

# Invitation to Judaism – Lesson Plan – Messiah- Afterlife-Heaven and Hell-Resurrection

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## Messiah: Supernatural or Super but Natural?

- I. Messiah: What does it mean?
  - A. Hebrew: *Mashiah* = “Anointed”
    1. **High Priest** – Ex. 29:7
    2. **King** – Saul (David calls him that I Sam. 24:7) and then David (II Sam. 5:3) and his offspring (II Sam. 22:50)
  - B. Anointing Oil – Ex. 30:22-25
- II. Messiah in Biblical Times
  - A. Stages of Development of Messianic Idea (from *Encyclopedia Judaica* article)
    1. Stage One: David and his descendants will be rulers over United Kingdom of Israel.
    2. Stage Two: When Kingdom is divided, prophecies that David’s successors will again rule over united Kingdom – Amos 9:11-12, Isaiah 11:10, Hosea 3:5, Ezekiel 37:15-24ff
    3. Stage Three: Isaiah shifts emphasis from perpetuity of Davidic Dynasty to qualities of future king: charismatic and acting with justice. Isaiah 9:1-6, 11:1ff, 16:4-5
  - B. Jeremiah predicts a return from Babylonian Exile – 32:1-15
  - C. Ezekiel predicts this restoration with dramatic vision of “Dry Bones” 37:1-14
  - D. Isaiah 45:1 calls Cyrus “Messiah” in figurative sense. (Chosen by God for special mission – to aid the Jewish return to Israel and rebuilding of Temple)
  - E. Zechariah has High Priest (Joshua) 3:8, and King (Zerubabel) 4:6 (see all of Chapter 4 – vision of lampstand)
  - F. Daniel – “predicts” end of Syrian Greek rule
  - G. Messianic Era
    1. Time of peace and tranquility – Isaiah 11:6-9, Hosea 2:20-25. Even predatory animals will be vegetarian. Like return to Garden of Eden
    2. Jerusalem will be center of religious faith for all humanity – Isaiah 2:2-4 (Micah 4:1-4)
    3. Perhaps preceded by war of good against evil (see Joel)
  - H. Typical Job Description (from *Wikipedia* article)
    1. The [Sanhedrin](#) will be re-established (Isaiah 1:26)
    2. Once he is King, leaders of other nations will look to him for guidance. (Isaiah 2:4)
    3. The whole world will worship the One God of Israel (Isaiah 2:17)

4. He will be descended from [King David](#) (Isaiah 11:1) via [King Solomon](#) (1 Chron. 22:8-10)
5. The Moshiach will be a man of this world, an observant Jew with "fear of God" (Isaiah 11:2)
6. Evil and tyranny will not be able to stand before his leadership (Isaiah 11:4)
7. Knowledge of God will fill the world (Isaiah 11:9)
8. He will include and attract all cultures and nations (Isaiah 11:10)
9. All Jews will have returned to [their homeland](#) (Isaiah 11:12)
10. He will swallow up death forever (Isaiah 25:8)
11. There will be no more hunger or illness, and death will cease (Isaiah 25:8)
12. All of the dead will rise again (Isaiah 26:19)
13. The Jewish people will experience eternal joy and gladness (Isaiah 51:11)
14. He will be a messenger of peace (Isaiah 52:7)
15. Nations will end up recognizing the wrongs they did Israel (Isaiah 52:13-53:5)
16. For My House shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations (Isaiah 56:3-7)
17. The peoples of the world will turn to the Jews for spiritual guidance ([Zechariah](#) 8:23)
18. The ruined cities of Israel will be restored ([Ezekiel](#) 16:55)
19. Weapons of war will be destroyed (Ezekiel 39:9)
20. The Temple will be rebuilt (Ezekiel 40) resuming many of the suspended mitzvos
21. He will then perfect the entire world to serve God together, as it is written ([Zephaniah](#) 3:9)
22. Jews will know the Torah without Study ([Jeremiah](#) 31:33)
23. He will give you all the desires of your heart ([Psalms](#) 37:4)
24. He will take the barren land and make it abundant and fruitful (Isaiah 51:3, Amos 9:13-15, Ezekiel 36:29-30, Isaiah 11:6-9)

III. Messiah in Rabbinic Times

IV. Messiah According to Maimonides (see *Laws of Kings and Wars*, Chapters 11-12)

V. **Messiah in Modern Times (from *Wikipedia* article)**

#### **A. Orthodox Judaism**

[Orthodox Judaism](#) maintains that Jews are obligated to accept [Maimonides's 13 Principles of Faith](#), including an unwavering belief in the coming of the messiah.

