

central elements used by individuals and communities to construct meanings of life and grief (Klass, 1999). At this time, however, scholarship has provided few concepts to understand how continuing bonds function in individual and family lives, or how continuing bonds express larger cultural meanings.

Continuing bonds to the dead play important roles in many of the world's religious traditions. Further, continuing bonds are intertwined in complex ways with other religious dynamics. In this article we will briefly review how continuing bonds function in individual lives and in the theology and politics of European Christianity and Japanese Buddhism. We will look then at contemporary continuing bonds to see what we can learn by placing these contemporary spiritual experiences in a comparative and historical context.

Two broad types of dead remain available for interactions with the living: ancestors and the sacred dead. The difference between ancestors and the sacred dead is one of degree, not kind; indeed, in many traditions we find a flow between being and/or relating to the ancestors and the sacred dead. Ancestor bonds are symmetrical in that they are characterized by mutual obligations between the living and the dead and by equal power to help or hurt. Bonds between the living and the sacred dead are asymmetrical in that there is nothing the living can do for the dead although the dead have power to help the living.

Ancestors

Religious traditions around the world have included ancestor veneration at various times in their histories, and have integrated veneration of ancestors with other spiritual practices in different ways. We will focus on ancestors in Japan as a clear example; later in the article we will review the more problematic ancestral bonds in Christianity. After attending a London performance of *Hamlet* in the late nineteenth century, a Japanese nobleman commented on the scene in which Hamlet meets his father's ghost. He said that the actor showed fear and dread not only at the story the father told, but also toward the ghost himself. A Japanese actor in the

role, he said, would show sorrow and love, respect, and sympathy toward the father's spirit, as well as horror and anger at the father's tale of betrayal and murder. He said a Japanese actor might try to embrace the ghost. He said that in Japanese ghost scenes family or friends never show dread, but rather show joy for the meeting, sometimes mingled with sorrow and sympathy, depending on the way the ghost died, or on its present circumstances (noted in Hamabata, 1990).

In Japan, death marks the beginning of a new phase of family membership. The dead become ancestors, who have different roles in the family than when they were living. The dead remain ancestors for the lifetime of those who knew them personally and then, if the proper rituals have been performed, their spirit merges with the general sense of the family ancestors, about whom individual stories might survive but who are no longer personally available to the living (Gilday, 1993; Klass, 1996; Klass and Heath, 1996–1997; LaFleur, 1992; Offner, 1979; Plath, 1964; Reader, 1991; Smith, 1974).

The Japanese term for ancestor rituals (often mistranslated “ancestor worship”) is *sosen sūhai*. The word *sūhai* means a deep, respectful feeling toward another person; it may be translated to admiration, adoration, idolization, or veneration, as well as worship. *Sūhai* may be toward highly esteemed living persons as well as toward the dead. *Sosen* are the objects of veneration. In one sense, the ancestors are anyone for whom a memorial tablet is placed on the Buddha altar in the family home. Most are lineal ancestors, but also included are deceased children, relatives by adoption or marriage, non-relatives such as a teacher or friend, and sometimes, deceased people, who have no family of their own to perform the rituals. As relationships in contemporary Japan become more self-chosen and not based on kinship, the deceased for whom tablets are placed on the altar tend to be more self-chosen.

The ancestors are those who can be reborn, though rebirth is not a personal matter, that is, there is usually not a particular set of past lives that can be identified for an individual. The point in the various meditation practices of Buddhism is to escape rebirth, *nirvana*. In esoteric practice, nirvana is achieved in life, for example, in Zen enlightenment. The spiritual elite strive for

nirvana in this life, but ordinary people become a buddha, a *hotoke*, only when they die (see Nara, 1995). This afterlife is not separated from the world of the living.

The world beyond cannot be described in any but equivocal phrases. Spatially it is both here and there, temporally both then and now. The departed and ancestors always are close by; they can be contacted immediately at the household shelf, the graveyard, or elsewhere. Yet when they return "there" after the midsummer reunion they are seen off as for a great journey. They are perpetually present. Yet they come to and go from periodic household . . . gatherings. (Plath, 1964, p. 308)

Japanese spirits of the dead interact with the living. They may be in the pure land, but they may be contacted at the grave or on the altar where they are venerated, and they may be called back for the *bon* festival. The same deceased person may be represented by a memorial tablet on the Buddha altar in more than one house and may be contacted in both places, so clearly the reality of the spirit of the dead, like other realities in Buddhism, originates co-dependently; that is, the reality of the dead is a function of the interaction between the living and the dead. Some of the dead go on to become *kami*. To some extent this is a function of where and by which rituals they are venerated (Buddhist or Shinto), so again we find that the reality is interactive, not ontological. The fastest way to become *kami* is to die in war or be a Shogun or emperor. For others, the movement is slower. The dead remain available to the living for as long as anyone who remembers them as a living person still lives. They become a *kami* at the end of the funeral rituals, which is either the thirty-third or fiftieth anniversary of the death.

