

Do We Survive Death? A Critique of The Belief in Afterlife

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ABSTRACT

Death is an existential puzzle man has always grappled with. The question of survival of death interrogates the brute abruptness and probable finality of death. Man considers himself an elevated, unique and special being that is too valuable to be reduced to the finality of an apparent waste, nothingness and meaninglessness occasioned by death. History shows that man has never willingly surrendered to the idea that death would put an end to his endeavors and being. Thus, the quest for, and the belief in the survival of death and the afterlife have always been strong and recurrent themes in the odyssey human of existence. Do we survive death? This work philosophically investigates this question, the bases of the question, the expectations surrounding the question and the answers humanity has given to the question over the years; and the possibility of an afterlife. The approach to this research is speculative and analytic. This work would give critical insights into the issues in contention; expand the conversation on the meaning of death, attempt a synthesis, and offer new vistas on the perennial discourse regarding the fate man at death.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Life is an experience man acquires without any prior knowledge, prior preparations, without any plan and without any user manual. Abruptness and arbitrariness characterize the basic manifestations of the human experience of life. Life comes to man with no creator or manufacturer information. Man has to figure out all that: what constitutes life, and the fate of man at the expiration of life. Does the expiration of life mean the extinction of the individual's identity? Does it mean the vanishing of being as man without traces? Does it entail the opening of a new vista of life; perhaps with individual identity or simply the impersonal retiring of life into the global pool or source of life? The empirical absence of this information makes man confront death with such psychological numbness that has left humanity seemingly endlessly trying to understand the meaning of death. Humanity has neither been able to fully fathom the meaning of death nor has it been able to resolve its ramifications into a meaningful mosaic that can offer man, the psychological comfort of certainty and blessed assurance. Death, so to speak has put humanity on the spot where it is not just short of explanations, but is forlornly standing askance in the wilderness of hope. The arbitrariness of life has left humanity in a condition where it has to confront death without adequate information hence the cacophony of the explanations rendered by humanity on the fate of man at death.

This variance of responses to the meaning of death has prompted the question which forms part of the title of this work, "Do we survive death?" It is the fundamental question this work seeks to unravel. But what is death? At what state is a human person considered to have died? What changes at death, what perishes and what remains constant? In a nutshell, what is the meaning of death? There is no way the question of death could be exhaustively addressed without discussing the meaning and nature of life itself. Death is but an event in life [1]. It could be called something that happens to life or in life, depending on the conclusion the work would eventually arrive at. It is all about life. No life; no death. Even the afterlife is about life. It is about dealing with an intervention in life; an experience in life. The quest for the afterlife forays into whether life survives the intervention of death or not. If life survives, does it survive unscathed or does it survive in modified forms? If indeed it survives in modified forms, what are the forms? Is identity lost or retained? Is the body recreated or discarded entirely? But what if death is the finality of life? These are the puzzles this work would attempt to solve. But what is life? If death is what happens to life or in life, what is life? The discourse on the nature of death could only properly proceed if life has been defined exhaustively.

2. THE NATURE AND MEANING OF LIFE

To understand death which modifies or terminates life, we must necessarily determine what constitutes life in all ramifications. Hence, we must interrogate the question, "what is life?". This question though so seemingly plain is in reality, intricately

complicated. It is as contentious as the meaning and nature of death itself. There is no intellectual consensus on the definition of life [2]. But the question shall be interrogated by moving from the simple to the complex. The simplest definition of life is that it is a characteristic of physical entities that undergo biological processes [3]. These processes may include: metabolism, irritability, growth, reproduction and expiration. Some of the physical entities considered to be living organisms are: animals, plants, bacteria and fungi [4]. There are also unconventional forms life like, viruses and viroids, archaea and protists [5]. These are what are biologically regarded as the forms of life or living organisms. But the definition above is just the tip of an iceberg in attempting to define life in all its ramifications. The typologies or forms of life mentioned above range from very complex animals with billions of cells through unicellular organisms, some of which could neither be classified as animals nor plants to life forms without cell at all which could simple be termed “agents” [6].

