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## The Remaining Days

TSUKIMOTO Masayuki (Professor, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, Japanese Linguistics)

It's safe to say that, today, the average Japanese—assuming they are not faced with special circumstances such as confronting their own death or are in a life-threatening situation—rarely speaks to others about their own views of death and life. Although the same holds true for me, I would like to use this opportunity to daringly explain part of my own view on death and life.

I was born in 1954 in a town in Fukuoka prefecture that faced the Genkai Sea (genkai nada). At the age of four I began to commute several kilometers from my house to kindergarten. As the kindergarten was run by the Catholic church (even today one can see the chapel from the Kagoshima honsen line), I was made to memorize the paternoster. However, the place where we learned this prayer was the chapel, and, perhaps due to the great height of the ceiling, it felt frightening to me, as a child. It was as if I was standing in a deep hole. Thus, I had a hard time memorizing the prayer and can recall often being left behind.

About two months after going to kindergarten, I contracted measles. The doctor, however, diagnosed me with having a common cold, and in the process of receiving treatment I contracted pneumonia. Having a high fever and finding breathing difficult, I saw the following vision of which I could not tell whether was dream or reality. The doctor, who carried with him a big black bag, often came to treat me and, one time, as he gave me an injection, solemnly stated, "Tonight will decide his fate." My mother, crying by my pillow, said, "If only I can take your place." After some time, being in darkness, I saw a red, arched bridge and, at the far end of the bridge, an unfamiliar elderly woman beckoning me with her hand. Being wary of strangers, I decidedly did not approach her. I don't know how long of a period lapsed, but when I came to I was already improving.

Of course, my story sounds as if it is made up; or perhaps the reader will think that adults told it to me later on; or perhaps I took the story from a book I read as a child and then made it my own. Further, this episode became taboo between my parents, and we rarely spoke of it. Several years prior, however, when I broached this episode with my Mother—who will be 84 this year—she said, "Well...maybe something like that did happen."

Regardless, this experience took on a profound meaning for me. Simply put, my entire life after the age of four became my "remaining" time. Further—and I can only mention this briefly

due to space considerations—when I was six, I read a story in a young boy's magazine about child with a terminal disease. I soon identified with this story as I was often sick (I was absent from school 3 days a month) and came under the idea that I would only live until I was 17. Actually, I lived and nothing dramatic happened to me. Yet, I continued to live as if I was living on borrowed time within borrowed time. Next, and I don't know exactly why, I came under the impression that I would only live until I was 27. Again, although nothing happened, I was living my third bought of borrowed time.

Perhaps the reader is thinking that this is a silly story. Regardless, in the 1970s—a period of time in which financial matters were of utmost priority—I went against this trend, and chose to study language [at university]. Moreover, I chose to specialize in Japanese and, specifically, the Japanese readings of classical Chinese text (a field in which there are about 10 specialists in the world). In a sense, I had become enlightened to the idea of living my life as I chose. Among colleagues, there are those that panic, thinking that once reaches the age of 60 that they can no longer do creative work. I, however, feel as if I will continue my research no matter what age I am, and I continue to make research plans for the coming decades. When one thinks like this, my "awareness of what is left of my life" is not necessarily a bad thing.

There is one thing that worries me, however. I would like to ask my Father—he will be 87 this year—about that dramatic event that happened to me more than half a century prior. I worry that he might say the following: Well...maybe something like that did happen.





## Do Computers Die?

NISHIGAKI Toru (Professor, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies, Information Studies and Media Theory)

Can computers actually “die”? This question probably comes across as quite silly on first sight. The definition of death is an immensely difficult task and the topic has been the subject of frequent debates in Death and Life Studies. However, at least in the life sciences, the term “death” is used in relation to living organisms—that is mainly multi-cellular organisms that reproduce sexually. Therefore, it should be impossible for a computer, which does not qualify as an organism in the above definition, to die.

Having said that, why, then, is there talk of the existence of the “mind of a machine”? Scientists working in the field of artificial intelligence are laboring to create robots that can talk, philosophers engage in profound debates about the fine line dividing a living organism from an electric machine, and writers untiringly continue to produce fantasies of cyborgs that blend cerebral nerves and electronic circuits. In fact, among scientists working in fields of the life sciences, such as molecular biology or brain science, there are many who secretly believe in a model that embodies an information-processing mechanism similar to that of the mathematical logic used in computers.

All of these considerations cast doubt on the mutual foreignness of living organisms and machines. This line of thinking is, in fact, the current intellectual mainstream of contemporary science. In this sense, then computers, too, have to “die.” Why? Because, as long as we are human, it is impossible for us to banish the shadow and fear of death from our minds. Every one of us lives a life that alternates between joy and sorrow at the shortness and length of life. Therefore, if, for example, a genius engineer builds a computer system that corresponds to such a “mind of a machine,” but it does not possess death’s shadow or anxiety towards death, then this computer system would be nothing but a bad copy of a living being.

Therefore, believers in the existence of a “mind of a machine” would probably answer the question posed in the first line of this essay in the following manner: “Of course a computer will die when it has reached the end of its life span. When computer parts get old, they will break. Isn’t this the same as with humans?”

Is this answer correct, then? In my personal opinion, this answer is not valid. A computer is an entity that forever repeats pre-programmed operations. The term “program” means to “write in advance” and for computers,

operating on this concept, time stands completely still. Computers, which react to various input signals with output signals, may appear to be “reacting dynamically” within the passing of time, but this is a misconception. In reality, computers only naively perform static logical manipulations that are pre-determined by a programmer.

Of course, as parts age, malfunctions occur and computers break down. However, at the point of break down, the computer ceases to exist as a computer and turns into refuse. In short, a computer should be understood as a heteronomous, synchronic existence manifesting a logical structure determined by a programmer—nothing more and nothing less.

On the other hand, living beings are autonomous, diachronic entities that within the ongoing passing of time incessantly adapt their structure based on their past in a self-reflexive fashion. Living beings do look as if they are reacting to outside stimuli, but they do not in fact react in any predetermined manner to such “input signals.” They only give the appearance of following some kind of mechanical rule, since they exist self-reflexively. Living beings exist within the passing of time. Individual living organisms may die, but it might be said that both birth and death are only strategies used to adapt through reproduction to changes in the environment in order for the species to continue to exist.