A young woman in Japan shared what the continuing bond between the living and the dead means to her mother. Her mother left the small town where the family had lived for several generations. When her mother and she return to the town, they go to the family shrine where her mother feels like she is again in the presence of her own mother whose tablet is there. When the young woman's mother feels badly she sometimes thinks that her deceased mother wants her to visit more often. In other words, when the adult daughter is depressed, her deceased mother is feeling lonely and neglected. The cure for both their negative feelings is for the

adult daughter to go to the shrine where she does the simple rituals that reestablish her bond with her mother. At the end of the ritual, the deceased mother is satisfied and the young woman's mother is less depressed. The relation between the living daughter and her ancestor/mother is thus symmetrical; the well being of each depends on the other.

Yamamoto and his colleagues (1969) give a sense of the positive quality of ancestor rituals.

If you would for a moment give up your Judeo-Christian beliefs and attitudes about one's destiny after death and pretend to be a Japanese, you might be able to feel how you are in direct daily communication with your ancestors. The family altar would be your "hotline." As such, you could immediately ring the bell, light incense, and talk over the current crisis with one whom you have loved and cherished. When you were happy, you could smile and share your good feelings with him. When you were sad your tears would be in his presence. With all those who share the grief he can be cherished, led, berated, and idealized, and the relationship would be continuous from the live object to the revered ancestor. (p. 1663)

The rituals gradually transform the dead into *hotoke*, then into *kami*. If the dead are not cared for, however, the dead can become *gaki*, hungry ghosts. Whether a spirit becomes a *gaki* or a *hotoke* depends on the living. The happiness and health of the living depends on the status of the dead, just as the status of the dead depends on the living. In his study of new religions, Davis (1980, pp. 288-290) gave a case study of how spirits of the dead can be harmful and how they can be transformed into helpful spirits by including them in the lives and concerns of the living. His story is of an unmarried woman—a bad fate in Japan—who was now alone in the world, so living at the *dojo*, the group's practice hall.

The woman had a spirit seizure that recurred after each time she received rituals of healing/purification that her sect's teaching said should have cured her. The spirit, she discovered, was her older sister in a previous life. The sister died at 28 from tuberculosis. Angry at her untimely death, the sister became a malevolent ghost, possessing and killing off her family, so finally there was no one left to care for her memorial tablet. Because of what the dead woman had done, and because there was no one to care for her spirit, she was transformed into various animal spirits (a status

even lower than *gaki* in the levels of suffering) that were described as “big as elephants” when they first possessed the woman. After the woman discovered who the spirit was, the spirit gradually got smaller and smaller and finally took on human shape, wept, and confessed the evil she had done. Seemingly, we should understand this story to mean that when the woman decided that the spirit was her sister in a former life, she was adopting the spirit. As the spirit had someone to care for it, the spirit became less and less malevolent, and then became a comforting ancestor spirit.

The presence of this spirit explained the bad things that had happened in the woman’s life. She often had been very sick. The spirit was causing her to be sick in this life just as the spirit had caused the family to be sick in the previous life. The spirit had also caused her to remain single. She remembered that she had suitors, but that it never worked out. So, she reasoned, if she had known earlier, she might have gotten married.

The woman was possessed by some other spirits including her grandmother who complained of being hungry. She went home to see what was wrong and found that a family member who had converted to Soka Gakkai had wrapped the grandmother’s memorial tablet in a cloth, stored it away, and put a new tablet in its place. Reader (1991) noted that Soka Gakkai strongly encourages its members to acquire a special kind of Buddha altar— that is why the grandmother’s tablet was put away and replaced with another tablet. The woman realized that the grandmother’s spirit had not moved to the new tablet, so of course the grandmother was hungry; she could not eat the food that was put out as an offering. She got out the old tablet, put it beside the new tablet so the grandmother’s spirit could move, and the grandmother was satisfied. The story ends with the woman no longer harmed by the spirits and given the positions of member of the dojo’s auxiliary cabinet and vice chairperson of the Helper’s Society.

Within the contemporary model of grief in which the purpose of grief is to construct new biographies of both the living and the dead, we see that the theme of this Japanese story is inclusion. The two spirits were satisfied when she included them in her life, the first by adopting the spirit, the second by restoring it to its ritual place. As she included the spirits in her life, she became more securely included in the religious group that served as her family.

