

What Happens After We Die:

Jewish Views on the Afterlife

Biblical Understandings

Genesis 25:8

And Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered unto his people.

Deuteronomy 32:48-50

And the LORD spoke unto Moses that selfsame day, saying: 'Get up onto this mountain of Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession; and die in the mount that you have gone up, and be gathered unto your people; as Aaron your brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people.'

2 Kings 20:20-21

Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made the pool, and the conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Hezekiah slept with his fathers; and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

1 Kings 28:7-8, 11-12

Then said Saul unto his servants: 'Seek me a woman that divines by a ghost, that I may go to her, and inquire of her.' And his servants said to him: 'Behold, there is a woman that divines by a ghost at En-dor.' **8** And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night; and he said: 'Divine unto me, I pray thee, by a ghost, and bring me up whomsoever I shall name unto you....'**11** Then said the woman: 'Whom shall I bring up unto you?' And he said: 'Bring me up Samuel.' **12** And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice; and the woman spoke to Saul, saying: 'Why have you deceived me? for you are Saul.'

Rabbinic Understandings

Pirkei Avot, Chapter 4:21-22

21) Rabbi Jacob used to say: This world is like a hallway to the future world. Prepare yourself in the hallway that you may enter into the banquet hall.

22) He also would say: Better is one hour of penitence and good deeds in this world than all the life of the world to come. Better is one hour of spiritual repose in the world to come than all the life of this world.

Shabbat 31a-b

When they bring a person to (final) judgment they say to him, Were your business dealings honest? Did you devote time to Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you look forward to salvation? Did you reason wisely? Did you deduce one thing from another (hermeneutics)?”

Shabbat 152b

A certain Sadducee said to R. Abbahu: “You maintain that the souls of the righteous are hidden under the Throne of Glory. Then how did the necromancer bring up (the Prophet) Samuel by means of his necromancy?” R. Abahu replied: “There it was within twelve months of death. For it was taught: ‘For twelve months the body remains and the soul ascends and descends; after twelve months the body ceases to exist, the soul ascends, and returns nevermore.’”

Maimonides, 13 Articles of Faith

The dead will be resurrected.

Amidah prayer

Your great mercies bring life to the dead...You keep faith with those who sleep in the dust....you are the master of life and death and deliverance....Faithful are You, who gives life to the dead.

Kabbalistic Understandings

Background- In Kabbalah, the general understanding is that a person's soul has 3 parts. They are:

Nefesh- This part of the soul is considered with the lowest level of the soul, and is something animal-like. The nefesh concerns itself with physical desire and instinct.

Ruach- This is the middle level of the soul and translates as "spirit." The ruach is the part of the soul which can distinguish between good and evil.

Neshama- This aspect of the soul is specific to man and elevates him above other forms of life. Through the neshama, we realize our intellect and attain the awareness of God. The neshama lives on after death.

(From <http://www.safed.co.il/kabbalah-and-the-inner-spirit.html>)

Zohar, Parashat Va-yehi 218b

It is taught that in the moment that a person's soul departs, all of their relatives and friends in that world (the World to Come) go with their soul, and show them the place of delight and the place of punishment. If they were a righteous person, they are shown their place (of delight) and they ascend, they sit, and they enjoy the sublime delights of that world. If they were not a righteous person, their neshama remains in this world until their earthly body is buried in the ground. Once they are buried, many Keepers of the Law take hold of them until they arrive at the grave and they put them in their dwelling-place in Gehinnom.

Zohar, Parashat Metzora 53a

The body is punished in the grave until it has returned to dust, and the nefesh with the fires of Gehinnom until such time as has been decreed that it has received sufficient punishment. Once it has received its punishment and been purified, it then ascends from Gehinnom and is refined of its impurities as iron is refined in fire, and they rise up with as it enters into the Lower Garden of Eden and it bathes in the waters and fragrant spices which are there as it is written in Scripture: "Who is she that comes up from the desert/Like columns of smoke,/in clouds of myrrh and frankincense,/Of all the powders of the merchant?" (Song of Songs 3:6).

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