to you in eternity.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

It is good to die on Friday, when you are praying. Munkar and Nakir (angels) are just going to smile at you, if you die whilst praying. And also, your soul will go straight to the sky.

(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

It is best to die when you are doing something good, like praying. It is also good to die as a result of murder. If a Muslim is killed, he or she will come to Paradise.

(Reza, Muslim male, 21 years)

When asked whether there is any particular age which is desirable at the time of death, I got varied answers and logics. A couple of respondents said that it was positive to die very young, even as young as a fetus. Their logic was that dying young would mean dying with little or no sins. Which in turn would lead to a positive result in the afterlife.

It is good to die when you are young. This way you avoid committing many sins, which Satan tempts you to do on earth.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

I wish to die when I am old. Then I have the chance to do many good deeds first, which will result in positive consequences for me. To die as a fetus is good, because then you have not done any sinful acts.

(Reza, Muslim male, 21 years)

Reza, who said it was good to die as a fetus, also said that he wished to die at an old age himself. He seems to contradict himself by saying that there will be good consequences in the afterlife for people who die young and also for him if he dies when he is old. However the argumentation is coherent when looking at the full picture. He explains that it is positive to die at a point in time, or at a certain age, when your history of good deeds is greater than the history of sinful actions. The most important consideration is to get the correct balance, where the good outweighs the bad.

Euthanasia was completely unacceptable amongst all the Muslim respondents. It was considered both as a murder and as an act of suicide. Any doctor carrying out euthanasia would be considered a murderer. And the person asking for assisted suicide falls under the same category as a person committing suicide. Taking someone's life, whether it is someone else's or your own is seen as a great sin in Islam. Ending a life is not permitted, because it disrupts Allah's decisions, according to respondents.

Euthanasia is in the same category as suicide, and is a great sin for both parties involved.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

Assisted suicide is not allowed, it is like killing. Only God knows our time of death.

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

I am totally against euthanasia as Allah decides the time of death. Suicide is despicable.

(Reza, Muslim male, 21 years)

It is not okay with euthanasia. Allah decides.

(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

With some of the respondents I posed the question slightly differently. At times people seemed uncertain, or perhaps reluctant, about describing a good way to die. So alternatively I asked them to share with me how they wished to die. A few of these respondents seemed to focus more on the process of dying, and on the existence on earth in their considerations of a good death.

I wish to die in my sleep, or when I pray. I do not want to die in an accident.

(Hartono, Muslim male, 35 years)

I want to die when I pray, when my husband and my family is happy.

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

Hartono wanted to die in a peaceful and pain free manner. Aisyah was concerned with the people she left behind, and wanted her earthly business to be in a good place when she left. They both focused on earth related matters when describing a good death. Both of them also mentioned wanting to pray at the time of death, but neither said anything regarding the effect this would have on the afterlife.

### **MUSLIM RESPONDENTS' FEELINGS RELATED TO DEATH**

Respondents were asked about feelings related to their own and loved one's death.

When it came to their own death the answers were undivided. Everybody immediately said they were scared to face their own death. One respondent stated that all Muslims are scared of death, and if you are not scared of dying, then you are not a Muslim.

We are very scared of dying. Scared of the torture in the grave and in Hell.

(Siti, 46 years & Anita, 52 years, Muslim females)

I'm scared to face the consequences of my actions. I'm scared of Naraka

(Hell).

(Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years)

Respondents said they were scared of dying, because they feared the punishments they expected to receive in the afterlife. Despite all the respondents stating that they were scared to die, the gravity of this fear was conveyed differently. Some respondents said they felt fear, in what I perceived to be a light hearted manner. One respondent put into words that fearing Hell would have positive consequences. This information has lead me to question whether fearing death was being over-reported by the respondents.

I feel good about dying, it will be positive to come to Paradise. But it is also negative to die, as I am prepared to be tortured in both the grave and in Hell. I am scared. Fearing Hell and shedding tears will reduce my punishment in Hell.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

When I think about dying, I hope to come to Paradise. I want to do many good actions to make this happen. But I do bad things, like fight with my husband. As a wife I should not do that, we have to respect our husbands. I will be punished for that. When I think about these punishments I try to do better.