The bond between the living and the ancestors is characterized by symmetrical interactions. The status of the dead, *hotoke* or *gaki*, depends on the living continuing to care for the dead. At one level, care for the dead is simply performing the prescribed rituals. At a deeper level, however, care for the dead is including the dead within the family, remembering them, and acting in ways they approve. In return, the dead provide comfort and guidance.

The Sacred Dead: Saints and Bodhisattvas

The sacred dead play roles in many religious traditions. *Saint* began as a term in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. The term is now applied in religious studies to a wide variety of persons who evoke imitation and veneration: Muslim *waliy*, Jewish *tsaddiq*, Buddhist *arahant* and *bodhisattva*, and Taoist *shen-jen*, as well as *gurus* who are the objects of Hindu *bhakti* (Hawley, 1987). Frequently, the power of these saints transcends death so they remain available to the living. Jewish *tsaddiq* is the exception, in that the saint is a living embodiment of Torah but seldom receives veneration after death. Saints are both like us and above us. They are like us in that they can serve as models of human holiness, but they differ from us because in them human virtue and strength are perfected. In some traditions, saints have intercessory powers. We will focus on Catholic saints and bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism.

Unlike the symmetrical power relationships between ancestors and the living, saints' relationship with the living is asymmetrical. Veneration allows the saints to help the living, but there is nothing the living can do to benefit the saints. Veneration has both an active and a passive aspect, especially in difficult times. Passively, the presence of the saint may provide solace. Actively, the presence of the sacred dead moves the living toward the perfection the saints embody. William James (1923) said of saints:

They are the impregnators of the world, vivifiers, and animators of potentialities of goodness which but for them would lie forever dormant. It is not possible to be quite as mean as we naturally are, when they have passed before us. One fire kindles another; and without that over-trust in human

worth which they show, the rest of us would be in spiritual stagnancy (p. 368).

Every religious form has a complex history. Christian veneration of saints has roots in the Greco-Roman idealization of heroes and in the intense feelings for holy figures and the martyred dead in Judaism. Veneration has the sense of intimate friendship with invisible companions previously found in relationships with gods, demons, or angels. Veneration of saints also evolved from the Christian cultic practice of communion with Christ who was once a human but now lives eternally (Brown, 1981).

The martyrs as exemplars of the holy were the first to be designated by the term *saint* (*hagios*). Christians believed that martyrs were immediately transported to heaven. By the third century CE, the laity venerated the tombs of the martyrs on the anniversaries of their deaths. Popular piety celebrated their rebirth into heaven as heroic beings whose superhuman strength and courage enabled them to conquer death. Eventually clergy performed public worship at the tombs of the martyrs, thus joining altar and tomb, linking the sacred dead to specific locales.

The martyr's tomb foreshadowed the later Christian reliquary where the relics of the sacred dead were housed. The tomb/altar became a "locus where heaven and earth met in the person of the dead, made plain by some manifestation of supernatural power—some *virtu*—of some *miraculum*, some wonderful happening" (Brown, 1982, p. 225). Christian communities turned the celebration of their memories of the martyrs into an assurance that the good power, associated with the pardon of God and the presence of the saint, overcomes evil.

As martyrdom waned, the notion of saint was expanded by the notion of confessors, those individuals who voluntarily suffered the passion of Christ in asceticism, piety, or heroic virtue. Saints took on mediating roles between the living and God. The communion of saints was a bond between the living and the sacred dead. In veneration God became present. Saints became conduits of supernatural power, effecting cures and other miracles at their tombs and later with their relics. Memory, power, and presence came together. The inscription on St. Martin's tomb reads: "Here lies Martin the bishop, of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of

God; but he is fully here, present and made plain in miracles of every kind" (Brown, 1982, p. 225).

Bodhisattva veneration evolved from the cult of the Buddha and the cult of the saints in the early Indian Buddhism (Ray, 1994). In pre-Mahayana Buddhism, bodhisattva referred to the period between the Buddha's vow to attain enlightenment and his attaining Buddhahood. In Mahayana Buddhism, bodhisattvas usually began as humans. They vow to postpone their own liberation and to remain accessible to the world, exercising compassion and miraculous powers until all others are saved. Bodhisattvas have accumulated vast funds of spiritual merit over eons of lifetimes that they could transfer to the faithful. Just as the saints in Christianity displaced the pagan pantheon, in Mahayana Buddhism the Indian pantheon was replaced by bodhisattvas and a host of other spiritual beings (Williams, 1989).

The association of tomb and altar in Christianity and the association of relic and stupa in Buddhism have much in common. The stupa always contains a body part of Buddha or a bodhisattva. The architecture of the stupa symbolizes the Buddha's or bodhisattva's body and presence. The base of the stupa is perceived as the feet and legs, the dome as the torso, the central axis as the spine, and the cupola as the head. The stupa, then, incarnates the bodhisattva's continuing presence or the continued presence of the Buddha (Ray, 1994).