In short, computers do not “die.” Why then, despite this fact, does modern science seek to take immortal computers as a model to explain mortal human beings? I think that in this regard a perspective that will expose this fundamentally warped view, not to say madness, of our time is called for.



## Fauré's Requiem and Representations of Heaven

WATANABE Hiroshi (Professor, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, Aesthetics)

Quite a while ago I happened to be watching a random TV drama, when suddenly Fauré's Requiem was played in one of the show's scenes. The drama was a crime program with the title *SP Keisatsuch Keibibu Keigoka Yon-gakari* (SP National Police Agency Security Division, 4th Unit) and I found the inclusion of the religious composition Requiem somewhat ill-fitting.

Among the many Requiem compositions of famous composers such as Mozart or Verdi, Fauré's Requiem is the one that most affirms a pure and innocent beauty. The otherworldly realm that is contrasted with this world mired in profanity is represented as paradisaical and its image possesses a unique popularity. With this in mind, I find that Requiem did not really fit the story (if I remember it correctly) of this drama with its scenes of people dying, a fierce gun battle between an assassin targeting the life of the Prime-Minister, and the Security Police trying to protect the politician's life. The Prime-Minister also turns out to actually have dirt on his hands.

It turns out that the number of movies that have used Fauré's composition is actually exceedingly high. The director of the drama I watched, Katsuyuki Motohiro (who seems to be a huge fan of classical music), had himself already used Requiem before in his movie *Space Travelers* (2000). Other Japanese movies that use this composition are *W's Tragedy* (1984) and *Kiri no Shigosen* (The Meridian in the Mist, 1996). If one also takes foreign movies into consideration, there are at least Godard's *Passion* (1982), *Lord of Illusions* (1995), *The Thin Red Line* (1998), *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), and *Someone* (2002).

The way in which Requiem is used in these movies varies, but although it is a composition that possesses the clear context of a Catholic mass for the dead, it is frequently used in ways that have nothing to do with death or religion. *The Legend of Bagger Vance* is the story of a golfer who had given up on himself being brought back by a mysterious caddy. In a scene in which the golfer miraculously hits a hole-in-one, the flight of the ball in slow-motion is accompanied by the finale of Requiem, *In Paradisum*. The movie *Someone* is the story of a movie director who creates a perfect actress out of computer graphics, lands a huge hit, but falls under the sway of the actress. It uses Requiem in a scene where the computer-generated actress appears and moves on a screen.

The ways in which Requiem is employed in these instances appears to deviate from its original use, but judging from the Catholic tradition, Fauré's Requiem itself was certainly not "orthodox." Fauré's composition emphasized the

image of paradise full of respite by removing *Dies Irae* depicting the terrors of Judgment Day, which had originally been the centerpiece of Requiem and adding *In Paradisum* to the end of the composition. This was a choice, which is said to have been fiercely criticized by the bishops when the composition was first performed at the *Eglise de la Madeleine* in Paris in 1888. Thereafter, this composition was re-written into a full orchestral version and performed at the 1900 Paris World's Fair. It became popular alongside this additional layer of secularization. The paradisaical atmosphere that Fauré's Requiem possesses can be said to have been shaped as part of this process of secularization. The background to this development is formed by the overall situation of this period, in which images of religion and death were separated from the Church and became secularized and individualized.

In this sense, the way Requiem is used in movies in recent years, which appears to be separated from the realm of religion, probably does not deviate from the context of this composition when one thinks on the level of the connection between images. The way in which Requiem is used is manifold, but in many instances it is related to scenes of movement in slow motion in which time appears to come to a standstill for a moment or situations that appear otherworldly. This music possesses the power to draw the viewer into a different dimension. The source of this power lies in the fact that this composition has come to be equated with paradise.

On the other hand, the fact that Requiem continues to be used in various contexts means that the use of this composition layers the various images of these movies intertextually and that this effect further adds a different layer to the religious image of heaven itself. The state of the world of today, which appears to have lost its religious mentality, is also a condition of continuing expansion into new territory in the multi-media realm. The example of Fauré's Requiem drives this point home anew.



## Saved Souls just before the End of Lives

KAMIBEPPU Kiyoko (Associate Professor, Graduate School of Medicine, Family Nursing)

I recently read Takano Kazuaki's [fictional work] *The Lifesaving Ghosts* Four Japanese ghosts, all who have committed suicide, are given a task from God: within 49 days, they must save 100 people who are thinking of committing suicide and then God will admit them into Heaven. Swiftly, the four ghosts return down to our world with special goggles that indicate how seriously a person is contemplating suicide, showing red, yellow, and green bodies—just like traffic lights. Red indicates those who have the highest risk of committing suicide and the outlines of their bodies tremble to the point of becoming blurred. As the group of four save one person after another in the city, they come to realize that even among in- and out-patients in hospitals that there are those who wish to end their lives.

In the hospital, they discover an elderly woman who emits the red signal. One of the ghosts enters into the woman's body and begins to monitor her psycho-somatic feelings, discovering that she has a great pain running from her stomach to her lumbar area: the elderly woman is suffering from algia caused by end-stage cancer. Further, the ghost finds that she knows she has caused her children great financial burden due to her hospitalization. In disparate sadness, but without blaming anyone, the old woman says "thank you, goodbye" to herself and proceeds to pull out her IV tube. The group of four ghosts argue whether they should save her in order to let her live out the rest of her life; whether they should let her die as to free her from further suffering; and whether it would be wrong to let such a good person die alone in a hospital. The ghosts encircle the elderly woman who is about to commit suicide in loneliness in the hospital room and are faced with a grave dilemma as to what they should do. The woman's hand stretches toward the IV tube. A ghost whispers with her heart and soul into the elderly woman's ear, "Grandmother, we know you are suffering. But live a bit more, please, if you ask, the doctor might be able to help your pain." The elderly woman's hand stops and her "signal" goes from red to yellow, then to green, her blurry silhouette dissipates, and the critical situation is avoided. The woman's face seems at peace. She passed away. The four ghosts cry. The woman's soul, which has left her body, now stands among the four ghosts. Peace is there in her eyes and even a slight smile can be seen on her lips. The elderly woman is liberated from the temptation of dying and able to "complete" her life. When her daughter and grandchild come to visit they notice her changes. The grandmother's soul looks at them with loving eyes.