However, the abiogenesis hypothesis introduced a new and interesting twist to the seemingly smoothly rendered definition of life above. Abiogenesis is the hypothesis that purports to explain how organic forms (life) arose out of inorganic matter [7;8]. The hypothesis is borne out of Stanley Miller’s 1952 experiments which decisively demonstrated that most of the amino acids which are the chemical bases of the proteins which propel life could be synthetically derived from inorganic matter [9]. On the bases of these experiments, science proposes the abiogenesis hypothesis to explain how life came out of non-life over time. But the abiogenesis hypothesis incidentally advertises the limits of conventional science [10]. How can life come out of non-life? How can a category arise out of a mutually exclusive category which is diametrically opposed to it?

According Parmenides of Elea, nothing can come out of nothing. It is either it was there or it would never materialize. In the same vein, how can life come out of non-life? It is either there was life in the supposed “non-life” or that what we call life is but a transformation or an activity of those things we conventionally refer to as “inorganic” or “non-life”. The amino acids which Miller synthesized from inorganic matter are one and same with the ones obtained from organic sources. Since the amino acids are same irrespective of whether they were “organically” sourced or “synthetically” derived, language, not the substance becomes the problem. Yet again, abiogenesis demonstrates the limits of conventional science. It follows that either what we consider “inorganic” are actually “organic” or that what we consider “organic” are actually “inorganic”. Either of these conclusions put forward above are inescapable. Science is not immune to language. Science is not vaccinated against the virus of obfuscation. Better still, it could be said that reality is what it is. Man, in his efforts to unriddle reality coins words to represent pieces and aspects of reality according to his understanding. Reality does not necessarily adjust to attune to words. Rather, words attempt to reflect reality as best as they could. Bottomline: reality is not necessarily ordered by our words. On the contrary, our understanding of reality is what is ordered by our words. Beyond the experiments of Stanley Miller, at the core of the problematics of the abiogenesis hypothesis is the conventional understanding of matter: the division of matter into “organic” and “inorganic”, and the definition of matter as dead and inert. Well, everyday realities point otherwise.

The critical question to be asked is about the scope of life. What is the scope of life? Does the term “life” apply only to the entities we refer to as living or organic things on earth? The definition of life is as much a scientific problem as it is a linguistic problem. What is the spread of the term “life”? Is the cosmos dead or alive? Is it organic or inorganic? If the cosmos is organic, life becomes a mere attribute of the cosmos [11]. In that case, whatever that is alive would merely share in the cosmic life. If the cosmos is inorganic, it certainly would not be able to support life. In the same Parmenidean principle, life would never emerge from non-life. If the cosmos is both organic and inorganic, then we would have to take a second look at the phenomena we designate as “organic” or “inorganic”. At least, the Stanley Miller experiments have decisively proven that organic and inorganic could be interchangeable at least with amino acids. He demonstrated clearly that organic amino acids could be synthesized from inorganic matter. The arguments above would necessarily lead to a review of the realities we ascribe as “organic” or “inorganic”.

Digging deeper into the nature of life, the question arises, is life material or non-material? Does life occur outside matter? Do we observe life only in matter? What is the relationship between life and matter?

2.1 Life as Matter

The realities we classify as organic or inorganic are all material. Therefore, both “organic” and “inorganic” are all attributes of matter. That is to say that life and non-life are reducible in the final analysis, to the reality we traditionally refer to as “matter”; and are but organizations of matter. This hypothesis would make Stanley Miller’s assumption of organic entities coming out of inorganic entities reasonable, logical and feasible. It can be clearly and indubitably stated that life is observed only in matter. What is contentious is whether all matter have life or whether life is applicable to certain forms of matter, and not applicable to some others. The life dynamism in matter becomes apparent when the traditional assumptive characterization of matter as “dead and inert” is jettisoned.

Kwame Nkrumah conceived matter in radically different ways from traditional physics. He credited matter demonstrably with attributes such as spontaneity, self-motion, intelligence and energy [12]. A phenomenon that can be described in attributes stated above could not reasonably be categorized as dead. However, Nkrumah was not talking in terms of living and non-living but in terms of material and non-material. But in the *Matser-Made World*, Ebo categorized reality not in terms of material or non-material, but in terms that show matter as possessing dynamism and varying degrees of the properties of life. Hence, his coinage of the neologism “*matser*” to designate the phenomenon we traditionally refer to as “matter”; as what is linguistically called “matter” does

not exhaustively encapsulate the properties of the reality the term seeks to represent [13]. Matter cannot be dead and be dynamic at the same time.

