

What Happens After I Die? Jewish Views of the Afterlife

Rabbi Michael Lotker
Jewish Federation of Ventura County
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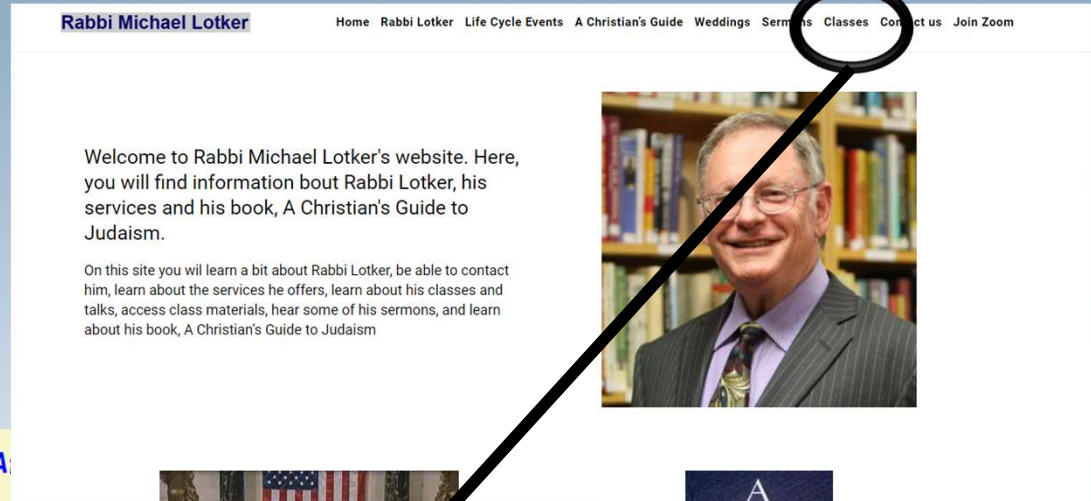
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"What Happens After I Die? – Jewish Views of the A

Many Jews are surprised to learn that Judaism has always held that there is something beyond the grave – a life in the "world to come." We just don't know (or teach) the details because no one has come back to tell us and because Judaism's focus is on this life. In this class, we will explore the wide range of authentic Jewish beliefs about the afterlife and how these beliefs have affected Jewish traditions of burial and mourning. In our sessions we will examine what the Bible has to say, the Rabbinic and Talmudic thoughts and commentaries, the amazing world of medieval commentary, mystical and kabbalistic insights and well as what modern thinkers contribute. We will also explore the world of Jewish funeral and mourning customs and their origins.

- [> Copies of Slides for Class](#)
- [> Moment Article: "What Does Judaism Have to Say About Life After Death"](#)
- [> Video of Session #1](#)





First Session

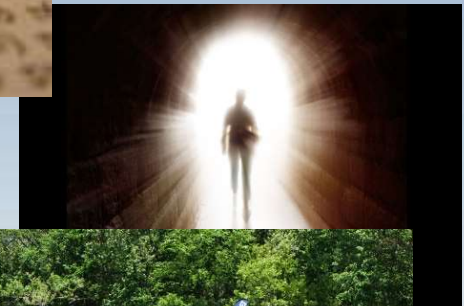
Biblical and Rabbinic Teachings

What Do Jews Believe About the Afterlife?



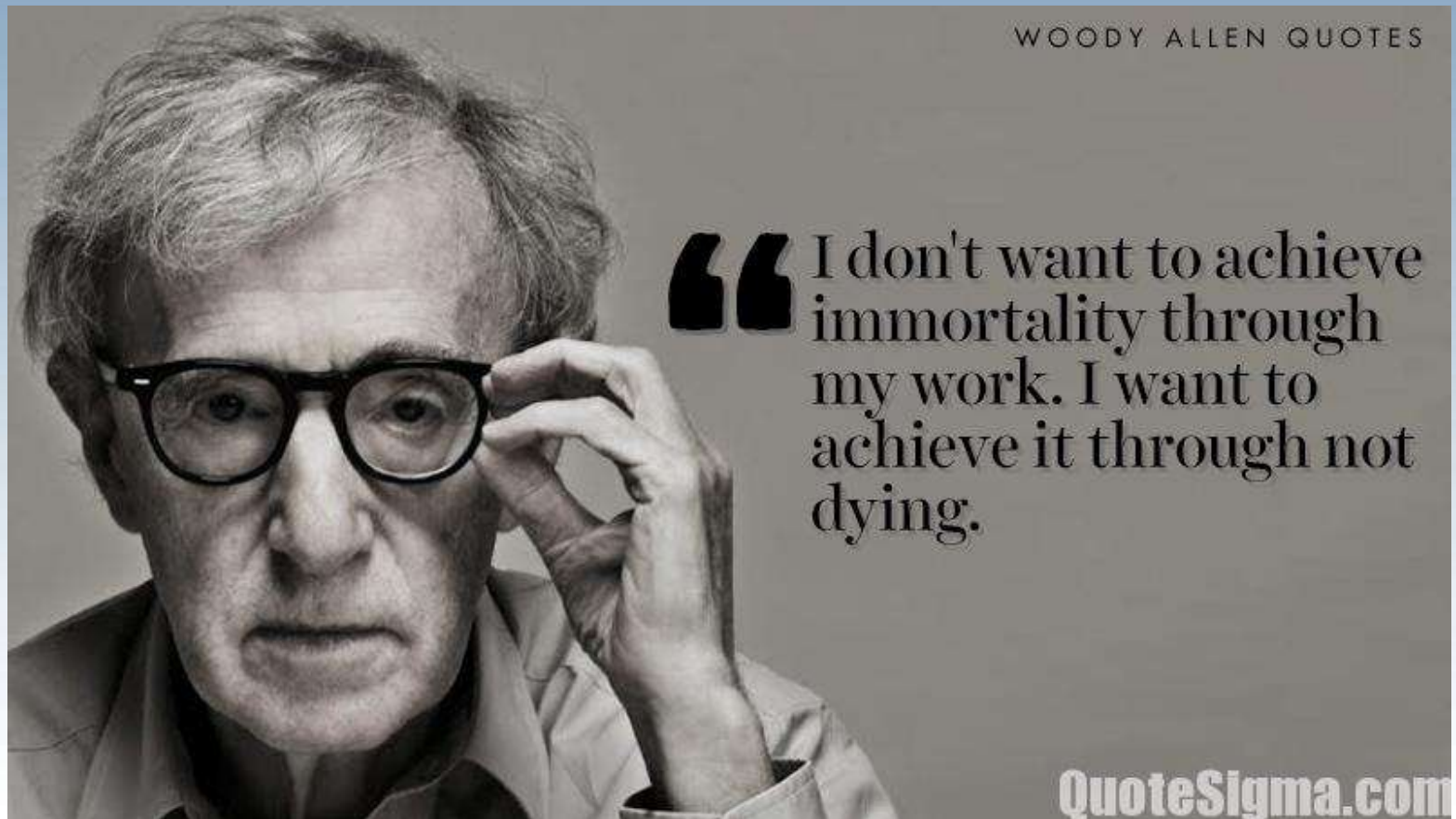
I Don't Know! Go Ask Them!

What Do Jews Believe About the Afterlife?



But I can address what Judaism teaches about the afterlife.

Here's Woody Allen's Response



WOODY ALLEN QUOTES

“ I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying.