This story recalls one of my patients "Mr. A" to my mind. Mr. A was a gentle salesman who, near the age of 60, was diagnosed as esophageal cancer. As Mr. A's preference matched the surgeon's opinion, he underwent a combinatory treatment of radiation and chemotherapy, which led to a temporary recovery. In the process of treatment, he developed esophageal and tracheal stenosis which led to difficulty with the expectoration of sputum. He further suffered from insomnia. At about this time, he began to express that he wanted to die with dignity. At times, when he suffered breathing difficulties, he began to say "let me die" and "get me a rope." Although he also had a stent inserted, it had little effect and a direct invasion of neoplasm exacerbated the tracheal stenosis. Accordingly, as a means to prolong his life, the doctors argued that it was necessary to perform a tracheotomy and intubation in order to maintain his breathing. When his attending physician asked Mr. A about his will, Mr. A stated that he did not want any form of artificial life-prolonging treatment. Mr. A's female partner was always silently by his bedside. Although Mr. A had a daughter with his prior wife, the daughter was now nearly out of the picture. She had visited him once during his admission, but it was a very brief visit for the sake of showing up. One day, when the primary nurse assisted him with showering, he muttered, "You're like my daughter. I'm so happy" and smiled. Two days later his heart rate declined and, with that, he passed away. Nine months had passed since being diagnosed as esophageal cancer.

Like the elderly woman in Takano's story and Mr. A, some patients express the wish to die as they approach the end of their lives. Although I don't believe that one can describe the psychological states of those facing death in a few lines, there is no doubt a desire to be liberated from algia, respiratory difficulties, the fear of death, and isolation. At the same time, one also hears people saying, "I don't want to die." Further, many think back on the hard spots in their lives and on their regrets. First, palliation of algia and respiratory difficulties must be performed. Many health professionals often believe palliation of familial pain is something beyond their working. The cases of Mr. A and the elderly woman, however, show us that repairing family relationships can be undertaken by nurses in daily practices.

The four ghosts, by the way, succeeded in saving 100 people's lives. Although it is a very serious topic, it is also a rewarding story that doesn't foist anything upon the reader.



## Psychiatric Treatment and Death and Life Studies

MATSUMOTO Satoko (Specially Appointed Researcher in the G-COE Death and Life Studies Program, Mental Health Studies)

A person once claimed to see hallucinations of decapitated heads from which blood was dripping here and there.

In conversation following the psychological examination, this patient talked about the hallucinations she was seeing. As this particular patient had been in treatment for a considerable amount of time, she realized herself that the decapitated heads appearing so vividly in front of his eyes were in fact hallucinations. In a certain group of mental ailments including schizophrenic disorder, patients experience visual and auditory hallucinations as well as delusions. Although the sights and sounds appear as real to the patient, others do not perceive these sights and sounds. In this sense, there exists a world for the patient, which he or she cannot share with others. Likewise, the world in the eyes of people suffering from depression, in which they can no longer enjoy the things they used to enjoy, also likely has a different guise than the world they perceived before.

In recent years, medical interest in Death and Life Studies in the area of palliative treatment is growing. I have hardly ever heard anything about his work from my father, a neurologist, a field that also deals with progressive diseases such as muscular dystrophy and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) in which methods of treatment are not known. However, I have seen him leave when he is sometimes called to his hospital ward late at night to look after a patient whose state has suddenly worsened. I believe I have also witnessed him several times tell my mother after returning home the next morning how that patient had passed away. Working in such an environment means that whether one likes it or not, one is forced to think about one's own death as well. However, whether the fact that my father became baptized as a Catholic when he turned sixty had anything to do with his work environment, I do not know.

In my line of work as a psychologist working in neuropsychiatry, it seldom happens that one comes face to face with death. It is especially rare at the hospital at which I am employed to come into direct contact with the death of a patient. This is for a number of reasons, including the fact that it is the peculiarity of my hospital that most patients are discharged within three months; the fact that mainly patients with conditions that can be adequately treated until discharge are admitted; the fact that because there are a sufficient number of staff to look after patients incidents such as suicides are not likely to occur; and that psychologists only come into contact with out-patients for psychological examinations. However, it is also not as if there is no

connection between psychiatric treatment and Death and Life Studies. As an easy-to-understand example of this relationship, in the case of grief care one can point to treatment given to patients who have suicidal impulses. Still, even though I have never come into contact with cases involving death, I believe that dealing with the various kinds of emotional injury, insecurity, or fear that people are suffering from and the aforementioned subjective worlds that are inaccessible to others, it is possible to come into contact with various ways of life and reflect on Death and Life Studies.

People live their lives in two worlds. In a material, objective world and an internal, subjective world that exists within their minds. Even if we share the same space and coexist within the same material world, our "mental worlds" perceived through the filter of subjectivity can never entirely overlap. This is true even in the case of intimates such as family members or lovers with which one shares much emotional understanding. For example, one method of treatment that has become widespread is cognitive psychotherapy, which propagates the view that the guise of the world reflected in our eyes is multi-shaped and based on the way we see things, that is our habits of perception.

The earth now has a population of more than 6.8 billion. While the stories that are spun by the lives of people all end in death and the return of the physical body to the earth, the varying mental worlds possessed by people spread into different directions. They seep into the memories of the deceased person's offspring. They enter into the minds of those who have come into contact with the ideas, art, technology, or knowledge produced by the deceased. In this way, fragments of the mental worlds of the dead are incorporated into the lives of the living and are passed on.

Life, carrying within it the fragments of the lives of the dead and the living, conglomerates and constitutes "society." There is no death without life, and neither is there life that does not already harbor death within it. Do not all of the manifold guises of life that one comes face to face with as a mental health practitioner give evidence of this?

Next year, I am reaching the end of my term as specially appointed researcher in the Death and Life Studies program, but working as a psychologist I want to continue to deepen my understanding of and considerations concerning Death and Life Studies.





## Conference Report: Japanese-Taiwanese Conference “Towards an East Asian Death and Life Studies”

TAKEUCHI Seiichi (Professor, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, Ethics)

The Japanese-Taiwanese conference “Towards an East Asian Death and Life Studies,” organized by the G-COE Program “Development and Systematization of Death and Life Studies” and the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at National Chengchi University was held on Friday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at National Chengchi University in Taipei, Taiwan. This conference was held as part of the G-COE program’s focus on “Death and Life Studies in East Asia,” following a similarly themed conference convened in Beijing, People’s Republic of China, in February 2008.