Just as in the early middle ages the cults of Christian saints were more important in popular piety than worship of God or the Christ, in the fifth and sixth centuries CE, the Chinese pilgrims Fa-hsien and Hsuan-tsang both noted that the stupas of Buddhist saints outnumbered the stupas of the Buddha (A Record, 1965; Buddhist Records, 1969). Just as the saints and bodhisattvas embody enlightenment in their bodies, so their stupas embody their abiding enlightened presence. "The sepulchre becomes a substitute for the ephemeral body of the dead person where his mystic presence continues to exist . . . we have therefore to do with a built body which represents the being of the dead person in such a way as his body did during his lifetime" (Paul Mus, cited in Ebert, 1980, p. 219).

Worshippers offer flowers, incense, lights, silk flags, and other things to the saint who is embodied in the stupa. The offering

ritual often includes circumambulating the stupa while meditating or reciting devotions. The bodhisattva in the stupa may have different meanings for lay people than for renunciants. The laity approach bodhisattvas as holy objects for veneration. They see them as their ultimate goal on the religious path, providing a model for aspiring and entering the bodhisattva path. For renunciants, the bodhisattvas may represent a teacher, the condition of liberation, and the object of personal aspiration. Renunciants meditate on the saint as a model for liberation, inspiring them to complete enlightenment.

The bodhisattvas, like Christian saints, are teachers of wisdom, exemplify compassion, and provide opportunities for the laity to gain merit and monastic practitioners to advance their own careers. The Mahayana tradition, like Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, encourages its followers to pay homage to these sacred dead, make offerings, and recite their names in devotion. These interactions, however, are different from interactions with ancestors. In caring for the ancestors, the living affect the status of the dead, but there is nothing the living can do for these sacred dead. The bond between living and the sacred dead is asymmetrical.

The Link Between Bonds with the Dead and Larger Transcendent Bonds

Continuing bonds with both ancestors and sacred dead are complexly interwoven with other religious dynamics. We will briefly examine some of the ways bonds with the dead are interwoven with the bond individuals have with their nation or tribe and (in the West) with God. We will look first at the historical changes in the link between ancestor veneration and national identification in Japan and then we will look at the ambivalence in Western history between valuing bonds with the dead and suppressing those bonds in favor of a bond to God alone.

In Japan, ancestor rituals and allegiance to the nation have been interconnected at least since the Nara era (8th-century CE) when the reverence for imperial ancestors was linked with reverence for one's own ancestors. At the beginning of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), as a way of ensuring there were no Christians in the country, everyone was required to be a parishioner of a

Buddhist temple where the main emotional and ritual connection was the ancestor rites. To be Japanese was to be Buddhist (not separated in the popular mind at that period from Shinto). To be Buddhist meant to venerate the ancestors. To venerate the ancestors was also to venerate the emperor who was descended from the gods and was, in many ways, himself a god. That historical connection continues today, as people return to their family's historic temple for funerals and subsequent rites. In the nationalism of the Meiji Restoration (1868), an attempt was made to establish Shinto as the national religion separate from Buddhism. That effort was not successful, partly because Buddhism's ancestor veneration was so deeply integrated into the social fabric. But at that time, Shinto emperor veneration was linked to ancestor veneration. State Shinto ended as a government policy in 1945, but it remains as a latent conservative political force. For conservatives, then, the link between their ancestors and their larger citizenship remains explicit, though the link is implicit for many others.

In Western history bonds to the ancestral dead have been in competition and tension with the individual's bond to God alone. Social membership usually includes a bond to God (Durkheim, 1995). The connection between God and society has sometimes been explicit, for example in the Holy Roman Empire or in Calvinist theocracies. At other periods, the connection is harder to see. Still, in times of fervent nationalism, God and country always feel as one. Through history, continuing bonds with ancestors and with the sacred dead have been periodically suppressed in favor of bonds that more directly support the power of the standing order.

Because Christianity has been transmitted largely in the form of belief, or theology, rather than through ritual and meditation practice as have been Asian religions, we can see the ambivalence about bonds to ancestors by looking at the history of the theology of heaven and afterlife. We find an alteration through Western history between heaven as a human place, from which there is a rather easy intercourse between those who have died and those who remain behind, and heaven as a place where the triviality of human relationships is replaced by communion with God alone. The changes seem to be a function of larger historical dynamics. When the institutions of political and religious power are secure from rivals within the land and safe from their enemies without,

interactions with the dead can be incorporated into the society in ways that support the standing order. When, however, bonds between the living and the dead seem to diminish the power needed to legitimate the standing order, then interaction between the living and the dead is suppressed in favor of interaction with God alone.