#### **B. Conservative Judaism**

*Emet Ve-Emunah*, the [Conservative movement's](#) statement of principles, states:

"Since no one can say for certain what will happen in the Messianic era each of us is free to fashion personal speculation. Some of us accept these speculations are literally true, while others understand them as elaborate metaphors... For the world community we dream of an age when [warfare](#) will be abolished, when [justice](#) and compassion will be

axioms of all, as it is said in Isaiah 11: "...the land shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." For our people, we dream of the ingathering of all Jews to [Zion](#) where we can again be masters of our own destiny and express our distinctive genius in every area of our national life. We affirm Isaiah's prophecy (2:3) that "...Torah shall come forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from [Jerusalem](#)".

"We do not know when the Messiah will come, nor whether he will be a [charismatic](#) human figure or is a symbol of the redemption of humankind from the evils of the world. Through the doctrine of a Messianic figure, Judaism teaches us that every individual human being must live as if he or she, individually, has the responsibility to bring about the messianic age. Beyond that, we echo the words of Maimonides based on the prophet Habakkuk (2:3) that though he may tarry, yet do we wait for him each day."

### **C. The messiah in Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism**

[Reform Judaism](#) and [Reconstructionist Judaism](#) generally do not accept the idea that there will be a messiah. Some believe that there may be some sort of "[messianic age](#)" (the [World to Come](#)) in the sense of a "[utopia](#)," which all Jews are obligated to work towards.

In 1976, the [Central Conference of American Rabbis](#), the official body of American Reform rabbis, authored "Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective". While not an official statement of principles, it is meant to describe the spiritual state of modern Reform Judaism. In regard to the messianic era, it states:

"Previous generations of Reform Jews had unbound confidence in humanity's potential for good. We have lived through terrible tragedy and been compelled to reappropriate our tradition's [realism](#) about the human capacity for [evil](#). Yet our people has always refused to despair. The survivors of [the Holocaust](#), being granted life, seized it, nurtured it, and, rising above catastrophe, showed humankind that the human spirit is indomitable. The [State of Israel](#), established and maintained by the Jewish will to live, demonstrates what a united people can accomplish in history. The existence of the Jew is an argument against despair; Jewish survival is warrant for human hope. We remain God's witness that history is not meaningless. We affirm that with God's help people are not powerless to affect their destiny. We dedicate ourselves, as did the generations of Jews who went before us, to work and wait for that day when "They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."



## **Moshiach: The Messiah**

### *Level: Intermediate*

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the moshiach, and though he may tarry, still I await him every day.  
- Principle 12 of [Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith](#)

### **The Messianic Idea in Judaism**

Belief in the eventual coming of the moshiach is a basic and fundamental part of traditional Judaism. It is part of [Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith](#), the minimum requirements of Jewish [belief](#). In the [Shemoneh Esrei](#) prayer, recited three times daily, we pray for all of the elements of the coming of the moshiach: ingathering of the exiles; restoration of the religious courts of justice; an end of wickedness, sin and heresy; reward to the righteous; rebuilding of Jerusalem; restoration of the line of King David; and restoration of [Temple](#) service.

Modern scholars suggest that the messianic concept was introduced later in the history of Judaism, during the age of the prophets. They note that the messianic concept is not mentioned anywhere in the [Torah](#) (the first five books of the Bible).

However, traditional Judaism maintains that the messianic idea has always been a part of Judaism. The moshiach is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah, because the Torah was written in terms that all people could understand, and the abstract concept of a distant, spiritual, future reward was beyond the comprehension of some people. However, the Torah contains several references to "the End of Days" (achareet ha-yameem), which is the time of the moshiach; thus, the concept of moshiach was known in the most ancient times.

The term "moshiach" literally means "the anointed one," and refers to the ancient practice of anointing kings with oil when they took the throne. The moshiach is the one who will be anointed as king in the End of Days.