Apart from the ten participants from Japan and the fifteen Taiwanese presenters and chairpersons, a further eighty persons attended as audience members. Since interest in attending the conference went beyond capacity, we were forced to choose audience members by lot. In an atmosphere of academic excitement and curiosity, the conference began at nine o’clock in the morning. First, the president of National Chengchi University Se Hwa Wu and the dean of the College of Liberal Arts Hui-min Chou welcomed the Japanese participants and pointed to the high level of interest that exists in Taiwan in Death and Life Studies and the philosophy of death and described their excitement for the conference. Next, Yen-zen Tsai, head of the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, and I opened the conference by mutually ascertaining our understanding of the conference theme: “Towards an East Asian Death and Life Studies.” Throughout the morning, the Japanese participants gave their papers. Starting things off, I gave a paper entitled “On the Views of Death and Life of the Japanese,” pointing out the subtle difference in usage that the character *ji*—denoting “self”—has in Japanese where it can be both read *onozukara* and *mizukara*. In this regard the Japanese usage differs from the nuances the character possesses in Chinese and Taiwanese thought. I then discussed the issue of views on death and life based on this subtle difference of nuance by mainly focusing on the figure of Norinaga Motoori. Next, Masaru Ikezawa (Religious Studies) gave a paper with the title “Bio-ethics as Modern Religiosity—From the Perspective of the Chinese Case” in which, based on a consideration of bio-ethics in mainland China, he argued that any discussion of ethics related to life and death inevitably needs to be founded on a certain religiosity. He further stressed that in this case, a situation occurs in which a religious tradition will be consciously employed or in which such a tradition unconsciously influences discussions regarding bio-ethics. Following Ikezawa, Osamu Kanamori (Philosophy of Science) from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Tokyo and also affiliated with the G-COE program gave a paper with the title “Sickness and Death in the Works of Miyazawa Kenji.” Based on the works of Kenji Miyazawa, for whom sickness and death were constant companions, Kanamori argued that while the subjective “first-person death” (one’s own death) is casually narrated in Miyazawa’s works as merely amounting to a tiny blip within the vast natural world, this is contrasted with the gravity attached to death in the second person (the death of a person to whom one is emotionally close).

After the lunch break, the four Taiwanese presenters gave their papers. Fong-Mao Lee from the Institute of Chinese

Literature and Philosophy at Academia Sinica who is also a practicing Daoist priest, presented on the topic “*Zhulian* (hauntings) and *Jiechu* (exorcism): Views on Unnatural Death in the Daoist Badu Ritual.” In the paper, Lee gave a detailed introduction to a ritual and its intellectual background that is still conducted in Taiwan and Hong Kong for those who died unnatural deaths. Next, Shu-wei Hsieh from the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at National Chengchi University talked about “Death and Life and Ritual: The Concept of *Liandu* (salvation through refinement) and *Salvation after Death*.” Hsieh discussed the concept of salvation after death and the transformation of ritual seen in medieval Daoist texts, focusing in particular on the relationship between body and soul. Then, Yen-zen Tsai, also from the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at National Chengchi University, delivered a paper with the title “An Analysis of the Views of the Afterlife of the Taiwanese People—Observations Based on the 2009 Preliminary Survey/Comparative Research into Religious Experience in Taiwan.” Based on the findings of a survey conducted as part of a project that he is participating in, Tsai discussed in detail the current state of perceptions of the afterlife in contemporary Taiwan and the changes that have taken place within these perceptions. Last, the scholar of Japanese thought Hsiang-sheng Hsu (Department of Japanese, National Chengchi University) talked about “Differences in Chinese and Japanese Views of Death and Life—The Concept of *Lover’s Suicides* (*Shinju*),” comparing Chinese and Japanese literary works that deal with the topic of lovers’ suicides and analyzing the differences in views on death and life in the two groups of works as well as the their background.

Incorporating the above topics, the concluding general discussion addressed the differences and similarities in the way that death and life are viewed in Japan and Taiwan and the intellectual background of these differences and similarities, the transformations brought on by modernization, and the potential contributions that an East Asian Death and Life Studies can make. The discussion carried on long after the originally planned end of the conference and finally came to a close at 18:30.

Through the conference, it became clear to me that research in Death and Life Studies is flourishing in Taiwan, and it was an important gain to have had the opportunity to discuss these matters in a way that also differed in important ways from the discussions we had in Beijing. We are planning to publish the conference proceedings later this year.





## International Symposium:

# Dialogue on Death and Life—Views from Egypt

OHTOSHI Tetsuya (Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology at the University of Tokyo, Department of Oriental History)

Two international conferences were convened under the above title from September 29 to October 4 of 2009 in the cities of Cairo and Alexandria in the Arab Republic of Egypt. They were jointly organized by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture (Supreme Council of Culture), the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the NIHU Program: Islamic Area Studies, the JSPS Cairo Research Station, the Center for Social Research and Studies at Cairo University, and were convened with the full support of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

At least as far as the Humanities outside the field of Japanese Studies are concerned, this was probably the first occasion on which Japan and Egypt organized an international conference on entirely equal terms. The term “equal” also encompasses here the financial burden. In this regard, this occasion should be praised as marking a turning point in Egypt-Japan cultural exchange and academic cooperation. It was also the first time that the GCOE Life and Death Studies program had the opportunity to engage in a joint project with the Muslim countries of the Middle East. Egypt, which possesses a rich environment of scholars and academic achievements as well as a global intellectual presence, was selected as the place for this occasion.