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

Almost half of the respondents also voiced having optimistic and positive thoughts regarding their own death, despite saying that they felt scared. They feared Hell, but at the same time they reported feeling hopeful about the prospects of coming to Paradise.

I have prepared myself for my own death to a great extent. Every day I try to live a good life. Allah will decide if my good deeds are approved. I am optimistic and believe that I will come to Paradise. Previously I have done bad things, but I hope I have made up for this by doing good. I feel good about my own death, but it is my responsibility to teach my children about Islam before I die.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

The afterlife is on my mind every day. Thinking about my own death I feel calm and peaceful, but also frightened. Every action has a consequence, and everybody have committed sins.

(Reza, Muslim male, 21 years)

Some of the respondents said that they had death on their minds daily. Thinking about death, and the afterlife which they believed to follow death, had a huge impact on their daily lives. These beliefs influenced the respondents' interactions with their family members. Beliefs about the afterlife also worked as a motivator to do good actions and avoid doing bad actions for several of the respondents.

On the question regarding death of a loved one, everyone said they felt sad. Only half reported feeling scared for the deceased, and most of them mentioned that their feeling scared would yield positive results for the deceased. Being able to help the deceased gave a sense of comfort, according to some respondents.

I feel sad, but I find comfort in knowing that by praying for the deceased I can ease their existence in Barzakh. I have many times felt scared for people who have committed sins and passed away. My fear is that they are being tortured.

(Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years)

I pray for my late husband. I pray that he has a good time in the grave, it is my duty as a widow. And since I pray for him, I believe that he has a pleasant experience. I cry out of fear thinking about his existence in the grave.

(Anita, Muslim female, 52 years)

Most of the people who reported feeling scared that their loved ones were suffering or experiencing an unpleasant existence, simultaneously said they believed that their loved ones had a pleasant time in the afterlife. And this belief was soothing for the respondents.

For good people it is positive to die, but it is sad for me. Knowing that they are well helps me. I don't think about the torture they have to endure to pay for their sins. When my father in law, who was a good man died, I had a dream

showing me that he was doing well. So I know he is in a good place. But if someone I love does many sins and dies, I will be upset as I know they will be tortured.

(Nur, Muslim female, 27 years)

I feel very sad. One year ago my father died, and my heart was broken. I kept crying. But a Muslim lesson says that you should not cry. It says that they are happy to be dead, because then they stop doing bad actions. My father was sick for many years. For him it is better to be dead, because he will not be in pain, he will be healthy.

(Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years)

On the whole, respondents were much more inclined to think positively about the afterlife for their loved ones compared to thoughts regarding their own afterlife. Their beliefs in an afterlife was reported to bring fear into their lives when they thought about their own prospects, whilst the same belief gave them comfort when they thought about family and friends who passed away. This seemed to be the most prominent tendency, although there were both positive and negative feelings reported in both cases. Several respondents also reported feeling sadness for their loss of a loved one, whilst at the same time thinking that death was something positive for the person who died, so they felt happy for them.

## **FINAL ANALYSES AND SUMMERY**

### **BELIEFS ABOUT DEATH AND RELATED FEELINGS**

Both Hindu respondents and Muslim respondents reported beliefs regarding death, that provided them with a sense of comfort and hope. For Muslim respondents, these beliefs were predominantly regarding death of family members and friends. Whilst for Hindu respondents, these beliefs were related to both their own death, and the death of loved ones. Feeling fear due to beliefs regarding death, was reported by Muslim respondents, but not by Hindu respondents. Muslim respondents mentioned fear of death with regards to their own deaths, for the most part.

