

Photo from the Funeral Home

Harrison Bae Wein—*National Institutes of Health*

I see you in miniature
on my phone's screen,
as if someone had caught you
asleep, head tilted back,
lips parted, white facial hair
reminding me of the underbrush
of the rose bushes we tended
when I was a child

the fine creases of skin
on your shoulders
are like the water
on the canal you took us to fish,
baiting our hooks—
although hurting even worms
bothered you, you did it for us

I can hear the tone of your voice
instructing us to pull weeds,
that mumble on your breath
as you dozed off midday on the couch.

This virus...
how alone you must have felt,
unable to hear the muffled voices
through face masks and shields,
hearing aids abandoned
in the rush from home.

I study this image—
earlobes scratched raw
from the strap of the oxygen mask,
lips thinned and pale,
plastic tubing still taped to your nose—
and know I will keep it
as you pass to bone and dust
in the earth's clay bed,
tubing unfurling like a wildflower
around your slumbering head.

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Religion, Meaning, and Fear of Death in the Time of COVID

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Abstract: Individual differences in response to the death toll of the COVID pandemic have been significant. Some people have taken tremendous steps to avoid illness and potentially death. Others have resisted protective measures. Our understanding of these differences is enhanced by a consideration of the impact of religion on death anxiety.

Keywords: afterlife, anxiety, COVID, death, fear, meaning, philosophical-systems, religion

Across the globe, the ubiquitous presence of COVID-19 has forced people to deal not only with the loss of loved ones but with the possibility of their own deaths. People have faced mortality in ways that many had not contemplated before. Has the prospect of dying evoked fear? Solace? Curiosity? Acceptance? Regret? Numerous scholars have written about attitudes and emotional responses to death; they have demonstrated that reactions take a variety of forms, depending on circumstance and individual characteristics. In the era of COVID-19, such reactions may include acceptance that death is ultimately a part of existence, the anticipation of a rewarding afterlife, as well as the fear of the unknown, regrets, or anger at events beyond their control.

Factors Affecting Reactions to Death

One variable logically related to attitudes toward death is the nature of a person's religious beliefs and the strength of those beliefs. The concept of an afterlife—whether it be something like heaven or reincarnation—is a feature of many religious systems that provides an answer to the question of what happens after death. The idea of an afterlife can offer comfort to believers as they face