After arriving at Cairo Airport on the night of September 28, we used the next day for intellectual acclimatization by visiting several mosques and the Egyptian Museum, where we let

our thoughts travel back in time to the culture of life and death in ancient and medieval Egypt. In the evening, we proceeded to the conference venue, the international conference hall of the Supreme Council of Culture located inside the Cairo Opera House area, attended the reception organized by the Egyptian Minister of Culture, Farouk Hosni, and held the opening session of the conference. The anteroom of the venue had already been overflowing with people, but the venue itself was even more so brimming with an atmosphere of intellectual eagerness and enthusiasm. Apart from Egyptian scholars, the local media was also present in large number. The session started with an opening address on behalf of the Minister of Culture given by Emad Abou Ghazi. Our fears of a tense atmosphere caused by reports in the local media about the decisive role played by Japan in Minister Hosni’s failed bid in the election for Director-General of the UNESCO, turned out to be completely unfounded. Next, Shimazono Susumu (professor of Religious Studies at the University of Tokyo and then-head of the GCOE project) and Kishimori Hajime (Director of the Information and Culture Centre at the Embassy of Japan) addressed the audience. There was a multitude of questions from the assembled print, radio and television media and it was impossible to respond to every single of them. I believe that the conference participants were able on that day alone to significantly deepen their scholarly exchange.

October 30 began with an opening speech by the Japanese ambassador to Egypt, His





Excellency Mr. Ishikawa Kaoru. Following, Shimazono Susumu gave an introductory talk, giving an overview of Death and Life research and its aims. Next, Ahmad Zayed (Sociology, former dean of the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University) and Machida Sōhō (Religious Studies, Hiroshima University) gave two keynote speeches. The speeches focused on Egyptian and Japanese examples respectively, employed many images, and in giving an overview of the entire conference, raised many points for discussion. Hasan Hanafi (Philosophy, Cairo University) and myself functioned as commentators to these speeches.

The first proper session had the title “This World and the Other World: From Philosophical, Theological and Comparative Religious Perspectives” and consisted of Suzuki Izumi (Philosophy, The University of Tokyo), Hala Fouad (Sufi philosophy, Cairo University), as well as Yoshida Kyōko (Shia Thought, GCOE). Yanagihashi Hiroyuki (Islamic Law, The University of Tokyo) functioned as chairperson. Despite the differences existing between western philosophy, Sufi philosophy, and Shia thought, the session showed the possibilities of philosophical dialogue across academic and national boundaries.

After a two-hour lunch break, the second session “Souls, Spirits, and Life After Death” started. From the Egyptian side, Ahmed Morsy (Sociology and Folklore Studies, Cairo University) and Sameeh Shallan (Folklore Studies, Higher Institute for Folk Arts at the Academy of Arts) presented. The Japanese panel participant was Shimauchi Hiroe (German folklore studies, GCOE). This panel was one of the key elements of the conference and received the largest extent of interest and praise from the local participants. Although Egyptian folklorists and anthropologists have been very interested in issues of life and death and have accumulated a rich body of data concerning this field of inquiry, they have so far only had scarce opportunity to engage in academic discourse with Japanese or western colleagues, since their work has been mostly conducted and published in Arabic. The conference can therefore be called a trailblazing event for further substantial academic exchange in this area.

Last, functioning as chairpersons, Ahmad Zayed and myself opened the floor to questions and general discussion and in the face of an unending stream of comments of questions from the Egyptian side, finally closed the session only due to time restrictions. I subsequently gave the closing address in Arabic, thanking the organizers and everyone who had cooperated for their efforts.

A reception was held after the conference, and continued on a chartered yacht. We spent the evening cruising up and down the Nile until late in the night, thanking the Egyptian organizers and participants for their efforts and deepening the friendship between the two countries. With the night breeze gently blowing over the Nile, participants and organizers bonded cordially.

The following day, October 1, and our last day in Cairo, was spent with an extensive program of visits to religious and historical sites. Until the evening, the conference participants roamed the city divided up into the three groups “City of the Dead,” “The Culture of Eastern Christianity,” and “Remains of Ancient Egypt.” Everyone met up again in front of the Husayn Mosque, followed by a joint visit to a neighborhood of booksellers and their extensive collections. Especially the group visiting the City of the Dead saw sites rarely even visited by the locals, such as the shrine dedicated to the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) and the tomb-dwellings of grave diggers. The participants also witnessed the grave makers at work. Furthermore, we had the opportunity to talk to other residents of the graveyard.

On the morning of October 2, we moved on to Alexandria and in the afternoon took part in a special tour organized for us with great kindness by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. First, Mr. Yusuf, an Egyptian Jew, functioned as our guide through the Jewish graveyard and its underground burial chambers. This was probably the first time that the Jewish graveyard in Alexandria received Japanese visitors. Next, we visited a Coptic graveyard, a graveyard for westerners from the period of the First and Second World Wars, and then a Muslim graveyard and shrine to Muslim saints. Actually, the graveyard serving the Coptic faith, which even predates Islam in Egypt, is difficult to visit even for scholars, and our visit to it therefore was a very precious opportunity.



In the evening, we attended the opening ceremony of the conference at the Delegates' Hall in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, which functioned as the conference venue. The library was built in the image of the ancient library of Alexandria. According to one theory, the term "symposium" itself is derived from the ancient Greek term "symposion," which were gatherings conducted at the library of ancient Alexandria. It can be said that we therefore followed the convention at the birthplace of the symposium. The venue was filled with the excitement of around one-hundred and fifty persons. Upon inspecting the list of participants, I discovered that many had even come from the cities outside Alexandria and as far as Cairo.

At the start of the conference, Khaled Azab (Islamic Archaeology, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, director of the Media Department) gave the opening address, followed by an informative talk by Yehia Halim Zaki (head of the Academic and Cultural Affairs Sector at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, former Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Alexandria University), based on his experiences as a medical practitioner. Ashraf Farrag (Linguistics, Dean of Faculty of Arts at Alexandria University) gave a further thought-provoking talk. On the Japanese side, after Shimazono Susumu's speech, director of the JSPS Cairo Research Station Ōishi Yūji addressed the assembled audience.

On October 3, Galila El Kadi (Urban Engineering, French Institute of Research for Development [IRD]), who had been invited from Paris, gave the keynote address, discussing the

urban planning and development of Cairo's City of the Dead from a historical perspective. A French-made film about the City of the Dead was also shown as part of the talk.

The first session of that day was entitled "Death and Life relating to Visual Culture." Its participants were on the Alexandrian side, Lovay Mahmoud Saied (Archaeology, Director of the Calligraphy Center at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina) and Khaled Azab. The Japanese session participants were Akiyama Akira (Art History, The University of Tokyo) and Tomizawa Kana (Indian Religions, GCOE). As many of the panelists employed images as part of their talks, we were able to make good use of the library's Lecture Hall's splendid audio/video equipment. The varied subjects of the talks, ranging from ancient Egypt, to Islamic architecture, to western and Japanese art as well as obelisk architecture in India, generated a lot of discussion and received much praise.