QuoteSigma.com



Objectives of the Class

- **To learn what Judaism has to say about “What Happens After I Die?”**
- **To investigate Jewish texts (Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Zohar, etc.) on the subject.**
- **To learn how Judaism addresses matters of faith – contrasted with matters of practice.**
- **To discover false notions about the above.**
- **To share what we, as individual Jews think about these ideas.**
- **To strengthen our bonds as a community.**



Your Thoughts

- **What were you taught by parents, grandparents, teachers, rabbis?**
- **What do you believe?**
- **If you believe in an afterlife, what do you think it's like?**
- **I know that many of you have had experiences relating to this question that cannot be simply explained. I hope some of you will share these.**

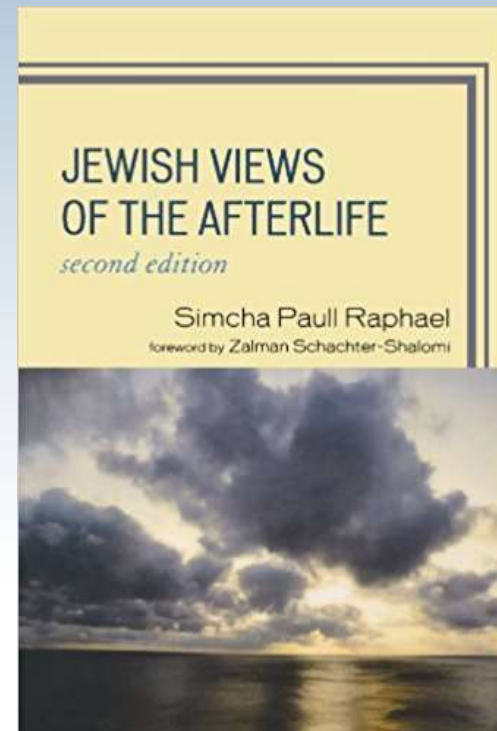
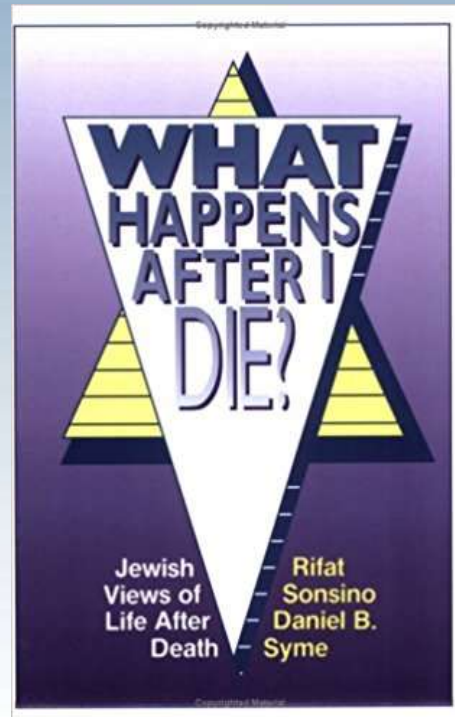
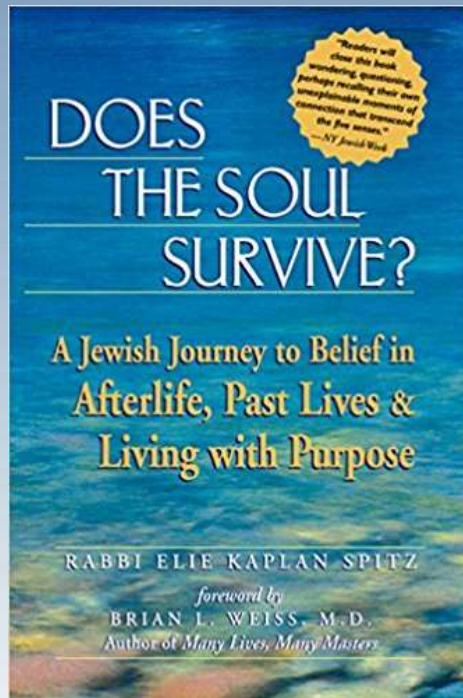
Survey Results



According to a Pew Forum survey

- **39% of Jews said they believed in an afterlife**
 - **Smallest of any group**
 - **Even smaller than “Unaffiliated” [48%]**
 - **About half the average of 74%**
- **But Jews had the highest response of “don’t know/refused to answer” of 14% [double the average of 7%]**
- **My own theory: “If the afterlife is so central to Christianity, we Jews must not believe it at all.”**

Some Excellent Resources





From *Does the Soul Survive?* by Spitz

A woman in her fifties working on her doctorate in a literary field called to make an appointment to discuss her studies. She is a serious student, a particularly organized woman who is self-described as very rational. In the course of our conversation she said, "Rabbi, I had an experience that I want to tell you about. One night I had a very vivid dream in which my brother, who died several years before, appeared to me and said that something important was going to happen. I was so startled by the intensity and vividness of the dream and the message that I awoke and sat on the edge of my bed. Soon the phone rang. It was my family thousands of miles away. They told me that my father had just died of a sudden heart attack. Neither I nor they had any indication that he had even been sick." (pg. 6)



From *Does the Soul Survive?* by Spitz

A female physician told my wife that while in medical school her roommate awakened her one night at 3:00 A.M., saying, "You are shouting 'Daddy, Daddy' and something about drooping eyelids." The next day the roommate learned that her father had suddenly, been hospitalized thousands of miles away with a severe muscle disease that affected his breathing and was difficult to diagnose. When she asked about his eyelids, which were indeed drooping, the doctors were able to make the diagnosis and save his life.

Years later, when this same man was in a coma, the daughter flew cross-country, repeating over and over to herself in her mind, "Dad, wait for me, I'm coming Don't die" When she reached his hospital room he suddenly opened his eyes and awoke from the coma. He said, "I heard you say 'Wait for me, I'm coming Don't die,' and I waited" Soon after, he died. (pg. 7)



From *Does the Soul Survive?* by Spitz

As I call on other colleagues, their reactions range from first-hand testimonials to uneasiness and skepticism. One rabbi from Orange County, California, who identifies himself as an ardent rationalist, shares the following:

About ten years ago my wife went into the hospital for routine surgery. Due to a surgical error she developed a life-threatening blood infection, coupled with pneumonia and other complications. The doctors gave her less than a ten percent chance of survival. She had a tube inserted in her throat to aid her with breathing, which prevented her from speaking. When they finally removed her breathing tube, she said, "While I was declining in strength and my pain was increasing, I became aware of all the prayers that people were saying for me. I could actually hear their voices. The prayers formed a cocoonlike structure around me. Each prayer added to the enveloping support. Why is it," she asked, "that our friends the Weisses weren't praying for me?"

What she could not have known was that the Weisses were in Europe around the time that she went in for routine surgery. They did not know she had been gravely ill. I still have no way to explain her uncanny knowledge and the sense that words of prayer had kept her alive.²

2- Pg 197

The Unsatisfying Simple Answer: Something. But We Don't Know the Details



- Story about lawyer and the balloon.
- Judaism has always held that there is something beyond the grave.
 - As we will see, this is necessary to salvage God's reputation. -- Since good not always rewarded and bad not always punished in this life.
 - The "something" has to do with reward and punishment – thus there are Jewish concepts that sound a lot like heaven and hell.
- Having said this, we don't know any of the details.
 - Unlike many other religions that seem to know.
- Digression: Why does this answer surprise many of us?
 - Sounds unscientific
 - Sounds Christian. My personal theory is that because Christianity is so focused on the afterlife, most Jews assume that Judaism denies it.

Biblical: What the Bible Has to Say About the Afterlife



- First, to repeat, not much
- First discussion in the openings of Genesis
 - God breathes into Adam the *neshamah* of life and Adam becomes a *nefesh*. Gen. 2.7
 - Note that Adam and Eve choose to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (in spite of the prohibition – or because of the prohibition) and ignore the tree of life.
 - Only after they eat, is there a need to place the *cherubim* to guard the way to the Tree of Life (Gen. 4:22-24).
 - Digression: We next see the Cherubim guarding the Torah (ex. 25:18-22), therefore – the Torah = The Tree of Life!

Biblical: What the Bible Has to Say About the Afterlife



- Physical death in the Bible:
 - “Dust you are, and to dust you shall return” Gen. 3:19
 - “In respect of the fate of man and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate ... Both go to the same place; both came from dust and both return to dust” Eccles. 3:19-20
 - “We must all die; we are like water that is poured out on the ground and cannot be gathered up.” II Sam. 14:14
- *Sheol*: “A Mysterious Hint of a Life Beyond”
 - *Sheol* like *sheolah* – a question – from the Hebrew verb *shaal* “to ask”
 - To go down to *Sheol* means to die.
 - Isaiah 14:9-11
 - Ps. 88:4-7
 - Dreary and “down” but not hell – concept of hell developed much later during Greek and Persian periods.
- The biblical two who didn’t die: “Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind” (II Kings 2:11) and “Enoch walked with God and was no more, for God took him.” (Gen. 5:24).
- Saul, the woman of Endor and the spirit of Samuel (I Sam 28:13-15)
- Hints of resurrection: Ezek. 37:11-12 & Daniel 12:2
- This is pretty much it for the Bible



Some Biblical Texts

Psalms 6:6. “For in death there is no remembrance of You. In *Sheol* who shall give You thanks?”