We can see the shift in the tension in preexilic Israel. Before the threat of Assyrian and later Babylonian invasion, family ancestor rituals seem to have been common.

To appeal to the dead meant basically to call upon lost relatives residing in Sheol to aid the living. Ancestor worship, carried out by or on behalf of genealogically related individuals, venerated dead forefathers and perhaps foremothers. From these dead relatives the living expected personal protection and, more importantly, numerous offspring. (McDannell & Lang, 1988, pp. 3-5)

Although there had been earlier attempts to suppress the ancestor rituals, especially in the 8th century, ancestor rituals were not fully suppressed until the Deuteronomic reform (621 BCE). The sections of the Hebrew scriptures coming out of the Deuteronomic reform contain very strong denunciations of interaction with the dead. The reformers blamed military and political weakness on interaction with any spiritual power that was not God. Other spirits included both local agricultural gods and the ancestral spirits. Calling up spirits and other idols was outlawed as the Enthronement Festival, with its allusions to the continuing presence of the dead kings in the present kings, was replaced by the Exile myth with its Passover ritual at the center of Israelite (soon to be Jewish) life (McDannell & Lang, 1988, pp. 62-63; also see Bloch-Smith, 1992).

The early medieval period in Christianity was characterized by a split between lay spirituality that included interaction with the deceased and monastic practice that broke with family ties and rejected the corrupt body in favor of the disembodied spirit. In Augustine's early writings, the human community offered solace in this world, but "God would provide all happiness in the next" (McDannell & Lang, 1988, p. 58). Later in his writings, Augustine thought people would have spiritual bodies in heaven and, after death, people could meet those who had gone before. But the spir-

itual bodies would have the defects taken away, so that human relationships would be very different from the degenerated relationships on earth.

There will be female parts, not suited to their old use, but to a new beauty, and this will not arouse the lust of the beholder, for there will be no lust, but it will inspire praise of the wisdom and goodness of God (McDannell & Lang, 1988, pp. 62-63).

The resolution of grief in Augustine, as it would be for every Christian theology that reasserted the transcendence of God, is bonding with God, not continuing bonds with the deceased. "Since in the city of God there will be no special friendships, there will be no strangers. All special attachments will be absorbed into one comprehensive and undifferentiated community of love" (McDannell & Lang, 1988, p. 64; also see Finucane, 1996, p. 40).

Ancestral dead and the sacred dead could be directly involved with the living in early medieval period lay practice. As the medieval period progressed, the church became the intermediary between the living and the dead. Prayers for the dead were offered in church, and if the dead were to speak, they were most likely to do so through a priest or monk (Geary, 1994). Furthermore, the church established control over access to the relics of the saints.

Starting in the late third century and coming to dominance by the late fifth. . . . the saints in heaven went from being primarily witnesses in a partnership of hope to being primarily intercessors in a structure of power and neediness (Johnson, 1998, p. 86)

The intercessory power of the saints and the ecclesiastic power of the bishops rose together.

When the doctrine of purgatory placed the ancestral dead firmly under the church's authority, the barrier between the living and the dead could be lowered. Even those who were damned to hell could return for a visit. Stories of such visits provided verification of church teachings. The dead warned the living about the importance of confession, extreme unction, and absolution at the point of death. The dead might ask that sacraments or donations to the church be done on their behalf, or that the living intercede, especially with the Virgin Mary, on their behalf (Zaleski, 1987). Thus, death was not the end of the process of achieving heaven. The

living could help the dead with their prayers, masses, and intercessions, and the dead could help the living with advice on proper belief and behavior and with practical matters like the location of lost money (Finucane, 1996). The symmetry in the interaction between the medieval living and their ancestral dead is similar to the relation between the living and the ancestors in Japan—the well being of each depended on the other.

Rejection of human bonds that continued after death was carried to its logical extreme by early Protestants (Finucane, 1996). Antipapal nationalism, an important component of the Protestant revolt, meant that the Roman church's control of the dead needed to be broken. The existence of purgatory was denied. Only heaven or hell were allowed as afterdeath possibilities. Indulgences (the trigger controversy of the Reformation), masses, and alms for the dead were meaningless as were prayers to saints. God alone had power. He ruled in individual souls and in the legitimate governments that He had established on earth. All medieval manifestations of communion between living and the dead were swept away. "For most sixteenth-century Protestants apparitions could only be demonic, angelic or illusory" (Finucane, 1996, p. 92).