After lunch at the refectory for honored guests located in the lecture hall building, the second session was held. The title of this session was "Dealing with the Dead and Their Bodies," and its participants were Morikawa Tomoko (Iranian History, Hokkaido University), Fujisaki Mamoru (European Medieval History, GCOE), Faruq Mustafa (Social Anthropology, Alexandria University), and Maged El-Raheb (Coptic Architect, Society of Egyptian Heritage Conservation). It was a great gain to have had the opportunity to engage in academic exchange with Faruq Mustafa, for whom this was the first academic contact with Japan despite his fame, and the Copt Maged El-Raheb.



Also, the Egyptian conference participants showed great interest in the Japanese papers.

The ambitious third session, "Legal Aspects of Death," was chaired by Sa'ïd al-Daqqaq (Law, former vice-president of Alexandria University), and brought together specialists in Islamic law with a talk on legal aspects of Coptic Christianity. The participants were Yanagihashi Hiroyuki (Islamic Law, The University of Tokyo), Muhammad Kamal al-Din Imam (Islamic Law, Alexandria University), and Magdi Girgis (Coptic History, Kafr al-Sheik University).

After the panels, Dr. Mansur`Uthman (Archaeology, The Supreme Council of Antiquities) had organized a slide show about remains in the western oasis region of al-Bagawat. Lastly, the closing discussion under the chairmanship of Machida SMhM and Lovay Mahmoud saw an unending stream of questions from the audience and was ended only by the time limit, as had already been the case in Cairo. I brought the conference to a close with a final address.

On the morning of the following day, a VIP tour had been organized for us at the library. Without even having the time to take a proper farewell from Alexandria, once the tour of the library was over, we had to drive straight to Cairo Airport, from where most of the participants returned to Japan.

As already mentioned in the beginning of this report, the two conferences held in Egypt mark a turning point that necessitates a rethinking of academic exchange between Egypt and Japan. Therefore, the attention paid by the Egyptian mass media to the Japanese visit was extraordinary. Shimazono Susumu appeared on four TV channels (including news programs) while I appeared on six channels (including a two hour long talk show). The Egyptian participants appeared on more than four TV channels and also responded to requests from two radio stations each, but we had to turn

down all other requests due to time restrictions. I believe that the visit was also covered by more than thirty newspapers and magazines, including the London-based *Asharq Alawsat* and representative local newspapers, such as *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Gomhuriya*. Coverage of the conferences extended even to Reuters and Saudi-Arabian as well as Moroccan newspapers. The interest of the mass media exceeded our expectations by far and we realized that next time we will need to plan our response to media interest beforehand. Since the conferences were reported about in such a large number of newspapers and magazines, the conferences themselves will likely be studied in the future in regard to contacts between Egypt and Japan. Also, the fact that this occasion marked the first attempt at a solid exchange with a range of Alexandria-based scholars has to be evaluated very highly.

Since our conferences got full publicity and coverage, we have been contacted by researchers across the Middle East who have expressed their hopes to read papers at our conferences, or take part in the Death and Life Studies project. Moreover, some of them expressed their wishes for investigating the Death and Life studies in Japanese institutions. We have to find a way to respond to these requests.

In face of the astounding response to the conferences, Shimazono Susumu has announced plans to organize a follow-up event in Japan to be held in 2011. That event will need to be conceived as an extension of the conferences that were held in Egypt, addressing the points of contact that have become clear during the course of our intellectual explorations at the conferences as well as fields of inquiry that have not been addressed yet.

In closing, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the presenters, the Egyptian conference staff, the specially appointed researchers who worked hard in the background, and most of all the more than three-hundred local participants from academia, the mass media and general society.



## Studying death to appreciate life

The Egyptian Gazette  
8 Oct, 2009 6



Understanding life and death: From left to right, Professor Susumu Shimazono, the director of the DALIS programme in Tokyo University, the Cultural Attaché of the Japanese Embassy in Cairo, Hajim Adhikari, and the head of the Committee led by Egypt's Supreme Council of Culture Emad Abu Ghazal, during the unique seminar held in Cairo last week.

**ASHARQ AL-AWSAT**  
Chief reporter

**DEATH** and Life Studies (DALIS) is a new Japanese academic discipline which seeks growth of mutual exchange between medicine, the social sciences and humanities, in order to understand life.

"People have to thoroughly understand and study death to appreciate the value of life," professor Susumu Shimazono told a recent Cairo seminar which was co-organized by Tokyo University and the Supreme Council of Culture (SCC).

"The new discipline also aims to study how the Western and Eastern cultures view death, which mankind has not been able to face and understand," he told *The Gazette* at the opening session of the seminar, which was attended by Japanese and Egyptian scholars.

Shimazono said that he chose Cairo to hold the seminar, the first of its kind in the Middle East, because the ancient and modern Egyptians and the Japanese share a common historical memory view and burial systems.

"As in Japan, there is a strong relationship between the living and the dead in Egypt," he said, adding that Death and Life Studies started in his country before it began in the West.

He explained that the need for understanding views of life and death as found in Eastern thought and among the Japanese themselves all started in the early 20th century.

Shimazono said that the University of Tokyo launched the DALIS programme in 2002 to further develop a robust system of education and research in this area, and launch philosophical and theoretical inquiries into the ethics and process of death and life.

"In order to achieve these goals, the programme aims to make active contacts with different countries in the Middle East like Egypt, to learn a great deal about death and examine the possibilities for this new discipline," Shimazono continued.

According to him, interest in DALIS in China and Korea is growing.

"At the same time, I intend to further deepen my previous connections with North American and European countries. Thus, along with these regions, and with an eye towards Muslim and other Asian regions, I hope to contribute to the creation of a global study of death and life," he declared.

However, Shimazono said the development and fulfilment of this new discipline was a long-term task, requiring the continuing efforts of many people.

"Our hope is that the new discipline can promote new forms of global scholarly interaction and the development of a new academic field. The creation of a small beginning for global society is one of our hopes," Shimazono, Chairman of the DALIS programme, added.