The word "moshiach" does not mean "savior." The notion of an innocent, divine or semi-divine being who will sacrifice himself to save us from the consequences of our own sins is a purely Christian concept that has no basis in Jewish thought. Unfortunately, this Christian concept has become so deeply ingrained in the English word "messiah" that this English word can no longer be used to refer to the Jewish concept. The word "moshiach" will be used throughout this page.

### **The Moshiach**

The moshiach will be a great political leader descended from King David (Jeremiah 23:5). The moshiach is often referred to as "moshiach ben David" (moshiach, son of David). He will be well-versed in Jewish law, and observant of its commandments. (Isaiah 11:2-5) He will be a charismatic leader, inspiring others to follow his example. He will be a great military leader, who

will win battles for [Israel](#). He will be a great judge, who makes righteous decisions (Jeremiah 33:15). But above all, he will be a human being, not a god, demi-god or other supernatural being.

It has been said that in every generation, a person is born with the potential to be the moshiach. If the time is right for the messianic age within that person's lifetime, then that person will be the moshiach. But if that person dies before he completes the mission of the moshiach, then that person is not the moshiach.

### **When Will the Moshiach Come?**

There are a wide variety of opinions on the subject of when the moshiach will come. Some of Judaism's greatest minds have cursed those who try to predict the time of the moshiach's coming, because errors in such predictions could cause people to lose faith in the messianic idea or in Judaism itself. This actually happened in the 17th century, when Shabbatai Tzvi claimed to be the moshiach. When Tzvi converted to Islam under threat of death, many Jews converted with him. Nevertheless, this prohibition has not stopped anyone from speculating about the time when the moshiach will come.

Although some scholars believed that [G-d](#) has set aside a specific date for the coming of the moshiach, most authority suggests that the conduct of mankind will determine the time of the moshiach's coming. In general, it is believed that the moshiach will come in a time when he is most needed (because the world is so sinful), or in a time when he is most deserved (because the world is so good). For example, each of the following has been suggested as the time when the moshiach will come:

- if Israel repented a single day;
- if Israel observed a single [Shabbat](#) properly;
- if Israel observed two Shabbats in a row properly;
- in a generation that is totally innocent or totally guilty;
- in a generation that loses hope;
- in a generation where children are totally disrespectful towards their parents and elders;

### **What Will the Moshiach Do?**

Before the time of the moshiach, there shall be war and suffering (Ezekiel 38:16)

The moshiach will bring about the political and spiritual redemption of the [Jewish people](#) by bringing us back to [Israel](#) and restoring Jerusalem (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5). He will establish a government in Israel that will be the center of all world government, both for Jews and gentiles (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:10; 42:1). He will rebuild the [Temple](#) and re-establish its worship (Jeremiah 33:18). He will restore the religious court system of Israel and establish Jewish law as the law of the land (Jeremiah 33:15).

## Olam Ha-Ba: The Messianic Age

The world after the messiah comes is often referred to in Jewish literature as Olam Ha-Ba (oh-LAHM hah-BAH), the World to Come. This term can cause some confusion, because it is also used to refer to a spiritual [afterlife](#). In English, we commonly use the term "messianic age" to refer specifically to the time of the messiah.

Olam Ha-Ba will be characterized by the peaceful co-existence of all people. (Isaiah 2:4) Hatred, intolerance and war will cease to exist. Some authorities suggest that the laws of nature will change, so that predatory beasts will no longer seek prey and agriculture will bring forth supernatural abundance (Isaiah 11:6-11:9). Others, however, say that these statements are merely an allegory for peace and prosperity.

All of the [Jewish people](#) will return from their exile among the [nations](#) to their home in [Israel](#) (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5). The law of the Jubilee will be reinstated.

In the Olam Ha-Ba, the whole world will recognize the Jewish [G-d](#) as the only true G-d, and the Jewish religion as the only true religion (Isaiah 2:3; 11:10; Micah 4:2-3; Zechariah 14:9). There will be no murder, robbery, competition or jealousy. There will be no sin (Zephaniah 3:13). [Sacrifices](#) will continue to be brought in the [Temple](#), but these will be limited to [thanksgiving offerings](#), because there will be no further need for expiatory offerings.

