

Between This World and the Next:
Jewish Wisdom on Death and Mourning
Rabbi Tziona Szajman

Session 4 – What Comes Next? Jewish Visions of the Afterlife

Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, an 18th-century Moroccan kabbalist, suggested that the Torah begins with the Hebrew letter bet — which corresponds to the number two — to hint that God actually created two worlds in Genesis, the physical world and the World to Come.

1. MASHIACH (Messiah)

The Prophets declared that the Messiah will be a descendent of King David who will bring universal peace with nations streaming to God. (Isaiah 11:1-10, Jeremiah 23:5-6, Ezekiel 37:24-28, Micah 4:1-14)

Talmud: Sanhedrin 97b

Rav Ḥanan bar Taḥlifa sent a message to Rav Yosef: I found one man, and in his hand there was one scroll written in *Ashurit* script and in the sacred tongue, Hebrew. I said to him: From where did this scroll come into your possession? He said to me: I was hired to serve in the Roman army and I found the scroll among the Roman archives. It was clear that the scroll was written by Jews, not Romans. And it is written in the scroll: After 4,291 years have elapsed from the creation of the world, the world will end; during those years there will be the wars of the sea monsters between the leviathan and the animals, and among those years there will be the wars of Gog and Magog and the remaining years of the messianic period. Then the world will be destroyed. And the Holy One, Blessed be He, will renew His world only after the passage of seven thousand years. Rav Aḥa, son of Rava, says that it was stated: After the passage of five thousand years. And seemingly, since we are awaiting the end of days and the Holy One, Blessed be He, is also awaiting the end of days, who is

preventing the coming of the Messiah? It is the divine attribute of judgment that prevents his coming, as it is written: "For the Lord is a God of judgment," and we are not worthy. And since the attribute of judgment prevents the coming of the Messiah and we are not worthy of redemption, why do we await his coming daily? We do so in order to receive a reward for awaiting his coming, as it is stated: "Happy are all they who wait for Him."

Rambam - Hilchot Melachim excerpts from chapter 11 & 12

In future time, the King Mashiach will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its initial sovereignty. He will rebuild the [Beit Ha] Mikdash and gather in the dispersed remnant of Israel. Then, in his days, all the statutes will be reinstated as in former times. We will offer sacrifices and observe the Sabbatical and Jubilee years according to all their particulars set forth in the Torah.

One should not entertain the notion that in the Era of Mashiach any element of the natural order will be nullified, or that there will be any innovation in the work of creation. Rather, the world will continue according to its pattern.

Although Yeshayahu [*Yeshayahu 11:6*] states, "The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat," these [words] are an allegory and a riddle. They mean that Israel will dwell securely together with the wicked gentiles who are likened to wolves and leopards, as in the verse [*Yirmeyahu 5:6*], "A wolf of the deserts despoils them, a leopard watches over their cities." [In this era, all nations] will return to the true faith and no longer plunder or destroy. Instead, at peace with Israel, they will eat that which is permitted, as it is written [*Yeshayahu 11:7*], "The lion shall eat straw like the ox."

Similarly, other prophecies of this nature concerning Mashiach are analogies. In the Era of the King Mashiach, everyone will realize what was implied by these metaphors and allusions.

The Sages and prophets did not yearn for the Messianic Era in order that [the Jewish people] rule over the entire world, nor in order that they have dominion over the gentiles, nor that they be exalted by them, nor in order that they eat, drink and celebrate. Rather, their aspiration was that [the Jewish people] be free [to involve themselves] in Torah and its wisdom, without anyone to oppress or disturb them, and thus be found worthy of life in the World to Come, as we explained in Hilchos Teshuvah.

In that Era there will be neither famine nor war, neither envy nor competition, for good things will flow in abundance and all the delights will be as freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d. The Jews will therefore be great sages and know the hidden matters, and will attain an understanding of their Creator to the [full] extent of human potential; as it is written [*Yeshayahu 11:9*], "For the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed."

2. TECHIYAT HAMETIM (Resurrection of the Dead)

Prophets: Ezekiel 37 Dry bones "This is what the LORD God says to these bones. I am about to make breath enter you so that you will live. I will attach tendons to you. I will put flesh back on you. I will cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you will live. Then you will know that I am the LORD."