Later, as Protestant hegemony became secure, the transcendent God of Calvin and Luther could be replaced by the more personal God of the Methodists and Baptists. The family became a microcosm of the larger society as it was in the Japanese imperial system. The modern heaven emerged, characterized by immediate separation of the soul from the body and a focus on human love and family bonds (see McDannell & Lang, 1988, pp. 183 ff.). In early industrialism, spiritual authority passed from the father to the mother. The home became a "haven in a heartless world" (see Lasch, 1977). The domestic God was reinforced by 19th-century consolation literature that featured detailed descriptions of heaven that resembled a middle-class neighborhood, and comforting messages from the residents there (Douglas, 1977).

Continuing Bonds at the Turn of the New Millennium

Social science, from a comparative religious point of view, is the modern myth by which we define good and bad ways of being human (see Vitz, 1994). Twentieth-century social science pro-

scribed bonds with the dead nearly as strongly as the early Protestants. This suppression supported the emerging power of consumer capitalism. Just as we are defined in consumerism by the temporary satisfactions of products we buy, the dominant theories of grief in modernity have defined us by the attachments that serve us in the present. The suppression of ancestral bonds opened the way for individuals to define themselves as part of mass society (see Warner, 1961) just as suppression of ancestral bonds allowed individuals to give their allegiance to the nation in the Deuteronomic reform. Just as advertisements in consumer society define true living as the gusto of the purchasable moment, 20th-century funerals “celebrate an individual life on earth rather than transport a soul into heaven” (Walter, 1994–1995, p. 245).

But now social science recognizes continuing bonds. What more, then, might we learn by setting contemporary continuing bonds in the comparative religious framework we have outlined? It seems to us that two statements are warranted: (a) Continuing bonds in the present function within the private sphere and have very limited functions within the larger society. (b) Continuing bonds in the present resemble traditional bonds with the sacred dead that at this time offers a protest and critique of the values and lifestyles on which consumer capitalism are based. We will briefly discuss each of these statements.

First, continuing bonds now have a private but not a public function. We might hypothesize that the interactions between the living and the dead can re-emerge now because transnational consumer capitalism is now firmly in control. At this time, however, the bond with the dead is relegated to the private sphere of family or a community of friends that is separated in modernity from the sphere of public discourse (Jacoby, 1975). Klass (1981–1982) and Klass and Hutch (1985–1986) showed that Kubler-Ross, with her personal guiding spirits and her symbol of acceptance, speaks to the private sphere. The Viet Nam memorial features individual names before which families perform private rituals. The bones of the Unknown Soldier from the Viet Nam War identified by DNA sampling, taken from the national crypt, and returned to his family seem a rather good symbol for the higher value contemporary culture places on continuing bonds to the dead as part of family bonds rather than national bonds.

Medieval dead appeared to verify the truth of Catholic doctrine and to warn of the dangers that awaited the living if they did not contribute to the church and rely on church sacraments. So far, contemporary dead do not return to direct the living to increase their credit limits, to testify to the truth of the economic doctrines of the International Monetary Fund, or to endorse brand names. Consumer capitalism has had limited success transforming the dead into commodities or tangible assets. Media stars like Diana or Elvis can be elevated to instant sainthood, but such saints are presented mostly as news and entertainment. Commercially, we have little more than television programs with angels, psychic cable channels, and workshops in which some "grief experts" offer themselves as vehicles by which those we love can say "hello" from heaven. The continuing bonds with the dead remain largely restricted to the private sphere.

The second statement we can make is that continuing bonds in the present resemble traditional bonds with the sacred dead, who at this time offer a critique of the values on which consumer capitalism is based. Contemporary negative experiences with ancestral dead are not processed within an ancestral framework. Balk (1996) found that bereaved college students who were characterized as highly attached to the person who had died "often tried to avoid reminders of the death but were overcome by intrusive thoughts and feelings" (p. 323). For college students whose life-stage task in this culture is to establish autonomy, a dead parent or grandparent is an intrusive presence much like a hungry or restless ghost. But none of Balk's subjects reported that they had developed rituals to pacify the dead. Their solution was to move away from the dead and to establish autonomous selves disconnected from the community that mourned and that might have included ancestral dead.

Positive contemporary continuing bonds are reported within a larger public narrative that includes the better-developed media narrative of the so-called near-death experiences (NDEs). Kellehear (1996) argued that contemporary accounts of NDEs are utopian social images "prompting people to change their social values and lifestyles" (p. 101). Kellehear said the NDE narrative validates individual experience as meaning-giving in a time when medicine has taken the personal experience out of the healing

realm (the doctor knows in a way that is different than the patient knows); when religion no longer speaks with authority, and when psychology reduces human response to death to defense systems against the "reality" of death in which any ideas of afterlife or continuing bonds are merely "necessary illusions." The media narrative of the NDE makes private experience authoritative in a way that it is not in the public sphere.