## The 15th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society for Clinical Thanatology

SHIMIZU Tetsuro (Uehiro Chair, Philosophy—Clinically oriented Death and Life Studies)

On December 5-6<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the 15<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Japanese Society for Clinical Thanatology was held at the Hongo campus (the main forum was the *Yasuda Kodo*). Although this meeting was not held under the direct auspices of Death and Life Studies (DALS), we were able to receive their full assistance in holding this forum. Simply put, following the end of the first day of our meeting, a special lecture sponsored by Death and Life Studies (see the accompanying articles) was held in the space of this forum and thus allowed for a large number of participants. Further, on the second day, three specially invited researchers and clinicians from the United States—who also gave public lectures for our annual meeting—held individual workshops as part of Death and Life Studies continuing education program. (This is a course designed to teach the fundamentals of Death and Life Studies for clinicians and caregivers). A number of COE-affiliated professors also kindly participated in our JSCT meetings. Further, many of our specially appointed researchers spent some 10 months graciously helping with preparations for this meeting and also assisted in the meeting itself. In other words, we received a great deal of assistance from Death and Life Studies. Remembering that this meeting could not have been accomplished without this support, I would like to take the opportunity to offer my profound gratitude to all who kindly helped. Of course, through this assistance, it is true, that we were able to make an appeal for the value of DALS' activities and the fruits of our research to many participants who hold an interest in clinical death and life studies.

That the 15<sup>th</sup> annual meeting was successful is attested to by the following figures:



739 paying participants attended and, when one includes speakers and staff members, some 860 people in total were involved. Further, the public lecture by Aoki Shinmon (see accompanying article) was attended by some 1050 participants. Such a number of attendees, including mostly professionals in medical and nursing care, shows the intense interest in what Death and Life Studies can provide for them.

As this was a meeting of the Japanese Society for Clinical Thanatology, we felt it necessary to merge it with Death and Life Studies. We decided on the theme of “Death and Life Studies: Active and to be Activated in Clinical Settings.” Our aim was to elucidate how the praxis-based knowledge of Death and Life Studies is “alive” in clinical settings and also to inquire as to how this field can further its various areas of research so that this work can be of use in these settings. My particular goal was to deepen the discussion on experiences of loss in which one's own existence is threatened with the anticipation of death and for those bereaving the traumatic loss of their beloved ones). In reality, however, the quality of the public lectures and symposia was well beyond what we had planned for. To cite an example, our first symposium—on the grief of bereavement—and our second symposium—on the lives of those who suffer from severely impairing medical conditions—allowed us to better understand those individuals who face the experiences of loss and to recognize the need to stay with these people in spirit through a multi-faceted discussion. Further, a great number of participants came to our general forum, which allowed for a variety of presentations and lively discussion.

To conclude, through this annual meeting, I was able to confirm the relationship and direction in which Death and Life Studies has taken with the clinical field. First, I was able to confirm that our continuing education program has met the needs and expectations of clinicians, and I also understood the need for the further development of our program. Second, I felt that although many involved in our COE program spend their days focused on research that is at times detached from clinical settings, the results of such forms of research hold the possibility of resonating with problems in the clinical field. Hence, such research is of great importance. My hope, in the final two years of our program, is to further such work.



## Public Lecture: Aoki Shinmon

### The Relay of Life: On the Film *Departures*

SHIMAZONO Susumu (Professor, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Religious Studies)

The 15<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Japanese Society for Clinical Thanatology was a meaningful event for our COE program. Notably, as the main event for the Death and Life Studies component of this meeting, a public lecture was held by Aoki Shinmon on December 5<sup>th</sup> (4:20-6:00 PM) in the Yasuda Kodo.

The film *Departures* (2008), which received the 81<sup>st</sup> Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, was based on Aoki's novel *Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician*. The novel depicts the story of a young man who takes on the occupation of performing rites for the departed, and offers us the chance to rethink the meaning of death and life. The film, which depicts the process by which this young man comes to find profound meaning in this line of work, received global critical acclaim. This work also offers a number of insights for those of us in contemporary society to examine our own views of death and life and also provides a chance to reconsider the cultural aspects of death and life in Japan.

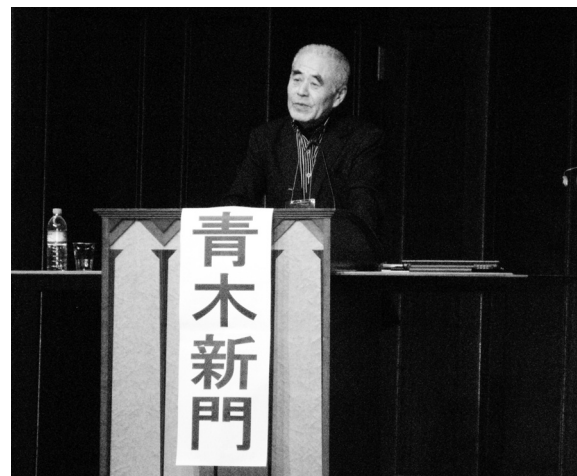
With great humor, Aoki explained how Motoki Masahiro, the main actor and originator of the film's conception, was deeply moved by his novel and how the two came to meet. Aoki also talked about how he was dissatisfied with the film's script and how ultimately he refused to allow his name to appear in the credits. Further, while drawing on various episodes from his own life and his personal views on death and life, Aoki explained how he came to become a "coffinman" and how he came to write his work; he also spoke on the problem of how Japan's culture of death and life is growing fainter in contemporary society. The 90-some minutes in which he spoke flew by due to the profundity of his talk. Those in attendance (it was a packed house) were deeply moved and listened with great interest.

