



Immortality as a Theoretical Framework for Psychological Intervention

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ABSTRACT

Individuals are more likely to respond to psychological treatment methods that are consistent with their world view. There is a need to have different treatment methods that can cater for the needs of diverse individuals based on their conception and understanding of the world.

The purpose of this paper is to propose the concept of immortality of the soul through reincarnation as a reasonable theoretical framework for psychological treatment and intervention in a variety of conditions.

The concept of immortality, though not accepted by all people, is consistent with the universal law of conservation of energy and matter which states that neither energy nor matter can be destroyed. Neither a proof of its existence nor scientific consensus on its status is required for it to be employed in therapy.

KEYWORDS : Immortality; reincarnation; psychotherapy; counseling; conservation of energy; soul.

Introduction

There is no question that the human body lives for a period of time and dies. It is also believed by many that the soul survives death and lives forever. The idea of the immortality of the soul has existed for centuries among the Greeks, Egyptians and Nigerians – to mention but a few¹.

There are people however for whom death is synonymous with absolute annihilation. For such people the idea of immortality is non-existent. An individual's personal belief should however not form a legitimate basis for discarding the present proposition. Humans are diverse enough to be accommodated in as many compartments as possible. The placebo effect should also tell us more about human nature and disease conditions.

Immortality is allied to the closely related concept of reincarnation. It is generally believed that when a person dies, the soul leaves the body and remains disembodied for a period of time until it is reborn through a new body as a baby. Through this way immortality is said to be accomplished. Let me quickly add that different people have different understanding and sometimes frank misunderstanding of reincarnation. The version that is adopted in this paper is not that human beings may be reborn as lower animals such as goat, dog or any other entity lower than Man in the evolutionary scale. In the same way, the concept of transmigration is outside the scope of my discussion. Transmigration has to do with the idea that somebody who lives and dies in a particular locality relocates to another locality where he or she is not known and continues to live there.

I state clearly here that my use of the term 'immortality' has no religious connotation, but simply a legitimate affair in nature. It is not as mysterious as the regular alternation of day and night, the rise and fall of tides in the ocean, nor does any fear or discomfort associated with it approximate the enigma of pregnancy and childbirth!

As said earlier, it is not everybody that accepts the idea of immortality. For many it simply does not exist; for them all they see at the end of life is perpetual darkness. People are entitled to their views and opinions especially on an issue of this nature for which there are no objective criteria for a scientific proof and consensus. The purpose of this paper is not to prove to people that immortality exists but rather to propose that the theory of immortality may form a framework for psychological treatment procedures which may be useful and beneficial to those who subscribe to the idea of immortality; after all there is no single treatment modality that is beneficial without exception, to the whole of human race. Individuals are more likely to respond to psychological treatment methods that are consistent with their world view. There is a need to have different treatment methods that can cater for the needs of

diverse individuals based on their conception and understanding of the world.

When I examine the issue on a personal level, I find the concept of immortality to be consistent with the law of conservation of energy and the law of conservation of matter. This universal law maintains that neither energy nor matter can be destroyed. They can only change from one form to another. Thus going by this law, even the body which is buried or cremated is never destroyed. By the same token there is no reason to subscribe to the idea that the soul is destroyed at anytime. I am mindful of the fact that there are people who do not subscribe to the existence of the soul. The discussion on that is outside the scope of this paper.

The Concept of Immortality in Therapy

Many people pass through life without achieving their goals. Some are born with disabilities and under circumstances that automatically limit what they can achieve in life. Some people develop terminal diseases early in life which do not only limit what they can achieve but also reduce their life span drastically. Many psychiatric patients are unable to achieve their full potentials. The care-givers of many of the groups of patients already mentioned and similar people in disadvantaged situations bear a lot of burden of care. The result is that both the patients and their care-givers do not enjoy a dignified existence in their lifetime. To add to these, the prospect of death brings fear and sorrow to many irrespective of their age and accomplishment in life.

The concept of immortality may be of assistance to people in that it may enable them to deal with whatever disadvantage, ill-fortune and disappointment they cannot change which they have in life. If such people are reminded that the present life is just one incarnation out of many which they will go through and that if things do not work out well for them now, there is hope that things may be different and better in another incarnation, they may have some relief. This is particularly important because many times, the experiences we go through are not as important as our reactions to those experiences. One of the major causes of disappointment and frustration in life is our expectation. Among humans there are those who believe that certain adverse experiences and misfortunes can never affect them. Such 'unbelievable' experiences are often very devastating to such people when they occur. This is not an advocacy for one to be careless in life or to not take measures to avoid unpleasant experiences in life, but going by what is implicit in immortality, an incarnation is at best a fraction of a second in the affair of Mankind!

A treatment method based on the concept of immortality may be used alone or in combination with counselling, cognitive behavioral therapy and/or psychotherapeutic methods. If it is used alone,

symptom remission may not be a primary goal in the same way that symptom remission is the primary goal of Freudian psychoanalysis. However symptom remission may occur as a secondary effect. For instance if a patient develops depressive episode as a result of infertility, the depressive symptoms may not be directly amenable to this proposed treatment method, but by enabling the patient to cope with the infertility (which she cannot change), the patient may obtain symptom relief.

Conclusion

The concept of immortality has existed for centuries among humans, though there is no objective proof for it. We do not have any proof against it either. Quite importantly, it is considered that it will be effective in therapy for those who subscribe to it; therefore we do not need a universal proof of its existence or scientific consensus on its status for it to be employed in therapy.

If we can study and understand the arrangement of cells, tissues, organs and systems to form the human individual without seeing anything extraordinary, then the concept of immortality through reincarnation can be approached without awe.

The idea of immortality through reincarnation is consistent with the law of indestructibility of energy and matter. That being the case, it is not in the realm of superstition. It is presented here as a reasonable framework which may form the basis for psychological intervention in a number of situations.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

None

Reference:

1. Makinde MA. Immortality of the Soul and The Yoruba Theory of Seven Heavens. *Journal of Cultures and Ideas* 1983;1:31 – 59