## What About Jesus?

Jews do not believe that Jesus was the moshiach. Assuming that he existed, and assuming that the Christian scriptures are accurate in describing him (both matters that are debatable), he simply did not fulfill the mission of the moshiach as it is described in the biblical passages cited above. Jesus did not do any of the things that the scriptures said the messiah would do.

On the contrary, another Jew born about a century later came far closer to fulfilling the messianic ideal than Jesus did. His name was Shimeon ben Kosiba, known as Bar Kochba (son of a star), and he was a charismatic, brilliant, but brutal warlord. [Rabbi Akiba](#), one of the greatest scholars in Jewish history, believed that Bar Kochba was the moshiach. Bar Kochba fought a war against the Roman Empire, catching the Tenth Legion by surprise and retaking Jerusalem. He resumed [sacrifices](#) at the site of the [Temple](#) and made plans to rebuild the Temple. He established a provisional government and began to issue coins in its name. This is what the [Jewish people](#) were looking for in a moshiach; Jesus clearly does not fit into this mold. Ultimately, however, the Roman Empire crushed his revolt and killed Bar Kochba. After his death, all acknowledged that he was not the moshiach.

Throughout Jewish history, there have been many people who have claimed to be the moshiach, or whose followers have claimed that they were the moshiach: Shimeon Bar Kochba, Shabbatai Tzvi, Jesus, and many others too numerous to name. Leo Rosten reports some very entertaining accounts under the heading False Messiahs in his book, [The Joys of Yiddish](#). But all of these people died without fulfilling the mission of the moshiach; therefore, none of them were the moshiach. The moshiach and the Olam Ha-Ba lie in the future, not in the past.

## Biblical Passages Referring to the Moshiach

The following passages in the [Jewish scriptures](#) are the ones that Jews consider to be messianic in nature or relating to the end of days. These are the ones that we rely upon in developing our messianic concept:

- Isaiah 2, 11, 42; 59:20
- Jeremiah 23, 30, 33; 48:47; 49:39
- Ezekiel 38:16
- Hosea 3:4-3:5
- Micah 4
- Zephaniah 3:9
- Zechariah 14:9
- Daniel 10:14

If you want to know how Jews interpret the passages that Christians consider to be messianic, see the [Jews for Judaism](#) website, especially the Knowledge Base under Resources. The Knowledge Base addresses more than 130 of the most common arguments that evangelists make to Jews.

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## Heaven and Hell in Jewish Tradition

**Though there is no official Jewish conception of the afterlife, Jewish sources do provide images of a torturous hell and heavenly paradise.**

By [Rabbi Or N. Rose](#)

Like other spiritual traditions, Judaism offers a range of views on the [afterlife](#), including some parallels to the concepts of heaven and hell familiar to us from popular Western (i.e., [Christian](#)) teachings.

### **Sheol: An Underground Abyss**

The subject of death is treated inconsistently in the [Bible](#), though most often it suggests that physical [death](#) is the end of life. This is the case with such central figures as [Abraham](#), [Moses](#), and [Miriam](#).

There are, however, several biblical references to a place called [Sheol](#) (cf. Numbers 30, 33). It is described as a region "dark and deep," "the Pit," and "the Land of Forgetfulness," where human

beings descend after death. The suggestion is that in the netherworld of Sheol, the deceased, although cut off from God and humankind, live on in some shadowy state of existence.

While this vision of Sheol is rather bleak (setting precedents for later Jewish and Christian ideas of an underground hell) there is generally no concept of judgment or reward and punishment attached to it. In fact, the more pessimistic books of the Bible, such as [Ecclesiastes](#) and [Job](#), insist that all of the dead go down to Sheol, whether good or evil, rich or poor, slave or free man (Job 3:11-19).

## **Afterlife and the World to Come**

The development of the concept of [life after death](#) is related to the development of eschatology (speculation about the "end of days") in Judaism. Beginning in the period following the destruction of the [First Temple](#) in Jerusalem (586 BCE), several of the classical Israelite prophets ([Amos](#), [Hosea](#), and [Isaiah](#)) began forecasting a better future for their people.

However, with repeated military defeats and episodes of exile and dislocation culminating in the destruction of the [Second Temple](#) in 70 CE, Jewish thinkers began to lose hope in any immediate change, instead investing greater expectations in a messianic future and in life after death. This was coupled with the introduction into Judaism of [Hellenistic](#) notions of the division of the material, perishable body and the spiritual, eternal soul.