Isaiah 38:18. “For *Sheol* cannot praise You, death can not celebrate You; they who go down into the pit cannot hope for Your truth.”

I Sam. 28:13-15. “And the king said to her (the woman of Endor), Do not be afraid; for what did you see? And the woman said to Saul, I saw a godlike man ascending from the earth. And he said to her, What is his appearance? And she said, An old man comes up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed. And Samuel said to Saul, Why have you disturbed by bringing me up? And Saul answered, I am in great distressed...”



Some Biblical Texts

Ezek. 37:11-12. “Then he said to me, son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off. Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.”

Daniel 12:2-3. “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And the knowledgeable will be radiant like the bright expanse (*zohar*) of sky and those who lead the many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever.”

Some Biblical Images



The Woman/Witch of Endor and Endora



...‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord” Ezekiel 37:11-14

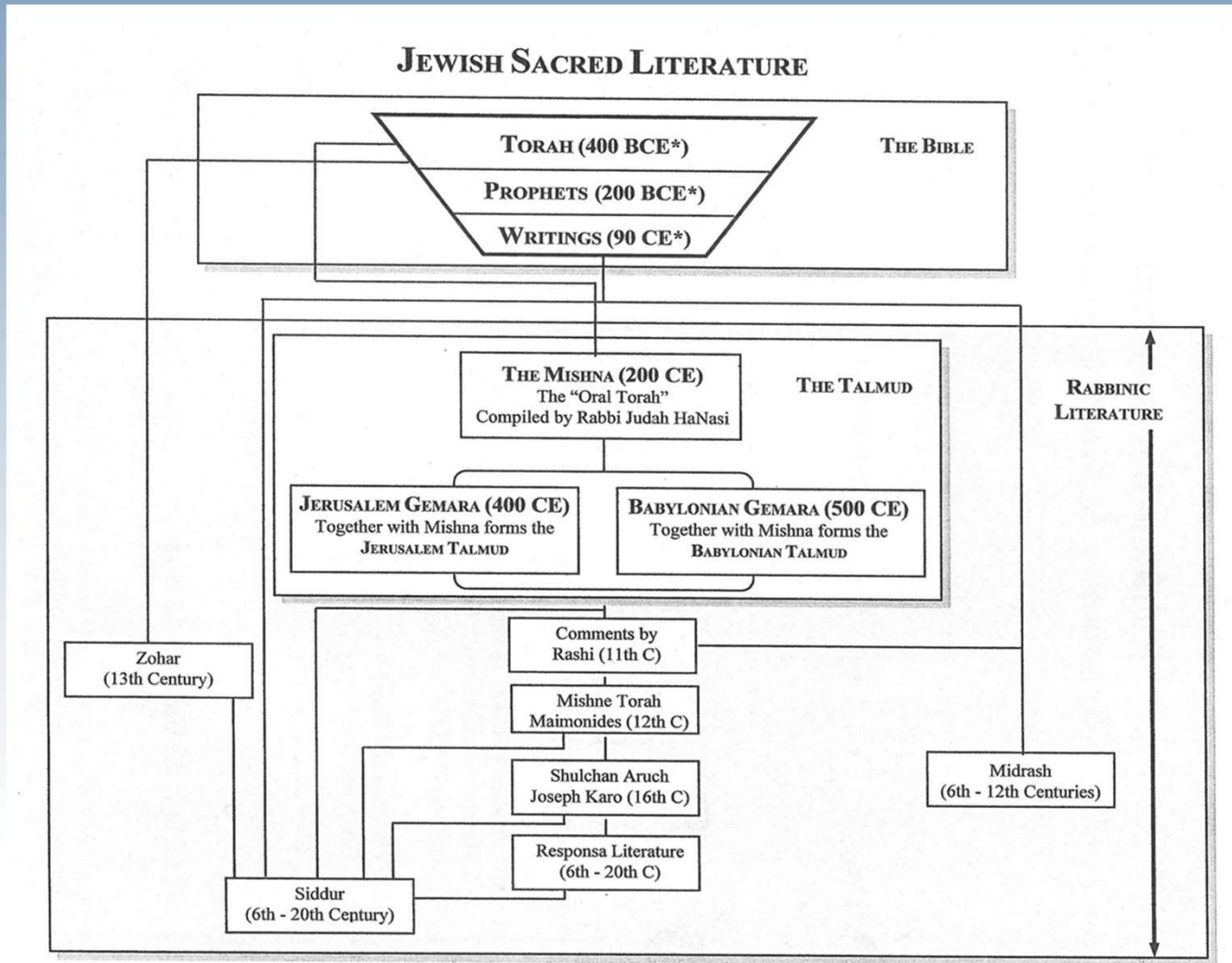


Rabbinic Judaism & the Afterlife

Who Were the Rabbis and How Do They Fit Into Jewish History and Thought?

- **Jewish History**
 - **Temple Times**
 - **Post-Temple Times: the Rabbis re-form Judaism**
- **Jewish Sacred Literature**
 - **Bible**
 - **Talmud**
 - **Midrash and Rabbinic Literature**

Rabbinic Judaism & the Afterlife



* Approximate Dates of Canonization

Michael Lotker 4/98



Rabbinic Judaism & the Afterlife

- **The World to Come**
 - *Olam Habah, Olam Hazeih, Atid Lavo* (what is to come)
 - Where I go after I die
 - Where the world will be in the Age of the Messiah
 - *Gan Eden*
 - To this day, traditional Jews talk about one's share in the world to come
 - Things that help you earn it (good deeds, suffering, studying)
 - Things that help you lose it (sins, heresies, etc.)
 - You don't have to be Jewish



Some Interesting Texts

***Pirkei Avot* (4:22) on *Olam Ha-Ba* – the World to Come**

- “Better is one hour of repentance and good works in this world (*Olam Ha-Zeh*) than the whole life of the World to Come.” and
- “Better is one hour of spiritual bliss in the World to Come than the whole of life in this world.”

When King David died, Solomon, his son sent this inquiry to the Bet Ha-Midrash. “My father is dead and lying in the sun; and the dogs of my father’s house are hungry, what shall I do?” The answer: “Feed the dogs first and then attend to you dead father. ... living dogs take precedence over a dead king.” (*Shabbat 30b*)



You Don't Have to Be Jewish

As to the fate of non-Jews, the rabbis of the second century differed sharply. One rabbi, taking a minority view, argued that gentiles do not have any place in the world to come. The position of another sage, Rabbi Joshua ben Hanamah, prevailed: "Righteous gentiles have a place in the world to come" (*Tos San 13:2*). This view was also affirmed by the great medieval philosopher and legal scholar Maimonides, who stated "The pious of all the nations of the world have a portion in the world to come" (*Mishneh Torah, Repentance 3:5*). (quoted in Soncino & Syme pg. 26)



Some Rabbinic Descriptions of Paradise

“One sage maintained that three things – namely, Shabbat, sunshine, and sexual intercourse are central in this world as well as in the world to come (see *Ber. 57b*).

He was not alone in viewing paradise as a sensual place. We read that the righteous will sit at golden tables (*Ta’an. 25a*) on stools of gold (*Ket. 25a*) and participate in lavish banquets (*B.B. 75a*). A 3rd century Babylonian scholar, *Rav*, disagreed: ‘In the world to come there is neither eating nor drinking; no procreation of children or business transactions, no envy or hatred or rivalry but the righteous sit enthroned, their crowns on their heads, and enjoy the luster of the *Shenchinah* (divine grace) (*Ber. 17a*).’”

The majority of the rabbis saw Paradise as a place of reward agreeing with Rabbi Tarfon who taught: “You know that the bestowal of reward upon the righteous will be in the time to come.” (*Avot 2:16*).”

[From Soncino & Syme pp. 28-29.]



What is Hell (*Gehinnom*) Like

- The term “*Gehenna*” dates from the biblical period referring to a valley in Jerusalem called *Ge Ben Hinnom* (“the valley of the sons of *Hinnom*”). It was the site of a cult whose rituals included the sacrifice by burning of children (II Kings 23:10, Jer. 7:31).
- Talmud (R.H. 17a) “Wrongdoers of Israel who sin with their body, and wrongdoers of the gentiles who sin with their body, go to *Gehinnom* and are punished there for 12 months.” Although some sages argued that after 12 months they would be annihilated forever, Rabbi Akiva taught that “the judgement of the wicked in *Gehenna* shall endure [only] 12 months.” (*Ed. 2:10*). After this year, he taught (and his teaching prevailed), even the wicked would be returned to paradise. This is the source of the custom for mourning parents for 11 months.
- Rabbi Hanina (B.M. 58b) taught that punishment was temporary for all except the following: the adulterer, one who puts his fellow to shame in public, and one who calls his fellow by an obnoxious nickname.”