While Nkrumah held that there could be a categorial conversion of matter from the material to non-material form, he did not explicitly imply a conversion from non-living to living. Ebo, on the other hand held that life is an elevated organization of matter [13]. For him, life is completely material: reducible without any residue to matter. However, his definition of matter transcends that of classical physics, as with Nkrumah, he holds matter to be dynamic, self-moved, intelligent and spontaneous [14]. It is important to note that these properties do not appear in all matter in equal degrees. They appear in different degrees and are observed in nature as different organizations of matter. Life as we know it is observed in higher organizations of matter, but the properties of life are observed in varying degrees, (sometimes in rudimentary forms) in all matter.

The crux of the argument is that life does not appear in forms other than matter. Ipso facto, life is material.

2.2 Life as a Non-Material Substance

It is the prevalent view in some quarters that life is a phenomenon other than matter. Those who hold this view assume that life exists in matter as an extraneous agent acting on matter. It neither has its origins in matter nor does it perish with the material body at death. There are those who hold this non-material life to be of divine origin while some hold life to be non-material but part of the processes of the cosmos. Those who hold life to be of divine origin accord it spiritual status, consider it to be immortal and superior to matter.

However, those in this school of thought do not accord life a universal status. Life in humans is considered to be somewhat elevated and different in substance from life as observed in other phenomena. This is the central thesis behind the concept of the soul and belief in metempsychosis. It is also the central thesis behind the assumed immortality of the soul in certain quarters. The belief in the non-material origin of life assumes a sort of god or God to be the source of life.

The belief in the non-material source of life is neither entirely religious nor philosophically unwarranted. It is rooted in the concept of cause. If cause is universal, what is the cause of the cosmos? If the cosmos ever had a cause, the cause of the cosmos would logically be something other than the cosmos. If the cosmos is fundamentally material, could it have been caused by something material? This query philosophically ushers in the concept of God, the x-factor that fills the gap.

2.3. Life as a Manifestation of the Living Cosmos

Another controversy on the nature and the meaning of life is the relationship between life and the cosmos. Is the cosmos a living or non-living phenomenon? If the cosmos is a non-living phenomenon, can it support life? Is the life that is observed in the multitude of phenomena merely a manifestation of the life of the cosmos? How do we categorize the cosmos as an entity: a living or non-living entity? If the cosmos as an entity is alive, life definitely will permeate every aspect of it just as life permeates every aspect of a living organism. As the cosmos is fundamentally material, in that case, by default, all matter in a living cosmos will be permeated with life. By this argument, life could be called a property of the cosmos which manifests in phenomena in varying degrees. This hypothesis would eliminate the need to account for the source of life outside the cosmos.

The budding field of research called synthetic biology would ultimately throw more light on this. Researchers are already synthesizing peculiar amino acids that are at the basis of life [15]. The research and the concomitant debates are on whether life could be completely synthesized in the near future. Hypothetically, that would be possible in a living cosmos in which life permeates every aspect of matter. Simply put: in a cosmos where matter is basically alive.

If this is the nature of life, what then is death? What does it mean for a phenomenon to be dead? Does death mean the extinction of life or the degrading of life from a higher organization of matter to lower and disaggregated organizations of matter? Can the human personality survive death? What happens to consciousness at death? The ruminations above return us to the fundamental question: what is death?

3. WHAT IS DEATH?

In the introductory part of this work, it was stated that before the possibility of the survival of death could be investigated, the nature and meaning of death should be thoroughly investigated. It was further stated that since death is an event that happens to life as we know it, a clear understanding of the meaning of life should be sought. Having reasonably discussed the meaning of life, the question of death shall be discussed in relation to what life is considered to be.

3.1. Death as a Biological Experience

Biologically, death could be termed as the completion of the dying process in any organism. In humans, it could be understood as the cessation of the functioning of the individual as a whole. The functioning of the individual as a whole is stressed because a patient diagnosed as braindead could be artificially sustained in an ICU environment while other parts of the body continue to grow despite the patient being brain dead.