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא

Talmud Sanhedrin 10:1 - All of the Jewish people have a share in the World to Come

Sanhedrin 90b - It is taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Simai says: From where is resurrection of the dead derived from the Torah? It is derived from a verse, as it is stated with regard to the Patriarchs: "I have also established My covenant with them to give to them the land of Canaan" (Exodus 6:4). The phrase: To give to you the land of Canaan, is not stated, as the meaning of the verse is not that God

fulfilled the covenant with the Patriarchs when he gave the land of Canaan to the children of Israel; rather, it is stated: “To give to them the land of Canaan,” meaning to the Patriarchs themselves. From here is it derived that the resurrection of the dead is from the Torah, as in the future the Patriarchs will come to life and inherit the land.

It is taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Yosei, says: With this following matter, I refuted the books of the Samaritans, as they would say that there is no source for the resurrection of the dead from the Torah. I said to them: You falsified your torah and you accomplished nothing, as you say there is no source for the resurrection of the dead from the Torah, and the Torah states: “That soul shall be excised; his iniquity shall be upon him” (Numbers 15:31). You interpret the phrase “that soul shall be excised” to mean that a sinner will be punished with death in this world. If so, with regard to the phrase “his iniquity shall be upon him,” for when is that destined to be? Is it not for the World-to-Come, i.e., the world as it will exist after the resurrection of the dead? Apparently, there is a World-to-Come and there is an allusion to it in the Torah.

The Gemara relates: Queen Cleopatra asked Rabbi Meir a question. She said: I know that the dead will live, as it is written: “And may they blossom out of the city like grass of the earth” (Psalms 72:16). Just as grass grows, so too, the dead will come to life. But when they arise, will they arise naked or will they arise with their garments? Rabbi Meir said to her: It is derived *a fortiori* from wheat. If wheat, which is buried naked, meaning that the kernel is sown without the chaff, emerges with several garments of chaff, all the more so will the righteous, who are buried with their garments, arise with their garments.

RAMBAM – ANI MAAMIN

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שתהיה תחיית המתים בְּעֵת שְׁיֵעֲלֶה רְצוֹן מֵאֵת הַבּוֹרָא תְּבָרֵךְ
שְׁמוֹ וְיִתְעַלֶּה זְכוֹרוֹ לְעַד וּלְנֶצַח נְצָחִים:

RAMBAM – ANI MAAMIN (13 Principals) #13 I believe with complete faith that there will be a resurrection of the dead at a time that pleases the Creator, blessed is His Name, and His Name will be exalted forever and to all eternity.

Rambam - Iggeret Teshuvot HaMetim

<https://archive.org/details/crisis-and-leadership-epistle-maimonides-moses-1135-1204/page/214/mode/1up>

Resurrection is a bridge, a pathway toward the end goal of Olam HaBah. One has to believe in the bodily resurrection, but it is temporary.

(Rambam, 12th century, Morocco)

The **Amidah** prayer includes a blessing praising God as the resurrector of the dead.

The second blessing reads, “You are eternally mighty, my God, You are the Resuscitator of the dead; abundantly able to save. He sustains the living with kindness, resuscitates with abundant mercy, supports the fallen, heals the sick, releases the confined, and maintains His faith to those asleep in the dust. Who is like You, Master of mighty deeds, and who is comparable to You, King, Who causes death and restores life and makes salvation sprout. And You are faithful to resurrect the dead. Blessed are You, God, Who resurrects the dead.”

Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism have altered traditional references to the resurrection of the dead in the liturgy, revising "who gives life to the dead" to "who gives life to all" in the second blessing of the Amidah.

Centuries later, the Reform movement, in its Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, rejected entirely the idea of resurrection, saying it was “not rooted in Judaism.” (The platform did assert a belief in the immortality of the soul.) The movement removed the Amidah resurrection blessing from their liturgy until 2007 when, with the release of its new prayer book *Mishkan T’filah*, it reinstated the

blessing — a move some attributed to Reform’s larger turn toward traditionalism and a growing comfort with liturgical metaphor.

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-afterlife-in-judaism-modern-liturgical-reforms>

3. **DIN** (Judgement)

Talmud: Rosh Hashanah 16b - It is taught in a *baraita*: Beit Shammai say: There will be three groups of people on the great Day of Judgment at the end of days: One of wholly righteous people, one of wholly wicked people, and one of middling people. Wholly righteous people will immediately be written and sealed for eternal life. Wholly wicked people will immediately be written and sealed for Gehenna, as it is stated: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall wake, some to eternal life and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). Middling people will descend to Gehenna to be cleansed and to achieve atonement for their sins, and they will cry out in their pain and eventually ascend from there, as it is stated: “And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on My name, and I will answer them” (Zechariah 13:9). This is referring to the members of the third group, who require refinement and cleansing. And about them, Hannah said: “The Lord kills, and gives life; he brings down to the grave, and brings up” (I Samuel 2:6).