[Soncino & Syme, pp. 26-27]



A Big Digression on the Messiah

English “Messiah” is a translation of the Hebrew “*Mashiach*” [משיח]

- *Mashiach* means “anointed.”
 - Kings of Israel were anointed by pouring holy oil on their heads.
 - 39 references to “messiah” in Heb. Bible
 - Not one refers to future redeemer
- When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (about 200 BCE), the Hebrew *Mashiach* became the Greek “*Christos*” [Χριστός].
- The Greek *Christos* gives rise to the English “Christ.”



Jewish Understanding of Messiah

- **Like the afterlife, messiah is barely mentioned in Bible but a big topic in rabbinic literature.**
- **Fully Human and Only Human**
- **A Political and/or Military Ruler like King David**
- **Not God in any sense**
- **Not the son of God in any sense beyond the idea that we are all children of God**
- **Not connected with redemption of sin**
 - **Only we can atone for our sins**
 - **For sins against God, God forgives**
 - **For sins against others, God cannot forgive unless the person offended forgives**
- **Messiah not at the heart of Judaism**



Jewish Prophecies Concerning Messiah

- **A time of peace on earth**
 - **Peace among people**
 - **Peace among animals**
- **All the world will come to know the one God**
- **Details unresolved**
 - **Mystics see the time as supernatural**
 - **Rationalists believe that we will do the work to make the world perfect**
 - **Many believe in a Messianic Age rather than an individual Messiah.**

My “Has the Messiah Come?” Test

- Read the LA Times cover to cover every day for a month.
- If there’s no story of war, or hatred or hunger or disease, the Messianic Age may be here!





Why Don't Jews Accept Jesus As Messiah?

- **No world peace, no Messiah**
- **The Second Coming not a Jewish idea**
- **But the larger issue is whether Jesus is God**
 - **The idea of God taking human form, suffering with us and dying for our sins is:**
 - **Beautiful and inspiring**
 - **But not Jewish!**
- **This is why I can have great respect for Christianity but less sympathy for “Jews for Jesus” and “Messianic Jews”**



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- This is why I can have great respect for Christianity but less sympathy for “Jews for Jesus” and “Messianic Jews”
- **This issue is not “Who was Jesus” but “Who is God.”**



Jewish Teachings on Resurrection

- We have seen the Biblical texts (Ezek. 37”11-12 & Dan. 12:2)
- Resurrection became a primary teaching of the Pharisees (who were the early rabbis).
- Rabbinic proofs (San. 91b) relied on Hebrew grammar – in Ex. 15:1 “Moses and the children of Israel “will sing” [*yasheer* - יִשְׁיֵר] to the Lord. And Ps. 84:5 “Happy are those who dwell in Your house, they will be praising You [*y’hallelu-cha* - יְהַלְלוּךָ] (i.e. in the hereafter).
- Rambam’s 13th Principle: “I believe with perfect faith that there will be a revival of the dead at the time when it shall please the Creator, Blessed be His name, and His mention shall be exalted for ever and ever.”



Jewish Teachings on Resurrection

- There are lots of conflicting ideas about one's physical appearance after resurrection, will you be married (to which wife), etc. Note that there is no need to resolve these issues.
- There is also conflict about who will be denied resurrection. Some ideas include:
 - One who says there is no resurrection
 - One who says the Torah is not from Heaven
 - One who reads heretical books or utters charms over a wound (i.e. magic)
 - One who pronounces God's name with its proper letters.
- BUT – some certain paths to immortal life include Studying Torah, living in Israel, getting married, leading others to do good and speaking Hebrew.
- Note that in early/Rabbinic Judaism there is no systematic theology.
- Reform prayerbook substitutes *michayeh ha kol* (Who gives life to everything) for *michayeh ha mayteem* (“Who give life to the dead”).

Helpful Article in Moment Magazine (on my website)



Luba Vitch Hasidim

Hebrew gives us three distinct and paradoxical words for a cemetery: 1) *beit haolam*, meaning a home for burial; 2) *beit olam*, meaning a home of eternity; and 3) *beit haolam*, which means a home for the living. Why the need for three different words?

The way we define death stems directly from the way we define life. If life is merely about tending to the appetites of our bodies and hearts—then death, that unfaithful moment when the body turns lifeless, constitutes the tragic cessation of life. The cemetery, then, is a home for burial. A life has, sadly, reached its final chapter.

But there is another possible perspective: seeing life as a spiritual experience in addition to a physical one. If being alive is also about nurturing and nourishing our souls, our spiritual identity, our inner spark of God, then death, as irrevocable as it is, is not the interruption of life.

Tragic and horrendously painful? Absolutely yes. The end of one's existence? Absolutely not. The soul, which is an aspect of G-d, a fragment of the divine, is not subject to death. It travels from one realm of experience to another. In this perception, a cemetery is a home of eternity. The body is interred, but the soul remains eternal.

Yet there is something even greater we can achieve. If we—the children, students, friends relatives and communities left behind—are the passion and values of those no longer with us to inspire our daily lives and behavior, then the cemetery becomes a "home for the living." Our loved ones continue to exist in a very tangible way, in the earthly lives of the people touched by their love and our commitments.

Rabbi Yaacov K. Jankowsky
Instructor, Rabbinical College
Cherry Town, Brooklyn

Modern Orthodox

The Bible is overwhelmingly focused on this life. Humans are commanded to live the good life, here and now, in harmony with God and Creation.

It remained for the Talmud to develop the limited references to a future life into a full-blooded statement of the immortality of the soul. The medieval Jewish tradition shift-

What does Judaism have to say about Life after Death?

ed the focus so that earthly life was viewed as fleeting years lived primarily to become worthy of the eternal blessing of *Heaven* (*Kan Eidek*).

Modern liberal Jewish ideology shifted the focus back to this life. Even Modern Orthodox figures like Joseph B. Soloveitchik stressed the centrality of this worldly life and religiosity, stating in his book *Halachic Man* that holiness means "the holiness of earthly here-and-now life."

The ironic result of this shift—intensified by the modern emphasis on biblical thought and the widespread ignorance of Talmudic and medieval sources—is that many liberal Jews have never heard any teaching about the soul, eternal life or existence beyond the grave. Often they have been taught that precisely this worldly emphasis con-

stitutes Judaism's superiority over Christianity, which is pre-occupied with the afterlife.

Many liberal Jews are shocked to hear from traditional Jews that Judaism does, after all, teach immortality of the soul and offer the promise of eternal bliss with God and reunion with the beloved departed.

Sephardic Orthodox

In *Dirshat Avnei Eitzim* (Ethics of Our Fathers), Rabbi Jacob taught, "This world is like a lobby, a waiting room for the world to come." This teaching suggests that our lives here on earth are one long journey towards an ultimate destination.

Where is this "world to come," and what kind of life is lived there? On these questions, the Talmud quotes a verse from the prophet Isaiah: "No eye has seen these things, O God, except for you." Maimonides adds that only God—and nobody else—knows the actual grandeur, beauty and spiritual strength of this mysterious place our sages call *Olam HaBa*.

It seems somewhat peculiar that we spend our lives on a journey towards a destination that we know nothing about. Perhaps it is for this reason that the same Rabbi Jacob who taught about *Olam HaBa* was quick to remark, "One hour of good deeds in this world is more beautiful than all of life in the world to come." It is not the destination that is important, then, but how we spend our journey getting there.

What happens after we die? The answer lies in what happens while we are alive.

Rabbi Daniel Buskila
Temple Tzoref Israel, Los Angeles, California

Conservative

The prayer book is an excellent place to begin an examination of the variety of Jewish views about the afterlife.

Here are a few examples: Psalm 36:10 asks, "What profit is there if I go down to the pit? Can the dust give thanks to You? Can it declare Your truth?" And Psalm 115:17 answers, "The dead do not praise God; neither any that go down into silence."

In the memorial prayer, *El Malch Rahaman*, we request that

FEBRUARY 2006 / MOMENT 29

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illions, ousands of cultures,

Judaism rarely speaks with one voice. This is especially true with high-interest, low-evidence topics like life after death. At one time or another, Jews have offered nearly every afterlife theory under the sun.

