

AFTERLIFE IN BIBLICAL AND RABBINIC TRADITION

1) MODERN RESPONSES - LIFE AND THE LIVING

Judaism celebrates life and the living. It dwells on life here rather than on the hereafter as other religious faiths do. Life is precious, the here and the now.

Jean Herschaft, *The Jewish Post and Opinion* 13 March 1981, p. 12.

Dead is dead - "what lives on are the children and a legacy of good works."

Rabbi Terry Bard, Director Pastoral Services, Beth Israel Hospital, quoted by Kenneth L. Woodward, "Heaven", *Newsweek*, (March 27, 1989) pp. 52ff.

2) DEATH OF JACOB - ANCESTRAL FAMILY TOMB

Then [Jacob] gave them these instructions: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebecca were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites. "When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

(Gen 49:28-33)



3) KING SAUL & WITCH OF ENDOR - SPIRITISM - EISHET BA'ALAT OB

Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. *Saul had expelled the mediums (הַאֲבוֹת) and spiritists (וְאֵת הַיִּדְּעָנִים) from the land.* The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa. When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of Y*H*V*H, but Y*H*V*H did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.

Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a *medium* (אִשֶּׁת בַּעֲלַת אוֹב), so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said. So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. "Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name." But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. *He has cut off the mediums (הַאֲבוֹת) and spiritists (וְאֵת הַיִּדְּעָנִים) from the land.* Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?" Saul swore to her by Y*H*V*H, "As surely as Y*H*V*H lives, you will not be punished for this."

Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a spirit coming up out of the ground." "What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself... face to the ground. Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do." **(I Sam. 28:3-15)**

4) REACTIONS TO SPIRITISM/CONTACT WITH THE DEAD

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead -> וְשֹׂאֵל אוֹב וְיִדְעָנִי וְדָרַשׁ אֶל-הַמֵּתִים (Deut. 18:10-1)

5A) IMAGES OF SHEOL - AN A-MORAL UNDERWORLD REALM

Says Jacob - "If any harm came to him [Benjamin] on the journey you are to undertake, you would send me down to Sheol with my white head bowed in grief" (Gen. 42:38).

5B) IMAGES OF SHEOL - A DARK SUBTERRANEAN REALM

"Your magnificence has been flung down to Sheol... underneath a bed of maggots and over you a blanket of worms" (Isa. 14:11).

6) COLLECTIVE ESCHATOLOGY - UNIVERSAL VISION OF REDEMPTION (6TH CENT)

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of Y*H*V*H's house shall be established on top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all the nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of Y*H*V*H, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of His ways so that we may walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go for Torah and the word of Y*H*V*H from Jerusalem'. (Isa. 2:2-3)

7) RESURRECTION IN DANIEL (2ND CENT. BCE)

There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation till that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one who shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan. 12:1-2)



8) OLAM HABA - RABBINIC PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND DEATH

Rabbi Jacob said: This world [Olam HaZeh] is like a vestibule before the World to Come [Olam HaBa]. Prepare yourself in the vestibule that you may enter into the banquet hall. And further, he used to say : "Better is one hour of repentance and good works in This World [Olam HaZeh] than the whole life of the World to Come [Olam HaBa]. Better is one hour of bliss in the World to Come than the whole of life in this world." (Mishna Avot 4: 16-17)

9A) OLAM HABA - POST-MORTEM OR MESSIANIC?

Not like this world will be the World to Come. In this world one has the trouble to harvest grapes and press them; but in the World to Come a person will bring a single grape in a wagon or a ship, store it in the corner of his house, and draw from it enough wine to fill it a large flagon... There will not be a grape which will not yield thirty measures of wine (Keth. 111b).

9B) OLAM HABA - POST-MORTEM OR MESSIANIC?

My Torah will guide you in your path in THIS WORLD; it will watch over you in your SLEEP; at the hour of DEATH; and when you awake, it will converse with you in OLAM HABA. (Sifre on Lev. 18:4)

The story is told that when Rabbi Abahu was about to depart from this life, he beheld all the good things that were stored up for him in Olam Haba, and he rejoiced (Ex. R. 52:3).

