

INTEGRATIVE LEADERSHIP INTERNATIONAL

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Lessons on the Path:

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“Dying for Life”

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OBSERVATION:

This Friday was Good Friday, the day that the Passion of Jesus Christ is remembered by many of the two billion Christians worldwide. I had planned on attending a weekend of church services as a personal pilgrimage that would allow me to delve more deeply—than I had in the past—into the sacred and secular meaning of the holy days leading up to Easter. But my plan changed when Lillas awoke that morning, suddenly and unexpectedly ill with what turned out to be a 24-hour flu. As a result, I chose to stay home and support her through her own personal Good Friday trial and tribulation. During her naps, rests and fasts from fluids and foods, I researched and reflected on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who for me, is one of the greatest spiritual mystic leaders of all time.

As I searched through the many historical and current references, I found a diversity of perspectives and a multitude of questions: Did a great teacher and philosopher by the name of Jesus of Nazareth live and die in Palestine? Was his life fiction or was it fact? Was he a myth, a metaphor or truly, as he claimed, the Son of Man and the Son of God? Did he spend his lost years (12 to 30 years of age) being taught in Persia, India and Egypt as some claim that would make his teaching universal? Was his life events accurately reflected in the books of the New Testament or were they altered over time as the institution of Christian doctrine and dogma evolved? Was Jesus always the Son of God or did he in time, trial, tribulation and choice, become the Christ—which means Anointed One in Greek? Was Jesus unique or can we all do what Jesus did? Should we idolize Him or should we imitate Him? Did he really perform miracles like walking on water, healing the sick and raising the dead or were these fictions made up by his disciples to impress potential Christian converts?

One of the core beliefs of Christianity that differentiates it from many of the other wisdom traditions is that, after his crucifixion, Jesus resurrected and conquered death. Without the resurrection, some scholars claim, Jesus would have simply been another great prophet, teacher or sage. Although we know that there is death after life, Jesus, by his resurrection, showed us that there is life after death.

In recent polls, 80% of all Americans believe in some kind of afterlife, whereas 20%, despite growing evidence such as Near Death Experiences (NDE), hypnotic past life regression or sightings and communications with people who have died, do not believe in an afterlife.

D. Fetteroll at St. Phillip Howard (UK) suggested that a belief in life after death could be approached in stages or degrees from the easiest to the hardest to accept. Adapted and rearranged, these stages are: (1) **Genetics**: through the genes we pass on to our children and their descendents; (2) **Legacy**: through the things we have achieved and left behind in our life (foundations, artefacts, writings); (3) **Memory**: we live on through our family, friends and living associations; (4) **Perpetual Personality**: that survives as our own mind and memory in a mental body after the death of the physical body; (5) **Eternal Soul**: (mind, emotions, will) that lives beyond our earthly life as a spiritual body in heaven, hell or somewhere in-between; (6) **Reincarnating Eternal Soul**: that returns from other realms to learn needed lessons in new physical bodies; (7) **Resurrection of the Body**: its descent into hell and eventual ascension into heaven.

In the end, the diversity of perspectives on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus could be divided into three primary approaches involving the **Person** of Jesus (mechanistic), the **Pattern** of the Christ (organic) and the **Power** of God (wholistic). The movement in awareness from the person of Jesus to the pattern of the Christ was the movement from knowledge to belief. The movement from the pattern of the Christ to the power of God was the movement in awareness from belief to faith.

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:” **John 11:25**

“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” **1st John 2:2**

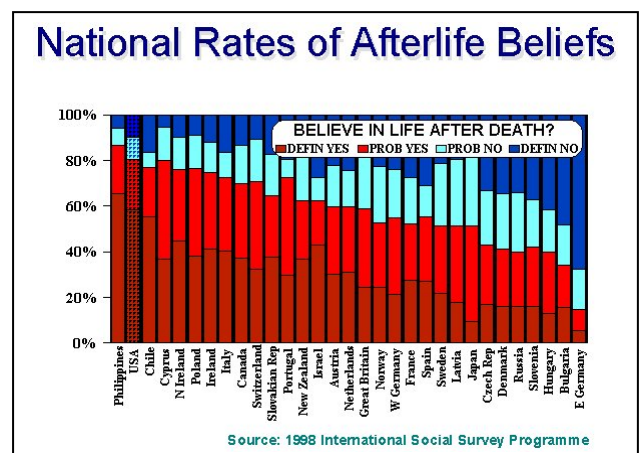
The meaning of Easter is the springtime celebration of new life and new light in our world. Jesus' paradoxical message is that one must lose themselves to find themselves; that one needs to be reborn to new life from a living death on earth. And it is only in dying to our illusions and delusions about the nature of our life and our impending death that we can truly begin to live our life once again.