Today, the enlightenment approach is ascendant. We don't know what happens after we die, perhaps nothing. But how we're remembered, and the difference we made on Earth that reverberates across the generations, is real.

This belief is appropriately

humble, yet still comforting. It forces the living to do their ethical and emotional best. It's spiritual, karmic even—we sow and others reap. And it fits in a tradition where, according to Exodus 34:7, God passes our mistakes on to those who follow us.

The second stanza of the Amidah prayer, *Gevurot*, is a sacred cacophony in many synagogues, with Reconstructionists saying *mechayeh kol chai* (who enlivens all life), Reform Jews saying *mechayeh kol* (who gives life to all) and traditional Jews saying *mechayeh metim* (who gives life to the dead). But all regroup near the end to affirm that *God we but are 'chayeh*, the Power behind both death and life.

Nothing is too great for the Torality of Existence. That same Creative Process that brought us into being also gave us intellectual, empiricist and philosophical impulses, which may have us hedge our bets. The afterlife makes for great speculation, but what matters most is what we do in the one realm and one timeline we surely share.

Rabble-rouser Mother Jones says it well: "Pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living." And poet Mary Oliver asks the key question, as reprinted in the Reconstructionist *Machzor*: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

Rabbi Fred Scherinder Dobb
Adar Shalom Reconstructionist
Congregation, Bethesda, MD

Jewish Renewal

So many accept the view that "Jews believe in life and living, here and now. We don't focus on the afterlife."

While this perspective may accurately describe 20th century Judaism, it is not representative of the broad-range historical legacy of Judaism. Nor is it reflective of the perspective of Jewish Renewal, which integrates mystical Judaism into contemporary Jewish practice.

In the pre-modern Jewish world—the world of Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Hasidic and Kabbalistic masters, and even the Rabbis of the Mishna and Talmud—never is there any doubt about the survival of the soul and of consciousness after death. Between the world of the living and the world of the dead is a window, not a wall.

Jewish Renewal recognizes that the soul passes through a journey of completion and purification after the death of the physical body. According to the sources, this is a four-fold journey.

It is understood that immediately after death there is a period of *transition*—*Hibbat HaKever*, "the pangs of the grave"—as the soul leaves go of its attachment to the physical body. According to the *Zohar*, "For seven days the soul [*nefesh*] goes to and fro from his house to his grave from his grave to his house, mourning

of injustice whereby e suffered and the pered was too dis- And so evolved the work-to-come, an a compensation for it who suffered on ould include ultra- tion. The wicked, ould be relegated to ishment, a hell or where their souls reged before being eved.

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re H. Schweitzer

Can Eden, experienced according to the level of spiritual
Apparently this message was too harsh for most people, and
President, Association of Humanistic Rabbis, New York

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From Feb. 2006 Edition, pp. 29-31

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Second Session

The Soul And Kabbalah



What is Soul?

- **Soul as an extension of God**
 - **Gen. 2:7 – “God formed Adam out of the dust of the ground (*adamah* related to Adam) and breathed into his nostrils the breath (*neshamah*) of life; and Adam thus became a living creature.”**
 - **In Hebrew there are three terms used for breath – *nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah*. These are used in Jewish mystical tradition to describe the soul.**
 - **The image of breath conveys the idea that the soul is intangible, animates life, and links us to God.**

From Spitz, pp. 23-26



What is Soul?

- The three dimensions of the soul as described in the *Zohar* [although there are three dimensions, there is one unified soul]:
 - *Nefesh*: the most primary level of human existence, representing the realm of action and physical pleasure.
 - *Ruach*: the realm of feelings, which enables personality and the expression of love. Animals have souls corresponding to these two levels.
 - *Neshamah*: associated with uniquely human capacities, analytic thought, the quest for meaning and transcendence. This is the living soul (*nishmat chayim*) that God breaths into Adam in Gen. 2:7.
- Isaac Luria (Egypt – Israel, 1534-1572), the *Ari* of *Sfat*, identifies two more levels of soul.
 - *Chayah & yechidah* – linked together as a fourth dimension of creation and might be called spirit.



Soul: Some Texts

“As God fills the whole world, so also the soul fills the whole body. As God sees, but cannot be seen, so also the soul sees, but cannot be seen. As God nourishes the whole world, so also the soul nourishes the whole body. As God is pure, so also the soul is pure. As God dwells in the innermost part of the Universe, so also the soul dwells in the innermost part of the body.” (*Berachot* 10a)

“To blow glass requires the glassblower to blow in deeply to get a breath, and then exhale through the glass tube. As the breath moves through the glass it expands and shapes it. When the work is completed the breath rests on the glass. In reverse order, the breath on the glass is *nefesh*, the most basic level of life force present in all living things. The *ruach*, which means wind, is the force that blows through the glass giving it shape. The *neshamah* is the outward breath of the glassblower. The *chayah* is the inward breath of the glassblower and the *yehidah* is the soul of the glassblower. These dimension of soul are intertwined and continuous.” (based on Chayim Vital’s *Nefesh HaChayim* 1:14)

Cited in Spitz, pp. 24, 26



Soul: Some Texts

“When a man is born he has only an animal soul, the *nefesh*. When he overcomes the Evil Urge [physical compulsions such as the craving for food or sex] the person is given a *ruach*. The entire world of angels is then in his domain. If the person is even more worthy [and he learns to master his emotions, such as anger] he is give a *neshamah*, corresponding to the Divine throne. This means that his every intent and thought creates a throne for God. When a person of this level thinks about his love of God, he is placed in the Universe of Love ... Such a person must never remove his thoughts from God, even for an instant, for God Himself rests in his thoughts.” The *Maggid* of Mezeritch (Rabbi Dov Baer, d. 1772), the chief disciple of the Ba’al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism.

Cited in Spitz, pp. 26-27



More on the Soul

Rabbi Spitz compares the multiple levels of the soul to four levels of human pleasure:

1. Physical pleasure -- pursuit of comfort, security, sports, sex, music, etc. corresponds to *nefesh*.
2. Emotional satisfaction – love of our children, spouse, best friends, etc. correspond to *ruach*.
3. Meaning – service to nation and community, bettering lives of people around us, charitable acts, etc. corresponds to *neshamah*.
4. Intuition, imagination, inspiration, Eureka moments, intuition of “oneness,” peak moment (sunset, holding a newborn), holy moments, etc. engage the *chayah* and *yechidah* dimensions of soul.



Body and Soul

In Judaism, the body and soul are not disconnected, even warring entities, but intertwined like lovers.

- Just as a wine stains the flask and the flask influences the taste of the wine, so body and soul interpenetrate and yet are distinctive.
- Saadiah Gaon (Egypt-Babylonia 882-942 C.E.) “Soul requires the good acts of the body to perfect its peculiarly immaterial, celestial-like substance, even as the body needs the faculties of sensation and reason that the soul provides.”

Spitz, pp. 31

Contrast this with Christian interpretations:

- “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.” Galatians 5:17



A Brief Introduction to Kabbalah

- The word *Kabbalah* means “received” meaning “the received tradition”
- The goal is to get closer to and even cleave to **God**
- It’s built on top of Judaism
 - Not an alternative but a much deeper practice
 - Begins with Orthodox observance
- Pop Kabbalah is pop spirituality
 - Madonna, tattoos, red strings, etc.
 - Wearing a stethoscope doesn’t make you a **MD**

Deuteronomy 6:4

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

She-ma Yis-ra-el, Ah-do-nai Eh-lo-hei-nu, Ado-nai Eh-chad

Hear O Israel: Adonai is (now) our God, Adonai (will be) One.

Hear O Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai alone.

Hear O Israel! Adonai our God, Adonai is one.