Hindu respondents said that their belief in death being a positive experience for the deceased, gave them comfort when family and friends passed away. In reflections regarding their own and others deaths, they reported feeling happy and positive about death. This was due to beliefs about death being pleasant and pain free. It was also said that death was more agreeable than life, as death unites people with God and also sets peoples' souls free. Beliefs in reincarnation and a trust in God, were also beliefs which provided Hindu respondents with a great deal of comfort in relation to death. A couple of Hindu respondents mentioned feeling fearful during their reflection on death. This was not a fear of death itself, but a fear regarding prospects of an unpleasant rebirth following death. There was also a fear of leaving children behind, before they were able to fend for themselves, mentioned by Hindu respondents in reflections on death. There were however no statements made by Hindu respondents, about fearing death in itself.

Muslim respondents said they believed that family members and friends, who had passed away, were in a good place. And they explained that this belief gave them comfort. However, when they talked about dying in general, death was not described as a positive experience on the whole. The same Muslims respondents, who spoke about afterlife as a good place, also reported holding the belief that everyone gets tortured there, including their loved ones. A few respondents mentioned feeling some fear, when thinking about people they love being tortured in the afterlife. However, when respondents reflected on their own deaths, their fear of the afterlife was the dominant focus. A couple of Muslim respondents also mentioned feeling excited about their own death, due to their belief in Paradise, and their own prospects of spending eternity there. These few Muslim respondents reported both feeling fear and excitement regarding their own deaths, as a consequence of their belief about the afterlife.

### **MASLOW'S HIRARCHY OF NEEDS APPLIED TO BELIEFS ABOUT THE AFTERLIFE**

The Hindu respondents and the Muslim respondents all hold beliefs regarding how the human needs are coped with in the afterlife. The group of Hindu respondents offer distinctly different solutions regarding humans needs in the afterlife, to that of the Muslim group of respondents.

The most basic needs for humans are the physiological needs, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The Hindu respondents believe in shedding the human body when the soul transitions into the afterlife. By detaching from the physical form, the soul also does away with the physiological needs which trigger us to ensure maintenance of the body. In other words, physiological needs are acknowledged and resolved by removal of the body which causes these needs in the first place. Muslim respondents on the other hand, tackle the physiological needs in the afterlife from a different angle. According to this group of respondents there is a resurrection of the physical body in the afterlife. The post death body is almost identical to the human body we are familiar with from life on earth. This body also has the physiological needs we as humans experience during life. The constant renewal of physiological needs of the body is addressed in beliefs held by the respondents. As opposed to removal of physiological needs, their beliefs suggest an existence, in Paradise, where all human needs are constantly fulfilled. There is an endless supply of all human necessities. These are readily available at any given time for those who have the fortune of being permitted to enter Paradise. For unfortunate souls who are condemned to an afterlife in Hell, there will be no fulfillment of the basic human needs. These physiological needs will still be present, as souls in Hell also have a human body, but the needs of the body won't be met by the conditions of Hell.

Climbing up Maslow's pyramid of needs, we find the human need for safety. The Hindu group said that there is nothing to fear in the afterlife. The afterlife is described as a safe place where pain is absent. The only concern regarding post death safety was the danger of being reincarnated into a new body belonging to a lower form than the previous one. A reincarnation into a lower form of life was most certainly something to fear and strive to avoid. This was however a fear related to a new life on earth. The time in between death and rebirth, the afterlife in other words, was described by respondents as a blissful state in the company and safety of God. The Muslim group of respondents were adamant that there was absolutely something to be feared in the afterlife. They all reported being scared for their safety in the afterlife. This fear was based on the belief that they would experience torture for their sins in the afterlife. Although respondents feared for their safety, some also focused on coming to



Paradise, where safety from all harm was absolute. Paradise provided people with an everlasting safety from all fear, hurt and pain, both on a physical and emotional level.

The need for love and feeling of affiliation, which sits even higher on Maslow's pyramid of needs, is also addressed in respondents' beliefs about the afterlife. According to Hindu respondents the souls of the deceased are together with God. They are not alone in the afterlife, and so their needs for affiliation is fulfilled by the unification with God. Muslim respondents explained how everyone in Paradise would get a partner. Yet again Paradise provides for the needs of humans, according to respondents. The same could not be said for the situation in the afterlife in Hell. People in Hell were said to be unable to help each other.