Rosh Hashanah 17a - It was taught in the *baraita*: Beit Hillel say: He who is “and abundant in kindness” (Exodus 34:6) tilts the scales in favor of kindness, so that middling people will not have to pass through Gehenna. The Gemara asks: How does He do this? Rabbi Eliezer says: He pushes down on the side of the merits, tipping the scale in their favor, as it is stated: “He will again have compassion upon us; He will push down our iniquities” (Micah 7:19). Rabbi Yosei bar Hanina said: He bears, i.e., raises, the side of the sins, as it is stated: “He bears [*noseh*] sin and forgives transgression” (Micah 7:18).

4. **OLAM HABAH** (Gan Eden) (World to Come)

Heavenly abode where the souls of the righteous live on after death OR the perfected world that will follow the coming of the messiah, when the dead are resurrected and complete peace prevails?

Talmud - Berakot 17a Rav was wont to say: The World-to-Come is not like this world. In the World-to-Come there is no eating, no drinking, no procreation, no business negotiations, no jealousy, no hatred, and no competition. Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor of the Divine Presence, as it is stated:

“And they beheld God, and they ate and drank” (Exodus 24:11), meaning that beholding God’s countenance is tantamount to eating and drinking.

Berakot 57b - "Shabbat is one-sixtieth of the World to Come" - that is, the joy of Shabbat is but a hint of the vastly greater pleasures that await the righteous.

Pirkei Avot 4:16-17 - Rabbi Yaakov says: This world is like a hallway before the world to come. Fix yourself in the hallway so you may enter the drawing room.

He would say: One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the time in the World to Come. And one hour of pleasure in the World to Come is better than all the time in this world.

Rambam - *Olam Haba* has no body or physical form, just the souls of *tzadikim* alone without a *guf* (physical body), like the angels. And since there is no physical form, there is no eating or drinking, and nothing that the body needs in *Olam Ha'zeh*. There is also nothing [physical] that occurs among the various [physical] things that occur to bodies in *Olam Ha'zeh*, for example sitting and standing, sleep and death, sadness and laughter, etc. The early Sages (*Brachot 17a*) thus said — *Olam Haba* has no eating, no drinking, no being fruitful and

multiplying, [no business (giving and taking), no jealousy, no hatred, no competition (*tacharut*)] but rather *tzadikim* sit with their crowns on their heads and bask in the *ziv haShechina* (splendor of G-d's Presence). When it says that "*tzadikim* are sitting," it is a metaphor which means the *tzadikim* will be there without work or toil. And this which says "their crowns on their heads" means the knowledge that they know — which is what allowed them to merit to life in *Olam Haba* — is found with them, and it is their crown. (*Hilchot Teshuva* 8:2).

The goodness of life in *Olam Haba*, however, is beyond our ability to value or compare. [Therefore,] the prophets never described it, in order to not diminish it through their description. This is what the prophet Yeshaya said — "The [human] eye never saw it, only Hashem alone." And as the Sages said — "All of the prophets only prophesized about the days of *Mashiach*, but *Olam Haba* — 'The [human] eye never saw it, only Hashem alone.'" (*Hilchot Teshuva* 8:7)

RAMBAM Mishneh Torah - Kings and Their Wars, 11:7, 12:1

All the deeds of Jesus of Nazareth and that Ishmaelite who arose after him will only serve to prepare the way for *Mashiach's* coming and for *Tikkun HaOlam*, moving all to worship God together... Do not presume that in the Messianic age any facet of the world's nature will change or there will innovations in the work of creation; rather, the world will continue according to its pattern.

Ramban (Nachmanides) "The World to Come is what will come into being in the present world after the messiah comes and the dead are returned to life." Nachmanides distinguishes between the World to Come, in which the physical body is present and the ancient Temple rebuilt, and the World of Souls (*olam haneshamot*), where the soul goes after the death of the body. Unlike Maimonides, who believed that the resurrection of the dead would be followed by a second death and the eternal rest of souls in the World to Come, Nachmanides believed the resurrected would enjoy eternal physical life in the messianic age.