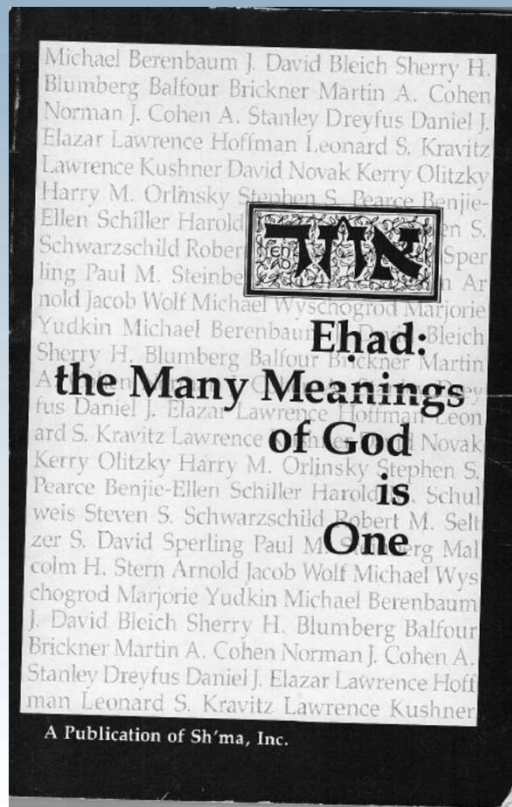
Hear O Israel! Adonai is our God, one indivisible Adonai.

Hear O Israel! Adonai our God is a unique Adonai.

Hear O Israel! Adonai our God is Ultimate.

Hear O Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai is Unity/Everything.

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A collage of religious and human figures in the background, including a menorah, a Star of David, a woman, and a man.

Where is God?

**When I count to
three, point to
God!**

Two Valid Images of God:

#1: Conventional/Rational

- In this image, God is “up there” and I am “down here”
- This is reflected in conventional Jewish blessings which begin with “Blessed are You, *Adonai...*”



Me

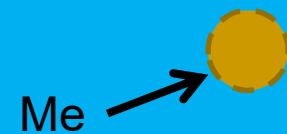


Two Valid Images of God:

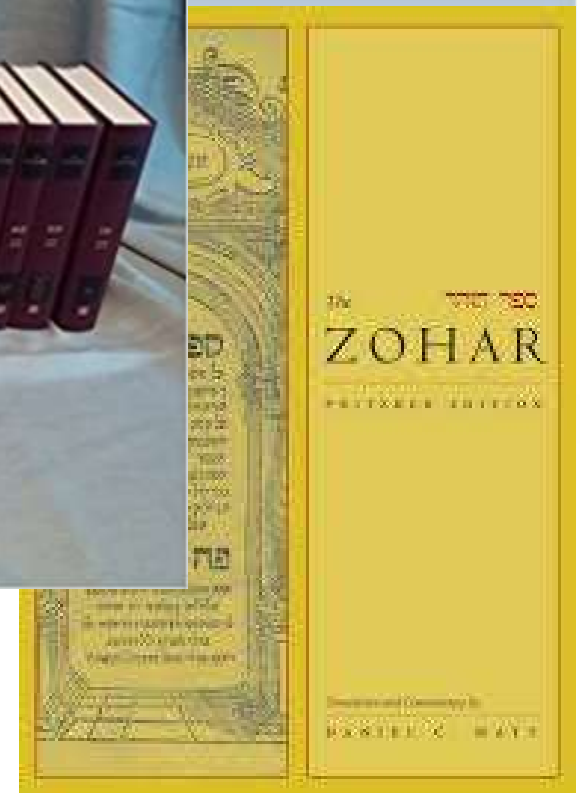
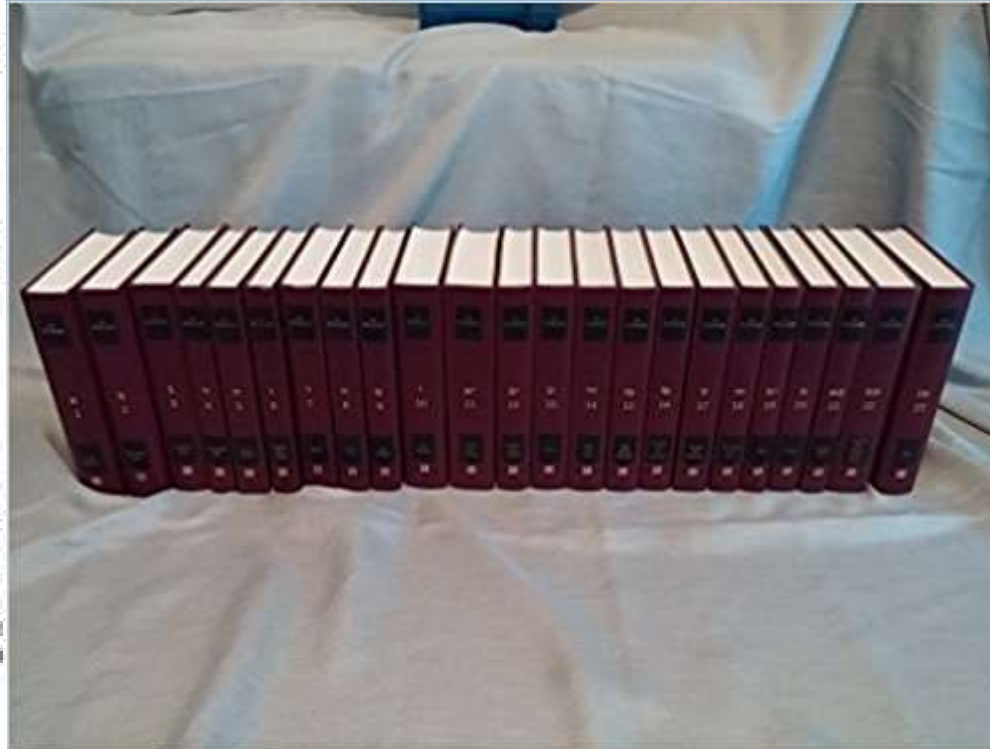
#2: Mystic/Kabbalist

- In this image, God is everywhere and everything (indicated by dashes)
- And my separation from God is an illusion (also indicated by dashes)


God



The Zohar: the Central Text of Jewish Mysticism



The Zohar: the Central Text of Jewish Mysticism



The Zohar is a work of pseudepigrapha.

- **It reads as though it was written by Shimon Bar Yochai, a 2nd century CE Mishna teacher. It is written in the Aramaic of the period.**
- **But it was actually written in the 13th century in Spain by Moshe de Leon or his school. We see examples of 13th century Hebrew and even medieval Spanish in the text.**



The Zohar

The Zohar:

- **Is structured as a commentary on the Torah.**
- **In it, we read of a brilliant rabbi of 2,000 years ago, wandering the Galilee with his disciples (sound familiar?)**
- **Provides a structure to the study and practice of *Kabbalah*.**
- **Introduces the 10 *Sefirot***
- **Is very difficult.**

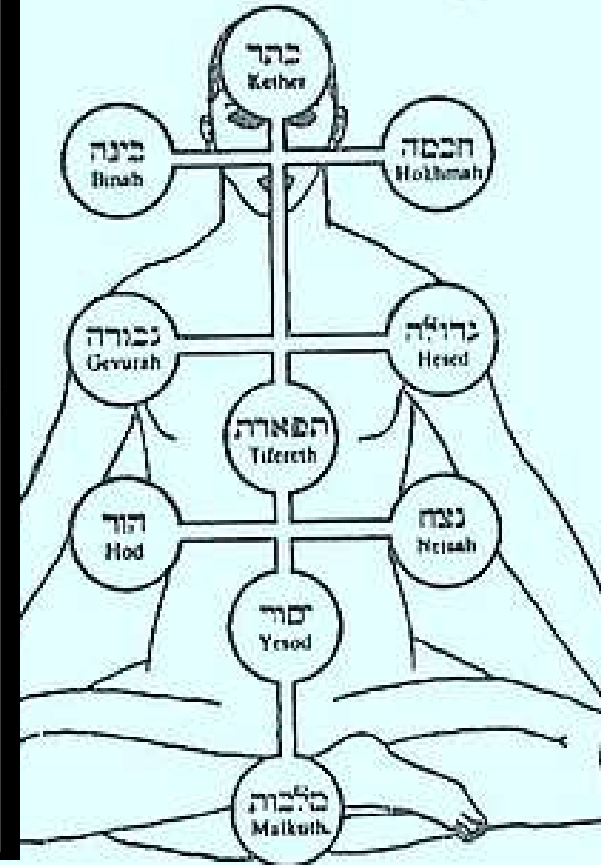
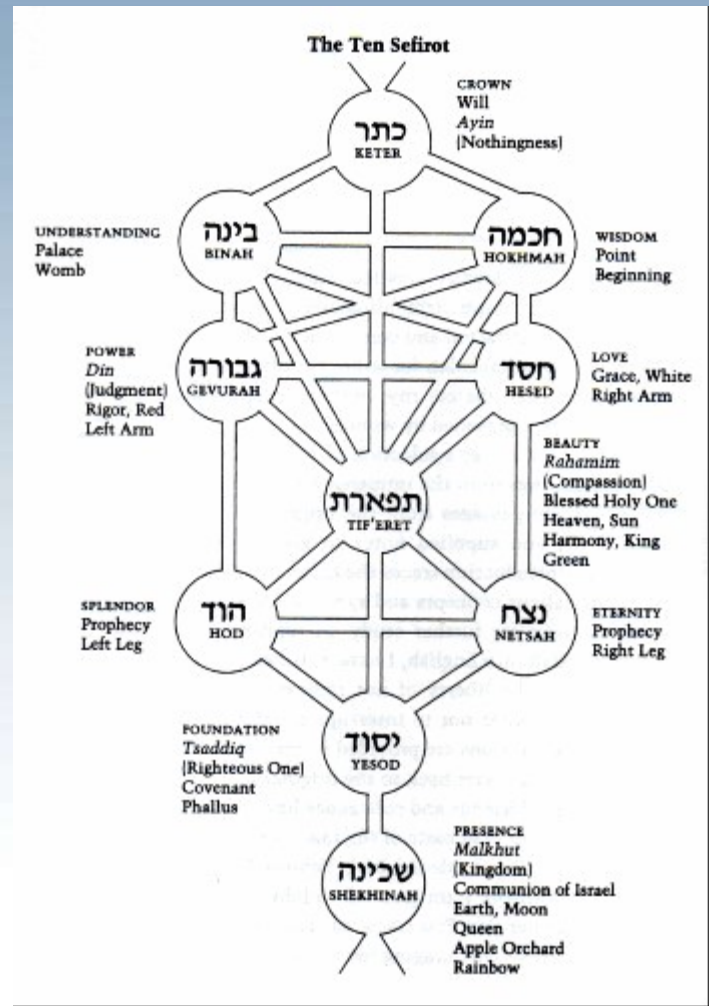


