

## The Afterlife

Jewish emphasis has always been on the HERE AND NOW:

- Torah: "I have set before you life and death: Choose life!" [Deut. 30:19]
- No encouragement to die because what comes after death is better than this life
- Death is never depicted as something to look forward to
  - "Judaism teaches us to understand death as part of the Divine pattern of the universe...Just because we are human, we are prisoners of the years. Yet that very prison is the room of discipline in which we, driven by the urgency of time, create." [Rabbi Liebman in *Gates of Prayer*, p. 625]

## Tanach

- Three concepts:
  - Body (or flesh, "bassar")
  - Soul ("nefesh"; "neshamah")
  - Life (spirit or breath) ("nishmat" or "ruach chayyim") – glue that keeps body and soul together
- In Torah, life is identified with blood:
  - Gen. 9:4. But flesh with its life, which is its blood, you shall not eat.
- Life comes from God's breath:
  - Gen. 2:7. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.
- At some point life stops: The body and soul separate, life is taken away or returns to God:
  - Psalms 146:4. His breath goes out, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.
  - Eccl. 12:7. And the dust returns to the earth as it was; and the spirit returns to God who gave it.
- As soon that happens, the soul goes down to a place called "Sheol", where it leads a mysterious and shadowy existence:

Numbers 16:33: [Korach's people] went down alive into Sheol...; the earth closed over them and they vanished from the midst of the congregation.

Psalms 6:6. For in death there is no remembrance of you. In Sheol who shall give you thanks?

Psalms 115:17. The dead cannot praise the Lord, nor can any who go down into silence.

Isaiah 38:18-19. For Sheol cannot praise you, death cannot celebrate you; they who go down into the pit cannot hope for your truth... The living, only the living can give thanks to You.

Eccl. 9:5. For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know nothing, nor do they have a reward any more; for the memory of them is forgotten.6. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; nor do they have any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.  
...10. So whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your strength; for there is no work, no scheme, no knowledge, no wisdom, in Sheol, to which you are going.

- Yet God will also be in Sheol and will get us out of there:

Psalms 16: 10. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will you suffer your pious one to see the pit.

Psalms 49: 16. But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; for he shall receive me. Selah.

Psalms 139: 8. If I ascend up to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there!

- Torah says eternal life is not for man, but only for God and celestial beings:

Gen. 3:22. And the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, what if he puts forth his hand, and takes also from the tree of life, and eats, and lives forever;

- But the Psalmist has faith in some kind of immortality:

Psalms 17:15. As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with beholding your likeness.

Psalms 73:24. You shall guide me with your counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.

Psalms 116: 7. Return to your rest, O my soul; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. 8. For you have saved my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. 9. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

- On the other hand, Job shows only desire for life after death, not faith:

Job 14:10. But man dies, and is laid low; indeed, man perishes, and where is he? ... 12. So man lies down, and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, he shall not awake, nor shall he be raised from his sleep. 13. O that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me, until your wrath is past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! 14. If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my service will I wait, till my reward comes.

- Elijah ascends to "heaven" in a chariot of fire:  
...A fiery chariot with fiery horses suddenly appeared... and Elijah went up to heaven [shamayim] in a whirlwind. (II Kings 2:11)
- The witch of Endor raises the prophet Samuel's spirit from the dead to speak to King Saul (ISam. 28:8ff).
- The prophecy of Daniel:  
Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, others to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence. (Daniel 12:2)

***So Tanach is not clear about the afterlife  
-Leaves room for a wide variety of theories.***

- In Ecclesiasticus (part of Apocrypha), Ben Sira believes Sheol is the final destination. Not accepted as Jewish teaching.

Sir 14:12: Remember that death will not be long in coming, and that the covenant of the grave is not shown to you.

Sir 17:30: For all things cannot be in men, because the son of man is not immortal.

Sir 17:32: ...all men are but earth and ashes.

Sir 21:10: At the end [of sinners] there is the pit of hell.

## **Talmud**

- Opinions in Talmud not always consistent or coherent, but agree on existence of a "World to Come" -- 'Olam Ha-ba, and on:
  - Immortality of the soul
  - Resurrection of the dead, when Messiah comes [*tehiyyat hammetim*]

- Second of 19 blessings in Amidah: (Gevurot -- "powers" or Tehiyyat ha-Metim--"the resurrection of the dead."):
 

*Baruch atta HaShem, mechayye ha-metim*  
Blessed are You, O Lord, who revives the dead
- Morning prayer (Berachot 60b):
 

*Elohai neshama shenatata bi tehora hi, ata berata, ata ietzarta, ata nefachta bi, ve-atta meshamra bekirbi, ve-atta 'atiyod lit-la mimmeni, ul-hachavirah bi l'attid lavo.*  
My God, the soul that You gave me is pure; You created it, You fashioned it, You breathed it into me. You preserve it within me, and You will take it from me, but will restore it to me hereafter.
- These beliefs were codified in Maimonides' "13 principles" (in Yigdal):
 

**12. Messiah will come**  
*Yishlach liketz yamim meshichenu, lifdot mechakkei ketz yeshu'ato*  
At the End of Days He will send our Messiah - to redeem those longing for His final salvation

**13. God grants eternal life**  
*Metim yechayye El berov chasdo*  
God will revive the dead in His abundant kindness

Not binding, as Judaism is centered on commandments, not beliefs.
- Talmud, Berachot 17a , gives details, quoted by Maimonides:
 

There are no bodies and no bodily forms in the World to Come... There is no eating or drinking there, nor is there anything which the human body needs in this world. Nor does there occur there any of the events which occur to the human body in this world, such as sitting, standing, sleep, death, distress, laughter, and so forth. The ancient sages say: "In the world to come, there is no eating or drinking or procreation, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and bask in the radiance of the Divine Presence... There is no way for us in this world to know or comprehend the great goodness which the soul experiences in the world to come, for in this world we know only of material pleasures, and it is these we desire. (Yad, Teshuvah 8)
- Wicked are punished by being denied this spiritual afterlife. Some say they go to Gehennom (Gei Hinnom), a valley outside Jerusalem, and are punished there ('hell'), but notion never received official sanction. It is also not eternal: "There will be no Gehennon in future times" (Talmud, Rosh Hashana 17a, Bava Metzia 58b, Nedarim 8b, Avodah Zara 3b)

The souls in Gehinnom are punished for up to 12 months, then continue on to Gan Eden (Eduyot 2:10). Those who remain wicked are annihilated (Rosh Hashanah 17a). → Practice of mourning the deceased for only 11 months, so as not to imply that they needed the full 12 months.

- Sadducees rejected afterlife. They lost:  
Those who deny resurrection of dead get no share in olam haba (Sanh. 10:1, 90b-91a)
  - If you don't believe in it, you won't get it
  - Does your belief *cause* its existence?
- Many Jewish writers likewise emphasize the spiritual nature of the afterlife.
- Some Hassidim believe in reincarnation.
- The mystics
  - Speak of eternity not as endless duration, but as outside time altogether
  - 'Heaven' is a state, not a place
  - The soul is divided into several parts
  - It gets complicated...
- Not Jews alone:  
'The righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come.' (Talmud, Sanhedrin 105a)

## Bottom line

- No uniform party line. A basic paradox that puts emphasis on **both** 'olam ha-zeh' and 'olam ha-bah' is in Talmud:

"Better is one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the whole life in the world to come; yet better is one hour of blissfulness of spirit in the world to come than the whole life in this world." (Rabbi Jacob in Talmud, Pirkei Avot 4:22)