Ramchal - Ramchal is Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto, an 18th century kabbalist and the author of one of the core texts of Mussar, or Jewish character development. He wrote a great deal about the soul and its pathway to Olam Habah.

https://www.sefaria.org/Derekh_Hashem?tab=contents

Derekh Hashem - part 3 - On the Soul and Its Activities

The distinguishable parts in the aggregate soul and their proceedings: However even though we more generally called it one spirit, see that it is actually made up of many parts and various levels. And we could even say that there are many spirits that are interconnected like the rings of a chain. So just like a chain is built, as befits it, from all of [the rings], so too is the aggregate higher spirit that we mentioned built from all of these spiritual levels. And they are all interconnected, with the last one connected to the lower spirit and the lower spirit connected to the blood, as we have written. And it is even possible for some of these parts to withdraw at a certain time and return later, or for levels to be added and then later go away. And no trace of all this is seen in the body at all. For these spiritual actions are not at all felt in the body - such that they add or take away anything from life, or in something that is felt. Rather their functions concern that which man really is and his relationship to the higher roots, according to how it is fit for him to be connected to them. Behold that included in this is the matter of the extra soul that comes on the holy Shabbat and leaves at the conclusion of Shabbat, yet its coming and going is not felt by the body. And behold the aggregate soul is divided into five parts; and they are called the spirit (*nefesh*), the essence (*ruach*), the soul (*neshemah*), the life (*chayah*) and the singularity (*yechidah*)

The division of repayment into two time periods and two places: However the axiom of free choice that automatically results in the possibility that we mentioned among the parts of the human specie - that they be good or bad, or likewise that some of them be good and some of them be bad - itself also automatically results in this possibility among the actions of each individual within the human specie. Hence it is possible that all of them be good or all of them be bad, but it is [also] possible that some of them be good and some of

them be bad. And this is from what impedes the group of [the good] ones that we mentioned. For there are truly good matters and bad matters found in one individual himself. And to pay attention to only some of [their actions] and not to the others - even if the ones that are given attention are the majority - is surely not from righteous judgement. For exact [justice] would require that all actions be repaid - whether they be large or small, many or few. Hence the Supreme Wisdom decreed to divide the repayment - for both reward and punishment - into two times and two places. This means that the sum of [a person's] actions be divided between the majority and the minority; and that the majority be judged by itself in the place and time that is appropriate for it, and the minority be judged by itself in the place and time that is appropriate for it. However, the true and main repayment will be in the world to come, as I have written: That the reward will be for the man who has merited to live on eternally, to cleave to Him, may He be blessed, forever; and the punishment is to be pushed away from the true good and to perish. However the judgement for this matter will only be according to the majority of the actions. However the [repayment] for the good deeds of the evildoer and the bad deeds of the righteous - being that they are the minority - will be found in this world, through his successes and his woes. For though it will the evildoer receive repayment for the little merit that he has, through his successes; and the righteous one will receive the punishment of his iniquities, through [his] afflictions in it - such that, in this manner, judgement be perfect for all. So the makeup of the world to come will remain as it should be in that perfect state. That means that the righteous ones will remain by themselves, without an admixture of evildoers among them. And they will be without impediments, from themselves, for the enjoyment destined for them; whereas the evildoers will be pushed away and perish, without there remaining any claim for them at all.

FOLKTALE (18th century) - Rabbi Haim of Romshishok was an itinerant preacher. He traveled from town to town delivering religious sermons that stressed the importance of respect for one's fellow man. He often began his talks with the following story:

I once ascended to the firmaments. I first went to see Hell and the sight was horrifying. Row after row of tables were laden with platters of sumptuous food, yet the people seated around the tables were pale and emaciated, moaning in hunger. As I came closer, I understood their predicament.

Every person held a full spoon, but both arms were splinted with wooden slats so he could not bend either elbow to bring the food to his mouth. It broke my heart to hear the tortured groans of these poor people as they held their food so near but could not consume it.

Next I went to visit Heaven. I was surprised to see the same setting I had witnessed in Hell – row after row of long tables laden with food. But in contrast to Hell, the people here in Heaven were sitting contentedly talking with each other, obviously sated from their sumptuous meal.

As I came closer, I was amazed to discover that here, too, each person had his arms splinted on wooden slats that prevented him from bending his elbows. How, then, did they manage to eat?

As I watched, a man picked up his spoon and dug it into the dish before him. Then he stretched across the table and fed the person across from him! The recipient of this kindness thanked him and returned the favor by leaning across the table to feed his benefactor.

I suddenly understood. Heaven and Hell offer the same circumstances and conditions. The critical difference is in the way the people treat each other.

