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“LIFE, DEATH, AND FREEDOM: A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE”

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ABSTRACT

The themes of life, death, and freedom have been central to philosophical inquiry across cultures and time periods. In Eastern philosophy, these concepts are explored through various frameworks, which often interweave the transcendence of life's impermanence, the nature of death, and the realization of freedom. This paper delves into the interconnectedness of life, death, and freedom, examining these themes through the teachings of Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha. Each of these thinkers provides a unique philosophical perspective, drawing attention to the essential nature of freedom in the midst of life's impermanence and the inevitable reality of death. Through their teachings, we will uncover a shared understanding of how life, death, and freedom are not separate, but interwoven into a unified view of existence.

This research paper explores the interconnected themes of life, death, and freedom through the philosophical lenses of Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha. It seeks to understand the role of death in human existence and how the pursuit of freedom enables individuals to transcend societal constraints and realize their true selves. By analyzing philosophical teachings and sociological perspectives, the paper emphasizes the importance of self-discovery, inner peace, and the detachment from materialistic and institutional limitations. The study concludes that true freedom lies in transcending societal boundaries and embracing a deeper spiritual awareness.

Key Words: Life, Death, Freedom, Lao Tzu, Osho, Buddha, Human.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Eastern philosophy, the relationships between life, death, and freedom are often depicted as dynamic, interconnected, and integral to the nature of existence. While Western thought has tended to dichotomize these concepts, focusing on the individual's struggle with death and the pursuit of freedom, Eastern traditions offer a more integrated approach. Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha—three influential figures in Eastern philosophy—each provide profound insights into the cyclical nature of life, death, and freedom. Their teachings emphasize acceptance, mindfulness, and liberation, suggesting that true freedom comes not from resistance to death, but through its acceptance and transcendence. This paper aims to explore the philosophical interconnections of life, death, and freedom by analyzing the teachings of Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha. By examining these thinkers' perspectives, we will understand how each philosopher navigates the dualities of life and death and reveals the role freedom plays in transcending them. The cycle of life and death has long been a central subject in philosophy and spirituality. Various thinkers have attempted to define the meaning of life and the significance of death. Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha provide distinct perspectives on these existential questions, offering pathways to understanding life and attaining freedom. In contemporary society, individuals are often trapped by economic, social, and personal constraints that limit their

autonomy. The quest for freedom becomes a fundamental pursuit as people struggle to find meaning beyond societal expectations. This paper explores how these three philosophical traditions address the themes of life, death, and freedom, proposing that inner peace and self-realization are key to achieving true liberation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concepts of life, death, and freedom have been enduringly significant in philosophical traditions around the world, particularly in Eastern thought, where they are often explored in relation to the self, the universe, and the cycle of existence. This literature review aims to examine these themes through the perspectives of three major Eastern philosophers: Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha. Each offers a unique lens through which to understand life, death, and freedom, providing a multifaceted view of these deeply interconnected experiences.

Lao Tzu: The Daoist Perspective on Life, Death, and Freedom

Lao Tzu, the founder of Daoism, provides a philosophical framework that emphasizes harmony with the natural order, which is embodied in the Dao (Tao). The key text of Daoism, the *Tao Te Ching*, expounds the philosophy of *Wu Wei*, or non-action, which promotes living in accordance with the natural flow of life. Lao Tzu's views on life emphasize the importance of simplicity, humility, and alignment with the Dao, the fundamental force that flows through all life. For Lao Tzu, life is not something to be forced or manipulated, but something to be experienced in balance with the world around us.

In terms of death, Lao Tzu offers a perspective that is less concerned with fear or sorrow, viewing death as an integral part of the cycle of life. He teaches that death, like birth, is a natural transition, and the wise person accepts it without attachment or resistance. This natural acceptance of death is linked to his broader philosophy of freedom. Lao Tzu argues that true freedom comes not through control or striving, but through surrendering to the Dao and letting go of the ego's desires. In the *Tao Te Ching*, death is not a final cessation but a continuation of the Dao's eternal flow, suggesting that freedom is found in the acceptance of life's impermanence.