At the top of Maslow's pyramid of needs are esteem needs and self-actualization needs. Esteem need is amongst other things, the need for self-respect and respect from others. Whereas self-actualization needs are focused towards fulfilling one's true potential through personal growth (McLeod, 2020). These human needs were not brought up as much in relation to the afterlife, in interviews with either group of respondents. It was interesting to find that the concept of Moksha was not given a great deal of attention by Hindu respondents when asked about the afterlife. Maslow's highest level "need for self-actualization" has much in common with the Hindu concept of Moksha, as Moksha entails the soul realizing its true nature through personal growth, and consequently fulfilling its ultimate potential. However this was not discussed by Hindu respondents who brought attention to the time in between death and rebirth, as well as focusing on the future reincarnations. Esteem needs, or more precisely the lack of them, were mentioned in regard to one stage in the afterlife by Muslim respondents. According to the Muslim respondents the esteem needs are non-existent on the Judgment day. Fear of the final judgment from God overshadow any desire for respect from onlookers.

## **REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF GROUNDED THEORY**

For this thesis I have used elements from Grounded Theory method in that I have taken the standpoint of moving from the data towards theory building. Data was collected in order to make an inquiry into how some Hindus and Muslims in

Indonesia relate to death, as opposed to being collected in order to verify or falsify existing theory. I have sorted through the data using codes, categories and concepts, and chosen to present the results of the data and analyses according to topics I found useful for structuring the material. However, I have not limited this study to only using Grounded Theory method. Through working with the empirical data, I found it useful to apply Maslow's theory of needs to my data. Applying pre-existing theories to new data is not Grounded Theory. I found it beneficial to present some of my data in light of a theory, and therefore chose to forgo the stringent use of Grounded Theory Method.

One aim of the use of Grounded Theory Method is to reach theoretical saturation. This is reached when further analyses and data collection does not produce new material, but starts to repeat what has already been discovered. This thesis does not reach theoretical saturation on the topic of investigation. The scope of this thesis is far too small for such a tremendous task. This study is rather an exercise in the use of the Grounded Theory Method, as a stepping stone towards further studies.

Theoretical sensitivity is an important aspect to Grounded Theory. This is the ability to spot and select data which is relevant to the emerging concepts and theories, during the data collection and the data analyses. This ability is gained through training and experience. This thesis is my first attempt at using Grounded Theory Method. As a novice researcher my theoretical sensitivity is still in early stages of development. It is possible, if not probable, that this piece of research would have evolved differently if I had carried it out at a later stage in my professional life, having acquired a more advanced theoretical sensitivity.

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# APPENDIX

## Interview guide - Hindu

Information given to the respondents in advance:

This interview is for my masters degree at university. I am interviewing Hindus and Muslims in Indonesia. The topic for the interview is death. And the questions will be about ceremonies, traditions and personal beliefs on this topic. I want to learn about your own thoughts and convictions, so there are no wrong answers. You are only asked to represent yourself as an individual, not represent or answer on behalf of other members of your religious community. You do not have to answer anything you are not comfortable with. And your answers will be anonymous.

1. Could you start of by telling me a bit about your background? Where you grew up (village/town)/ the importance of religion in your family and upbringing/ your occupation and your age.
2. Can you describe the process of cremation for me? What happens to the body during cremation? According to your own believes, where is the soul/spirit of the deceased? What happens to it, and how aware of "it's" surroundings is "it" (consciousness /emotional state)?
3. What is the dress code for participants of the cremation? Any symbolic meaning behind the dress code?
4. What emotions can typically be seen during cremation? And why is that, do you think?
5. Do you believe in the possibility of contact between humans and the dead? If so, in what form? And is there a timeframe for the communication, like a window of opportunity that opens and closes at any point? Any personal experience? How do you feel about connecting with the dead?
6. Are you familiar with the work of a Dukun/Mangku? Can you explain what they do? Do you trust their abilities?
7. Do you believe in reunification with loved ones, who have passed away, at any point? In what form? As spirits or bodies? Under which circumstances? Where and when does this take place?
8. Can you explain who Dewa Yama is? And who is "he" for you in your life?