An Example of Zohar Text

“At the head of the potency of the King, He engraved engravings in luster on high. A spark of impenetrable darkness flashed with in the concealed of the concealed, from the head of infinity – a cluster of vapor forming in formlessness, thrust in a ring, not white, not black, not red, not green, no color at all. As a cord surveyed, it yielded radiant colors. Deep within the spark gushed a flow, splaying colors below, concealed within the concealed of the mystery of *Ein Sof*. It split and did not split its aura, was not known at all, until under the impact of splitting, a single concealed supernal point shone. Beyond that point, nothing is known, so it is called *Reshit*, *Beginning*, first command of all.” (Zohar Be-Reshit, 1:15a)

- **This modern translation is accompanied by three pages of 13 footnotes.**

The Sefirot





The Journey of the Soul After Death

The following is a synthesis of Kabbalistic understandings following the teaching of Simcha Raphael [pp. 273-327].

- *Nefesh* suffers the experience of the dying process, of the grave and separation from the physical body (takes 7 days of *shivah*). Experiences the River of Light, encounters angelic spirits and deceased relatives, undergoes life review.
- *Ruach* experiences the cleansing of *Gehenna*, a time to experience and resolve unresolved emotions [postmortem psychotherapy?]. This takes up to a year – deceased is helped by children's *kaddish*, and enters lower *Gan Eden*, a world of emotional bliss where the personality is completed. And, it gets a break from *Gehenna* on Shabbat.



The Journey of the Soul After Death

- ***Neshamah*** takes another dip in the River of Light and enters Upper *Gan Eden*, the heavenly repose for the soul. The quality of your stay here depends on your focus in life. If it was on the physical, Upper *Gan Eden* won't seem like much; if it was on the spiritual you reap the spiritual reward and experience transcendent bliss. Yearly *kaddish* at time of *Yahrzeit* is said to elevate the soul to higher spheres annually. The sources speak of seeing God.
- ***Chayyah*** returns to the storehouse of souls in preparation for rebirth. If, in the previous stage, we see God, in this stage we are being with God in the *tzror ha-hayyim*, the “storehouse of souls” or the “bundle of life.” The associated mourning ritual is the 4 times/yr. *Yizkor*.



The Journey of the Soul After Death

- *Yehidah* is joined with God and then is placed in the womb. The soul in the womb is shown the entire world, *Gan Eden*, *Gehenna* and where it will live and die and some say, the entire Torah. When the moment of birth arrives, an angel touches the baby just beneath the nose and the soul forgets all it has learned.
- The rabbis believed that the dead can communicate with both the human (*Baba Batra* 58a) and heavenly (*Baba Metzia* 85b) realms, where they petition for mercy on behalf of the living (*Taanit* 16a). They speak of the dead being on the other side of a curtain. [Raphael p. 137-8]



Some Traditions on Gehenna

- “The punishment of the wicked in Gehenna is (a maximum of) 12 months.” (*Shabbat* 33b) – but some are sent eternally:
 - Heretics (*Rosh Ha-Shanah* 17a)
 - “One who commits adultery with a married woman, publicly shames neighbor, or fastens an evil epithet upon his neighbor.” (*Baba Metzia* 58b)
- The period is a time of purification and atonement and then the soul enters *Gan Eden*.
- Helping avoid Gehenna: giving charity, sharing food with poor, tithing money to teachers and students and being humble. (*Pesikta Rabbati* 50:1).
- You get Shabbat off!
- Punishments fit the crime: Those:
 - That were vain hang by their hair
 - Whose eyes led them to sin, by their eyes
 - Perfumed to sin by their nose
 - Who slandered by their tongues
 - Those who committed adultery hanged by sexual organs

[Source: Raphael]



Traditions of Heaven (*Gan Eden*)

- A heavenly realm where the souls of the righteous reside.
- The term *Gan Eden* is used both for existence after death and for the time of the coming of the Messiah.
- There are fantastic descriptions with gates of ruby, thousands of ministering and singing angels, white robes, crowns of gold, gems and pearls, rivers of milk, wine, balsam and honey, the Tree of Life bearing 500,000 varieties of fruit and the sages expounding Torah. (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bereshit 20*)
- The Kabbalistic tradition speaks of both Lower and Upper *Gan Eden* and an even higher level.
 - Lower is a transit point
 - Upper is reserved for the pious of a higher grade.
 - Contains *yeshivot* (schools) for Torah study.
 - *Tzror Ha-Hayyim* – the Source of Life
 - The disembodied soul prepares for rebirth
 - That is reincarnation

[Source: Raphael]

Reb Simcha Raphael's Summary

JEWISH VIEWS OF THE AFTERLIFE			
DIMENSION OF HUMAN BEING	AFTERLIFE STATE	PROCESS OF AFTERLIFE	RITUAL
 SPIRIT	TZROR HA-HAYYIM SOURCE OF LIFE	SPIRITUAL UNIFICATION	YIZKOR
 MIND	GAN EDEN HEAVENLY BLISS	INTELLECTUAL CONTEMPLATION	YAHRZEIT
 EMOTION	GEHENNA EMOTIONAL PURIFICATION	EMOTIONAL PURGATION	KADDISH
 BODY	HIBBUT HA-KEVER PANGS OF THE GRAVE ANCESTRAL GUIDES MYTHIC BEINGS LIFE REVIEW DISSOLUTION OF ELEMENTS	PHYSICAL SEPARATION	SHIVA

Simcha Raphael, 2014

Reincarnation - *Gilgul Neshamot* (“Turning/Rolling of Souls”)

- This is strictly a Kabbalistic idea; there is no reference to it in biblical, talmudic or midrashic literature.
- Allows one to bring about restitution for sins of prior lives and attain further perfection.
- Reincarnation is only into human bodies although there are some minority opinions that souls of the wicked return as animals.
- The custom of naming someone after a deceased relative is based on this idea.
- As does the concept of the *Dybbuk* – malevolent possession of an evil soul prior to its ascent for divine judgement.
 - Lurianic kabbalah contains stories of exorcism.
- Converts to Judaism have Jewish souls from a prior life.