Although biological death is generally believed to have occurred when the brain is dead due to non-supply of oxygen rich blood to the brain, the diagnosis of the accurate moment the death event occurs is however, problematic especially under the ICU environment. Certainly, the individual as person would have been dead when the brain dies, but certain biological functions of the

body could still take place as sub-systems even when the individual is medically braindead [16;17]. While such a braindead person could be termed socially dead, due to the irretrievable loss of personality, he could only be termed as biologically dead when all biological functions have ceased to take place in the individual's body as a whole. To keep it simple: to be braindead does not necessarily mean to be biologically dead. To become biologically dead, all biological functions of the body must cease to occur. It is safe to narrow down the concept of death to: loss of personality and discontinuation of all body functions either as systems or subsystems. To be dead one does not just have to be braindead, one has to be biologically dead. This experience entails loss of personality and the functioning of the body as a living system. The body however does not disappear. It undergoes a process of disintegration, and ultimately returns to earth-matter.

3.2 Social Death

There is a social dimension to the experience of death. The loss of personality at death is as much a social event as it is a biological event. Death entails the loss of the capacity of the individual to function as a social entity. The loss of self-consciousness/personality in the individual translates to the loss of social identity. The individual ceases to exist as a social unit. However, the memory of the individual continues to exist in the consciousness of the society. It is the society that quests for immortality. It is the society that enacts elaborate funeral rites for the dead in the hope of a smooth passage into the afterlife [18]. It is the society that seeks to make its dead citizens immortal by erecting their statues, erecting monuments in their honour and instituting festivals and holidays in their honour. The society also seeks to endure forever.

3.3 Death as a Possible Spiritual Experience.

The gaps in human experience of existence present a strong psychological appeal to the possibility of a category of being other than the world as we see it: the spiritual. Not even science has been able to give a comprehensive (scientific) account of the universe that resolves all the puzzles regarding the cosmos. The infinity and eternity of the cosmos present strong categorical dilemmas which have led sizeable proportion of humanity to conclude over the years that there must be a spiritual dimension to existence.

The spiritual school of thought presumes the human person to be a component of matter and spirit. Therefore, death as a spiritual experience entails the dissolution of the composite of the spirit and body that constitutes the human person [19]. Death as a spiritual experience warrants the spirit leaving the body. The spirit is assumed to be immortal while the body decays and fades away [20]. There is no empirical evidence to support these assumptions neither is it empirically possible to establish that the universe is infinite or eternal. The appeal of this school of thought rests strongly on the apparent incapacity of humanity to comprehensively account for the universe.

4. THE AFTERLIFE

From time immemorial, human civilizations have never fully regarded death as the final event in the existence of man. Although a number of cultures thought it so, the overwhelming majority of humanity have always believed that the human person somewhat survives the event of death. Morals and goals of most societies and civilizations are tailored towards this expected survival beyond the event of death. There is hardly any culture that does not have its own account of what becomes the fate of man at death. From the ancient times to the contemporary era, numerous accounts of the afterlife have gained currency and continued to hold sway among many civilizations, diverse cultures and multitudes of ideologies. Selected models of the afterlife in selected civilizations are discussed below.

4.1 The Concept of Afterlife in Ancient Egypt

Religion played a central role in ancient Egyptian culture. The ultimate goal of the Egyptian religion seemed to the attainment of immortality. Immortality was not universal as it was not attainable to all Egyptian dead but nonetheless attainable to those who had conducted its affairs ethically while alive; and of course, had the necessary burial rites performed. Needless to say, the belief in afterlife was a central feature of ancient Egyptian religious and social spheres. The attainment of wellbeing in the afterlife was a driving motif in ancient Egyptian human existence.

Death in ancient Egypt was fundamentally the separation of the *ka* from the body [21]. Ancient Egypt believed that the cosmos including man was created by the god, *Atum* [22]. All things were basically imbued of matter and magic. The magical element in the human person was the soul. The soul in ancient Egyptian conception was basically made of three parts:

- a. The *ka* which is the vital essence of the human person; the double. It is the vital essence that distinguished the living from the dead.
- b. The *ba* is the part of the soul responsible for the uniqueness of the individual; the individual's personality. It is also the intermediate state of the soul between death and the transfiguration of the soul into eternal blessedness.
- c. The *akh* was essentially the transfigured soul. The soul that has been found worthy of eternal blessedness in the presence of the god *Osiris* in the afterlife after passing a stringent judgment by the goddess *Maat* [23].