The catastrophe of 70 CE caused a theological crisis. How could it be that the God of Israel would simply allow His sanctuary to be destroyed and His people to be vanquished at the hands of the [Roman Empire](#)? While the rabbis often claimed that it was the Israelites' sinfulness that led God to allow it to be defeated (*mi-p'nei hataeinu*, "because of our sins"), it was more difficult to explain why good and decent individual Jews were made to suffer.

This led to the development of another theological claim: "Rabbi Ya'akov taught: This world is compared to an ante-chamber that leads to *Olam Ha-Ba*, (the World-to-Come)" (*Pirkei Avot* 4:21). That is, while a righteous person might [suffer](#) in this lifetime, he or she will certainly be rewarded in the next world, and that reward will be much greater. In fact, in some cases, the rabbis claim that the righteous are made to suffer in this world so that their reward will be that much greater in the next (*Leviticus Rabbah* 27:1).

## **The Garden of Eden: A Jewish Heaven**

What the next world is, however, is far from clear. The rabbis use the term [Olam Ha-Ba](#) to refer to a heaven-like afterlife as well as to the messianic era or the age of resurrection, and it is often difficult to know which one is being referred to. When the Talmud *does* speak of *Olam Ha-Ba* in connection to the afterlife, it often uses it interchangeably with the term *Gan Eden* ("the Garden of Eden"), referring to a heavenly realm where souls reside after physical death.

The use of the term *Gan Eden* to describe "heaven" suggests that the rabbis conceived of the afterlife as a return to the blissful existence of [Adam and Eve](#) in the Garden of Eden before the "fall." It is generally believed that in *Gan Eden* the human soul exists in a disembodied state until the time of bodily resurrection in the days of the [Messiah](#).

One interesting talmudic story, in which the World to Come almost certainly refers to a heavenly afterlife, tells of Rabbi Joseph, the son of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, who dies and returns back to life. "His father asked him, 'What did you see?' He replied, 'I beheld a world the reverse of this

one; those who are on top here were below there, and vice versa.' He [Joshua ben Levi] said to him, 'My son, you have seen a corrected world.'"

In the [kabbalistic](#) (Jewish mystical) tradition, there is much discussion about the voyages of the human soul to the Garden of Eden and other heavenly realms during one's life on earth. In the [Zohar](#), the greatest of the medieval mystical works, there are many stories about the soul-ascents of various members of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai's mystical brotherhood. Most often, these journeys take place at night, while the body is at rest (see, for example, *Zohar I: Parashat Vayehi*, 217b-218b).

## **Gehinnom: A Jewish Hell**

Only truly righteous souls ascend directly to Gan Eden, say the sages. The average person descends to a place of punishment and/or purification, generally referred to as *Gehinnom*.

The name is taken from a valley (*Gei Hinnom*) just south of Jerusalem, once used for child sacrifice by the pagan nations of Canaan (II Kings 23:10). Some view Gehinnom as a place of torture and punishment, fire and brimstone. Others imagine it less harshly, as a place where one reviews the actions of his/her life and repents for past misdeeds.

The soul's sentence in Gehinnom is usually limited to a twelve-month period of purgation before it takes its place in Olam Ha-Ba (*Mishnah Eduyot* 2:9, *Shabbat* 33a). This twelve-month limit is reflected in the yearlong mourning cycle and the recitation of the [Kaddish](#) (the memorial prayer for the dead).

Only the utterly wicked do not ascend to Gan Eden at the end of this year. Sources differ on what happens to these souls at the end of their initial time of purgation. Some say that the wicked are utterly destroyed and cease to exist, while others believe in eternal damnation ([Maimonides](#), [Mishneh Torah](#), Law of Repentance, 3:5-6).

## **Conclusion**

As is clear from this brief discussion, the Jewish tradition contains a variety of opinions on the subjects of heaven and hell.

Interestingly, while in traditional Jewish thought the subjects of heaven and hell were treated extensively, most modern Jewish thinkers have shied away from this topic, preferring to follow the biblical model, which focuses on life on earth.