Third Session

Communication Between Worlds, Near Death Experiences and Jewish Mourning Practices



Jewish Mourning Practices

- Jews often concerned with Jewish law when “hatched, matched, dispatched”
- Death to Funeral – *Aninut* – mourner called an *Onen*
 - Honor the deceased
 - Body regarded as the creation of God and the dwelling place of the soul
 - Ritual cleansing and care



Jewish Mourning Practices

- **Death to Funeral -- continued**
 - **Closest relatives exempt from positive mitzvot**
 - **Quick burial – within a day if possible (Deu. 21:23)**
 - **this is why no flowers (used in cultures where burial delayed)**
 - **Visitors don't visit**
 - **Body traditionally not left unattended - Shomer**
 - **Embalming not traditional – not supposed to remove blood**



Jewish Mourning Practices

- **Funeral**
 - **Simple shrouds only (see Reichman Brothers story)**
 - **Simple wooden coffin – no metal (war, inconsistent with “rest in peace”)**
 - **Viewing discouraged except for ID**
 - **Earth from Israel placed in grave (to prepare for trip?)**
 - **Even better, burial in Israel/Jerusalem/Mt. of Olives**



Jewish Mourning Practices

- **Funeral -- continued**
 - **Tearing the garments**
 - **Ribbon, over left for parents, over right for others (siblings, spouse, children)**
 - **Jacob tore his garment upon seeing Joseph's blood coat (also Job 1:20)**
 - ***Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, dayan ha-emet***
 - **Helping to bury the deceased**
 - ***Minyan* for *kaddish***
 - ***Cohanim* don't attend except at the edge of cemetery for close family**

Mourners' Kaddish

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא. בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ,
וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיִּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית
יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעַגְלָא וּבְזַמַּן קָרִיב, וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.
יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי וּלְעַלְמֵי עַלְמֵיָא.
יְתַבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר
וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ דְּקֻדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא, לְעַלְמָא מִן כָּל
בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא תַּשְׁבְּחַתָּא וְנַחֲמַתָּא, דְּאִמְרִין בְּעַלְמָא,
וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.
יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא, וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.
עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל
יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

Exalted and hallowed be God's great name
in the world which God created, according to plan.
May God's majesty be revealed in the days of our lifetime
and the life of all Israel – speedily, imminently, to which we say Amen.

Blessed be God's great name to all eternity.

Blessed, praised, honored, exalted, extolled, glorified, adored, and lauded
be the name of the Holy Blessed One, beyond all earthly words and songs of blessing,
praise, and comfort. To which we say Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and all Israel,
to which we say Amen.

May the One who creates harmony on high, bring peace to us and to all Israel.
To which we say Amen.

*Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba.
B'alma di v'ra chirutei,
v'yamlich malchutei,
b'chayeichon uv'yomeichon
uv'chayei d'chol beit Yisrael,
baagala uviz'man kariv. V'im'ru: Amen.*

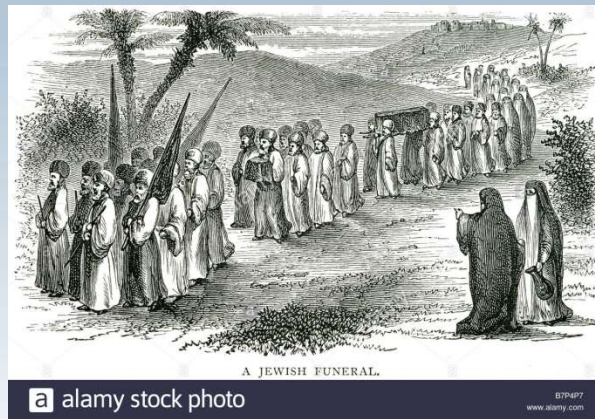
*Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach
l'alam ul'almei almaya.*

*Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpaar
v'yitromam v'yitnasei,
v'yit'hadar v'yitaleh v'yit'halal
sh'mei d'kud'sha b'rich hu,
l'eila min kol birchata v'shirata,
tushb'chata v'nechemata,
daamiran b'alma. V'imru: Amen.*

*Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya,
v'chayim aleinu v'al kol Yisrael.
V'imru: Amen.*

*Oseh shalom bimromav,
Hu yaaseh shalom aleinu,
v'al kol Yisrael. V'imru: Amen.*

Jewish Funeral Images





After the Funeral - Shivah

- Pitcher of water at the Shivah home for ritual cleansing. Mitzvah blessing ending in “*Baruch... vitzvanu al n’teelat yadayim.*”
- Shivah
 - 7 days (Joseph mourned for Jacob) after funeral
 - Halted by a holiday
 - First 3 days most intense
 - The Zohar gives a mystical reason: "For seven days the soul goes to and fro between the house and the grave, mourning for the body" (Zohar, *Va-Yehi*, 226a).



After the Funeral - Shivah

- Shivah -- Continued
 - Sit on low stools (or floor like Job)
 - Cover mirrors (vanity, prayer, spirits)
 - Don't shave or get haircut
 - Don't go out except for *Shabbat* (don't mourn on *Shabbat*)
 - Thus, prayer *minyan* must come to you
 - Don't greet mourner or initiate conversation; simply approach and sit
 - **RULE:** Always go or call. Go on some of the later days.
 - **SUGGESTION:** Sit the whole 7 days
- Kaddish prayer
 - Because we don't feel like praising God
 - Because God is diminished by the loss

Shivah Images



Gravestone Inscriptions



פ"ן = פה נטמן

Here Lies



.ת.נ.צ.ב.ה. It is customary, but not obligatory, to put these letters on the bottom of a monument. These letters are an acronym for the Hebrew words (תהא נפשו/ה צרורה בצרור החיים) *t'hay nafsho/ah tzrurah b'tzror hachaim*), "May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life." This paraphrases the words that Abigail told King David ([1 Samuel 25:29](#)): "But my lord's soul shall be bound in the bond of life with the L-rd your G-d."



The Reichman Funeral

One of the Reichman brothers passed away this summer, leaving 1 billion dollars. He left two wills, directing that one be opened immediately and the second be opened after the *Shloshim* (30 days of mourning after burial).

Among the instructions left in the first will was a request he be buried with a certain pair of socks that he owned. The Reichman children immediately brought the socks to the *Chevra Kadisha* (Jewish burial society), requesting that their father be buried in them.

Of course, the *Chevra Kadisha* refused, reminding the family that it's against the *Halacha* (Jewish law). They pleaded, explaining that their father was a very pious and learned man, and he obviously had a very good reason to make this request. The *Chevra Kadisha* remained firm in their refusal.

The family frantically summoned the *Chevra Kadisha* to *Beit Din* (Rabbinic court), where the Rabbi gently explained to them, "Although your father left that request when he was on this world, now that he's in the world of truth, he surely understands that it is in his best interests to be buried without the socks. Mr. Reichman was buried without his socks.

30 days later, the second will was opened, and it read something like this:

"My dear children. By now you must have buried me without my socks. I wanted you to truly understand that a man can have 1 billion dollars, but in the end, he can't even take along one pair of socks!

[<http://katinchozer.blogspot.com/2010/04/one-pair-of-socks.html>]



After Shivah

- ***Shloshim*: 30 days after burial**
 - Avoid social gatherings, entertainment
 - Also halted by holiday
- ***Shanah***
 - Children observe 11 months
- ***Yahrzeit* (Yiddish word)**
 - Anniversary of date of death rather than birthday celebrated
 - A 24-hour memorial candle is lit for that day, as a symbol of the verse "the soul of man is the lamp of God" (Prov. 20:27).
- **Unveiling**
 - A matter of custom not law
 - Allows time for grave to settle

Near Death Experiences & Communication Between Worlds

- My Stories
- Stories from Rabbi Spitz's book
- From the Internet
- Your stories
- Bonus: from *The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven: Reviewing & Renewing Your Life on Earth*
 1. Did you deal honestly with people in your business practices?
 2. Did you busy yourself with procreation?
 3. Did you set times for Torah?
 4. Did you hope for deliverance?
 5. Did you seek wisdom and did you understand one thing from another?
 6. Were there earthly pleasures permitted to you that you did not enjoy?
 7. Were you you? Were you true to yourself?



Suggested Reading

- S. P. Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, Jason Aronson, Inc., 1994.
- R. Sonsino and D.B. Syme, *What Happens After I Die?: Jewish Views of Life After Death*, URJ Press, 1990
- E. K. Spitz, *Does the Soul Survive?: A Jewish Journey to Belief in Afterlife, Past Lives & Living With Purpose*, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000.
- B. L. Weiss, *Many Lives, Many Masters: The True Story of a Prominent Psychiatrist, His Young Patient, and the Past-Life Therapy That Changed Both Their Lives*, Simon & Shuster, 1988.
- R. Wolfson, *The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven*, Jewish Lights, 2009.