Clearly, the belief in afterlife in ancient Egypt was elaborate and well pronounced. It is responsible for the painstaking rites, funeral practices and burial texts of that era. Ancient Egyptian philosophy of death lays down an elaborate pathway to the survival of death.

At death which is the separation of the *ka* from the physical body (*khet*), the individual is prepared for possible attainment of an afterlife bliss. This includes the maximal preservation of the dead body. Ancient Egyptians believed that the physical body would still be used in the afterlife, hence the need to preserve it in optimal condition. That was the belief that gave rise to the practice of mummification in ancient Egypt. The tomb is furnished with food items and such necessities of life that the dead were thought to require in their journey to the afterlife. They were also provided with sacred texts from the *Book of the Dead* to guide their conduct as they undertake the underworld journey [24]. Since life in the afterlife is deemed to be fairly similar to life on earth, they are provided with servants symbolically represented in statuettes called *shabtis* to help them perform the tasks that might be required of them in the underworld. They might also be accorded the pleasure of having their favourite pets mummified alongside their dead bodies to afford them the comfort of the company of such pets in the afterlife.

The *ba* part of the soul which was symbolically depicted as a bird with human face is more or less seen as the intermediary soul state, liaising with the dead body, the world and the underworld. Niches were often created in the tombstone to enable the *ba* of the dead perch there and view the goings on in the world.

At a stage in the perilous underworld journey, the soul is brought to judgment before the goddess *Maat* which would assess the ethical purity of the deceased by weighing his heart against an ostrich's feather. This process basically involved the 42 assessors of *Maat* interrogating the deceased who would recite all the sins he did not commit. The judgment process culminates with the weighing of the deceased heart in a scale against the feather of *Maat* to ascertain its purity. The actual weighing is done by the god Anubis on behalf of *Maat*. The heart must balance with the feather or weigh less than it to attain eternal blessedness. If the heart of the deceased weighs more than the feather of *Maat*, it will be eaten by the monster, *Ammut*, consigning it to eternal restlessness or eternal oblivion. The soul that has successfully passed the purity test of *Maat* is transfigured for blessed eternity, thereby becoming *akh*. The soul is now welcomed by the god Osiris into the Field of Reeds or *Sekhet-Aaru*. That is the ancient Egyptian concept of paradise. It is conceived as a fertile enclosure with eternal access to the Nile. Food and the goodies of life abound therein. The justified souls enjoy the goodies of this paradise in the presence of the god *Osiris* in eternal blessedness.

4.2 The Afterlife in Western/Judeo-Christian Thought

The Western hemisphere is dominated by the Judeo-Christian religious worldview. Although it is aggressively being challenged by liberalism, the Judeo-Christian worldview fundamentally drives the Western culture. Judaism has its origin in the Egyptian religion. Moses, the founder of Judaism was an adopted son of Pharaoh, and a teacher of the Egyptian religion [25]. Israel itself is a breakaway state from Egypt. They were part and parcel of Egypt; practiced Egyptian religion and Egyptian culture. Naturally a lot of Egyptian religious practices found their way into Judaism [26;27].

Christianity on the other hand is a breakaway religion from Judaism. The founder, Jesus the Christ was a Judaist who was also versed in the Egyptian religion. Christianity came up with a similar but significantly modified version of the afterlife from the Egyptian version. Unlike the polytheism of Egypt, Christianity and Judaism hold tenaciously to monotheism. The Judeo-Christian version of the afterlife holds that the soul of the dead will face judgment at death. The soul of the just will proceed to paradise where it will enjoy an eternity of bliss with God. The souls of the unjust would however roast in hellfire in an eternity of torments with the antigod, Satan. However, Christianity posits a final judgment day when the body will be resurrected, and joined with the soul to either enjoy an eternity of bliss or an eternity of torments. In all this, immortality is guaranteed for both the just and unjust. Existence goes on for both but the quality of existence differs diametrically. Death for the Judeo-Christian religions is not the final event in the existence of man. Man is believed to survive death either as one of the blessed or one of the damned.

4.3 The Afterlife in Igbo-African Ontology

African traditional worldviews generally admit that death is not the final event in man. The Igbo worldview is singled out for detailed emphasis. For Ndigbo, there is neither heaven nor hell. The earth is contiguous but has a spiritual dimension. Death is a transition to ancestry for those who were just, and whom have been properly buried in accordance to the traditional funeral rites. Immortality was not for children though. It was for full adults who had the capacity to choose between right and wrong.