What do you believe about the deeper meaning and significance of Easter and the idea of the Resurrection? Are you *dying for life* or are you simply mechanically existing within it?

APPLICATION: Review the seven degrees of belief in life after death this coming week. What is easy for you to believe and where does it become more difficult? For it is your belief about death and the existence or non-existence of life after death that will significantly impact the nature and quality of your life, learning, love and leadership endeavours.

INSPIRATION: Three perspectives on the Resurrection. (1) **The Resurrection as Historical Fact:** "Belief in the resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian faith. It is the Christian faith." **George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, London Times, 1992-APR-19.** "The apostolic faith of the Church is based on the reality of the resurrection of Christ. As St. Paul says: 'Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the death, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith is in vain.' (1 Cor. 15:12-14) Viewed as the ultimate victory over the powers of sin and death, the resurrection of the Lord is not only an historical event but also the sign of God's power over all the forces, which can keep us from his love and goodness. It is a victory not only for Christ himself but also for all those united with him (1 Pet. 1:3f). It is a victory, which marks the beginning of a new era (Jn 20:17). The resurrection is the ultimate expression of the Father's gift of reconciliation and unity in Christ through the Spirit. It is a sign of the unity and reconciliation which God wills for the entire creation." **Statement of the World Council of Churches / Middle East, Council of Churches Consultation, 1997.** "The early Christians believed and taught that Jesus' resurrection was the first of many to follow. If we *'are not going to resurrect after death, then this life on earth is meaningless, like a nightmare, without any sense... Hamlet would have been right, 'life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'... but earthly life is filled with meaning, because there is an afterlife...*" **Dr. Dominguez.** (2) **The Resurrection as Science-Fiction:** "Michael Persinger's theory that Jesus was drugged using Reserpine or similar drug, was in a deathlike coma for three days in his tomb, and then spontaneously revived, is just another individual seeking natural explanations for the supernatural. For example, others have suggested that the Star of Bethlehem was a conjunction of planets; a tidal wave accompanying a volcanic eruption in the Mediterranean Sea explains the parting of the Red Sea. Why don't we just argue that the resurrection story was made up by the creative authors of the Gospels and just leave it at that..." **Jay Ingram, Discovery Channel.** (3) **The Resurrection as a Universal Symbolic Ideal:** "Jesus' disciples understood that the spirit of Jesus transcended death because the way Jesus died was exactly like they way he lived. He gave his life to others and for others. He loved wastefully and selflessly. In that living and dying, the disciples concluded that Jesus revealed the meaning of God... God is the meaning that is present in the face of fate, tragedy, and undeserved pain. God cannot be seen in Jesus' escape from death at Easter until God is first seen in the crucified one who gives life as he dies, who offers forgiveness as he is victimized, who shows love as he is hated." **Derek Miller.**

INFORMATION: The history of Easter and the Resurrection from multiple perspectives can be found at: <http://www.religioustolerance.org>. About 1/3 of the world or 2 Billion people profess a faith in Christianity that includes the doctrine of Resurrection and an afterlife. In America, according to a 1998 ISSP Survey, 80% believe in an afterlife: In Canada, 75%: Whereas in East Germany, only 6% believe in an afterlife. See the figure on the right for your country and this link: <http://www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/never.html>. In addition, in a 2003 Harris Poll, 30% of Americans overall



(40% falling in the 20-29 age group) believe in reincarnation-up from 3% of Americans in 1947 which indicates eastern wisdom traditions influence in the past 50 years, on western philosophy and beliefs:

http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=359 . A USA Today/Gallup Poll in 2002-JAN showed that almost half of American adults appear to be alienated from organized religion. If current trends continue, most adults will not call themselves religious within a few years. Results include: (1) About 50% consider themselves religious (down from 54% in 1999-DEC) (2) About 33% consider themselves "*spiritual but not religious*" (up from 30%) (3) About 10% regard themselves as neither spiritual nor religious.

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