I ran back to Hell to share this solution with the poor souls trapped there. I whispered in the ear of one starving man, *'You do not have to go hungry. Use your spoon to feed your neighbor, and he will surely return the favor and feed you.'*

'You expect me to feed the detestable man sitting across the table?' said the man angrily. 'I would rather starve than give him the pleasure of eating!'

(Moshe Kranc, *The Hasidic Masters' Guide to Management* Devora Publishing, 2004, pages 108-109)

5. GILGUL (Reincarnation)

The ARI, Rav Isaac Luria, Jerusalem, 1534, Kabbalist, Gates of Reincarnations https://www.sefaria.org/Shar_HaGilgulim.1.8?lang=bi

Kabbalah Magazine Vol. 1, Issue 5, July/August 1996

A SOUL HAS MANY ROOTS

In the *Gate of Reincarnations*, the Ari explains that there are five levels of consciousness of the soul, and this is the order from the lower to the higher: *Nefesh* (Being), *Ruach* (Spirit), *Neshamah* (Soul), *Chayah* (Living), and *Yechida* (Oneness). Adam is the soul consciousness within the body, that is, all souls come from *Adam HaRishon* (Primordial Man). *Nefesh* is from the world of *Asiyah*, *Ruach* is from the world of *Yetzirah*, *Neshamah* is from the world of *Briah*.

The significance of this knowledge, according to the Ari, is the understanding that a human soul has many roots. In each root, there are many sparks. In each incarnation, some of these sparks are corrected and those that are not corrected come back to be corrected, but those sparks that are corrected elevate and stand at their proper level.

<https://onehouse.kabbalah.com/en/articles/the-life-and-teachings-of-the-ari/>

6. Angels

In Midrash, the rabbis talked about angels that welcome the soul after it has departed the body. (Pesikta Rabbatai 2:3) The mystics add that, in addition to angels, the souls of loved ones who have died are also present to welcome the newly arrived soul.

"At the hour of a man's departure from this world, his father and relatives gather round him, and he sees them and recognizes them, and likewise all with whom he associated in this world, they accompany his soul to the place where it is to abide." (Zohar 1, 217b)

"When a man departs to his eternal home, all his deeds are enumerated before him." (Talmud Ta'anit 11a)

"Angelic messengers help the person complete the process of life review by counting up the days that a man has lived, the sins that he has committed and all the works that he has accomplished." (Zohar I:79a)

"But the souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God, no torment shall ever touch them. In the eyes of the unwise, they did appear to die, but they are at peace." (Wisdom of Solomon 3:2)

QUESTIONS:

The Modei Ani Prayer thanks God for returning our soul to our body.
Do our souls leave our body during sleep? How is the soul connected to the body? How does the soul leave the body?

Berakhot 57 - Sleep is 1/60th of Death

Rabbi Toba Spitzer: https://www.dorsheitzedek.org/divrei-torah/rabbi-toba-spitzer?post_id=934460

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/559460/jewish/The-Kabbalah-of-Sleep.htm

Eating the Leviathan

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/leviathan-a-jewish-ouroboros/>

Talmud Bava Batra 75a:4-8

Rabba says that Rabbi Yoḥanan says: In the future, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will make a feast for the righteous from the flesh of the leviathan, as it is stated: “The *ḥabbarim* will make a feast [*yikhru*] of him” (Job 40:30). And *kera* means nothing other than a feast, as it is stated: “And he prepared [*va’yikhreh*] for them a great feast [*kera*]; and they ate and drank” (II Kings 6:23). And *ḥabbarim* means nothing other than Torah scholars, as it is stated: “You that dwell in the gardens, the companions [*ḥaverim*] hearken for your voice: Cause me to hear it” (Song of Songs 8:13). This verse is interpreted as referring to Torah scholars, who listen to God’s voice.

MUSSAR

Rabbah said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan that in the future God will make a hut for the righteous out of the hide of Leviathan as we know from Job 40,31: *התמלא בשכות עורו, ובצלצל דגים ראשו*. [The traditional translation of this verse is too different from this aggadah to be relevant. Ed.] If the person is deserving, G–d will make a *סוכה*, hut, for him; if not, a shade-giving heave-to without walls. If he is still less deserving, G–d will make him some kind of jewelry as we know from Proverbs 1,9: "and graceful ornaments around your neck...

Rabbi Eliyahu Munk, *Shenei Luchot HaBerit*, Torah Shebikhtav, Toldot, Torah Ohr 113-114 (early 20th century, Germany/France)