There was much in his talk that provided food for thought from the perspective of Death and Life Studies. The *Departures*' script depicts that ritualists who perform the clothing of the dead [i.e., placing them in their funerary garb] and encoffinment are a separate entity from general funeral homes. Originally, the dressing of the dead was undertaken by family members and those close to the deceased, and was seen as a form of ablution. Aoki, who left Waseda University before graduation, returned to his home in (what was then part of) Toyama prefecture, where this rite was still practiced. Of course in the past such practice was obviously done by families, but times changed. Aoki, who was primarily interested in literature, opened a pub, which ultimately went

bankrupt. When Aoki began to work at a funeral home, the above-mentioned practice was already beginning to be outsourced to professionals

Although in *Departures* Daigo [literally, "great enlightenment" ], a failed orchestral cello player, becomes a "coffinman," such a line of work is not common. Such an occupation, however, shows how the funeral industry often comes into contact with so-called death pollution. When Mika, Daigo's wife, learns of his new profession, she calls him "filthy" [i.e., polluted] and then flees to her family home. This scene, in which the wife rejects her husband ( "You're filthy. Don't get near me." ), is exactly the same as that found in Aoki's novel. For Aoki, the question as to how humans can overcome the supposed taboo-nature of death is a crucial dilemma. In his novel, [one scene depicts] the coffinman having to dispose of a decaying body. As he rounds up the maggots [infesting the cadaver], he becomes transfixed by the movement of each individual maggot and realizes that they, too, are filled with life. Through this experience, the maggots seem to emit radiance.

Listening to Aoki speak, we had the chance to reconfirm that contemporary society has indeed attempted to keep death at bay. At the same time, one also gained the feeling that many today are aware of this fact and seek to reconfirm death as something close at hand. In his conclusion, Aoki spoke of the importance of being at hand for the death of one's family members and friends. The title of his talk, "The Relay of Life," clearly contains this message. Our physical presence at the moment of the death of those close to us can awaken in the desire to live fuller and more meaningful lives. In this sense, Aoki's deep conviction greatly moved the audience.





## The 15th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society for Clinical Thanatology: Seminar

Ryan WARD (in order)/ DALS Specially appointed researchers  
MATSUMOTO Satoko (in order)/ DALS Specially appointed researchers  
ITO Yukiko (in order)/ DALS Specially appointed researchers

**Lecture 1:**  
***“What Death and Life Studies can give to sites of Clinical Practice”*** Shimazono Susumu

**Lecture 2:**  
***“Understanding and Responding to the Dying and the Bereaved”*** Donna L. Schuurman

On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009, as part of the 15<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Japanese Society for Clinical Thanatology, lectures by Shimazono Susumu (Global COE Death and Life Studies project leader, 2007-2010) and Donna L. Schuurman, Executive Director of The Dougy Center for Grieving Children and Families ([www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)), Portland, Oregon, USA, were given. Wakabayashi Kazumi of Yamanashi Eiwa University served as chair for both lectures.

Professor Shimazono began his lecture by introducing various facets of spiritual care as practiced in clinical settings in Europe and North America. He expressed that such care was a necessity in the Japanese medical system, as well. That said, however, Shimazono noted that the establishment of such methods of care in Japan faces a number of hurdles. Notably, Japan does not have a resident chaplaincy system and that Buddhist hospitals, for example, are not common in Japan. Thus, although such a system is truly needed, we will have to overcome or transcend certain sectarian biases or bases as found in the West. In terms of what is needed, Shimazono noted 1) the complex nature of how Death and Life Studies can contribute to clinical practice; 2) how Death and Life Studies can serve as a facilitator of dialogue for contemporary society; and 3) how Death and Life Studies can contribute in a specific fashion for clinical sites and in a broader fashion for civil society in general. Shimazono's lecture allowed attendees and those involved with our program for the chance to reconsider how Death and Life Studies can contribute to the establishment of new forms of “care” in Japanese society.

Following this lecture, Doctor Donna L. Schuurman a leading international figure in grief and bereavement work for children, first introduced the conception behind the founding of the Dougy Center, a Portland-based organization that offers clinical counseling for youth. Schuurman then offered an insightful comparison between North American and Japanese ways of grief support for children. Schuurman noted:

In comparing students scores in math, science and literacy, students from the Japanese

school system dramatically out-perform their counterparts in the United States. Yet the comparisons in understanding of death, and death education lag behind.

Schuurman also discussed a number of guiding principles for how clinicians can help children overcome grief and bereavement. Four guiding principles were particularly introduced: 1.) grief as a natural reaction to death; 2.) within each person is the natural capacity to heal; 3.) the duration and intensity of grief are unique to each individual; and 4.) that caring and acceptance assist in the healing process, is based on the belief that our society is not accepting of death and does a poor job of equipping people to comfort the bereaved.

Finally, along with emphasizing the need for expanding global grief work for children, Schuurman concluded by stating that grief and bereavement work cannot be a one-way street. She concluded that “the true experts are the children themselves, and if we listen—really listen—they will show and tell us what they need. But first, we must educate ourselves.”

(WARD)





**Lecture 3:**  
***The Supportive Care Model—Helping the Caregivers, Elizabeth Davies***

The third lecture, entitled “The Supportive Care Model—Helping the Caregivers,” was given by Elizabeth Davies (Kashiwagi Tetsuo of Kaneshiro Gakuin University served as lecture chair). As “quantity” is more valued in our current medical system, direct and “human” time spent with patients and their family members is not highly valued. Davies spoke on how this current state creates a great number of dilemmas and dissatisfaction for many caregivers. While discussing specific examples concerning palliative caregivers, she noted how this dilemma leads to a great deal of physical and emotional stress. Davies also noted how this problem makes it difficult for many caregivers, who hold the ideal of “caring for their patients,” to continue with their work. She also noted the need for more sensitivity and for spiritual care, as well. In closing, Davies also pointed out how it is necessary for these caregivers to also care for one another—not only for their patients

(MATSUMOTO)

**Lecture 4:**  
***Catching our Breath in Grief, Thomas Attig***

Lecture 4 was given by the renowned scholar of grief care, Thomas Attig. Attig, who has more than 30-some years of work in this field, talked about how the bereaved can overcome the grief caused by the death of a loved one (Hirayama Masami of Seigakuin University served as chair). In the first part of his talk, “The Breath of Life,” Attig spoke on the sanctity and mystery of birth and death. He also noted how human beings seek to keep their inner beings in synch with the rhythm of the universe. It is this “Breath of Life” which keeps humans alive. In the second part of the lecture, “When Loss Takes our Breath Away,” he noted how the death of a loved one causes us to lose this sense of balance and harmony. In the third part of the lecture, “Catching Our Breath,” Attig explained how we can obtain a new desire for life through facing our grief, establishing a new relationship with the world, and learning to love the departed. It was also of interest for me how the process of overcoming grief in Attig’s magnificent worldview is applicable—and how it may differ—in other cultures, such as Japan.

(ITO)





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