10) OLAM HANESHAMOT - THE WORLD OF SOULS

In any case, concerning the meaning of **Olam Haba [the World to Come]**, we have learned that is a world in which the body, the Sanctuary, and its vessels will be present; it is not **Olam HaNeshamot [the World of Souls]** in which every man receives his due immediately after death. [Nahmanides, *The Gate of Reward*, p. 107]

11) GEHENNA AND THE RABBINIC WORLD VIEW

There are seven names for Gehenna: Sheol [Jonah 2:2]; Abbadon, or Destruction [Ps. 88:12]; Be'er Shakhmat, or Corruption [Ps. 16:10]; Bor Sha'on, or Horrible Pit and Tit Ha'Yaven, or Miry Clay [Ps. 40:3], Tzalmavet, or Shadow of Death [Ps. 107:10], and Eretz Ha-Takhtit, the Nether World, which is a tradition [Moses receive at Mount Sinai] (**Erub. 19a**).

Rabbi Eliezer asked Rabbi Joshua: "What should a man do to escape the judgement of Gehenna?" He replied: "Let him occupy himself with good deeds" (**Midr. Prov. 17:1, 42b**)

... the judgement of the generation of the Flood lasted twelve months in Gehenna (**Gen. R. 28:8**).

...after going down to Gehenna and receiving the punishment due him, the sinner is forgiven from all his iniquities, and like an arrow from the bow he is flung forth from Gehenna (**Pesikta Rabbati 53.2**).

12) GAN EDEN - POST-MORTEM OR MESSIANIC?

In *Olam Haba*, the Holy Blessed One will prepare a banquet for the righteous in Gan Eden, and there will be no need to provide balsam or perfumes, because a north wind and a south wind will sweep through and sprinkle all the romantic plants of Gan Eden so that they will yield their fragrance (**Num. R. 13:2**).

[In passing from this world, R. Yohanan ben Zakkai exclaimed]: "...there are two ways before me, one heading towards *Gan Eden* and the other to *Gehinnom*, I do not by which I shall be taken" (**Ber. 28b**).

13) MYTHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF GAN EDEN - REALM OF MINISTERING ANGELS

Gan Eden has two gates of ruby, by which stand sixty myriads of ministering angels. The luster of the face of each of them glistens like the splendor of the firmament. When a righteous person arrives, they divest him in white robes of the clouds of glory, set two crowns upon his head, one made of gems and pearls and the other of gold... each person has a chamber allotted to him by himself according to the honor due him. From it issues four streams, one of milk, one of wine, one of balsam, and one of honey; and above every chamber there is a golden vine studded with thirty pearls, each one of them glistening like the brilliance of the planet Venus... (**Yalkut Shimoni, Bereshit 20**).

14) RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

There is no section of the Torah which does not imply the doctrine of Resurrection, but we have not the capacity to expound it in this sense (**Sifre Deut. 306; 132a**).

Since a person repudiated belief in the resurrection of the dead, he will have no share in the resurrection (**Sanh. 90a**).

The Holy Blessed One will burrow the earth before them and their bodies will roll through the excavation like bottles, and when they arrive at the land of Israel their soul will be reunited to them. (**P. Keth. 35b**)

15) PHENOMENA OF THE AFTER-DEATH JOURNEY

As they are about to depart from this world, the righteous are shown the reward rightfully due to them, and they rejoice in such sublime vision (**Ex. R. 52:3**).

When a man departs to his eternal home *all his deeds are enumerated before him and he is told: "Such and such a thing have you done, in such and such a place on that day."* Admitting to the justice of the verdict the individual then signs the record shown to him saying, "Rightly have You judged me" (**Taan. 11a**).

It is said of the *Angel of Death* that he is full of eyes. When a sick person is about to depart, he stands above his head-pillow with his sword drawn out of his hand, and a drop of gall hanging on it. As the sick person beholds it, he trembles and opens his mouth [in fright]; he then drops it into his mouth. It is from this that he dies, from this that [the corpse] deteriorates, from this that his face becomes greenish. (**AZ 20b**)

16) SPIRIT-WORLD IN RABBINIC FOLK TRADITION

...a man who fell asleep in a synagogue and was locked in by the sexton [and] awoke to find himself in the midst of... a spirit congregation; to his amazement he discerned the forms of two men who were still among the living. Sure enough, within a few days these two passed away. (**Trachtenberg, p. 62**).

[Legend tells] of a R. Benjamin ben Zerah who, on his deathbed, promised to warn members of his congregation if any disaster impended. A short while after his demise he appeared in the synagogue & divulged that at the instant of death he had seen a heavenly decree inflicting a persecution upon them. (**Trachtenberg, p. 223**).