However, the rise of interest in mysticism in the last several decades has prompted a renewed discussion about the afterlife. Given the rich mythical descriptions of the afterlife in the classical Jewish tradition, we must ask how such imagery impacts our views of heaven and hell and the destiny of the human soul.

Are these ideas to be dismissed as the wishes of earlier, less sophisticated religious seekers? Have advances in the natural sciences made it impossible for us to believe in life after death? Or has our disillusionment with certain aspects of modernity--particularly its great reliance on rationality--reopened the possibility of belief in the afterlife in our day?

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<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/heaven-and-hell-in-jewish-tradition/>

## Jewish Resurrection of the Dead

**When and how will the dead will be resurrected? The debate is old, but it has not been entirely resolved.**

**BY RABBI LOUIS JACOBS**

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Resurrection is the doctrine that in a future age the dead will rise from their graves to live again. This doctrine appears frequently in Jewish eschatology, where it is associated with the doctrine of the Messiah and the immortality of the soul.

### **Waking the Dead: Biblical and Rabbinic Sources**

There are only two biblical references to the resurrection of the dead, in passages generally held by biblical scholars to be of late date, so that it has been conjectured that the doctrine owes something to Persian influence. The first is: “Thy dead shall live, my dead bodies shall arise, awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust, for thy dew is as the dew of light, and the earth shall bring to life the shades” (Isaiah 26:19); and the second: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence” (Daniel 12:2).

There is no systematic treatment in the Rabbinic literature of the doctrine of the resurrection, any more than there is of any other theological topic. The ancient Rabbis were organic rather than systematic thinkers. Nevertheless, the picture which emerges from the numerous eschatological thoughts in this literature is of a three-staged series of events.

The first of these is the state of the soul in heaven after the death of the body. The second stage is the Messianic age here on earth “at the end of days.” The third stage is that of the resurrection of the dead. Unlike the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the belief in the resurrection was nationalistic rather than individualistic. It was the hope of national revival that came to the fore and this embraced the resurrection.

After the restoration of the Jewish people to its homeland in the days of the Messiah, it was believed, the resurrection of the dead would take place.

### **Rabbinic Fusion: Immortality, Resurrection, and Judgment**

While there is no necessary contradiction between belief in the immortality of the soul and belief in the resurrection, there is some incompatibility between the idea of a great judgment day to take place after the resurrection of the dead and the judgment of each individual soul after the death of the body. When, as eventually happened, the two beliefs were fused together, there was bound to be some confusion on this matter and a large variety of views on how the two beliefs could both be true.

This helps to explain the many details, sometimes of a contradictory nature, in the Rabbinic literature with regard to the final judgment.

The Pharisees [the predecessors of mainstream, rabbinic Judaism] seem to have held that both doctrines were basic to Judaism; the resurrection afforded hope for national survival, together with the idea of the Messiah, while the belief in the immortality of the soul appealed to the individual's need to be assured that he survives death. The Sadducees [an opposing Jewish sect] appear to have rejected both beliefs, although some scholars claim that the frequent references to Sadducean denial apply only to the doctrine of the resurrection, not to that of the immortality of the soul.

The Christian dogma of the Resurrection and the general eschatological picture presented in the New Testament has to be seen against the background of Pharisaic beliefs in the early first century CE.

### **Medieval Views: Bodily Resurrection, More or Less**

Although Maimonides lists belief in the resurrection as a basic principle of faith (the thirteenth) he refers to it in a very off-hand manner. In Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* there is no reference at all to the doctrine. There are one or two stray references to the resurrection in Maimonides' Code but, on the whole, he seems to identify the Rabbinic World to Come not with the resurrection but with the immortality of the soul, or, rather, he seems to believe that the resurrection itself is of the soul, not the body.

Maimonides' critics accused him, in fact, of denying the doctrine of the resurrection. These critics point out that his virtual silence on the fate of the body in the Hereafter certainly contradicts Rabbinic teachings on the subject. There are found in the Rabbinic literatures such statements as that the dead will be resurrected wearing their clothes (Ketubot 111b) and that the righteous whom God will resurrect will not return to their dust (Sanhedrin 72a), obviously pointing to a belief in bodily resurrection.

