

TEACHING JEWISH VIEWS OF THE AFTERLIFE: FOR BELIEVERS, SKEPTICS AND THE CONFUSED

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.

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.

"Biblical metaphors for death, such as "and thou shalt go to thy fathers" and "he is gathered to his people," are symbolic of "the historical living on of the individual in the historical continuity of the people."

Hermann Cohen, Religion of Reason, Out of the Sources of Judaism, 1919.

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 הַיִּדְעָנִים) 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 הַיִּדְעָנִים) 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." (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 וְיִדְעֵנִי וְדֹרָשׁ אֶל־הַמְּתִים (Deut. 18:10-1)

5) 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).

5A) 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) RAMBAN ON OLAM HANESHAMOT - THE WORLD OF SOULS

...**the World to Come [Olam Haba]** is the world which the Holy One, blessed be He, will create after the era of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead...it is not the World of Souls [**Olam HaNeshamot**] in which every man receives his due immediately after death. (Ramban, *The Gate of Reward*, pp. 105, 107)

12. HIBBUT HA-KEVER/PANGS OF THE GRAVE Rabbi Yehuda said: "for seven days the soul goes to and fro from one's house to one's grave from one's grave to one's house, mourning for the body" (Zohar I, 218b)

13. ANCESTRAL GUIDES - FAMILIAL BEINGS: Rabbi Shimon said: 'Have you seen today the image of your father or your mother? For so we have learnt, that at the hour of one's departure from the world, their father or mother and other relatives gather round, and they see them and recognize them, and likewise all with whom they had associated in this world, and they accompany their soul to the place where it is to abide. (Zohar I, 218a).

14. ANCESTRAL GUIDES - MYTHIC BEINGS: When one departs this world...they see many strange things on their way & meets Adam, the first person, sitting at the gate of Gan Eden, ready to welcome all who have observed commands of their Master. (Zohar, I, 65b) ...no person dies before seeing the Shekhinah....(Zohar, III, 88a) and with the Shekhinah there come 3 ministering angels to receive the soul of the righteous (Zohar, I, 98a)

15. LIFE REVIEW: when God desires to take back a person's spirit, all the days they have lived in this world **pass in review**. (Zohar I, 221b)

16. GEHENNA: There are five kinds of punishments in Gehenna, and Isaiah saw them all.... He entered the 2nd compartment, and he saw two men hanging by their tongues; and he said, "O You who unveils the hidden, reveal to me the secret of this." He answered, "These are the men who slandered, therefore they are thus punished." He entered the 3rd compartment, and he saw there men hanging by their organs. He said, "O You who unveils the hidden, reveal to me the secret of this." He answered, "These are the men who neglected their own wives, and committed adultery with the daughters of Israel." (*Keitzad Din Ha-Kever*, 1-3).

17.GAN EDEN - Gan Eden has two gates of carbuncle, and sixty myriads of ministering angels keep watch. Each of these **angels shine like the radiance of the heavens**. When the righteous person approaches, angels remove from him the clothes in which he had been buried, and clothe him with eight robes of the clouds of glory, and place upon his head two crowns, one of precious stones and pearls, and the other of gold.... (*Masekhet Gan Eden*, 1-2)

18. GILGUL/ REINCARNATION -> FOR THE SAKE OF MITZVOTH:

Rabbi Shimon said to them, friends [students, disciples] the time has come to reveal some mysteries concerning transmigration of souls. This applies when the soul is required to reincarnate, either because of sins, or because it had not completely fulfilled obligations in Torah and *mitzvot* while alive in this world. It is forced to come back to this world and don a body, that is be born again and finish what was imposed on it for the seventy years of the life in this world. (*Zohar II*, 94b)

JOURNEY OF THE SOUL IN THE WORLD BEYOND: WISDOM FROM KABBALAH

HIBBUT HAKEVER - PANGS OF THE GRAVE

Rabbi Yehuda said: "for **seven days** the soul goes to and fro from his house to his grave from his grave to his house, mourning for the body" (*Zohar*, I, 218b).

ANCESTRAL GUIDES - FAMILIAL BEINGS

Rabbi Shimon said: 'Have you seen today the image of your father? For so we have learnt, that at the hour of a man's departure from the world, his father and his **relatives gather round** him, and he sees them and recognizes them, and likewise all with whom he associated in this world, and they **accompany his soul to the place where it is to abide**. (*Zohar*, I, 218a).

ANCESTRAL GUIDES - MYTHIC BEINGS

When a [person] departs this world... [s]he sees many strange things on his way & **meets Adam, the first man, sitting at the gate of Gan Eden**, ready to welcome all who have observed commands of their Master. (*Zohar*, I, 65b) ...no man leaves the world before he sees the Shekhina... (*Zohar*, III, 88a) and **with the Shekhina there come three ministering angels** to receive the soul of the righteous (*Zohar*, I, 98a *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*).

LIFE REVIEW:

when God desires to take back a man's spirit, all the days he has lived in this world **pass in review before Him**. (*Zohar*, I, 221b)

GEHENNA/REALM OF PURGATION AND PURIFICATION

There are **five kinds of punishments in Gehenna**, and Isaiah saw them all... He entered the **second compartment**, and he saw two men hanging by their tongues; and he said, "O You who unveils the hidden, reveal to me the secret of this." He answered, "These are the men who slandered, therefore they are thus punished." He entered the **third compartment**, and he saw there men hanging by their organs. He said, "O You who unveils the hidden, reveal to me the secret of this." And He answered, "These are the men who neglected their own wives, and committed adultery with the daughters of Israel." [*Keitzad Din Ha-Kever*, 1-3).

GAN EDEN/HEAVENLY GARDEN OF EDEN

Gan Eden has two gates of carbuncle, and sixty myriads of ministering angels keep watch. Each of these angels shine like the radiance of heaven. When the righteous person approaches, angels remove from him the clothes in which he had been buried, clothe him with eight robes of the clouds of glory, and place upon his head two crowns, one of precious stones and pearls, and the other of gold, ... (*Maskhet Gan Eden*, 1-2)

TZROR HAHAYYIM/SOURCE OF LIFE

...in the same way as the soul has to be clothed in a bodily garment in order to exist in this world, so is she given an ethereal supernal garment wherewith to exist in the other world, and to be enabled to gaze at the effulgence of life radiating from that "land of the living" (*Zohar*, I, 66a).