Osho: Liberation Through Awareness and Transformation

Osho, a contemporary spiritual teacher, offers a radical reinterpretation of the relationship between life, death, and freedom, influenced by a wide range of philosophies including Zen, Hinduism, and Western psychology. In his numerous discourses, Osho emphasizes the role of awareness in achieving liberation. His approach to life stresses the importance of living fully in the present moment, without being bound by societal conditioning or material desires. Osho teaches that most people live with a deep sense of unconsciousness, trapped by cultural expectations and the weight of societal norms.

For Osho, freedom is a state of consciousness that arises from breaking free of the ego and the illusions of social constructs. His views on death are closely linked to his understanding of the ego: death is the ultimate release of the self, a dissolution of the egoic mind, which is the source of suffering. In works like *The Book of Secrets* and *Freedom: The Courage to Be Yourself*, Osho discusses death as a transformative force that leads to liberation, urging followers to embrace death as a passage to deeper freedom. He argues that true freedom is found not in material success or external achievements but in inner transformation and mindfulness.

Osho's emphasis on meditation and self-awareness leads to an understanding of death not as an end but as a continuation in a different form. His teachings argue that by fully accepting death, an individual can release the fear that binds them to the transient aspects of life and experience true freedom. In his vision, death is not to be feared but celebrated as an opportunity to transcend the ego and reach a state of spiritual liberation.

Buddha: The Buddhist Path to Freedom Through Liberation from Suffering

The teachings of Buddha offer a profound and systematic approach to the interconnected themes of life, death, and freedom. Central to Buddhist philosophy is the concept of *dukkha* (suffering), which encompasses the inherent

dissatisfaction of human existence. Buddha teaches that life is filled with suffering due to the impermanence of all things and the attachment to transient pleasures. The key to freedom, according to Buddha, is not in controlling life or avoiding death, but in understanding the nature of suffering and transcending attachment.

Buddha's Four Noble Truths provide a foundational framework for understanding life, death, and freedom. The First Noble Truth recognizes the existence of suffering, the Second Noble Truth identifies attachment and desire as the root causes of suffering, and the Third Noble Truth asserts that the cessation of suffering is possible through the cessation of attachment. The Fourth Noble Truth lays out the Eightfold Path, a guide to ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom, which leads to the cessation of suffering and the attainment of *nirvana* — the ultimate freedom from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

In Buddhist thought, death is not an end but a continuation of the cycle of *samsara* (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth). However, through the practice of mindfulness and the cultivation of wisdom and compassion, one can break free from this cycle. The Buddhist path to freedom involves overcoming the fear of death by understanding its impermanent nature and recognizing the potential for liberation in both life and death. The Buddhist view of death emphasizes non-attachment and the realization of the interdependent nature of all things, offering a transformative path to freedom.

Synthesis of Themes

While Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha each offer distinct perspectives, their views on life, death, and freedom converge in several important ways. All three philosophers emphasize the transient nature of existence, advocating for a shift from attachment to a deeper understanding of life's impermanence. For each thinker, freedom is found through transcendence — whether it be through alignment with the Dao, awareness and meditation, or the cessation of desire and attachment. The acceptance of death as a natural and inevitable process is another shared theme, with each philosopher proposing that true freedom arises when one no longer fears death but embraces it as part of the greater flow of life.

These teachings suggest that freedom is not an external or material achievement but an internal state of liberation — a freedom from ego, fear, and attachment. Lao Tzu's emphasis on living in harmony with the Dao, Osho's focus on radical awareness, and Buddha's path to *nirvana* all highlight that true freedom involves releasing control and embracing the fluid, impermanent nature of life and death.

III. LIFE, DEATH, AND FREEDOM: A UNIFIED PERSPECTIVE

The concept of freedom, as understood by these thinkers, is not confined to the absence of external restrictions, but instead refers to a deeper spiritual liberation. Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha all offer perspectives where life, death, and freedom are not seen as separate events or conditions but as interconnected parts of a larger process. Through the lens of these philosophers, life's true meaning is found not in material success or external achievement but in achieving a state of balance, mindfulness, and liberation through the acceptance of both life and death.