9. Who is Sang Suratma? Is "he" important to you? In what way?
10. Where do you stand on assisted suicide/ How do you feel about doctors ending someone's life, assuming that the person is in pain and asks for it?
11. Thinking about the fact that you will die one day, how does it make you feel? Why?
12. How would you like to die? What makes that an ideal way to die for you?
13. How do you feel about your loved ones dying? Why do you feel that way?
14. Would you live your life differently if you did not believe in reincarnation and karma? How?

### **Interview guide - Muslim**

Information given to the respondents in advance:

This interview is for my master degree in university. I am interviewing Hindus and Muslims in Indonesia. The topic for the interview is death. And the questions will be about ceremonies, traditions and personal beliefs on this topic. I want to learn about your own thoughts and convictions, so there are no wrong answers. You are only asked to represent yourself as an individual, not represent or answer on behalf of other members of your religious community. You do not have to answer anything you are not comfortable with. And your answers will be anonymous.

1. Could you start off by telling me a bit about your background? Where you grew up (village/town)/ your occupation and your age. Did you grow up in a religious family?
2. Can you explain what happens when someone die? Can you explain what happens during a funeral? What happens to the body in the grave? What happens to the soul in the grave?
3. Who are Munkar and Nakir? What do they do? (What do they ask?)
4. What will happen on doomsday/Judgment day?
5. How do you picture Paradise?
6. How do you picture Hell?
7. Where did you learn about Paradise and Hell?
8. Do you sometimes cry out of fear of Hell? When was the last time?

9. What do guests at a funeral wear? Any symbolic meaning behind?
10. Do you believe in the possibility of contact between humans and the dead? If so, in what form? And is there a timeframe for the communication, like a window of opportunity that opens and closes at any point? Any personal experience? How do you feel about connecting with the dead?
11. Do you believe in reunification with loved ones, who have passed away, at any point? In what form? As spirits or bodies? Under which circumstances? Where and when does this take place?
12. Where do you stand on assisted suicide/ How do you feel about doctors ending someone's life, assuming that the person is in pain and asks for it?
13. Thinking about the fact that you will die one day, how does it make you feel? Why?
14. How would you like to die? What makes that an ideal way to die for you?
15. How do you feel about your loved ones dying? Why do you feel that way?
16. Would you live your life differently if you did not believe in Islam's teachings about the afterlife? How?

## Images of Padang Mahsyar



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## List of respondents

### Hindu respondents (pseudonyms used)

Adi, Hindu male, 40 years, Bali  
Agug, Hindu male, 62 years, Bali  
Ari, Hindu female, 30 years, Bali  
Ayu, Hindu female, 56 years, Bali  
Gede, Hindu male, 20 years, Bali  
Gusti, Hindu male, 51 years, Bali  
Ketut, Hindu female, 35 years, Bali  
Made, Hindu male, 29 years, Bali  
Ratih, Hindu female, 25 years, Bali  
Suasti, Hindu female, 45 years, Bali

### Muslim respondents (pseudonyms used)

Aisyah, Muslim female, 20 years, mainland Indonesia  
Anita, Muslim female, 52 years, mainland Indonesia  
Annisa, Muslim female, 19 years, mainland Indonesia  
Bilqis, Muslim female, 19 years, mainland Indonesia  
Fathoni, Muslim male, 25 years, mainland Indonesia  
Hartono, Muslim male, 35 years, mainland Indonesia  
Nur, Muslim female, 27 years, mainland Indonesia  
Reza, Muslim male, 21 years, mainland Indonesia  
Siti, Muslim female, 46 years, mainland Indonesia  
Suprpto, Muslim male, 36 years, mainland Indonesia