As a utopian narrative within the private sphere, the values in the NDE/continuing bonds narrative, such as cooperation, humanism, and self-development, are implicit criticism of other values such as competition, selfishness, and authoritarianism, that is, the values in the public sphere of consumer capitalism. The NDE world, Kellehear (1996) said, is set in an idealized, park-like natural world that is enjoyed, not exploited for its resources in the pursuit of profit. The social system is stratified along moral lines (see McDannell & Lang, 1988, on how the stratification has changed over the centuries). Social interaction is cooperative, but sanctions control deviance. The narrative now being constructed around the continuing bond, then, is part of a larger narrative that serves as a *utopian ideal*. We have, then, a narrative that befits the *pure land of the bodhisattvas* and the *heaven of the Western saints*.

Evolutionary psychologist Paul Gilbert (1992) stated that the major difficulty in human social life is the interplay between individualistic/power-seeking instincts that developed early in vertebrate evolution and cooperative behavior, including parenting's care-eliciting/care-giving, that evolved later. Every religious tradition has at points developed spirituality based in domination/competition. When dominance is won, the feeling of elation may be given religious significance: We have triumphed in the name of our god, or our god has given us the victory. The new dominant male, the conquering hero, is often regarded as god-like, whether it be in the executive board room or on the athletic field. The problem with religious systems based in competition is that the feelings and thoughts are hard to sustain. Dominance must be constantly defended and so is maintained uneasily by constantly evaluating threats and by defending against attack or criticism and against a self-evaluation as powerless. Competition does not lead to growth into more highly developed spirituality. Important components of all religious traditions have opposed the spirituality of

domination, have supported cooperation/caregiving, and have worked to control individualistic striving for power. The teaching that we should do unto others as we would have done to us is found in some form in all the major religious traditions as is valuing love and compassion rather than aggression toward others.

The modern dead who return seem to support this higher spirituality and, therefore, however gently, protest against the competitive world of corporate capitalism. Bereaved parents report that their continuing bonds with their dead children support behaviors and attitudes of cooperation and nurturing, the same behaviors and attitudes that they tried to live out parenting their live children (Klass, 1999). The parents say that bonds with their children help them overcome, rather than act on their feelings of depression, anger, resentment, shame, envy, humiliation and self doubt, feelings that first evolved among losers in the competitive struggle for power (see Nietzsche, 1967, pp. 24–56) and that are common early in parents' grief. In a study of a more random population, Marwit and Klass (1994–1995) found that people identified the roles deceased individuals still play in their lives as supporting their being better persons, making better decisions about their lives, or personifying important values.

Conclusion

The dead do return, it seems, even in these times, though their activities and messages seem restricted to the private sphere. They come in unseen presence, communicate in silent words, and influence our lives by siding with our better selves. They return from a more perfect world where they do not suffer as they might suffer in the ancestor realm or in the medieval purgatory. They do not return bearing their wounds or sores and they do not seem to fear descending into lower realms of suffering. The living can do nothing for the dead although the dead can help the living to be better persons.

Right now, then, it seems that continuing bonds are asymmetrical—like bonds to the sacred dead—and function almost exclusively in the private sphere. Our study of continuing bonds in both the Christian and Buddhist traditions, however, has shown us

the flexibility cultures have in the ways bonds to the dead are interwoven with other bonds and meanings. It may very well be that as the 21st century progresses, we will see continuing bonds with the dead that more resemble those with ancestors, or we may see bonds with the dead taken out of the private cooperative sphere of individual and family meaning and put in the service of political and economic power structures. If those changes happen, our understanding of grief and the resolution of grief will be very different from the way we understand now.