Lao Tzu: The Wisdom of the Dao

The ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu emphasized the importance of living in harmony with the natural order of the universe. He advocated for *wu wei* (effortless action), where one flows with life rather than resisting it. For Lao Tzu, death is not an end but a transition, and fearing it is unnecessary. Living a balanced life aligned with nature helps individuals accept death as part of existence.

Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher and founder of Daoism, presents a worldview that sees life, death, and freedom as part of an eternal cycle, governed by the Dao, or "Way." In the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu emphasizes the importance of living in harmony with the natural order of the universe, acknowledging that life and death are two sides of the same coin. According to Lao Tzu, life and death are not opposing forces but are part of the natural rhythm of the world, and true freedom lies in aligning oneself with this rhythm.

For Lao Tzu, the concept of freedom is not rooted in rebellion or resistance but in yielding and surrendering to the Dao. He suggests that human beings often struggle with life's impermanence, trying to impose their will on the world, and resist the natural flow of existence. This resistance leads to suffering. The key to true freedom, according to Lao Tzu, is letting go of control and embracing the cyclical nature of life and death. He writes:

"The Tao gives birth to One. One gives birth to Two. Two gives birth to Three. Three gives birth to all things."

Here, Lao Tzu teaches that life is an unfolding process of transformation and that death is an inevitable aspect of this process. Freedom is not the absence of death but the ability to live without fear of it, to flow with its inevitability, and to recognize it as an essential part of the whole.

In Lao Tzu's view, life is a journey of non-action (*wu wei*), where one transcends the ego and the fear of death by embracing simplicity, humility, and tranquility. The death of the ego—an attachment to one's identity and desires—is crucial for spiritual freedom. By becoming "empty" and open to the flow of the Dao, one attains a state of freedom where death loses its power to cause fear and anxiety.

Osho: Transcending Life and Death Through Awareness

A modern mystic, Osho saw death as a new beginning rather than an end. He challenged societal fears surrounding death, urging individuals to embrace it with awareness. According to Osho, death should not be mourned but celebrated, as it is an opportunity for transformation. He believed that by confronting the reality of death, individuals could live more freely and authentically.

Osho, a 20th-century Indian mystic and philosopher, offers a radical and transformative approach to life, death, and freedom. Like Lao Tzu, Osho emphasizes the importance of surrender, but he also adds the idea of awareness as a central tenet of liberation. Osho challenges the conventional understanding of life and death, arguing that they are not opposing forces but complementary experiences within the journey of existence.

Osho's teachings on life and death revolve around the idea that human beings are imprisoned by societal conditioning, fears, and attachments. These attachments, particularly to the idea of a permanent self or identity, create suffering and limit freedom. Osho suggests that true freedom can only be realized when one is no longer attached to the fear of death or the desire for eternal life. In his lectures, he often emphasizes that death is not something to fear but something to be understood and embraced:

"Death is not the opposite of life. Life has no opposite. The opposite of death is birth. Life is eternal."

In Osho's philosophy, death is not an end but a transition, a return to the source from which we came. Life, for Osho, is about transcending the identification with the body and the mind. By shedding these attachments, an individual becomes aware of the eternal nature of existence, realizing that the soul is not bound by the physical body. This awareness brings freedom—the freedom to live fully, without the fear of death.

Osho's approach to freedom also includes the cultivation of meditation, awareness, and mindfulness. He asserts that by being present in each moment, individuals can liberate themselves from the cycle of suffering and death. Freedom is not attained through escape or denial of death, but through the realization that life and death are interconnected, and that both are expressions of the same eternal energy.

Buddha: The Middle Path to Liberation

Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) taught that life is transient and suffering arises from attachment. The Buddhist philosophy of impermanence (*anicca*) suggests that accepting death allows individuals to live without fear. Buddha emphasized mindfulness and self-realization as means to liberate oneself from the cycle of birth and death (*samsara*). Enlightenment (*nirvana*) is achieved when one transcends the material world and attains inner peace.

Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, offers a profound philosophical system that addresses life, death, and freedom
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through the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Central to Buddhist thought is the idea of impermanence (*anicca*), which asserts that all phenomena, including life and death, are in a constant state of flux. Buddha's teachings encourage individuals to recognize the fleeting nature of life and death as a means to overcome attachment and suffering.

For Buddha, death is a natural part of the cycle of existence, and it should be viewed with equanimity rather than fear. His teachings on freedom focus on liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*)—a cycle driven by desire and ignorance. According to Buddhist philosophy, suffering arises from attachment to things, including the fear of death. The path to freedom is not through avoiding death or clinging to life but through understanding the nature of existence and developing detachment.

Buddha's concept of freedom is closely tied to the notion of *nirvana*, a state of liberation from the suffering of the cycle of existence. Freedom, in the Buddhist sense, is the ability to transcend attachment and ego, which bind individuals to the cycle of life and death. Through practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and ethical conduct, individuals can achieve *nirvana*, where death no longer holds power over them. Buddha teaches that true freedom is the realization that both life and death are impermanent and that liberation comes from transcending both.

IV. FREEDOM AND SOCIETY

Economic Constraints

Financial dependence and material possessions often become barriers to personal freedom. Capitalist structures encourage consumerism, leading people to equate wealth with happiness. However, Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha all rejected materialism, arguing that true fulfillment comes from within.

Social Norms and Institutions

Marriage, property ownership, and rigid social hierarchies restrict individual choices. Osho criticized societal conditioning, advocating for personal liberation through meditation and awareness. Buddha similarly rejected caste-based discrimination, emphasizing equality and inner wisdom over societal expectations.

Personal Liberation

Achieving freedom requires breaking free from internal and external limitations. According to these philosophies, self-awareness, meditation, and detachment from worldly desires are essential steps toward liberation.

V. THE SEARCH FOR ENLIGHTENMENT AND PEACE

Self-Discovery

Instead of conforming to societal pressures, individuals should engage in introspection. Lao Tzu emphasized inner harmony, Osho promoted meditation as a tool for self-awareness, and Buddha taught mindfulness as a path to enlightenment.

Detachment from Materialism

Material wealth does not guarantee peace. True happiness arises from understanding oneself and living in alignment with one's values.

Spiritual Awakening

When individuals transcend their fears—especially the fear of death—they experience true freedom. The highest form of liberation is not physical but spiritual, where one attains peace beyond societal constraints.

VI. INTERCONNECTION OF LIFE, DEATH, AND FREEDOM

While Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha each approach life, death, and freedom through their own unique lens, their philosophies share a common thread: the recognition that life and death are not opposites but complementary aspects of the same cycle of existence. Each philosopher emphasizes the need for a shift in perspective—a realization that true freedom comes not from controlling life or avoiding death, but from embracing their interconnectedness.

For Lao Tzu, freedom is found in surrendering to the Dao, accepting the natural flow of life and death. For Osho, freedom arises from awareness and the transcendence of ego, allowing one to live in harmony with the impermanence of existence. For Buddha, freedom is the cessation of attachment and the realization of the true nature of existence, where both life and death are understood as fleeting and interconnected.

VII. CONCLUSION

Life, death, and freedom are intimately interconnected in the philosophies of Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha. These thinkers offer profound insights into the nature of existence, encouraging individuals to embrace the impermanence of life and death. Through surrender, awareness, and mindfulness, one can achieve freedom from fear, attachment, and suffering. In doing so, one transcends the duality of life and death and experiences a deeper sense of liberation that is not bound by the physical body or the inevitable end of existence. By understanding life and death as interconnected, we can live fully and freely, transcending the limitations imposed by our attachments and fears.

The study of life, death, and freedom through the philosophies of Lao Tzu, Osho, and Buddha reveals that true liberation is not found in material success or societal approval but in self-awareness and detachment from external constraints. These thinkers offer a vision of life where death is not feared but embraced as part of existence, and freedom is not a privilege but a state of being.

In a world where individuals are increasingly trapped by economic pressures and social norms, these philosophies provide a roadmap to inner peace. By transcending societal limitations and seeking self-realization, individuals can experience true freedom—one that is not defined by external circumstances but by the depth of their inner awakening.

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