Towards the end of his life, Maimonides wrote his *Essay on the Resurrection* (the view that this is not Maimonides' but a clever forgery is not now accepted by Maimonidean scholars) to defend himself. In this essay Maimonides protests that he had never denied the doctrine of a physical resurrection but advances a novel theory (though hinted at by a few other medieval Jewish thinkers) that the resurrected dead will not live forever but will eventually die again. Maimonides could not conceive of the idea of a body inhabiting eternity. Only the soul is immortal.

### **Picturing the (Resurrected) Body**

On this subject the great debate took place between Maimonides and Nahmanides. Writing after Maimonides' death, Nahmanides, in *The Gate of Recompense* devoted to the subject, takes strong issue with Maimonides' view that the bodies of the resurrected dead will also die eventually, although he does believe that these bodies will be exceedingly refined and ethereal.

[Hasdai] Crescas in *The Light of the Lord* (iii. 4) agrees with Nahmanides and discusses how the decomposed body will be reconstituted. It is not necessarily the case, says Crescas, that the same body the soul inhabited during its lifetime on earth will be given to it at the resurrection, but one that will have the same purpose. The identity of the individual will not be affected by this, since even during a person's life in this world the body suffers changes all the time.

[Joseph] Albo (*Ikkarim*, iv. 35) also agrees with Nahmanides and offers his speculations on how the new bodies will take form and shape. But Albo discourages too much speculation on what is by all accounts a miracle and a mystery. He quotes with approval the Talmudic saying: "We will consider the matter when they come to life again" (Niddah 70b).

As one might have expected, no perfectly coherent doctrine of the resurrection emerges from the medieval thinkers any more than it does from the Rabbinic literature.

### **Modern Views: Who Believes What**

The tendency among some of the medieval thinkers to play down the doctrine of the resurrection is evident in the modern period in even greater measure. Moses Mendelssohn believed in the immortality of the soul and wrote his treatise, *Phaedon*, on the topic but did not seem to believe in a physical resurrection.

Among many contemporary Jewish theologians there is a marked tendency to leave the whole question of eschatology without discussion, either because they do not believe in the Hereafter at all or because they believe that the finite mind of man is incapable of piercing the veil and it is best to leave the subject severely alone.

Orthodox theologians still maintain the belief in the resurrection and refer to it, as did their forebears, in their daily prayers and at funerals. In the special *Kaddish* recited by a son at the funeral of a parent there are explicit references to the resurrection of the dead. At the same time, memorial prayers recited by the Orthodox contain references to the soul of the departed being at rest beneath the wings of the *Shekhinah* [God's immanent presence].

Some Orthodox thinkers--very few, it must be said--develop further the idea that the resurrection means of the soul not of the body. One of the Orthodox objections to cremation is on the grounds that it involves a denial of the doctrine of the resurrection.

Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century went the whole way in rejecting the doctrine of the resurrection in favor of that of the immortality of the soul. In Reform prayer books, passages in the traditional prayer book to the resurrection have either been deleted or interpreted as referring to immortality of the soul.

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## Reincarnation: The Transmigration of a Jewish Idea

Though some Jewish thinkers vigorously rejected the notion of reincarnation, kabbalists embraced it enthusiastically.

BY RABBI LOUIS JACOBS

*The reincarnation of souls into other people or animals—known as gilgul hanefesh (lit. the rolling of the soul) in Hebrew—is an outgrowth of the idea of the soul’s immortality. It has seized the imagination of many Jews and remains a popular literary subject. Numerous stories of demonic possession and exorcism by wonder rabbis are based on the idea of lonely souls, sinners in previous lives, entering into other bodies. Reprinted with permission from The Jewish Religion: A Companion, published by Oxford University Press.*

Reincarnation is the idea that a soul now residing in a particular body may have resided in the body of another person in an earlier period of time. Theories of reincarnation or metempsychosis are found in many religions and cultures, ancient and modern, but there are no references to the idea in the Bible or the Talmud and it was unknown in Judaism until the eighth century CE, when it began to be adopted by the Karaites [a sectarian Jewish group] (possibly, it has been suggested, under the influence of Islamic mysticism).