The ancestors just hovered around the community in the spiritual realm. They took interest in the affairs of the community and in the affairs of their families [28]. Supplications are often made to them for favourable auspices. They are not seen as dead and obliterated. They are seen to have passed into nothingness or disappeared impersonally into some cosmic entity. Ndigbo classify their ancestors as "the living dead" [29]. In Igbo ontology of death, the ancestors do not go to paradise neither are they said to exist in an afterlife of bliss and sumptuous consumption in the presence of any god. The Igbo ancestors rather, abide in a comity of fellow ancestors. They are never in remote indifference. Their focus is forever on the community: the wellbeing of the people and in particular, the wellbeing of the family members they left behind. The unjust and the irresponsible among the Igbo-African dead are not admitted into the comity of ancestors. They hover spiritually on the outskirts of the community rejected admittance among the living and among the dead. They are called *akalogheri*. Unlike the ancestors who exist in a comity, the *akalogheris* don't enjoy any sense of community. They are condemned to an eternity of rejection, aloneness and restlessness.

The afterlife among Ndigbo is also expressed in their peculiar concept of reincarnation. Worthy ancestors reincarnate their influence and personality traits in their chosen descendants. Ndigbo did not believe in literal reincarnation. These descendants are not seen as

the literal continuation of the existence of the soul or person of the reincarnating ancestor. They are seen as the manifestations of the character traits; and sometimes physical features of the said ancestor. It is not a replication of the life of the ancestor as ancestors in Igbo-African ontology often reincarnate in multiple persons among their descendants. Clearly this is not reincarnation in the literal sense of it but rudimentary genetics. The descendant who often have some personality traits or genetic resemblance to the ancestor in question. Hence, some other descendants would still have these features and still be called reincarnations of the same ancestors. Reincarnation as understood by Ndigbo was simply a genetic expression. The fact that the reincarnated descendants would still reincarnate in succeeding generations as themselves rather than the ancestor who reincarnated in them buttresses the fact that reincarnation among Ndigbo is a generational genetic transfer rather than transfer of soul, personality or identity of the ancestor. Each Igbo individual ultimately retains their unique individual identity in life and in death irrespective of which ancestor is said to have reincarnated in them. There is no replication of the dead in the Igbo concept of reincarnation. Although, reincarnation expresses the afterlife in Igbo worldview, it does so materially, and surprisingly rather scientifically – genetics. The Igbo ancestor never leaves his place in the comity of ancestor to exist in the form of any his descendants in the community. No matter how many persons that are regarded as his incarnations, the community still believes the ancestors exist perpetually in the comity of ancestors, offer libations to them and offer supplications to them for favorable auspices. They never offer the libations or supplications to the reincarnations of the ancestors. The *akologheris* do not reincarnate. Reincarnation is for the dead who lived ethically and who were properly buried in accordance to the required funeral rites. Reincarnation among Ndigbo, applied to men and women.

Ndigbo clearly were not searching for any world beyond the earth. Their existence was not conceived to be fundamentally wired for the service of any god. The gods were tools for favorable auspices on earth. The Igbo ancestors retain an equal status to the gods. Although they are not worshipped as gods, but like the gods, supplications and libations are made to them. The afterlife among Ndigbo is in summary a spiritual existence in the community by deserving ancestors.

5.0 CONCLUSION

It is not possible to present an empirical or decisive answer to the question, “Do we survive death?” neither is it possible to make a logically decisive conclusion on the possibility of afterlife. Such conclusion cannot be made without hearing from the dead. That in itself is a logical absurdity. What is certain is that the human body returns to the elements at death. The possibility of the survival of the subjective experiences of the human person beyond death is a matter of speculation. Matter is definitely indestructible. It can only be converted from one form to another. However, organizations of matter lose identity when they are converted. A burnt log of wood will become ash. Ash decisively has a different identity from wood. But both are fundamentally reducible to carbon. What would be subjective experiences of man be ultimately reducible to? If consciousness survives death can self-consciousness possibly survive? Are subjective experiences like matter or the rest of the body converted to other forms of matter? Are they reduced to the fundamental features of matter in unorganized or simple states? Perhaps, more understanding of the nature of the cosmos beyond the contemporary understanding of the cosmos might throw light on that.

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