References

- A record of buddhistic kingdoms* (J. Legge, Trans.) (1965). New York: Dover.
- Attig, T. (1996). *How we grieve: Relearning the world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Balk, D. E. (1996). Attachment and the reactions of bereaved college students: A longitudinal study. In D. Klass, P. R. Silverman, & S. Nickman (Eds.), *Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief* (pp. 311-328). Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.
- Bloch-Smith, E. M. (1992). The cult of the dead in Judah: Interpreting the material remains. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111, 213-224.
- Brown, P. (1981). *The cult of the saints*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Brown, P. (1982). *Society and the holy in late antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Buddhist records of the western world* (S. Bea, Trans.). (1969). London: Trubner.
- Davis, W. B. (1997). *Dojo: Magic and exorcism in modern Japan*. In H. Byron Earhart (Ed.), *Religion in the Japanese experience: Sources and interpretations*. (2nd ed, pp. 288-290). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Douglas, A. (1977). *The feminization of American culture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Durkheim, E. (1995). *The elementary forms of religious life* (Karen E. Fields, Trans.). New York: Free Press.
- Ebert, J. (1980). Parinirvana and stupa: Was the stupa only a symbolic depiction of parinirvana? *Dallapiccola*, 219-225.
- Finucane, R. C. (1996). *Ghosts: Appearances of the dead and cultural transformation*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Geary, P. J. (1994). *Living with the dead in the middle ages*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Gilbert, P. (1992). *Human nature and suffering*. New York: Guilford.
- Gilday, E. T. (1993). Dancing with the spirits: A view of the other world in Japan. *History of Religions*, 32, 273-300.
- Hamabata, M. M. (1990). *Crested kimono: Power and love in the Japanese business family*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Hawley, J. S. (Ed.) (1987). *Saints and virtues*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jacoby, R. (1975). *Social amnesia*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- James, W. (1923). *The varieties of religious experience*. New York: Longmans, Green.
- Johnson, E. A. (1998). *Friends of God and prophets: A feminist theological reading of the communion of saints*. New York: Continuum.
- Kellehear, A. (1996). *Experiences near death: Beyond medicine and religion*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Klass, D. (1981-1982). Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and the tradition of the private sphere: An analysis of symbols. *Omega, Journal of Death and Dying*, 12, 241-267.
- Klass, D. (1988). *Parental grief: Solace and resolution*. New York: Springer.
- Klass, D. (1993a). The inner representation of the dead child and the worldviews of bereaved parents. *Omega, Journal of Death and Dying*, 26, 255-272.
- Klass, D. (1993b). Solace and immortality: Bereaved parents' continuing bond with their children. *Death Studies*, 17, 343-368.
- Klass, D. (1996). Ancestor worship in Japan: Dependence and the resolution of grief. *Omega, Journal of Death and Dying*, 33, 279-302.
- Klass, D. (1999). *The spiritual lives of bereaved parents*. Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel.
- Klass, D. & Heath, A. O. (1996-1997). Mizuko kuyo: The Japanese ritual resolution. *Omega, Journal of Death and Dying*, 34, 1-14.
- Klass, D. & Hutch, R. A. (1985-1986). Elisabeth Kubler-Ross as a religious leader. *Omega, Journal of Death and Dying*, 16, 89-109.
- Klass, D., Silverman, P. R., & Nickman, S. (Eds.). (1996). *Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief*. Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.
- LaFleur, W. R. (1992). *Liquid life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lasch, C. (1977). *Haven in a heartless world*. New York: Basic Books.
- Marwit, S. J., & Klass, D. (1994-1995). Grief and the role of the inner representation of the deceased. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 30, 283-289.
- McDannell, C., & Lang, B. (1988). *Heaven, a history*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Nara, Y. (1995). May the deceased get enlightenment! An aspect of the enculturation of Buddhism in Japan. *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 15, 19-42.
- Neimeyer, R. A. (1998). *Lessons of loss: A guide to coping*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Neimeyer, R. A., & Stewart, A. E. (1996, June). Trauma, healing, and the narrative employment of loss. *Families in Society*, 96, 360-375.
- Nietzsche, F. (1967). *On the genealogy of morals* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). New York: Vintage.
- Offner, C. B. (1979). Continuing concern for the departed. *Japanese Religion*, 11(1), 3-16.
- Plath, D. W. (1964). Where the family of god is the family: The role of the dead in Japanese households. *American Anthropologist*, 66, 300-317.
- Ray, R. (1994). *Buddhist saints in India*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reader, I. (1991). *Religion in contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

- Silverman, P. R., & Klass, D. (1996). Introduction: What's the problem? In D. Klass, P. R. Silverman, & S. Nickman (Eds.), *Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief* (pp. 3-27). Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.
- Smith, R. J. (1974). *Ancestor worship in contemporary Japan*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Vitz, P. C. (1994). *Psychology as religion: The cult of self-worship* (Rev. ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans.
- Walter, T. (1994-1995). Natural death and the noble savage. *Omega, Journal of Death and Dying*, 30, 237-248.
- Walter, T. (1996). A new model of grief: Bereavement and biography. *Mortality*, 1, 7-25.
- Warner, W. L. (1961). *The family of God: A symbolic study of Christian life in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Williams, P. (1989). *Mahayana Buddhism*. New York: Routledge.
- Yamamoto, J., Okonogi, K., Iwasaki, T., & Yoshimura, S. (1969). Mourning in Japan. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 125, 1661-1665.
- Zaleski, C. (1987). *Otherworld journeys: Accounts of near death experience in medieval and modern times*. New York: Oxford.