### The Philosophers Were Scornful

The usual Hebrew term for reincarnation is *gilgul*, “rolling,” that is, the soul “rolls” through time from one body to a different body. The earliest [non-Karaite] reference to the doctrine is that of Saadiah [882-942] (*Beliefs and Opinions*, vi. 8). Saadiah writes:

“Yet I must say that I have found certain people, who call themselves Jews, professing the doctrine of metempsychosis, which is designated by them as the theory of the ‘transmigration’ of souls. What they mean thereby is that the spirit of Reuben is transferred to Simeon and afterwards to Levi and after that to Judah. [These names are generic, like Tom, Dick and Harry; no reference to the sons of Jacob is intended. Ed.] Many of them would even go so far as to assert that the spirit of a human being might enter into the body of a beast or that of a beast into the body of a human being, and other such nonsense and stupidities.”

We learn incidentally from Saadiah’s discussion that one of the reasons these people believed in reincarnation (this reason resurfaces in the Kabbalah) was because of the theological difficulties in God allowing little children to suffer. That they do, it was argued, is because of sins they had committed in a previous existence.

Among the other medieval thinkers, neither Judah Halevi [died 1141] nor Maimonides [1135-1204] makes any mention of the doctrine. Albo [15th century] (*Ikkarim*, vi. 20) refers to the doctrine only to refute it. He argues that the whole purpose for which the soul enters the body is to become a free agent, but once a soul has become a free agent why should it return to occupy another body? It is even more unlikely, says Albo, that human souls transmigrate into the bodies of animals.

### The Mystics Were Believers

The kabbalists, on the other hand, do believe in reincarnation. The *Zohar* [the great 13th century kabbalistic text] refers to the doctrine in a number of passages (e.g. ii. 94a, 99b). Nahmanides [1194-1270], in his commentary to the book of Job (to Job 33:30), speaks of reincarnation as a great mystery and the key to an understanding of many biblical passages. The later Kabbalah is full of the belief in the transmigration of souls.

Various sins are punished by particular transmigrations; for example, the soul of an excessively proud man enters the body of a bee or a worm until atonement is attained. The heroes of the Bible and later Jewish histories are said to be the reincarnation of earlier heroes. Thus the soul of Cain (Genesis 4:1-16) entered the body of Jethro and the soul of Abel the body of Moses. When Moses and Jethro met in friendship they rectified the sin caused by the estrangement of the two brothers (Exodus 18:1-12).

Manasseh ben Israel (died 1657) devotes a large portion of his *Nishmat Hayyim* ("The Soul of Life") to a defense of reincarnation. In chapter 21 Manasseh observes that the doctrine was originally taught to Adam but was later forgotten. It was revived by Pythagoras [the 6th-century BCE Greek mathematician and philosopher], who was a Jew (!), and he was taught the doctrine by the prophet Ezekiel.

The Hasidim believe explicitly in the doctrine, and tales are told of Hasidic masters who remembered their activities in a previous incarnation.

### **Three Kinds of Reincarnation**

In the kabbalistic literature three types of reincarnation are mentioned:

1. *gilgul*, transmigration proper, in which a soul that had previously inhabited one body is sent back to earth to inhabit another body.
2. *ibbur*, "impregnation," in which a soul descends from heaven in order to assist another soul in the body.
3. *dybbuk*, a generally late concept, in which a guilt-laden soul pursued by devils enters a human body in order to find rest and has to be exorcised.

The philosophical difficulty in the whole doctrine of reincarnation lies in the problem of what possible meaning can be given to the identity of the soul that has been reincarnated, since the experiences of the body determine the character of the soul. How can the soul that has been in two or more bodies be the "same" soul?

[Gershom] Scholem has suggested that it was this difficulty which led the *Zohar* to postulate the existence of the *tzelem* ("image"), a kind of "astral body" which does not migrate from body to body and which therefore preserves individual identity. We are here in the realm of the occult, as, indeed, we are in the whole area of reincarnation.

Some modern Jews are attracted to the occult and believe in reincarnation. Otherwise the doctrine has had its day, and is believed in by very few modern Jews, although hardly any Orthodox Jew today will positively denounce the doctrine. This doctrine of reincarnation shows how precarious it is to attempt to see Judaism in monolithic terms. Here is a doctrine rejected as a foreign importation by a notable thinker such as Saadiah, and upon which other thinkers, including Maimonides, are silent, and yet, for the kabbalists, it is revealed truth.

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